

"The entire era of modern fishing was started in 1946 by one man, Elwood L. (Buck) Perry of Hickory, North Carolina. He is truly the Father of Structure Fishing . . . he even coined the word! He gave us our basic vocabulary of structure fishing. Millions of fishermen today are fishing with his methods, and many of them don't know it. We are privileged to have him for our Education Editor, the only publication for which he writes. He is the wellhead of fishing knowledge. He has been enshrined in the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, and at age 70, he has taken his rightful place among the legendary pioneers of our sport."

# STRUCTURE

WHAT IT IS... AND WHAT IT ISN'T

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

Recently (unobserved) I was listening to a "Pro" angler talking about a particular fishing situation. One of his comments went something like this: "Recently I ran across a typical structure — a bunch of stumps in about 8 feet of water."

Shortly after this, while fishing a particular reservoir, I listened to a group of fishermen talking. One of them said: "I know where there is one of the best 'structures' in this lake. It's about ten miles up the lake. It's a bush standing off a point in about 4 feet of water. You don't catch

a fish every time, but when you do, it's a good one." His partner said: "Let's go!" (I lost sight of them as they zoomed around a point of land with a "rooster tail" no less than 15 feet long behind the boat.)

Recently I was waiting in an airport for a plane flight. There was a fishing program in progress on a TV set in the lounge. The scene showed two fishermen casting to some standing timber. Everywhere you looked the water was filled with dead trees. The thing that got my attention was a remark made by one of the anglers: "When fishing in 'structure' such as

this, you should never use a line less than 20-pound test."

Over the years I have received many invitations to fish particular bodies of water. In most cases the invitation will contain a description of the lake. It is rather interesting to note most of the time the word "structure" is used when speaking of the fishing potential. (I suppose this is a result of the person extending the invitation having heard or read somewhere I was the so-called "Daddy" of structure fishing.) I'd have to say practically the

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The anglers in the above photo may or may NOT be fishing near structure. We suspect many of today's fishermen would be surprised to learn that there may be little or no structure here (in spite of all the timber above the waterline). In this article Education Editor Buck Perry, the father of structure fishing, explains why fishermen must learn what lies BENEATH the surface of the water if they intend to become highly skilled anglers.

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same thing about every one of the invitations I have accepted from fishermen who talked about "structure" in their lake. Just a couple examples should be enough to get the desired point across.

Not long ago, after several phone calls and letters, I decided to take a look at a reservoir which had been described as "full of structure." One reason I decided to fish the body of water was due to the

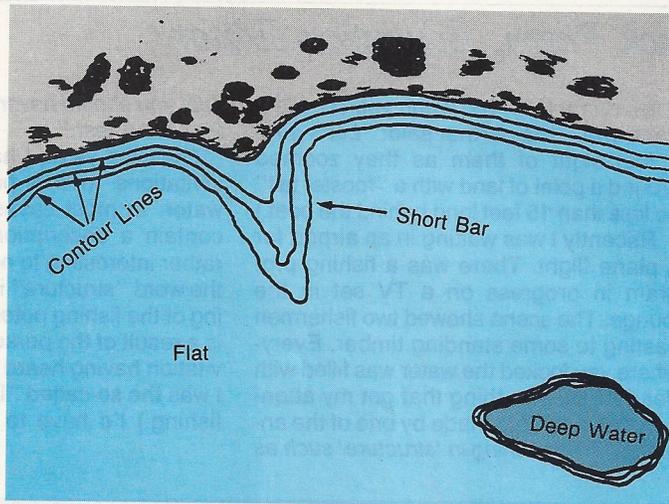
builders of the reservoir had failed to remove before the lake filled.

While accepting another invitation, the angler stated his body of water had "the best structure of any lake in the country."

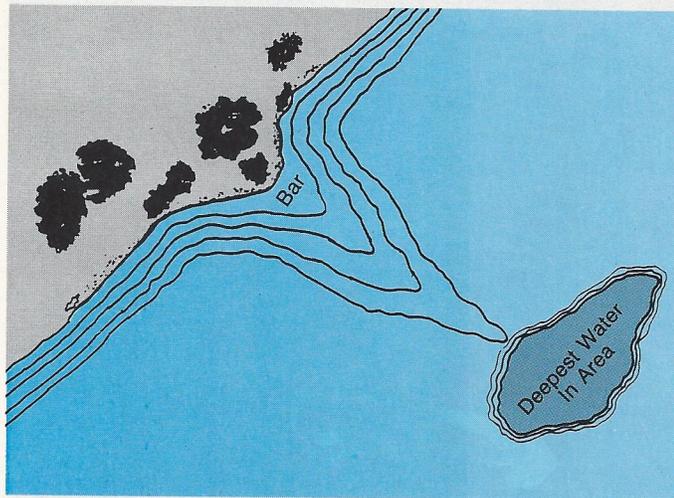
When I got there, I sat in his boat and watched him run at high speed from a bush standing in the water, to a pile of visible rocks, to a section showing a stump field, to a section where weed beds were scattered over a big mud flat; and at no time did he pass up a pier or boat house. I had to hold my hat as he dashed from one side of the lake to the other. I don't

we've talked about the features in a body of water and how the fish use these features in their movements and migrations.

