

Fishing Thoroughly Can Improve Your Results

Fishermen needn't cast 40 or 50 times to a spot to find out if fish will 'bite'! There's a much better way.

Buck talks fishing

by Buck Perry, Education Editor



Time after time I am asked—
“What do you mean when you say fishermen should fish a feature in a lake THOROUGHLY?”

I don't really know what brings up a question like this. The only thing I can guess is that the person asking the question may be thinking he has to sit *all day* in a spot to let the fish decide to “bite.” He could be thinking about casting 40 or 50 times at a single “stick-up.” He may be thinking how many different sizes, colors and lure actions he must use. Probably the question is asked because the fisherman has missed our talks in the past, or hasn't seen or studied the Structure Fisherman's (Spoonplugger's) guidelines as given in our books and Home Study Series. But who *really* knows what a fisherman is thinking?

Fishing a feature “thoroughly” means we must **CONTROL** the **DEPTH** and **SPEED** of our lures (or bait) correctly on, all over, and around that feature.

Let's talk about how I would go about fishing a particular feature THOROUGHLY. (In fact, what I say is little more than the Spoonplugger's basic guideline for the presentation of lures.) My purpose in fishing the

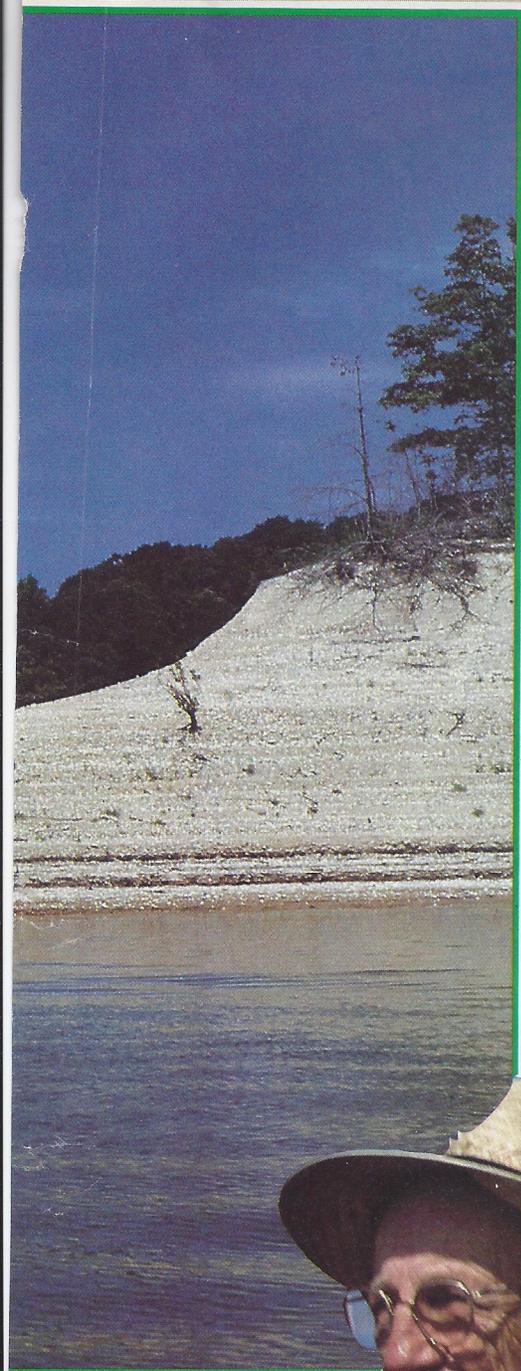
feature is to catch a bunch of big fish—if they are there. I would not know if they are there, or if they are NOT there, if I didn't fish it “*thoroughly*.” Sure, I might get “lucky” and hit a fish on my first trolling pass, or catch one on my first cast. Again, I could go over it in a hit-or-miss fashion and not find a fish, even though he is there. However, if I fish it THOROUGHLY and find no fish, *I can go my merry way with no thoughts there might have been a fish there I missed.* (Think about that for a spell!)

