

Buck talks fishing

by BUCK PERRY, Education Editor

There's Really No Mystery About Suspended Fish

Editor's Note:

E. L. (Buck) Perry, of Hickory, North Carolina is the father of "structure" fishing. It is Buck Perry who gave modern day structure fishermen a "language" with which they could communicate. It is Buck Perry who first coined the words "structure", "migration route", "breaks and breaklines", and many more. It is also Buck Perry who correlated many of the basic facts concerning fish habits, their movements, and how they could best be caught. He later named these facts about fish and fishing, SPOONPLUGGING.

Each month Fishing Facts is introduced to new readers. For many of them the words "structure" and "structure fishing" will be totally new. For these new readers, we will continue to emphasize the basic concepts of structure, fish habits, instincts, etc. from time to time.

However, in this present series titled "Buck Talks Fishing", Buck Perry will be addressing those fishermen who have already studied their "BASICS" and are now ready to move on to additional knowledge. In order to gain the most benefit from the articles, it is important that the student have a clear understanding of the terminology and nomenclature.

If you are a new reader, may we suggest several steps which will allow you to "catch up" or achieve a better understanding of the articles.

May we suggest that you:

1. Study a copy of Buck's great new book, "Spoonplugging, Your Guide To Lunker Catches". This book contains all the basic facts of fish movements, basic structures, basic weather and water conditions, basic presentation of lures, and much more. This book was 25 years in the making, a quarter century of

fishing knowledge put down on paper for the first time so that fishermen everywhere could share in better fishing. The book is on sale for \$10.30 postpaid and available on an unconditional money back guarantee from us, Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 609, Menomonee Falls, Wis. 53051.

2. Familiarize yourself with our glossary of terms titled "Fishing Talk — Our Language of Structure Fishing", which can be found near the beginning of each issue of Fishing Facts.

No other publication is privileged to have Buck Perry on its staff. He has become a legend in his own time. As Fishing Facts Education Editor, this former Physics Professor from North Carolina State, has consented to share his vast fishing knowledge and experience with us. Many of today's successful fresh water anglers owe him more than they may ever realize.

The last time we were talking, it was brought out if a person does not THOROUGHLY understand what is said, or written, he is likely to become confused, and this is especially true if he hears or reads something about the subject which may be slightly contradictory. It was also pointed out that when speaking to students about a fishing fact, GREAT DETAIL AND REPETITION IS OFTEN REQUIRED TO BE SURE THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS SAID.

In order to cover a particular subject thoroughly, it is very important that the student ask questions, or state any thought that he may have. Quite often it is difficult to get the student to speak up, although it is pointed out there is no such thing as a stupid question in my fishing class.

After many, many years of teach-

ing and talking to fishermen, it has become quite easy to predict what questions will be asked, or in what areas the subject matter requires a great deal of detail and repetition. This experience has been a great help in getting students to talk. If I can get them talking and asking questions about a particular subject, I know we are into a good session. We may not completely clear the air, nor will we always agree; but, one thing for sure, the students are thinking for themselves, and this means they are on their way to becoming better fishermen — the sole purpose for the discussion in the first place.