About a half-century ago, when I started using the term "structure" in fishing, there were few people who did NOT know what I was talking about. The reason for this was due to the fact I explained fully by words and by showing them on the water what I meant by the word "structure." However, as the word spread and others began to use the term, it became apparent that most anything seen in a body of water became "structure." Spoonplugger Doug Travis didn't miss it much when he said, quote: "It's pathetic how the word structure has been so distorted since first introduced. EVERYTHING is structure to almost everyone! Rocks, stumps, roots, fence posts, dogs, cats, elephants — EVERYTHING is called structure. This is understandable, though, as a mention of this word requires a 'basic' knowledge of what the term means. It is unfortunate that so many writers use the word so loosely. Their influence on less-



**FIGURE 1-A**  
Top view of a fishing situation. Notice how the bar "peters out" long before it reaches deep water.



**FIGURE 1-B**  
Here the under-water bar goes all the way to deep water. In your opinion, would this make a difference in the value of this spot as a fishing area?

*"Most newcomers do not grasp the importance of deep water and its relationship to the other features fish use in their movements and migrations."*

knowledgeable fishermen is great and is the basic cause of many years of frustration in trying to locate and catch fish. Unless their readers come in contact with a TRUE structure fisherman, it's doubtful they will ever be successful. Even then, they may not accept the truths."

The knowledgeable structure fisherman refers to a "structure situation" as a situation where the features OF and ON the bottom of a body of water are so made up or so constructed, they will be used by the fish in their movements and migrations. To state it differently, **the features of and on the bottom are such that they point out a path or route the fish can see and follow ALL THE WAY from the deep water to the shallow water — and vice versa.** (Put no faith in a fish being able to see very "far," nor his pea-sized brain being able to figure out what might exist someplace else.)

The guideline of the structure fisherman says a "structure situation" is made up of STRUCTURE, BREAKS, BREAK-LINES, and DEEP WATER. Our glossary of terms would define these parts thusly: STRUCTURE — a portion OF the bottom that is different from the surrounding area (examples: "bars," "humps"). BREAKS

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fact the reservoir had been built since I last passed through the area (I try to fish them all). Another reason for taking the fisherman up on his invitation was due to my recalling, when I passed through the area previously, it was obvious any reservoir built there would be a Flatland type. It puzzled me that he was able to say the lake was "full of structure." To whet my appetite more, I was informed the lake contained "all types" of structure situations.

To make a long story short, let me say I spent a very long day in the front of a big boat casting toward **all types of standing trees, bushes and logs** the

know how many miles we traveled but, one thing for sure, I saw the major part of the lake. And I certainly saw a multitude of things he called "structure." I might add, I've never made so many BLIND casts in all my born days. When we got back to the launching ramp, he spent the rest of my stay trying to explain why we didn't catch any fish. I'll not bore you with his remarks (and excuses) because I'm sure you've heard them all in the past.

All the remarks above and the experiences have one thing in common. They point out the fact that many fishermen have not "gotten the message" when

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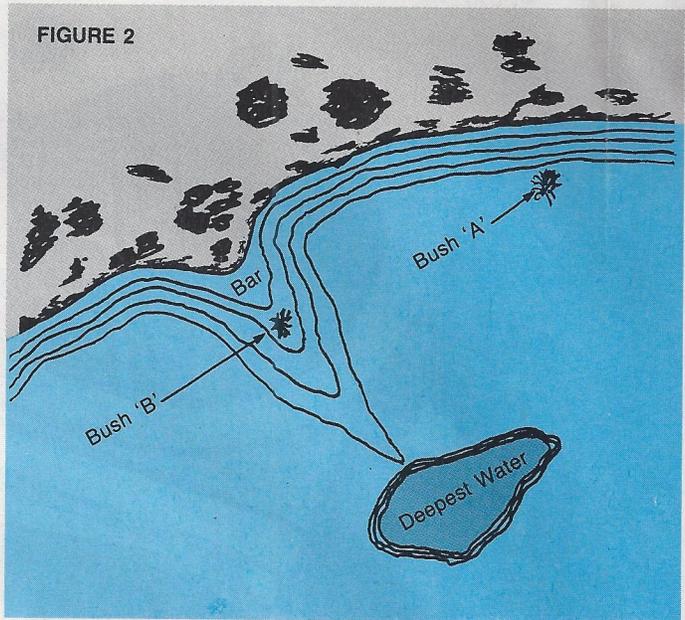
— things ON the bottom (examples: “stumps,” “rocks,” “weeds,” “logs,” “bushes,” etc.) BREAKLINES — a line or lines along the bottom where there is a definite increase or decrease in depth, either sudden or gradual (example: the edge of a channel, “hole,” or “gully.”) There are other “breaklines” such as: the “wall” of a weedline; a brushline; where two bodies of water meet which differ in temperature, color, or water movement (current). DEEP WATER — the guideline of the true structure fisherman says all depths greater than 8 to 10 feet should be looked upon as deep water.

It's at this point where we have to get our thinking straight. We can get started by saying: “All the bottom features that could be called ‘structure’ WILL NOT be used by the fish in their movements and migrations.” In other words, all things that could be called “structure” will not always produce fish; which means, all the bottom features that could be called “structure” CANNOT be labeled a “Structure Situation.” If we don't understand this, then the “Structure Fisherman” is just as bad off as the fisherman who puts the label “structure” to a bunch of stumps or weeds in shallow water. Let's talk more about this.