Figure 1 is a top view of a feature in a lake. In this case it is a “bar” extending out from a slight point in the shoreline. The shape of the bar is shown by a broken line representing a “breakline” (sudden increase in depth) around the bar.

It could be we have been told this particular bar has produced in the past. It could be we are on the lake for the first time. However, it would not affect our efforts to find out what gives AT THIS TIME. The figure shows two positions of the boat we will use during our *casting* procedures.

The weather and water conditions indicate we will probably have to go the *whole route* in the presentation of lures, both casting and trolling, and even then we may not make contact with the fish. One thing is for sure! We'll know what makes this bar “tick” before we're through. *continued*

Top Left. A long underwater bar (structure) is revealed during low water period. Note stumps and roots (“breaks”) at end of bar. When water levels returned to normal, this spot gave up the lunker bass held by Education Editor, Buck Perry.



Buck talks fishing

I won't talk at this time in great detail about our trolling efforts, but do not take lightly or pass over quickly what is said. Our trolling efforts must not be made in a haphazard way, but weather and water conditions (clear skies, high wind, getting colder) indicate the fish are not likely to be very active. This would suggest that we do not spend too much time trolling if we plan to fish the bar THOROUGHLY—for inactive, non-chasing fish. I always figure the fishing conditions are bad and will probably get worse. Even then, I have to keep reminding myself to fish "thoroughly." I'm no different than other fishermen, I'm lax at times because I keep thinking (or hoping) things will get better after awhile.

Trolling is one of the better and faster ways to see if the fish are active. It is the BEST way I know to find the shape and interpret the features of a structure. Trolling is much more difficult to master CORRECTLY than casting, and to cover all aspects of trolling THOROUGHLY is a full talk within itself. (In the future we will talk about this in more detail.)

Our first approach to fishing the bar thoroughly is to troll it with free-swimming, bottom-bumping lures, making our passes and keeping the lures in proper position. We make our trolling runs in the shallows first, and then in the deep. Our final trolling passes in the deep water are made by utilizing wire line in order to reach as deep, or deeper, as an average sanctuary depth (30-35 ft., if available). We know if we do not go at least this deep (if available) we have not fished the area of the bar "thoroughly." Our depth control is fairly thorough as we use several lure sizes, various line lengths, and enough trolling passes, to be sure few areas or few depths are missed. We make certain we vary the speed of the trolling passes and are careful to see that the lure bumps the bottom in the deeper sections of the bar. As we change lures to work the different depths, we check the "aids" of size, color, and action. We are all set to go to the cast if at any time we latch onto something that swims.

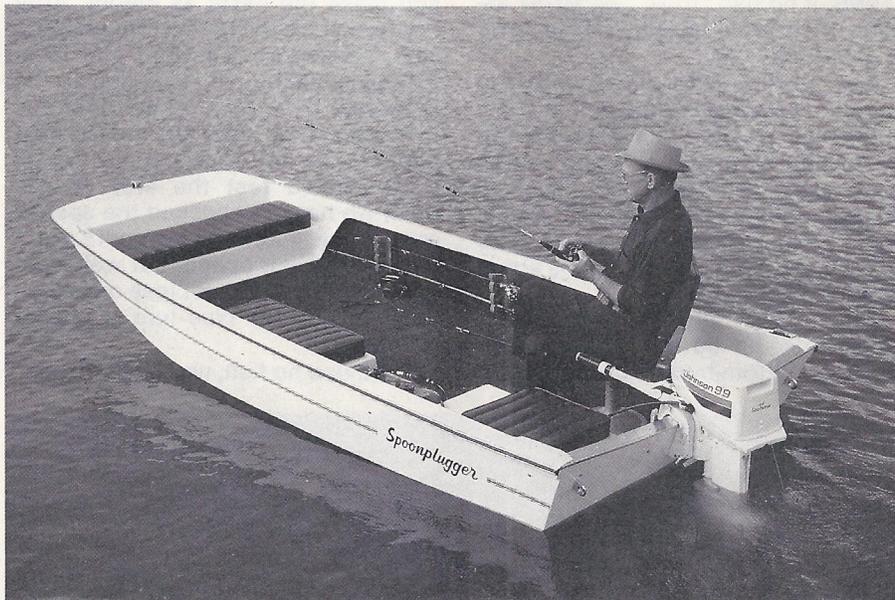
Though we work the depths as deep as we can go, and check the speeds, etc., we do not make contact with the fish. Since we are confident the area (structure, breaks, and break-lines) is potentially productive, it becomes obvious that something is wrong. It doesn't take long, or much thought, to figure either the speed was off, or our trolling passes weren't