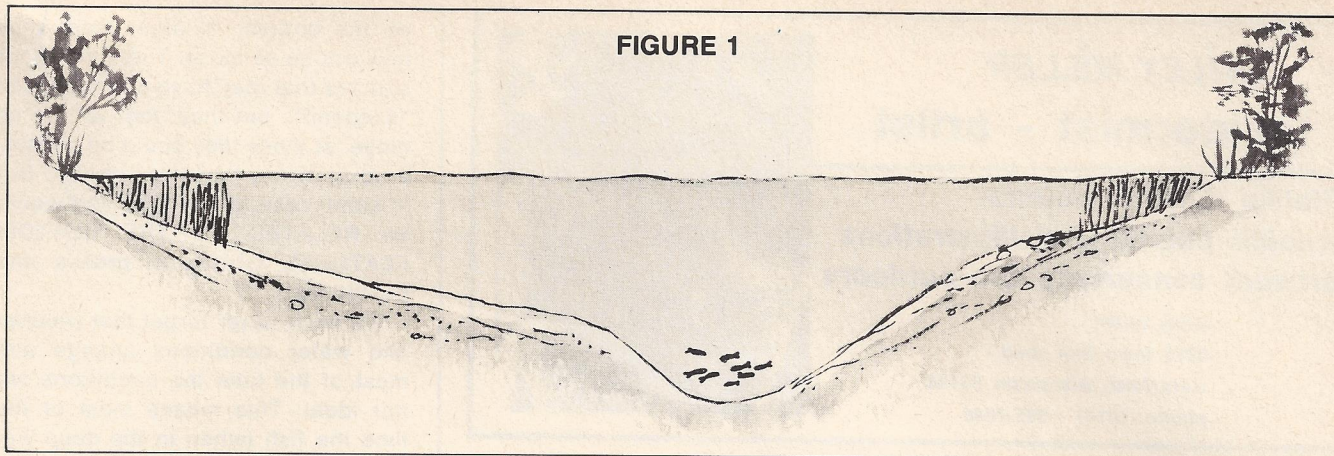
Subject matter that comes to mind at this time are the subjects of "Sanctuary", "Suspension", and "Structure". Quite often it is not necessary to stimulate a discussion on these three subjects, but at times, it IS necessary. This is due to the nature of the subjects themselves.

We usually get around to questions, or a discussion, in one way or another. I try to guide the discussion so that we gain the detail and cross references required to clarify the subjects in the student's mind.

For example; you might say: "In your drawings, when talking about the deep water sanctuary, you placed the fish directly on the bottom to show their position. Are the fish always in a position as shown? Is the sanctuary of the fish always on the bottom?"

In past discussions the figure (drawing) used was to show the EXISTENCE of a deep water sanctuary. It was not intended to say ALL deep water sanctuaries were exactly like the example shown. There are many different shapes and features in a given body of water. It is possible no two would be the same. There are numerous waters with different depths; there exists a multitude of weather and water conditions and, of course, we have SEASONAL changes.

I'm not sure I fully understand what you have in mind, but regardless what it might be, the point that was being made at the time was the fact that fish spend the GREATER part of their time in DEEP water (sanctuary), not in the SHALLOW water. The particular (or exact) POSITION they might be in, will depend upon quite a few things; the bottom



makeup, the conditions of weather and water, depths, seasons, etc.

Let's change your question somewhat and say, "Is the deep water sanctuary of a group of fish at the SAME PLACE all the time?"

Let's look at a few figures and see if we can't straighten this subject out in your mind.

FIGURE 1

Figure 1 is a side view of a small natural lake. There exists only one small deeper section in the whole lake. The deepest water available is only 24 feet. In a situation such as this, you might say the deep water sanctuary is in the SAME PLACE all the time. Figure 1 could also represent a "channel" (or underwater "slot"). Here again you could say the sanctuary is always in the same place — the channel. But, they (the

fish) do not NECESSARILY have to be at the same place in the channel all the time. However, when the fish MOVE toward the shallows we would normally expect them to COME FROM somewhere in this (24 ft.) area.

FIGURES 2-A AND 2-B

Figures 2-A and 2-B are side views of the same section in a body of water. Figure 2-A shows the fish in their deep water sanctuary under a good weather and water condition. Figure 2-B shows the SAME FISH in their sanctuary under a cold front (weather condition), or after the water cleared, or after a seasonal change (such as winter).