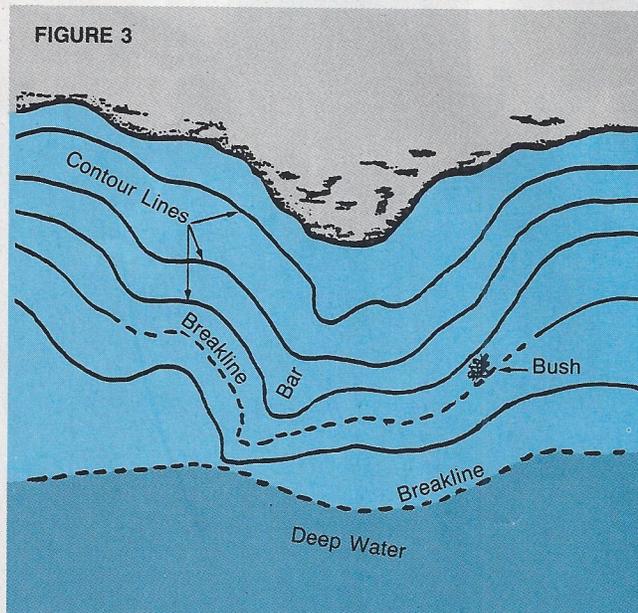
Some may wonder why “deep water” is included as a part of a “structure situation.” The “old” structure fisherman would have no trouble at this point, but most newcomers do not grasp **the importance of deep water and its relationship to the other features (structure, breaks, breaklines) the fish use in their movements and migrations.** First, it must be remembered the deep water is where the fish spend the **greater** part of their time — a sanctuary from a changing environment (weather and water conditions). The second reason (probably the greater of the two) is that in order for any structure, break or breakline to have the potential of being productive, **it must tie or join in some manner to the deep or deepest water in the area being fished.** Another way to put it would be to say: “In order for a structure, break or breakline (singular or in combination) to be productive, it must GO ALL THE WAY from the shallow water to the deep or deepest water in the area being fished.” I could say: “You can have structure, breaks, and breaklines WITHOUT fish, but you cannot have fish if the structure, breaks and breaklines are not connected in some manner to deep water.” This guideline is very important in our “interpretation” as to whether the area we are fishing has the potential of being productive.

Let's look at some figures to make this point clearer. **Figure 1-A** is a top view of a situation in a lake. The ridgelike “bar” extending out from the slight extrusion in

**FIGURE 2** — Can you see why your fishing efforts should be directed toward the bush marked “B”, rather than bush “A”?



**FIGURE 3** — Top view of a “bar” (structure) that has good fishing potential.



For the benefit of his grandson, Eric, Education Editor Buck Perry demonstrated how to work a deep breakline (drop-off) during a severe cold front weather condition when the fish had retreated from the shallows. Buck explained the reasons why they had to fish deep water if they expected to make a decent catch (no other fish were caught that day by fishermen working the shallows).



FIGURE 4

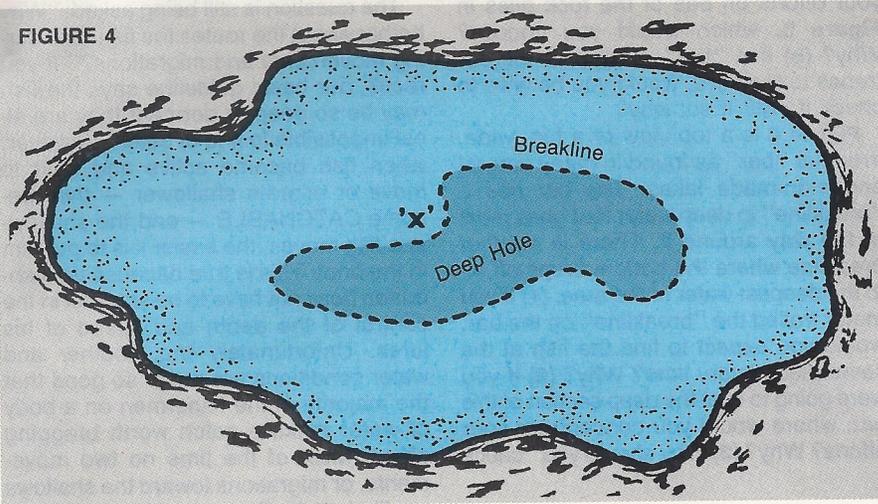


FIGURE 5

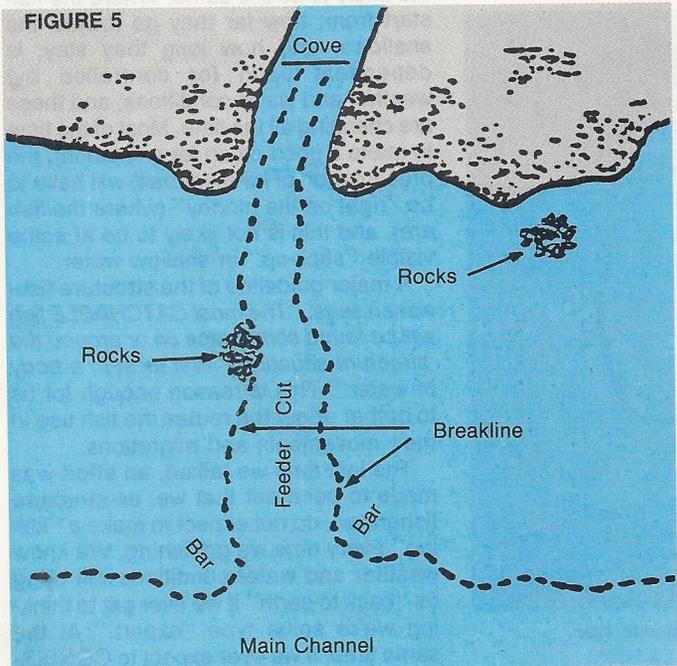


FIGURE 4 - Top view of a natural lake with one deep section that serves as a "home" area to the fish.