thorough enough. The speed used on the troll could have been too fast for the prevailing conditions, or we just "missed" the fish.

With this knowledge, we spend no more time trolling, but immediately position (anchor) the boat for casting, for a more thorough and more exact control of our depth and speed. We first position (anchor) the boat so all the SHALLOWS in the near area of the structure (bar) can be reached on the cast (Figure 1, position 1). If heavy weeds, grass, or bushes exist in the

lure has sunk a distance, or all the way to the bottom. Some retrieves would be made slow, and some fast. Just a few casts (5 or 6) WITH EACH SIZE LURE should check out the area (Figure 1). (I'd probably use two size lures, a 250 Series and a 200 Series Spoonplug.)

If the casts with the free-running, bottom-bumping lures don't produce, we switch and go to a "jump-type" lure (jig, soft plastic, spoon, etc.), which will allow us to check out the SLOWER speeds. Most likely, I'd go



Buck Perry "tests" the area by casting. First a sinking, free-swimming, bottom-bumping type lure is used with a steady retrieve. If this fails to produce action, Buck switches to a "jump type" offering (jig, soft plastic, or spoon, etc.). With rod action, this lure is "jumped" and then allowed to sink back to bottom.

shallowest water, we might work, for a few casts, topwater and weedless lures at different speeds. However, since we did not locate any fish on the troll, it is not likely any fish are back in the weeds, etc. So, it is probably wise to just forget the weedless and topwater lures, and begin testing the open water. We can always go to the weeds, etc., if any fish are found in the near vicinity outside the weeds.

To do it right we should choose and use first a sinking, free-swimming, bottom-bumping type lure, with a steady retrieve. Our selection of lure size, or sizes, must allow us to cover all the depths in the shallows (0 to 8-10 ft.). We would fancast the area, being sure to work all depths and all bottoms (bumping bottom) within reach. Some retrieves would start soon after the lure hits the water, while others would not start until the

to a basic jump-type lure, such as a leadhead jig. Again, we would fancast the area. In this case, after the cast is made, the lure is allowed to sink to the bottom. With rod action, the lure is "jumped" and then allowed to sink back to the bottom. When it hits bottom, we would jump it again, and again let it sink back. We would continue this process on each cast until the lure is near the boat. We would probably fancast the area several times in order to check out the various speeds with the "jump" lure. The speed is checked by moving the rod fast or slow, with little movement or big movement. The speeds could be checked still further by changing the weight of the lure, or by adding various dressings. Regardless how slow or how fast we moved the rod, or how much dressing or weight used,

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Buck talks fishing

each "jump" would give us a number of speeds. It would commence with zero speed (no movement) and then have a variety of speeds on the "jump" and on the sink. As in the case of the free-swimming, bottom-bumping lure, a few (5 or 6) casts for each speed checked should test the water fairly well. We can assume this to be true, for if the fish are at these depths they are most likely active and would move to take the lure.

The two type lures used in this manner would check out the depths and speeds necessary for the SHALLOWS. If no fish "took," we MUST assume there are no fish in the shallows at this time.

The next area to check with the cast is the deeper water. Let's assume that our casts will reach a depth of 20 feet from the position of the boat taken for checking the shallow water (position 1 in Figure 1). Again, we would use the same two type lures to work the deeper water on the structure (bar) by fancasting.