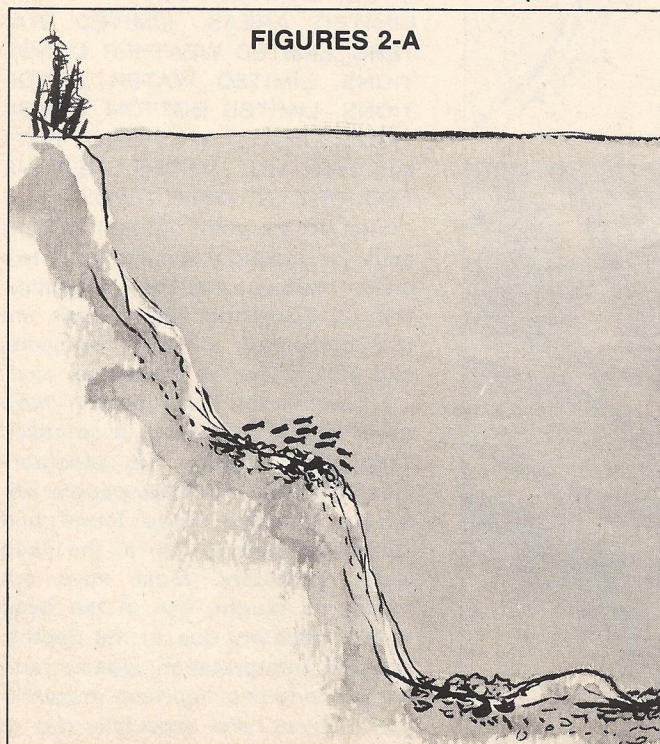
FIGURES 3-A AND 3-B

Figure 3-A shows some bass in a deep water sanctuary during the

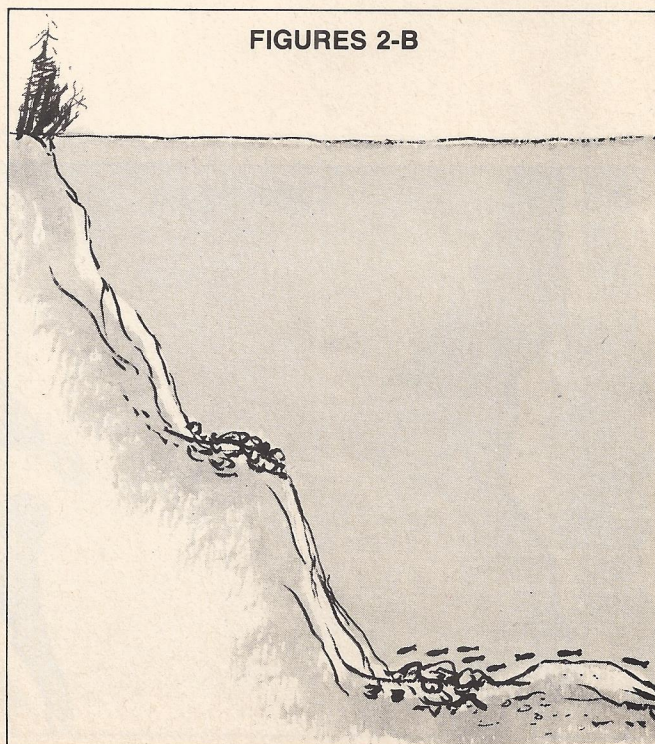
warmer part of the season. They are using bar "A" as structure in their movements and migrations towards the shallows. Figure 3-B is a top view of the same section of water, in the colder (winter), or prespawn season. Figure 3-B shows the fish are using the steep shoreline, or the breaks and breaklines of the feeder stream, in their movements and migrations toward shallower water at this period. These SEASONAL movements and migrations could have SOME SPECIES of fish using structure, breaks, and breaklines IN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE BODY OF WATER.

* * *

Now let's look at the second part of your original question, "Is the deep water sanctuary always on the BOTTOM?" Probably what you meant was, "Are the FISH always on