FIGURE 5 A side feeder stream (or wash) has cut some type of channel all the way to the deepest water in the area (main channel).

FIGURE 6 - Top view of a big, wide, irregular bar as found in many natural and man-made lakes.

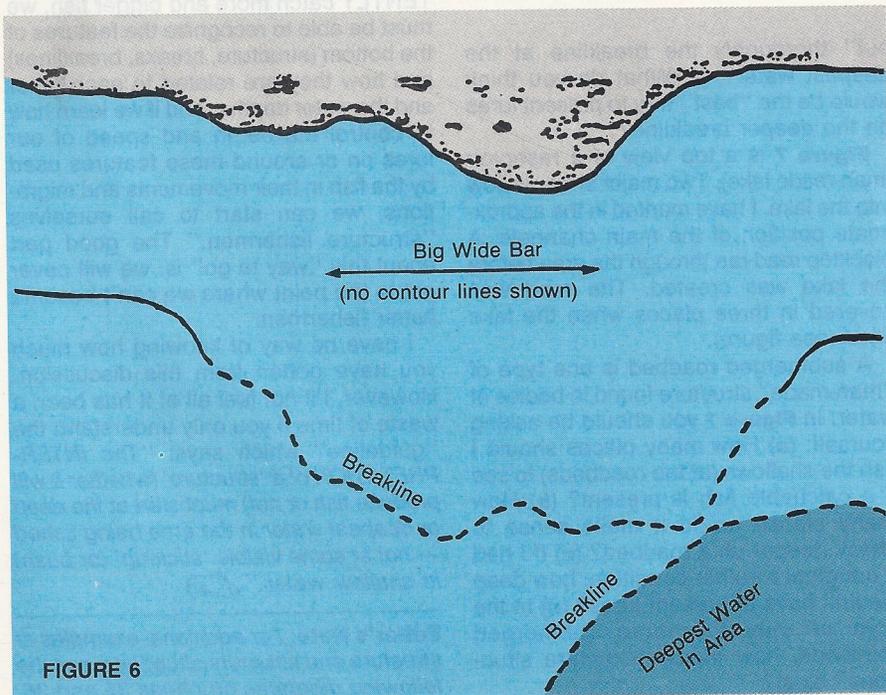


FIGURE 6

the shoreline is a "structure" (a feature of the bottom, different from the surrounding area). You will note the bar "peters out" long before it reaches the deep or deepest water in the area. Since the fish spend the greater part of their time in the deep water, my thoughts would be: "Do the fish know the bar exists?" "Does the bar GO ALL THE WAY?" "Do the fish have a visible path all the way to the shallows?"

Figure 1-B is quite a different situation. In this case the "bar" goes all the way. My thoughts in this case are: "The fish in deep water would know this bottom feature exists." "The fish would have no difficulty locating a bottom feature showing them a clear route toward (or to) the shallows." "This 'structure situation' should produce."

Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1-B, but in this case a couple of "breaks" in the form of a bush have been added. They have been labeled "A" and "B". My thoughts are: "Bush 'A' is not related (tied to) IN ANY MANNER to a 'structure' or the

*"The most CATCHABLE fish will be found someplace on or around the 'structure situations' that exist in a body of water."*

deep or deepest water in the area." Can you see why your fishing efforts should be directed toward bush "B"?

One of the "guidelines" of the structure fisherman says: Fish will move along a "breakline" when ON or CONNECTED to a structure AND/OR deep water. To make the guideline more clear, let us look at some additional figures.

Figure 3 is a top view of a "bar" (structure) in a section of a lake. It is a "structure situation" because it goes "all the way" and so has the potential of being productive. There is a "breakline" ON the bar that goes almost all the way around it. I have placed a bush ("break") on the breakline. This bush produces fish ever so often. The question may be: Why is a fish **ever** caught at the bush? Do you think the fish would head straight for the bush without using the bar or breaklines for most of the route? Our guidelines would say they move toward the end of the "bar", probably along the deeper breakline, then **along the "breakline" toward the bush** (we do not know the exact "contact point" on this deeper breakline). Do you understand "why" a fish would move along a breakline? Would you "check out" the deeper breakline?

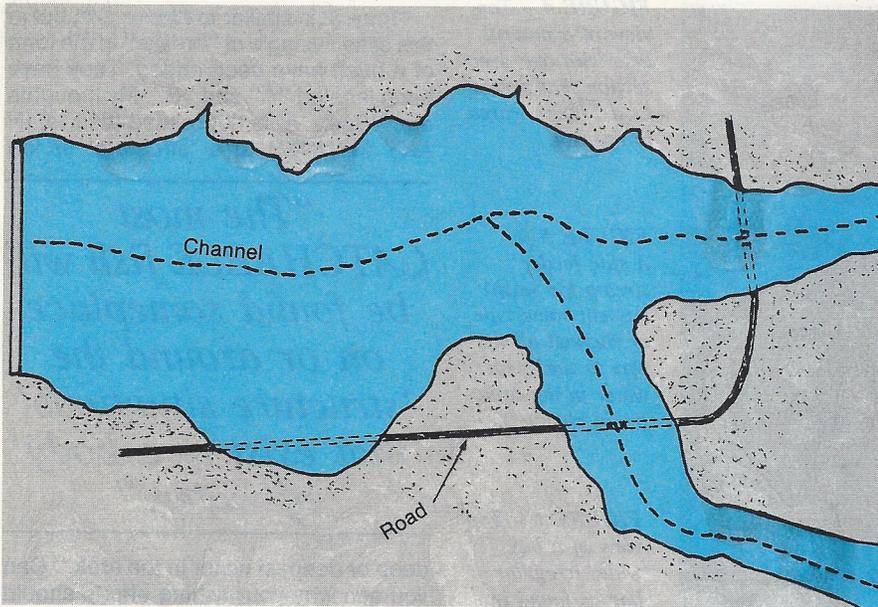
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**Figure 4** is a top view of a natural lake. It has one deep section that serves as "home" (a place where the fish spend the greater part of their time — a sanctuary from a changing environment). There is a "breakline" all around the deeper section. We could say the breakline is CONNECTED to the deep water. When the fish make contact with the breakline at some place (probably at the "finger" or extrusion in the bottom — say position "X") it would be a good bet to say the fish are likely to move along the breakline (probably scattering) and under most

