

*A photo essay by one of America's finest outdoor photographers  
on exploring the big rivers of the West, and finding  
that good fishing is only a small part of their unique appeal*

# FLOATING

ERWIN A. BAUER

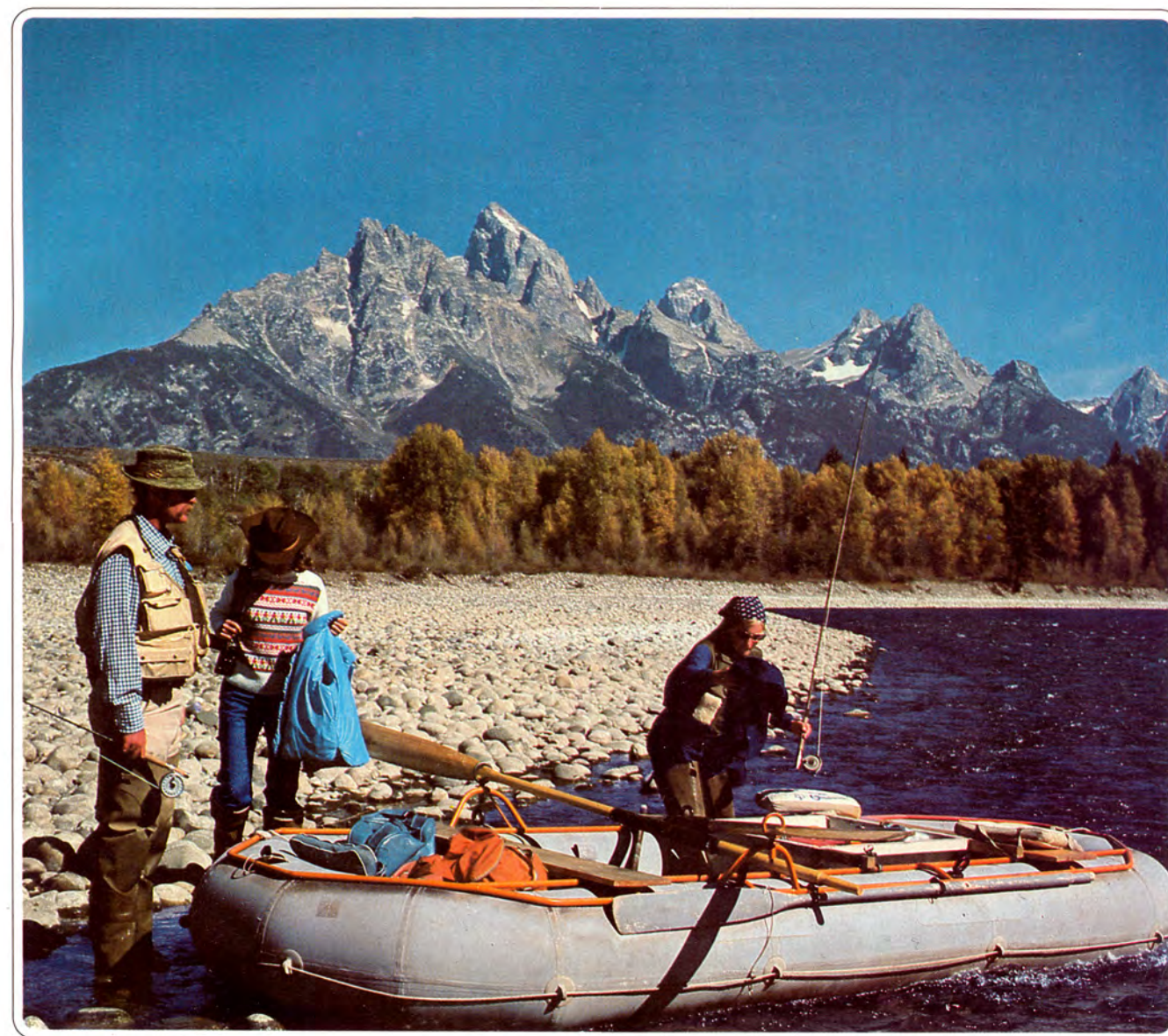
**O**N A GOLDEN MORNING last October, Peggy and I joined Jay and Kathy Buchner on a rich and memorable adventure. The Buchners are our neighbors, young husband-and-wife fly-fishing guides of Jackson Hole who invited us to share an end-of-summer postman's holiday. The four of us spent the entire day leisurely drifting down the Snake River in northwestern Wyoming.