FIGURES 2-A



FIGURES 2-B

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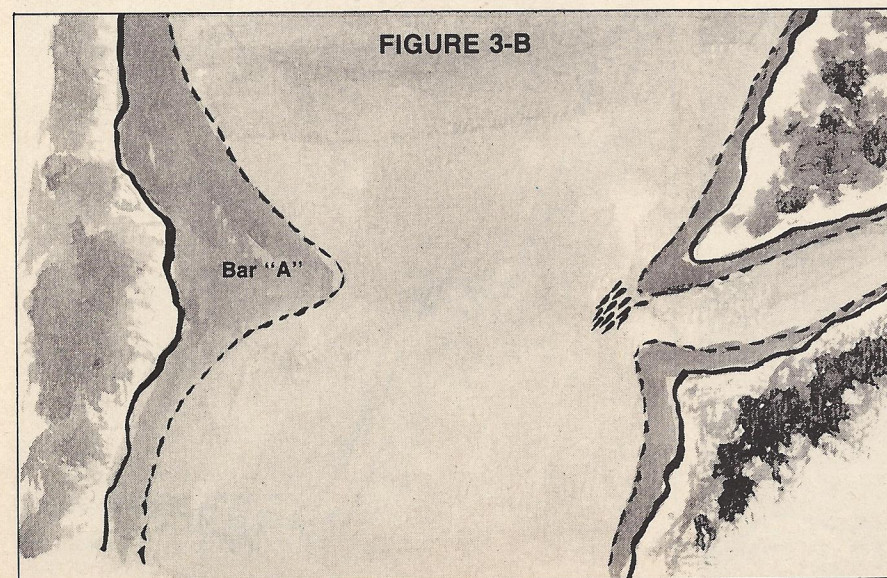
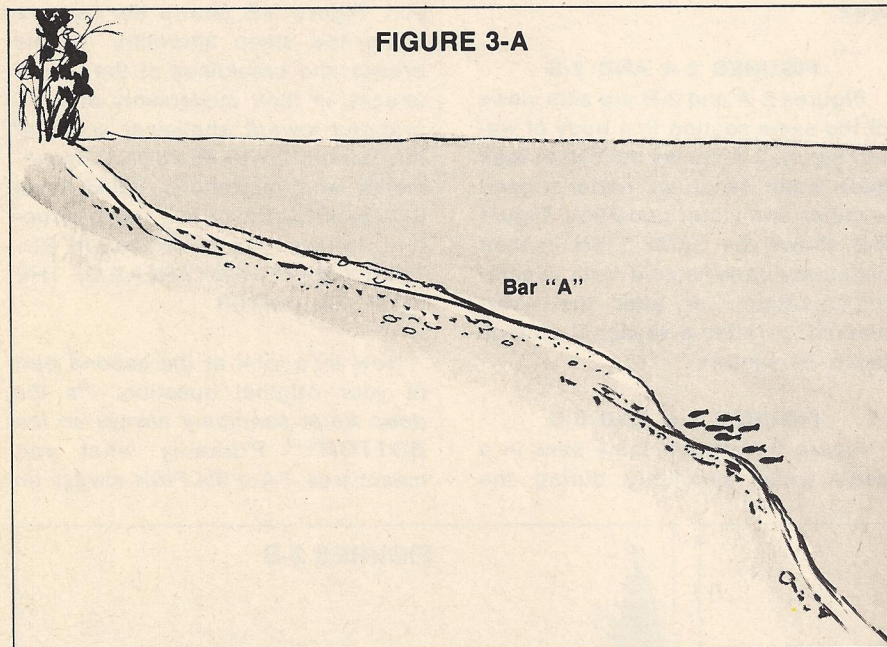
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the bottom when in the deep water sanctuary?"

The answer is they could be, or they may NOT be. It would depend upon the particular situation, and

upon the species of fish. In the case of bass, most of the time they will be so close to the bottom (structure, breaks or breaklines), for all practical purposes you might say they are



on the bottom. At other times they may not be so close. There are other species that may have a tendency to "suspend", but they, too, will be so close, at times they could be considered as being "on the bottom". But in either case, their POSITION would be RELATED TO THE BOTTOM FEATURES (structure, breaks and breaklines).

We must never forget that weather and water conditions change and most of the time the conditions are not ideal. This means most of the time the fish (when in the deep water) are dormant and close to the bottom features. It shouldn't be so difficult for you to understand the fish would not necessarily be directly ON the bottom. They could be over a clean spot, rocks, hump, or around a bush, etc. If they are located under "cover", such as weeds, brush, etc., they wouldn't necessarily have to be right on the bottom. But again, I say they are related to bottom FEATURES that serve as "signposts" for their movements.