Our FIRST lure (for the faster speeds) would be the sinking, free-running, bottom-bumping type. As the

depths increase, our lure size (and its running depth) must increase also. When working this deeper water we do not have to "swim" the lure in open water. We allow the lure to sink to the bottom before the STEADY retrieve is made. And we would make the lure bump, or walk, the bottom as much as possible during the retrieve. If the lure left bottom, we would let it sink back before starting the retrieve again. Here again, a few casts (5 or 6) should cover and check the area. If no fish are found, we would then switch to the jump-type lure (jig, etc.) again, and make the casts as before. After the lure sank to the bottom on each cast, we would "jump" it and let it sink back (taking up slack line as the lure sank back). We would continue this procedure until the lure is near the boat. As before, just a few (5 or 6) casts should test the area. If you think we haven't checked the speeds enough, we'll fancast the spots again and change our speed, but we've got to be careful we do not lose our depth control with this type lure in deeper water.

If we find no fish, we can (and must)

assume there are no fish under the 20 foot depth. This means we must go deeper. We already know if we do not check at least to the 30-35 foot depth (if available), we haven't *thoroughly* fished the area, regardless of the weather and water conditions or whatever the mood of the fish.

Our next step is to reposition our boat (Figure 1, position 2) so we can check out the greater depths. (Before we are through it may require additional positioning of the boat.) Again we fancast the area with the same type lures used previously.

In this case our boat may be anchored so deep (position 2) we find we have trouble working the free-running, bottom-bumping lure properly on a steady retrieve. We may let it sink to the bottom, but when the steady retrieve is started, the lure immediately leaves the bottom and starts swimming up towards the boat. The steep angle of the retrieve will not allow the lure to walk the bottom. However, we *must try the walking lure first*. It is possible our casts may go beyond a breakline (or drop-off) and the lure sinks into a hole or channel. If this happens, then we are able to "walk" the lure up and over the breakline or drop-off without any trouble. The lure may leave the bottom shortly after walking over the breakline, but this matters little, because we have already tested the "fishable" spot. If we are unable to get a good steady walk along bottom with our bottom-bumping lure (or a fish), we should lose no time going to the "jump-type" lure. This time we'd probably choose a slightly heavier one than before, so it gets down in a reasonable length of time; and so we can "feel" better what the lure is doing.

We are at this time working fairly deep water, and can assume our speeds may be slower than in the water previously fished (under 20 feet). It would not be out of order to assume the fish are more dormant and non-chasing, and our lure presentation must be more "exact" in both depth and speed. Therefore, when covering the area, instead of making a half dozen casts, we may have to use more casts and place them closer together. We may have to fancast the area several times if conditions are bad, and we are working extra deep.

On the first set of casts we would probably NOT desire to "dress" a jig. But on subsequent fancasting of the area, we would probably dress the lure with dead or live bait, or some soft plastic. Dressing the jig on the