Now the Snake is not the best trout river originating in the Rocky Mountains — trout grow larger and more numerous elsewhere — and even at its best, the fishing is slower than during an average day on such streams as the Yellowstone or Big Hole or Henrys Fork. But the Snake does flow through some of the most magnificent country in America, and few fishermen mind the slightly longer interval between rises.

From the launching site above Deadman's Bar to our take-out at Moose, there was always something to fascinate us. We floated close past beavers frantically building lodges in which to spend the bitter months ahead. Bald eagles watched us unalarmed from traditional perches along the banks. One lonely robin still lingered. Merganser and goldeneye ducks flushed as we suddenly rounded bends. We glided above schools of whitefish that were clearly visible in the low, clear water of autumn. Enough native cutthroats inhaled Muddlers and Muskrat Nymphs to keep us busy. One which Kathy hooked weighed more than three pounds; she released it with all the rest.

But maybe the most pleasant time of all was the hour or so we paused for lunch and to stretch our legs. On a gravel bar criss-crossed with fresh bear tracks, we built a modest fire of sun-dried driftwood and cooked hamburgers over it. A pot of coffee brewed on the coals. Somebody produced a sack

*Text continues on page 55*



*Launching a float-trip is an expectant and important moment. You wonder how the trip will go, if the trout will be active. It is also the last chance to check all your tackle and equipment. Photos by Erwin A. Bauer.*

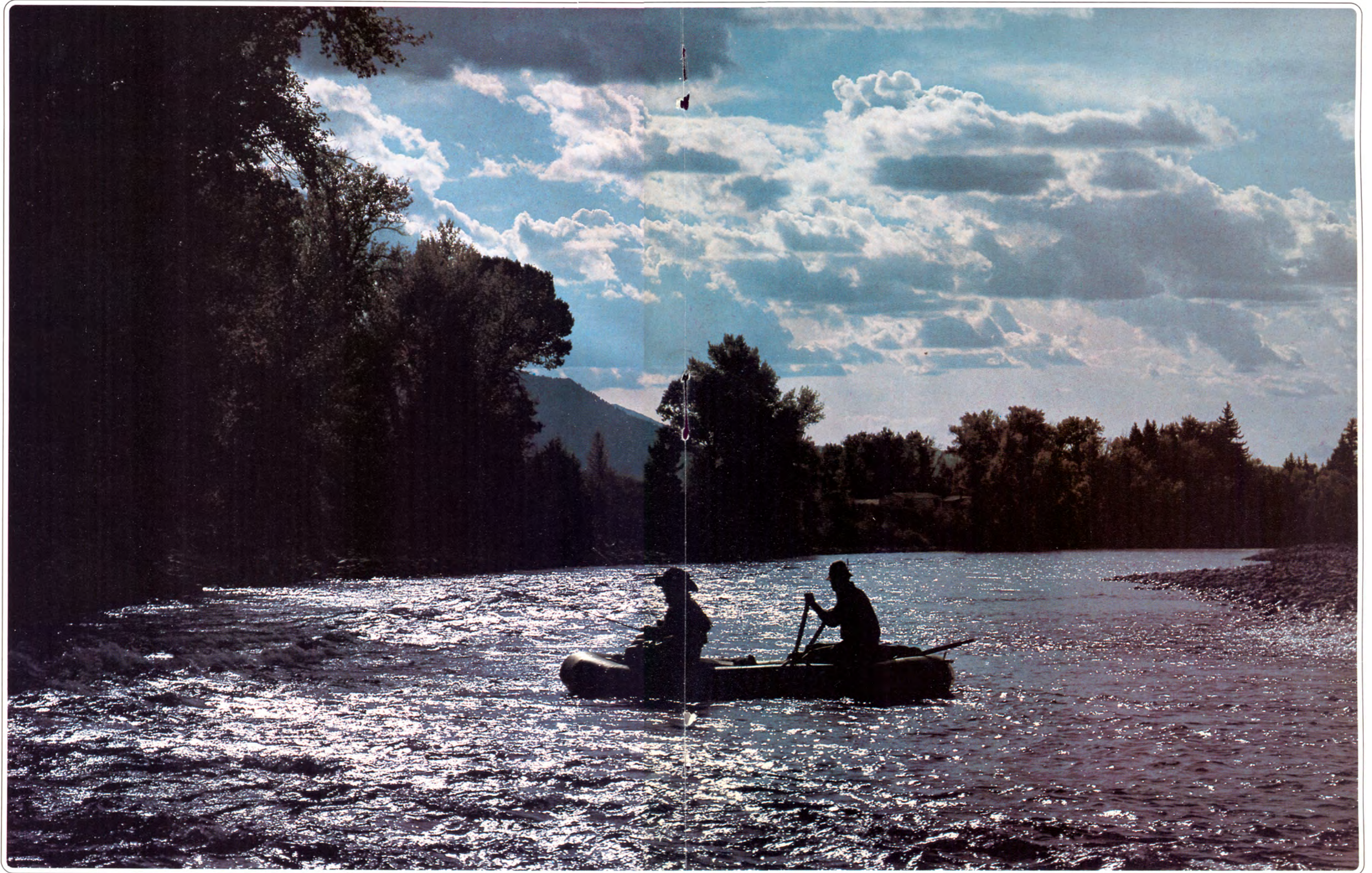
Floating . . .

