

# The Last Great Day of Summer

by Gary Brower

Every year, my wife Cis and I take a trip down the Willamette to see the fall foliage cloaking the riverbank. During these delightful excursions, we often experience many seasons of weather during a single day! We had taken our annual trip in early autumn, but since the weather remained pleasant we were able to squeeze in a bonus trip later in the season.

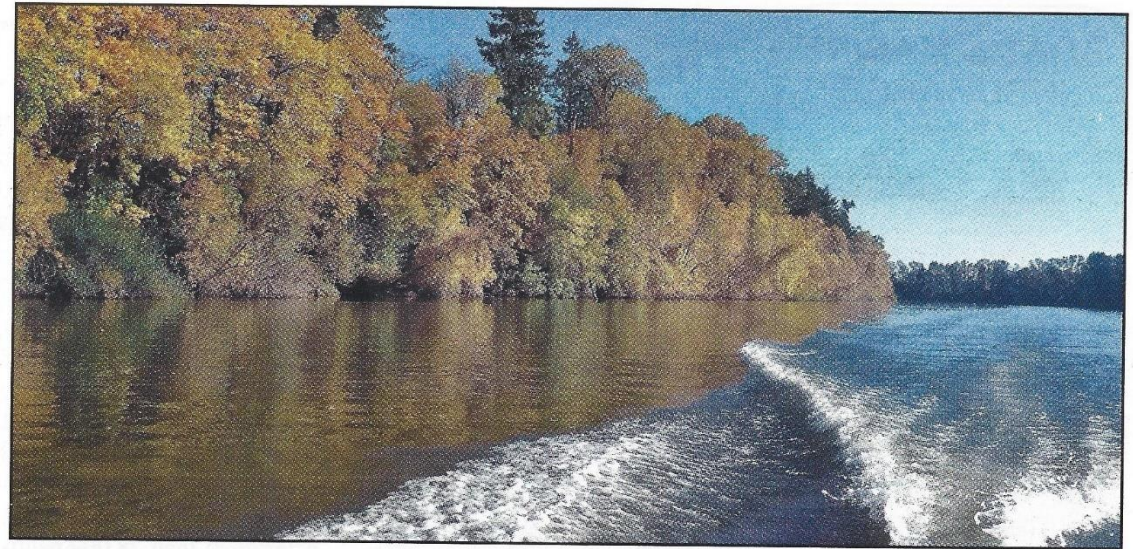
The morning started with a crispness in the air. With a shiver, we donned our coats and life jackets as we backed the boat off the trailer and into the river at Newberg's Rogers Landing. We were alone and all was quiet; the water was as smooth as glass and the morning mist shimmered over the water. We quickly discovered some river otters playing in the waterlogged driftwood that surrounded the dock while a family of ducks played contentedly near some trees overhanging the riverbank.

A slight drizzle developed as we motored north toward Champoege State Park, then the sun materialized and we saw a great blue heron poised on a log at the side of the river. We were thrilled to hear this wading bird's distinctive "gronk" as we motored by. The sun continued to shine, and later in the day, we were able to remove a few layers of clothing. It was a pleasure to be back in short sleeves, and we basked in the sun one last time before winter tightened its grip on the Pacific Northwest.

We took this opportunity to find a sunny spot and killed the engine. The new-found silence provided a peaceful setting for a picnic. We enjoyed a variety of cheeses and other snacks as we sipped hot chocolate and drifted down the waterway. The views were breathtaking. There was a splattering of colors as the deciduous trees displayed intense reds, vivid yellows, and deep greens. This chromatic display was mirrored by the water, which reflected all the vibrant hues of the vegetation that grew along the river's edge.

As we drifted, we saw a new manifestation. At first, we were unable to identify the many long strands that seemed to emanate from the water and billow out in the light breeze. However, when we came in contact with one of the ethereal strings we instantly recognized it as a single super-strength spiderweb. Later in the day, we spotted a large bird flying along the river. As it soared closer, we were able to identify our feathered friend as a bald eagle. We watched as the eagle came closer and landed in a bright yellow tree. As she landed, a few of the colorful leaves spiraled from the tree and floated into the water.

Looking back at the eagle's landing site, we could see a nest that was partially exposed by the fallen leaves. On closer inspection, we saw a second eagle in the nest. Over the course of the next ten minutes or so, we watched as the first eagle flew across the river and

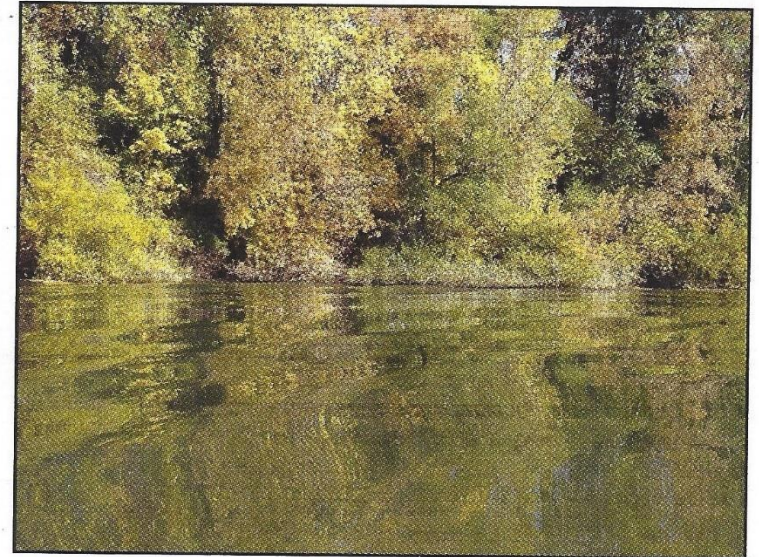


*The last great day! Photos by Gary Brower*

alighted in a tree with blazing red foliage, then flew back across the river to return to the nest. We were truly fortunate to see such a spectacular sight.

As we started the engine, we noticed that other boaters had joined us. They were also enjoying the final rays of the summer sun. We even saw one last stalwart wakeboarder, clad in a wetsuit, practicing his tricks. During our trip home we saw waterfront homeowners making last minute repairs to their docks and preparing their boats for the winter.

Somewhere along the way, the sunny summer weather gave way to fall. As the afternoon waned, the temperature dropped and we saw a wedge of geese flying south for the winter. In the end, we had to pull on our sweatshirts as summer finally surrendered to fall. On this cruise, we were able to enjoy the weather from many seasons dur-



*The Willamette River reflects the beauty of fall. Photos by Gary Brower*

ing a single day. And, throughout the winter we will remember this last great day of summer and the glorious fall colors.

*Gary Brower is a Licensed USCG Master who enjoys sharing stories about the joy of boating ([www.camberpoint.com/writing](http://www.camberpoint.com/writing))*