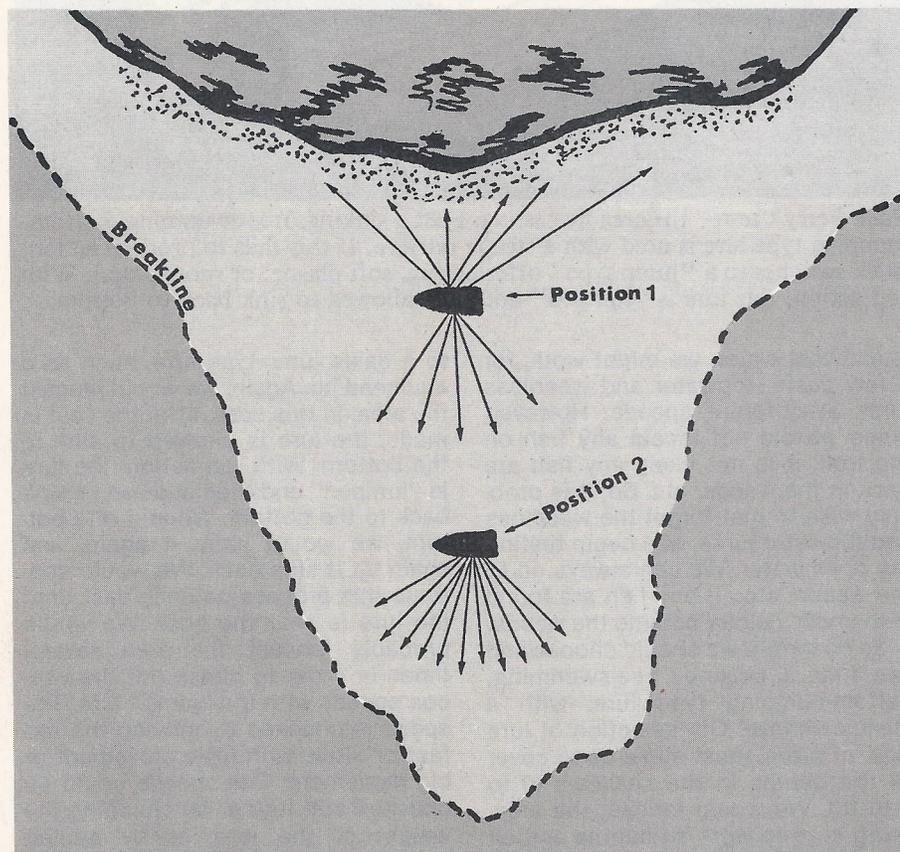


FIGURE 1—A more thorough and more exact control of lure depth and speed can be attained by anchoring the boat for casting. The boat is first positioned so all the shallows in the near area of the structure (bar) can be reached on the cast. Next the boat is repositioned (position 2) so greater depths can be checked.

second go-around is done to slow the speed, and to give the fish a better shot at picking the lure up (or sucking it in); or for making the *bait* move *unnaturally* (hurt, wounded, etc.)—a plus. These sets of casts are done in the same manner as in the shallows with a jump-type lure. If this double coverage (undressed and dressed) does not produce, we then go to our final depth and speed control.

The only real difference with this go-around is that after the lure sinks back to the bottom we WAIT (zero speed) for awhile before the rod tip is moved again. What we are actually doing when we jump the lure in this last and final speed control is to say: "Hey, fish, here I am!" Then we wait for him to pick it up (zero speed). If a fish does not pick the lure up, we jump it a *short* distance again and wait some more (up to a minute is not too long at times). You can bet, if we cover the area thoroughly and get the lure *close enough*, and for *long enough*, the fish will take it. Our guideline should be, *regardless how dormant or how deep the fish may be, if we place our lure in front of his nose at zero speed, he will suck it in.*