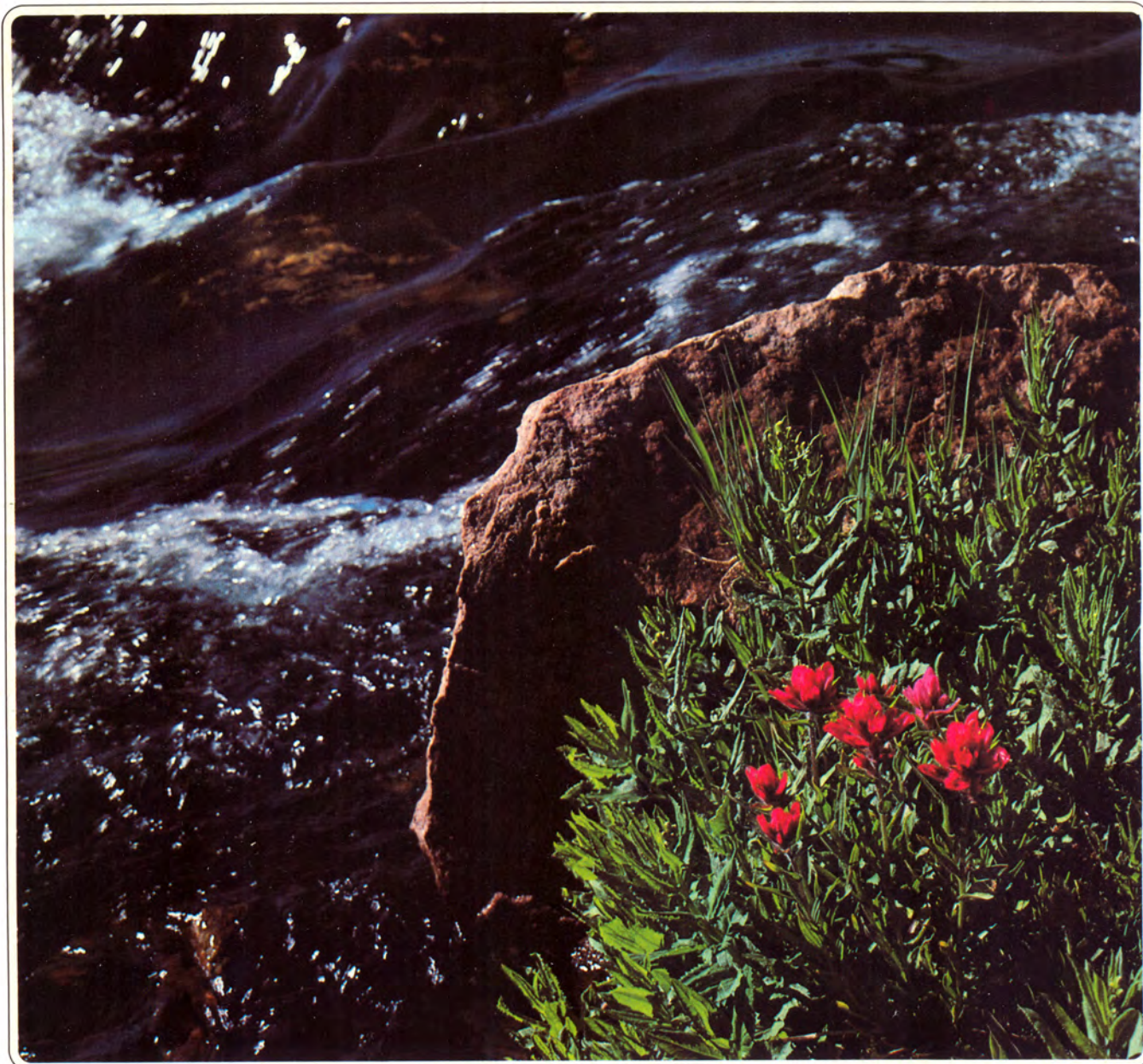
Today the float-trip standby is the inflatable rubber raft. They are lightweight, safe, almost puncture-proof and they provide fairly comfortable casting platforms. The Mackenzie boat, originally used mainly on Pacific coastal rivers, has made an appearance on several Rocky Mountain streams. Many guides prefer the Mackenzie and will use nothing else.



