CHAPTER XI

A SHOOTING PUNT AND ITS CONSTRUCTION

A shooting punt is a little punt that can be used much like the sinkbox, yet is capable of being rowed to and from the shooting-grounds or of being easily transported overland. The construction is different and a little more complicated, but it should offer little difficulty.

The first thing to do is to bend up the bow piece, which should be of oak ¾ inch thick, 8 feet long and 3 inches wide. This should have one straight edge, but the other should be concaved so that the piece is just one inch wide in the middle and carried in a gentle curve to full width, 2½ feet each side of center.

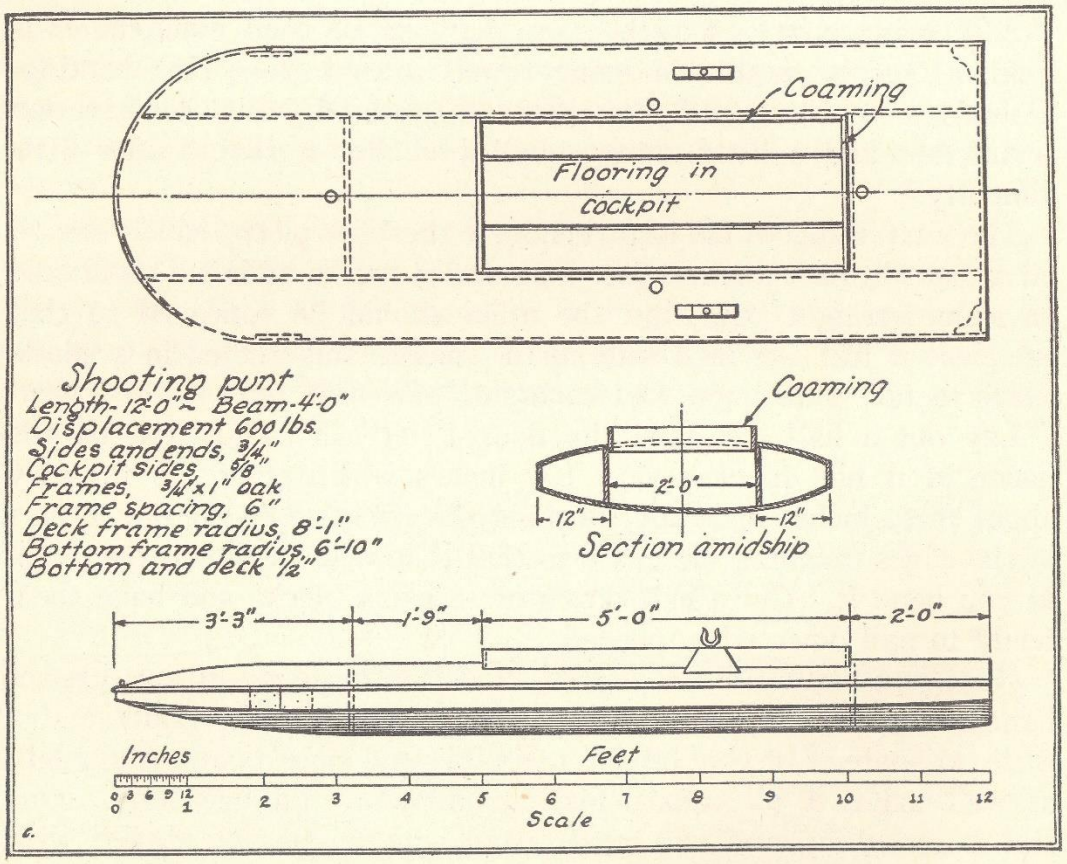
Lay out a half circle on the floor 1′ 11″ in radius and on the inside of it nail blocks every few inches which stand up squarely about three inches high and touching the circle. Cut off the corners of the edges touching the circle so that they will not break the plank as you bend it. Get a half dozen or so extra blocks and have them ready to nail down when needed.