your efforts on one of the rock piles in **Figure 5**, which would you choose? Why? (b) If a "bar" existed at the entrance to the cove, would you be wise to check it out? If so, why?

**Figure 6** is a top view of a big, wide, irregular "bar" as found in many natural and man-made lakes. The bar has a "breakline" in deep water that goes most of the way around it. There is another breakline where the bottom drops off into the deepest water in the area. (1) If you motor trolled the "breakline" on the bar, would you expect to find the fish at the same place every time? Why? (2) If you were going to cast the deep section of this bar, where would you concentrate your efforts? Why? (3) Why should you "check



**FIGURE 7** — Top view of a man-made lake. A submerged roadbed is one type of man-made structure found in many bodies of water.

weather and water conditions, seldom go shallower or move toward the shoreline — regardless how "fishy looking" the weeds might be.

**Figure 5** is a top view of a "structure situation" in a Flatland or Lowland type reservoir. I use this type figure often because it teaches fishermen more about "structure situations" or the relationship between structure, breaks, breaklines and deep water than any other thing I know.

**Figure 5** shows where a side feeder stream (or wash) has cut some type channel *all the way* to the deepest water in the area (main channel). In this case it has formed two "bars" (structure) where it entered the main channel. It (the stream or wash) has created rather pronounced "breaklines" along the edges of the "feeder cut." **Figure 5** also shows two piles of rocks ("breaks"). (You could substitute a bush, stump, weed bed, etc., in place of the rock piles.) In light of what has been said (a) If you concentrated

out" thoroughly the breakline at the deepest water? (4) What do you think would be the "best" way to present lures on the deeper breakline?

**Figure 7** is a top view of a reservoir (man-made lake). Two major streams flow into the lake. I have marked in the approximate position of the main channels. A blacktop road ran through the area before the lake was created. The road was covered in three places when the lake filled (see figure).

A submerged roadbed is one type of "man-made" structure found in bodies of water. In **Figure 7** you should be asking yourself: (a) How many places should I fish the shallows (at the roadbeds) to see if a catchable fish is present? (b) How many places would it make sense to check deeper on a roadbed? (c) If I had a marginal weather condition, how deep would I have to present lures? (d) In the light of **only** the three submerged roadbeds, how many "structure situations" exist?

The question is still being asked: "Why bother about the routes the fish take during movements and migrations?" If you recall, our basic guideline says the fish may be so deep or dormant they are almost impossible to find or catch. However, when fish become active and start to move or migrate shallower — they become CATCHABLE — and the shallower a fish moves, the easier it is to put him in the boat. This is true because the fisherman does not have to be so exact in the control of the depth and speed of his lures. Unfortunately the weather and water conditions are never so good that the majority of the fishermen on a body of water make a catch worth bragging about. Most of the time no two movements, or migrations toward the shallows are likely to be the same. Where the fish start from, how far they go toward the shallows, and how long they stay, is dependent upon (or controlled by) weather and water conditions; and these are changing all the time. Most of the time to make a good catch (or any catch), the presentation of lures (or bait) will have to be "right on the money" (where the fish are), and this is not likely to be at some visible "stick-up" in shallow water.

A major guideline of the structure fisherman says: "The most CATCHABLE fish will be found someplace on or around the 'structure situations' that exist in a body of water." This is reason enough for us to bother about the routes the fish use in their movements and migrations.

The last time we talked, an effort was made to point out that we, as structure fishermen, do not expect to make a "killing" every time we go fishing. We know weather and water conditions will bring us "back to earth" if we ever get to thinking we're some type "expert." At the same time, if we ever expect to CONSISTENTLY catch more and bigger fish, we must be able to recognize the features of the bottom (structure, breaks, breaklines) and how they are related to each other and the water depths. And if we learn how to control the depth and speed of our lures on or around these features used by the fish in their movements and migrations, we can start to call ourselves "structure fishermen." The good part about this "way to go" is: we will never get to the point where we can't become *better* fishermen.

I have no way of knowing how much you have gotten from this discussion. However, I'll not feel all of it has been a waste of time if you only understand the "guideline" which says: "The INTERPRETATION of a 'structure' (whether it will produce fish or not) must start at the deep or deepest water in the area being fished — not at some visible 'stick-up' (or bush) in shallow water." 

**Editor's Note:** For additional examples of structure and structure situations, see the following diagrams on pages 35 and 36.