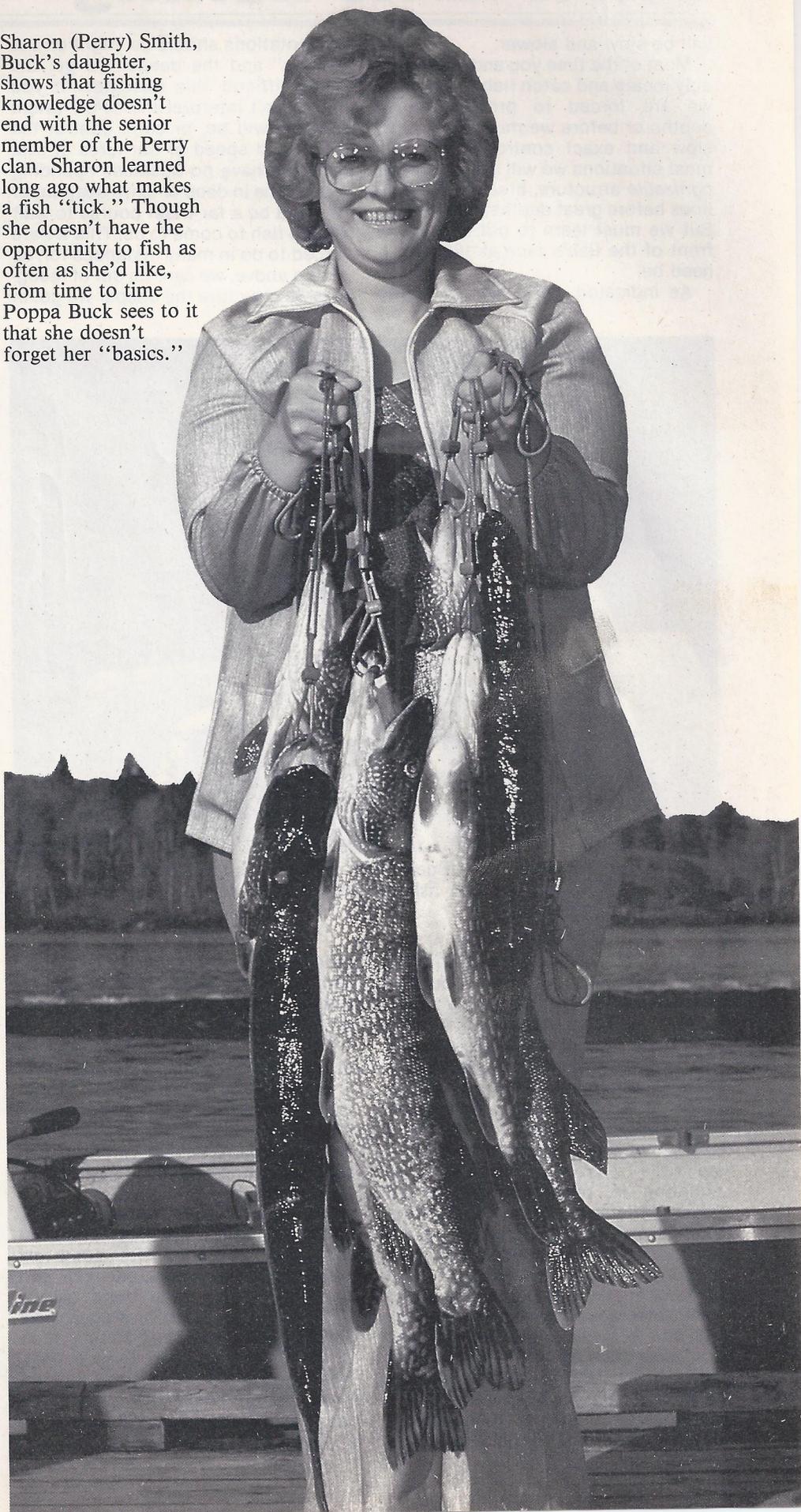
We must keep in mind, after each jump of the lure, to take up slack line and *keep tension against the lure as it sinks back to the bottom.* If we do not do this the fish may suck our lure in and spit it out without our ever being aware it happened.

Normally, this last (slowest) depth and speed control presentation is not necessary until we get into the deeper sanctuary zones, and under bad weather and water conditions. [Note: I have to insert a comment here regarding bad weather and water conditions, as there are situations where the fish do not have access to extra deep water. In some cases, the sanctuary (deepest water) may be less than 20 feet. However, in these cases the depth and speed control may have to be even MORE exact (right in his face at zero speed) as these fish do not have sufficient water depth to help offset some of the ill effects of the weather and water conditions.]

When working deep water we can assume, up to a point, the fish are dormant and non-chasing; and our presentation must be right on the money (extremely accurate). However, this may not be true at all times. We have to keep in mind that fish become active periodically (with no migration to shallower water) and many times a trolled lure at extra depths is highly effective. (We checked this out before we went to the cast.) However, we can normally feel when our efforts are directed toward extreme depths (below 30-35 feet) our speed control

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Sharon (Perry) Smith, Buck's daughter, shows that fishing knowledge doesn't end with the senior member of the Perry clan. Sharon learned long ago what makes a fish "tick." Though she doesn't have the opportunity to fish as often as she'd like, from time to time Poppa Buck sees to it that she doesn't forget her "basics."



Buck talks fishing

will be slow and slower.