Next you require a steam box which can be made of any lumber handy and should be just big enough to contain the plank and a little to spare. If you intend to build any more boats you might as well make it 6″ square inside and about ten feet long. One end is sealed up and the other fitted with a door or stuffed with rags. A piece of hose is fitted in near the sealed end and the other end jammed over the spout of the tea kettle. If much work is to be done it is better to arrange something like a wash boiler to furnish the steam. The whole box can be covered with old carpet to keep down radiation.

When the box is good and hot with the steam, put in the plank and stoke up for about half to three-quarters of an hour. When it seems soft get it out quickly and lay it up against the blocks, straight edge down with the center of it at the midpoint of the half circle. Nail down a block outside so as to jam the plank tightly in place. Then pull the ends steadily and slowly into shape and nail

down another block every foot or so as the plank comes to position. The ends will stick out beyond the half circle and should be blocked in just a trifle less than parallel. The plank should show a fair curve. If it has a hump look it over for a possible break. It may have slivered in places but if you catch them in time with a clamp they will not go far and will do no harm.

While the bow is setting get out the side pieces, which are 4 inches wide, one edge straight, the other also straight except for 2



feet at the after end and one foot forward where it is gradually tapered in a curve to three inches wide at the ends. The butt blocks or straps of the same wood can be screwed to the forward ends and the corner blocks to the after ends.

The stern piece requires a board 12 inches wide and 4 feet long. The radius of the deck curve is 8 feet 1 inch and of the bottom 6 feet 10 inches. The width at the ends is, of course, the same as the side pieces. The deck and bottom frames are sawed out of 3/4-inch oak and are one inch wide. The easiest way to mark them out is to make a pattern of thin wood for the deck frames and an-

other for the bottom frames. One pattern will do for each set and twenty-three of each are needed.

When the bow piece is cold and dry tack a strip across to hold it, cut the ends to proper length and screw on the side pieces by means of the butt straps. Be sure that the straight edges of all three pieces are on the same side (the top) of the boat. Then fasten the stern board in place.

The cockpit side can now be fastened to bow and stern. These are simply 10-inch boards and have as yet no shape. Their position on the stern board will give the height above the sides and they should be parallel to the sides. It will probably be necessary to tack a couple of temporary struts between cockpit sides and boat sides to hold the shape and a couple of short diagonals will keep the frame from weaving.

Now take up a top frame and lay it across the boat. It will rest on the cockpit sides but will not touch the boat sides. Therefore the cockpit sides must be carefully notched until the top of the frame will come flush with the top of the boat sides. The frames fit inside and are fastened by a nail through the boat side into their ends. Also a nail is driven through the frame into each cockpit side.

When all the deck frames are in place the cockpit sides can be planed up flush with them and the edges beveled to fit, after which the boat is turned over and the process repeated. The planks are put on in one length and should not be over 4 inches wide. The curvature of the frames gives just the right kind of a caulking seam tight on the inside but open on the outside and it will hold the cotton or wicking in good shape. See that the outside planks are well fastened to both sides and frames as they will then hold the boat well together.

Before planking the deck cut out the frames in the cockpit opening, and fit the combing after the planking is finished. The joint between cockpit sides and deck and bottom should be watertight and the notches for the frames can be caulked if necessary.

Get four corks 2 or 3 inches in diameter and fit them as shown in the deck so as to be able to pump out the various compartments.

Row locks are fitted up on blocks as shown and a large eye forward for the anchor rope to go through. The rope leads into and can be handled from the cockpit.

The boat should be camouflaged and will need some ballast to sink her to about the deck edge. This is best provided by waterproof bags which can be filled with water at the anchorage.

For carrying decoys a 4-inch wash board can be fitted across the stern and along the sides held in place by dowels and loops just as wagon stakes are attached. The side boards should be short enough to stow in the cockpit. A grating or slat floor is put in an inch or so above the bottom to keep the crew out of the water.

I have seen such a boat used in fairly rough water by means of a canvas apron or fender about 6 inches wide and 10 inches long attached to the stern (the boat being anchored stern first by the apron).

By fitting a piece of canvas to the bow to fill in the curved space it would make a better job.

One who is accustomed to tools can cut all the timber or scanting dimensions an eighth of an inch and get a much lighter boat. If, however, this is your first attempt at anything but a box you will do well to use the heavy stuff indicated.