# Typical Structure Situations

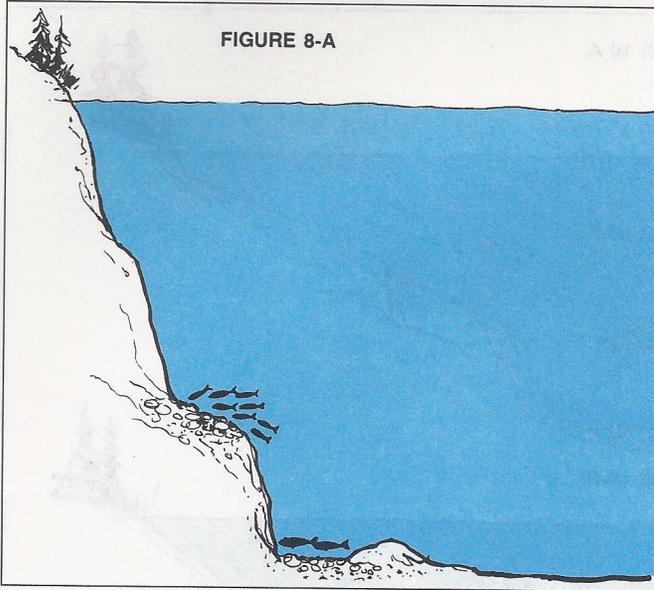


FIGURE 8-A

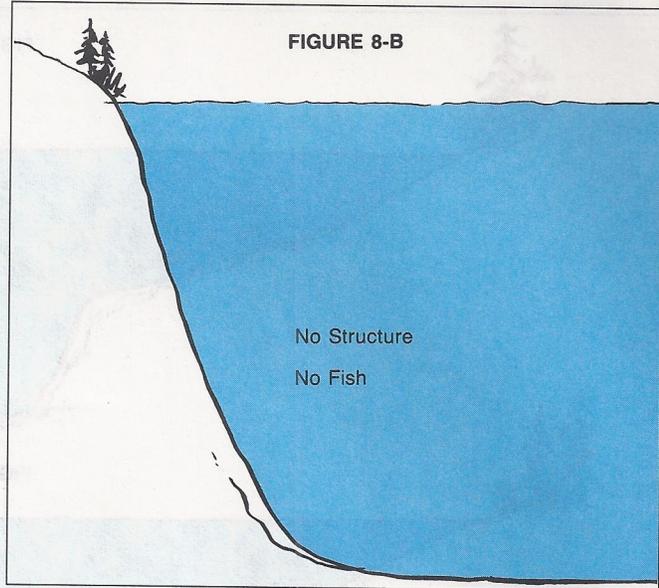


FIGURE 8-B

Figures 8-A and 8-B are side views of a steep drop-off in a body of water. Note how fish relate to the structure (in this case a rocky ledge) shown in Figure 8-A. Next, note what happens when the structure is removed, as in Figure 8-B.