Most of the time you and I will probably locate and catch fish long before we are forced to probe extreme depths or before we must use a final slow and exact control. In fact, in most situations we will run out of *recognizable* structure, breaks, or breaklines before great depths are reached. But we must learn to put the lure in front of the fish's face at 100 feet, if need be.

As indicated, when we move into

presentations should be "right on the money;" and the deeper we go, the more difficult this becomes. If you and I can't interpret the *SPOT* where the fish will be, or can't control the depth and speed of our lures at that spot, we have no business spending much time in deep or extra deep water. It would be a far wiser course to wait for the fish to come to us. This we are forced to do in many instances for, as stated above, we can run out of recognizable structure the deeper we go. In

Your thoughts at this time may be, "Yeah, your presentation of casting lures and trolling to work a bar thoroughly sounds pretty good. But what about all the other features found in lakes? Some waters I fish don't even have 'bars.' I fish some lakes where motor trolling is not allowed. I know some places where no boats are permitted on the water, etc."

Of course, there are different type features found in various bodies of water. There are long breaklines such as the drop-off along a channel. There are large underwater humps, old roadbeds, tall weedlines, steep shorelines, submerged trees, rip-rap along dams and causeways, slots, narrow coves, hay fields, etc.

We are always aware there are situations we will encounter where our presentation of lures may be limited to casting. All the same, there are situations where casting is a waste of time. There are also situations where we would pass up the trolling, as we may be able to secure better control by casting. There are instances where we can't always reach the area on the troll (such as the head of a deep pocket). If motor trolling is restricted in one place, we can go to another where it isn't. If our "rig" (boat, motor, etc.) does not allow proper depth and speed control, we can always rent or borrow one that will.

All of these things, and more, do not change the facts of fishing a lake feature thoroughly. If you and I are limited in our presentations in any manner, it means we have to work that much harder. When thinking about lakes and the various features found in them, the basic presentation of lures, casting or trolling, to control depth and speed (together) does not change. In fact, the type lures used need not change. The basic presentation of lures (as discussed) is simple, easy to perform, and it will give you the depth and speed control to *consistently* catch fish, while at the same time keep you learning and becoming better all the time.

Most of us do not have the knowledge nor the skill (thank goodness) to make contact on every fishing trip. However, we must go about our fishing in such a way that we can expect to get them all the time. We must use features in the body of water (structure, breaks, breaklines) as our guide to where the fish might be. Then IF we control our depth and speed on a feature in a lake **THOROUGHLY** and catch no fish, we can say with the utmost confidence—"There are no catchable fish here at this time!" 



We received this photo from Buck Perry students who asked the "daddy" of structure fishing to pose with fish that were caught during a day of "on the water" instruction.

the deeper water, our presentation (both casting and trolling) should be pinpointed. We cannot simply "fish" an area such as a long drop-off, breakline, ridge, line of bushes, big hump, etc. In deeper water we must concentrate our efforts where the fish will be. *If this is not done, it is not likely our presentation of lures will be exact enough to make contact.* However, if we have a specific spot we are shooting at, proper control is not overly difficult to obtain. We compensate for some error by fancasting. We use maps, floating markers, shoreline sightings, depth sounders, trolled lures, or anything to help pinpoint the spot (after we learn what to look for). We can assume when the fish are shallower than 20 feet (when deeper water is available) lure presentation does not have to be so exact. But when we go deeper in the sanctuary depths, our interpretations and lure

other words, we reach a "drop-off," and we just don't blunder around where no "sign posts" exist, or where we can't see them.

The above does not mean we should avoid working deep and deeper water. If we don't learn to "interpret" deep water features and control the depth and speed of our lures there, we can't expect to catch fish consistently wherever or whenever we might fish.

Our deeper water interpretations and presentations are areas where we can always improve. After some experience we can work as deep and spend as much time there as we desire. We can learn in stages; first the shallows, then to 15-20 feet, then to 30-35 feet, then to the deepest. This could take some time, but so what? In all likelihood we will be catching fish from the very beginning, and we'll be improving all the time.