You might say; *"I have read, and heard some 'expert' indicate there was no such thing as a deep water sanctuary, and that bass more often suspend off structure when not on structure."*

Probably those who made such statements did not read, or STUDY the Spoonplugging material IN DEPTH. But, such statements are largely due to LIMITED EXPERIENCE, LIMITED OBSERVATION, LIMITED AREAS, LIMITED WATERS, LIMITED WEATHER CONDITIONS, LIMITED WATER CONDITIONS, LIMITED BOTTOM CONDITIONS, LIMITED SPECIES OF FISH, and especially, LIMITED CREATIVE THOUGHT OF THEIR OWN!

First, let me point out that your remark (or question) is made up of two distinct subject matters: (1) Sanctuary, (2) Suspended fish. These are two completely different subjects, and should not be treated as one.

I have heard some say, *"I have never found the fish in a so-called sanctuary; therefore, a sanctuary must not exist."* Very few people, relatively speaking, have found and caught schools of fish in the deep water sanctuary. Most have not found, or caught, fish in the deep water sanctuary due to the depths, position, interpretation, weather and water conditions, improper presentation of lures, and especially due to

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the dormancy (inactivity) of the fish.

At times a fisherman may "just happen" to present his lures correctly enough at the right place to get a "lone" fish before they (the fish) become active and migrate to recog-

nizable structure. Many, many fishermen have found the fish in deep water, and caught them immediately AFTER the fish began to move (became active). Anytime you hear that the deep water is not the home or

sanctuary of the fish, you should give this statement a great deal of thought. You should not only consider the source of the remark, but you should also do a little "fishing" and observation on your own.

You probably have also heard or read where someone said something like this: "If there is such a thing as a deep water sanctuary, why aren't bass sanctuaries found away from the vicinity of weed beds, bushes, trees, etc.?"

So much could be said about a statement such as this it would fill a book. We'll just note a couple things. Not all fishing water has weeds, brush, etc. The MOVEMENTS (and activity) of the fish would put them in the vicinity of these breaks (weed beds, brush, etc.) — if the weeds, brush, etc. were on structure (breaklines, etc.). This statement would indicate the "expert" never got very far from the "stick-ups". And, possibly his choice of lures, or his "method", has never put him in a school of fish in the deep water. IF he had spent more time fishing a channel or a deep water "slot", his conclusions regarding sanctuaries not existing away from weed beds, bushes, trees, etc. might be totally different.

Now, concerning the second part of your question (or the "sayings" of your assumed expert). This is in reference to "suspension".



On rare occasions Education Editor, Buck Perry, finds time to break away from his busy schedule in order to discuss fishing facts with various fishing groups. During these "classroom sessions", the daddy of structure fishing covers many of the habits and characteristics of numerous fish species, plus effective methods to capture them.