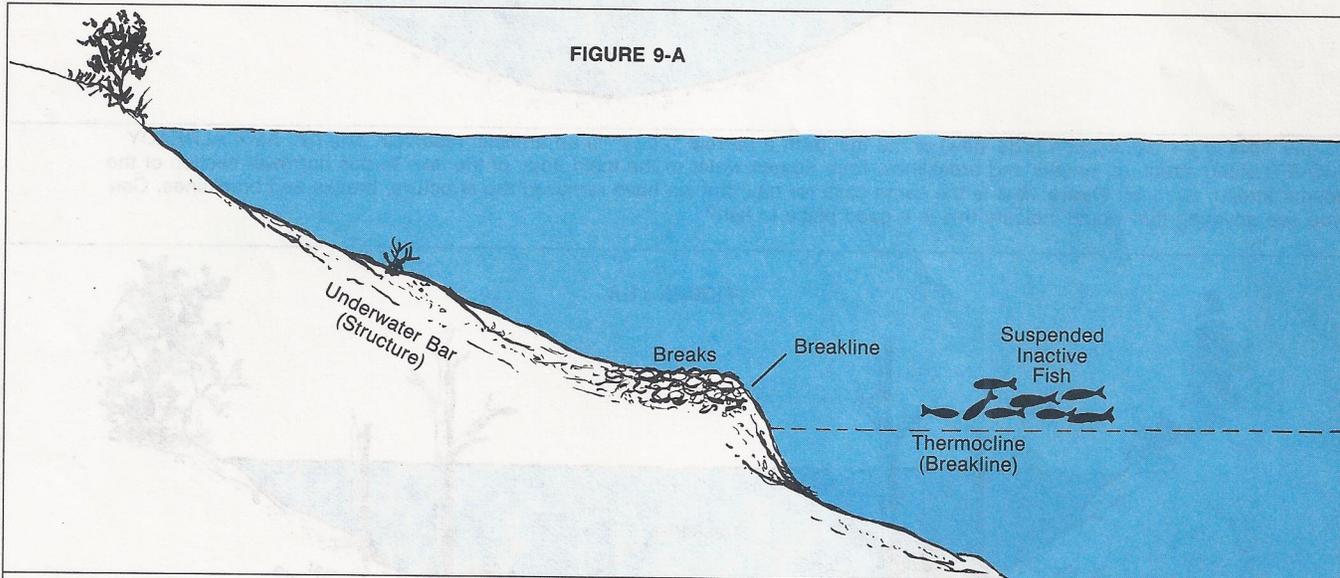


FIGURE 9-A

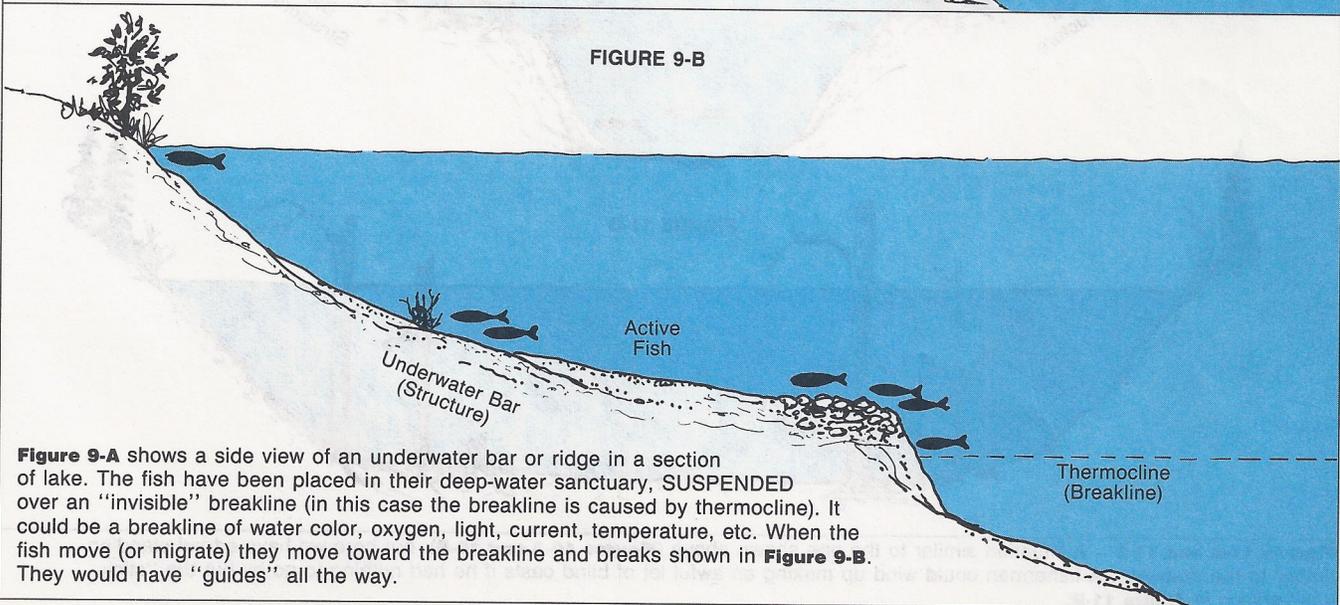
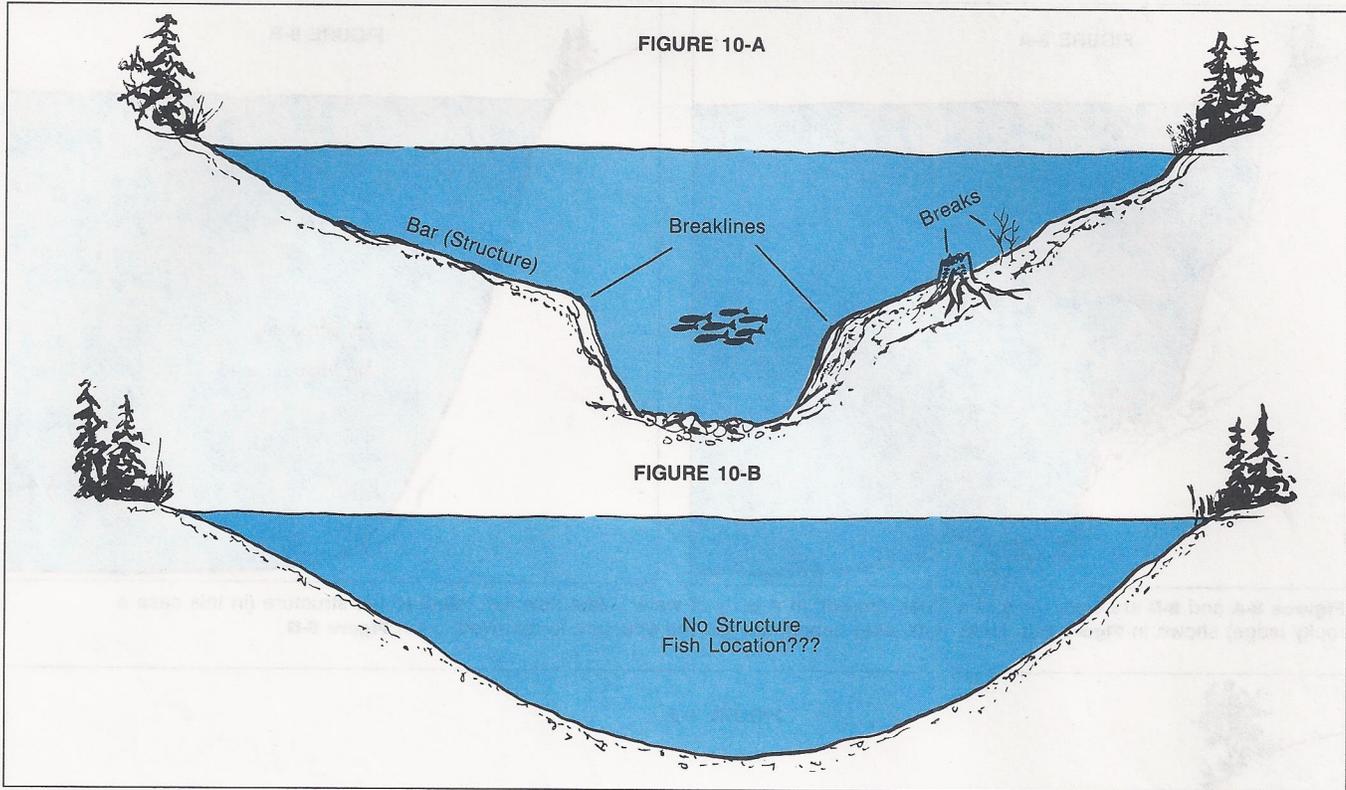