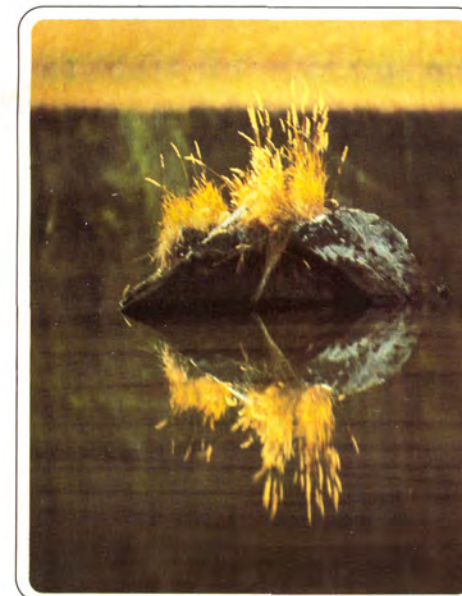
Other float-trip sights include the indomitable Muddler Minnow and the acrobatic rainbow trout — both favorites of float-fishing anglers.







*Float-fishing is not all flies, boats and tackle. The angler shares the river with many forms of life, and he cannot help but be aware of such things as scarlet paintbrush beside a granite boulder (does a heavy trout wait beneath?), or the mirror image in placid water of an isolated rock on which foxtail grass grows.*



*But there are larger, more noticeable sights as well—such as this Shiras moose. Fortunately it is a friendly giant, except for certain cows with calves, who require plenty of room in passing. Bulls are usually never troublesome until the fall rut begins.*

*Continued from page 48*

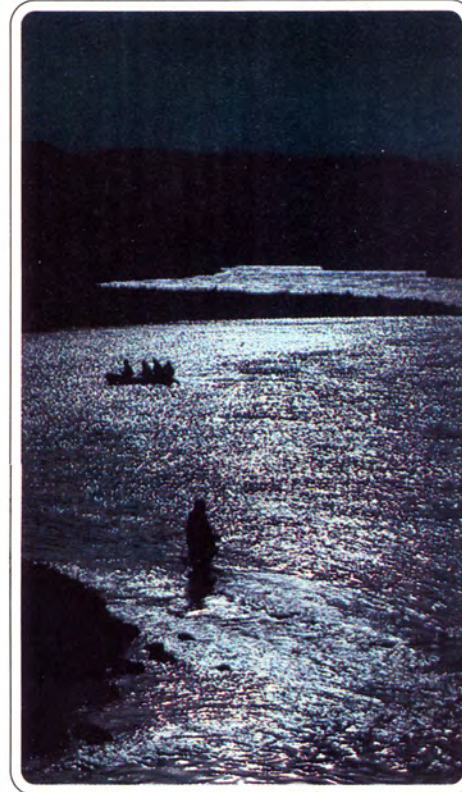
of chocolate bars. Then on again downstream. It was a bittersweet moment when that float trip ended, but the memory remained warm throughout one of the snowiest winters Wyoming has ever seen. Now it is float trip time again.

There simply is no better, more rewarding way to explore the large, wild-trout rivers of the West than by float-tripping. You reach lonely places far beyond where the bankside foot paths end. You cast into deep, green runs, pools and pockets that wader-bound anglers can never reach. The soft dip of paddles into the current replaces the crunch of felt soles on loose rock. You drift down and away into the best possible kind of quiet, fly fisherman's world.

Floating . . .



*One point is certain: few angling opportunities can match the experience of float-fishing our Western trout rivers. These rivers give freely of their natural beauty and stillness, and they invite an escape back into a wilderness America when all rivers were sweet and the air was pure. And there is no better way to savor these rivers and to fish for their trout than by float-fishing. ↪*



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