FIGURE 4

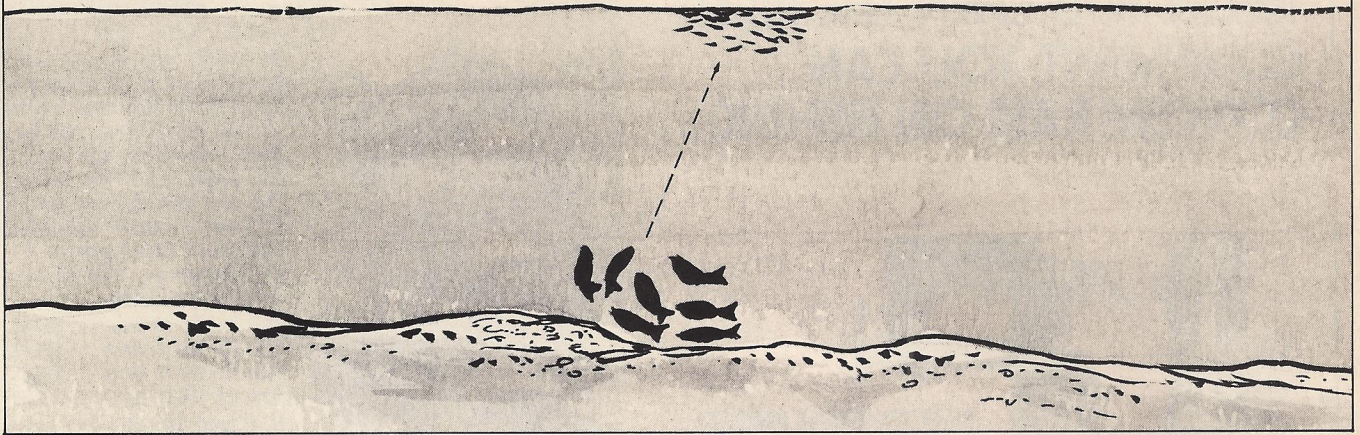


FIGURE 5

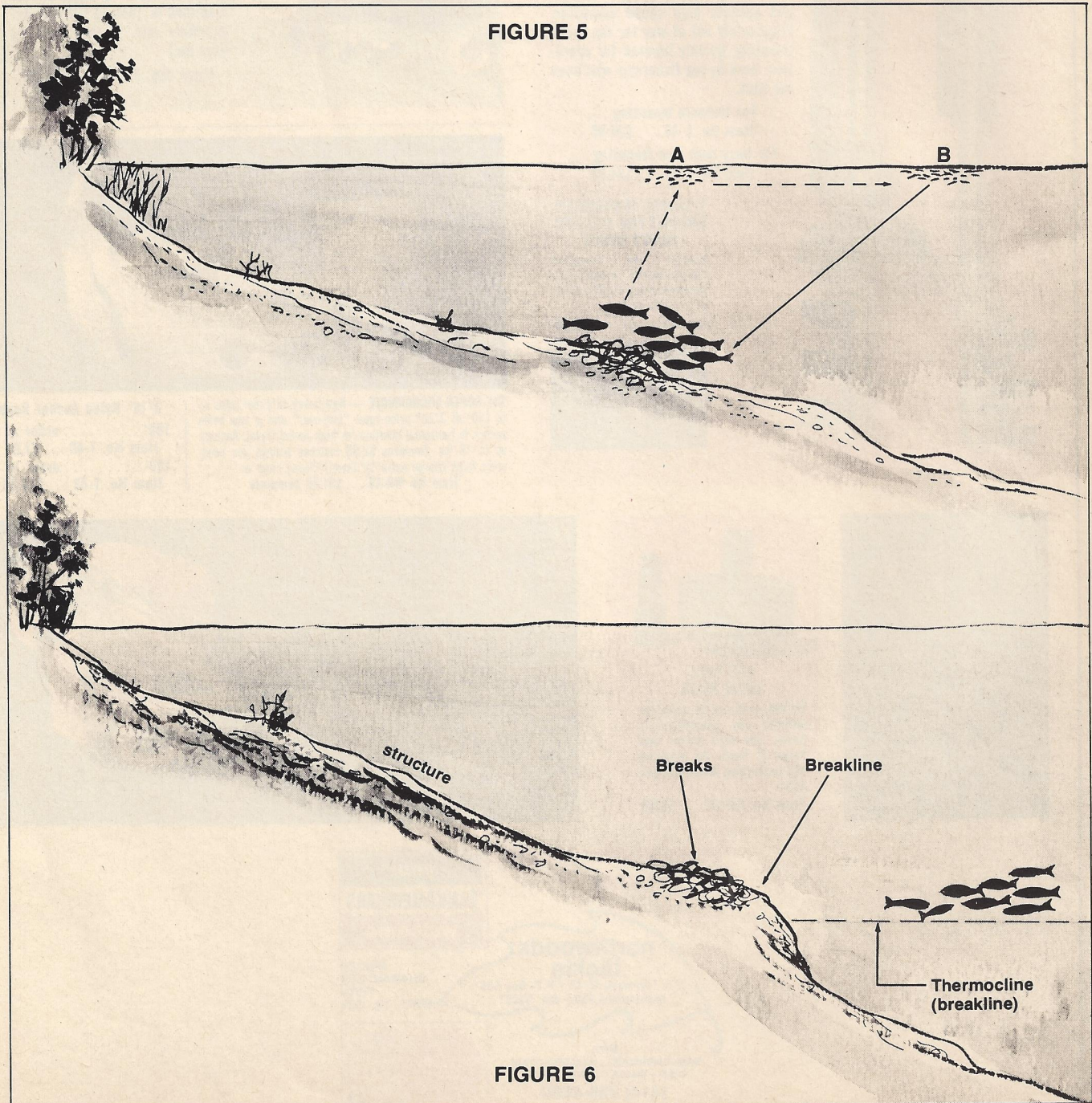


FIGURE 6

You might say: "I find, and catch, most of my fish when they are after schools of small fish on the surface. In fact, lots of times I find them by watching the birds that have been attracted by the commotion. These fish aren't down on the bottom nosing around in the muck and mud; neither are they peeping out from behind some rock, bush or weed. Another thing, these fish can be found over many depths of water. How do you relate this to structure and migration?"

First, let us understand you are talking about a particular FEEDING situation, NOT a basic movement pattern. YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT A FEEDING PROCESS AFTER THE FISH HAVE BECOME ACTIVE AND MOVING. The word "schooling" has often been used to describe a feeding process as you describe. The word has been around for quite some time. It is not a good word to describe the action. Neither is the term "schoolies" a good word for yearlings (small fish) that may roam around more, and seem to be "schooling" more. These terms were, in all probability, used and adapted because fishermen did not know that ALL the fish schooled, particularly big fish in deep water. Most fishermen probably thought the fish only gathered together (schooled) when they decided to gang up on a batch of small forage fish (minnows, shad, etc.) on the surface. But, the words are here, and we have to live with them.

Probably you did not relate this activity to structure and to basic movements, because it was never necessary to relate it, or you never gave much thought to what made a fish "tick". I'm sure if you had made your own personal observations, you would have related even the FORAGE fish to structure (at times). You must have observed your depth sounder lighting up like a Christmas tree (from the forage fish) just before, or just as you came up to a bar, break or breakline. Did you observe when the "schoolies" were smashing the shad in the shallow "stick-ups" (brush, etc.) they were related to some "point", channel, breakline, etc.?