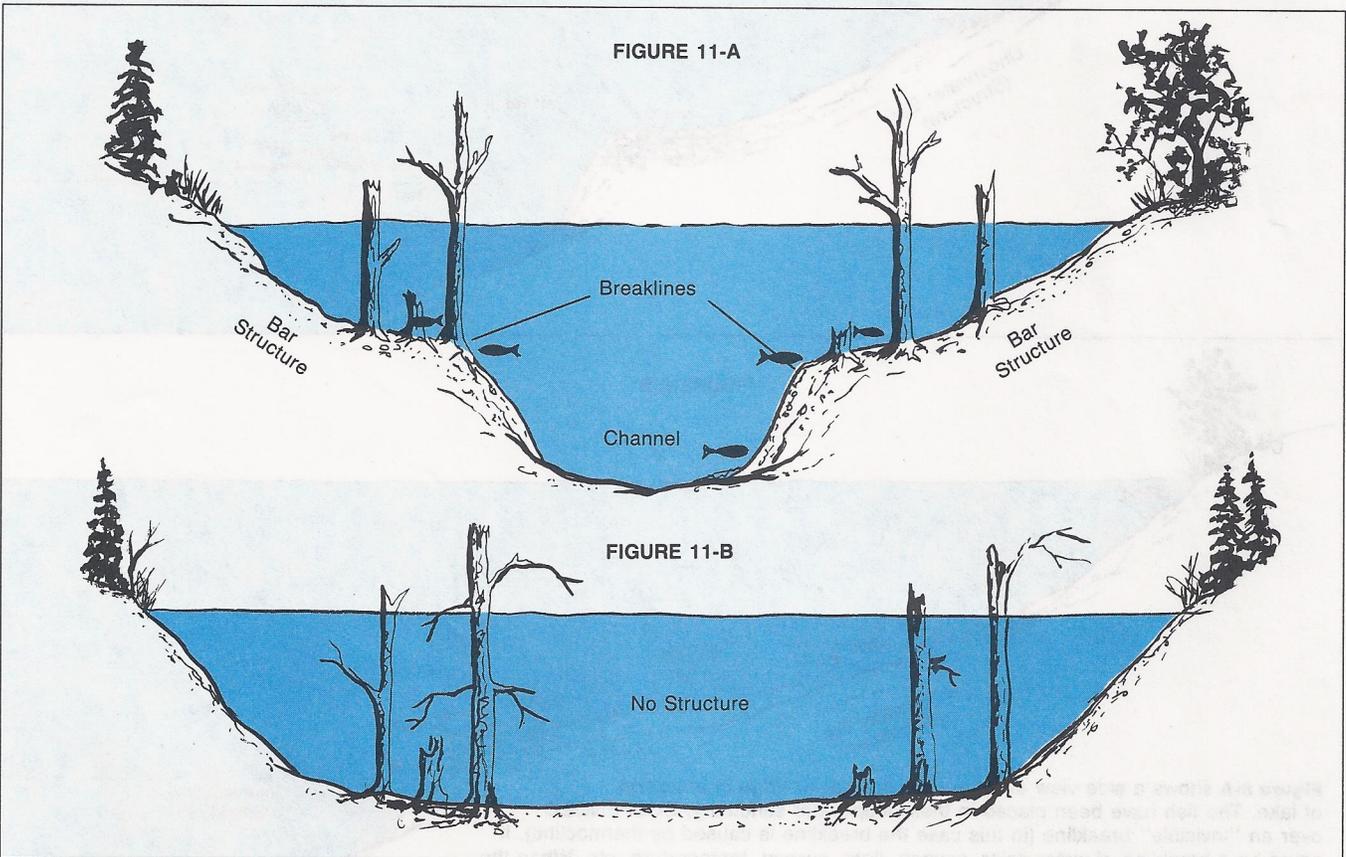
FIGURE 9-B

Figure 9-A shows a side view of an underwater bar or ridge in a section of lake. The fish have been placed in their deep-water sanctuary, **SUSPENDED** over an "invisible" breakline (in this case the breakline is caused by thermocline). It could be a breakline of water color, oxygen, light, current, temperature, etc. When the fish move (or migrate) they move toward the breakline and breaks shown in Figure 9-B. They would have "guides" all the way.

# Typical Structure Situations



**Figure 10-A** is a cross section (side view) of the mouth of a narrow "cove" in an artificial reservoir. The fish have ALREADY MOVED along structure, breaks and breaklines, from deeper water in the main body of the lake to this narrower section of the feeder stream channel. **Figure 10-B** is the same cove (or bay) but we have removed the structure, breaks and breaklines. Can you see anything that would indicate this is a good place to fish?



**Figures 11-A and 11-B** – A situation similar to the one shown above (Figures 10-A and 10-B), but here we have added standing timber to the drawings. A fisherman could wind up making an awful lot of blind casts if he had nothing to go by but the "stick-ups" shown in **Figure 11-B**.