Let's look at a couple situations where the fisherman may not relate "schooling", or feeding fish to structure (and the basic movement).

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FIGURE 4

Figure 4 is a side view of a cross section of a stream (it could represent a section in a lake). The fish are located near the bottom. Periodically a school of small shad (or minnows) will move by overhead, near the surface. The game fish will move toward the surface plowing into the baitfish. After a short action they return to the spot near the bottom. This "FEEDING" situation pulled them away from the bottom (structure, break or breakline).

FIGURE 5

Figure 5 shows a similar situation, and may better illustrate what is meant. This figure is a side view of a "bar" the fish are using on migration. We'll place a school of small shad at position "A". The larger fish on the bar move up into the shad. After the action stops, they either move back to the bar, or MOVE ALONG WITH THE SCATTERED SHAD until they have regrouped and settled down in position "B". If you were there (position B) when the

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"schooling" began again, YOU MAY NOT RELATE THIS POSITION TO STRUCTURE IN THE AREA. However, if you desired to find the fish after all the surface action had stopped, you would have no trouble relating their position to structure (breaks or breaklines).

This "following" of baitfish could place the larger fish on a "flat" or over deep water where there were no indications of structure, breaks, or breaklines at that particular spot. However, at times you may "think" no structure, breaks or breaklines are present, but they still exist. You just can't "see" them, or they do not always show up on your recording device (breaks may be too small, or the angle of your "scope" not wide enough, etc.). If you were trying to locate the position of the fish by other means, such as implanted transmitters ("beepers") in the fish, you are not likely to relate their position to structure, breaks or breaklines. In fact, you are not likely to even try.

There is one thing that you and I should keep in mind about "schooling" fish. If the fish are NOT active or NOT moving on structure (breaks and breaklines) you wouldn't have any "schooling" to begin with.

By this time in our discussion, we are really into the subjects, and we begin to get some of those things that are "bugging" the student. We might get one question such as this from a student who has never spoken up before. He might say: *"You said fish may be drawn away from structure, breaks and breaklines in a feeding situation. I can now understand how this might occur, but I was wondering if the location of the fish in their deep water sanctuary might be away from structure, breaks, or breaklines due to temperature?"*

If I understand your question, I believe you mean, will the temperature of the water influence the position of the fish in deep water? Or, it could be you have been "looking" for fish on your depth sounder, and when you "saw" some in a suspended position, you could not relate them to structure, breaks or breaklines. You could be asking this question because you have been running around looking for fish with a temperature gauge. You could also be asking this question to discount the idea that you must use structure as your guide in locating fish. Quite of-

ten, fishermen will use temperature, the depth sounder, food, and other things as a guide to where the fish might be. These, at times, could be used as AIDS, but they never should be used as guides. STRUCTURE is the guide.

Water temperature could have a bearing, or be related to where the fish might be, if you looked at the fishing situation from a seasonal point of view (hot in summer, cold in winter). But, unless the fish have been "drawn away" from structure, breaks or breaklines by some feeding situation (after movement), or by some particular water condition (floods, drawdowns, etc.), their position must be viewed as being guided by bottom structure, breaks or breaklines. (The name of the game is to CONSISTENTLY catch more and bigger fish; the only way this can be done is to use structure as your guide.)

Since you asked the question in terms of TEMPERATURE and specifically mentioned the sanctuary, let us look at a figure where you might have observed (by depth sounder or graph recorder) fish apparently in their deep water sanctuary and you could not relate it to structure, breaks or breaklines.

FIGURE 6

Figure 6 shows a side view of a section in a lake. I have placed the fish in their deep water sanctuary; in this case, SUSPENDED as shown. I have also placed one of those "IN-VISIBLE" breaklines we have talked about in earlier study. IT COULD BE A BREAKLINE OF WATER COLOR, OXYGEN, LIGHT, CURRENT, TEMPERATURE, ETC. In this case the breakline is caused by thermocline. It would appear (from your depth sounder) the fish are unrelated to structure, breaks or breaklines. This is not true. They are positioned in direct relationship with the temperature breakline, as well as the breakline on the bottom. If we could look from a top view, we would likely find them positioned in direct relationship to a nice structure, such as a bar, hump, etc. When the fish move (or migrate) they would move toward the bottom breakline, then onto structure to shallower water. They would have "guides" all the way.

FIGURE 7

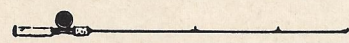
Let's look at another situation where you might find the fish on

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your depth sounder and not relate them to structure, breaks or breaklines. We'll disregard temperature in this case.

Figure 7 is a side view of a section in a lake. A group of fish are in their deep water sanctuary, in this case suspended slightly above the bottom. But, the fish are located in relationship to "breaks" on the bottom; in this case a hard bottom covered with rocks. In most instances, and especially with bass, you will not be able to see the fish in a position such as this. The fish will be so close to the rocks, your depth sounder would probably not record their existence. This will hold true with most species WHEN CONDITIONS ARE BAD, and the fish become very DORMANT. You'd think they were rocks themselves, as far as showing up on your depth sounder — and for that matter, you'd also think they were rocks as far as taking a pass at your lure (if you were doing sloppy fishing in any way, shape or form).

FIGURES 8-A, 8-B, and 8-C

While we are on the subject of "suspension", let's look at a few more figures.

Figure 8-A is a side view of a situation with suspended walleyes. Their position is related to the breakline.

Upon further movement they could go HORIZONTALLY in and over the breakline, but they could move PARALLEL with the breakline, still in a suspended manner. But in either case, horizontally or parallel, movement would be related to the breakline, and during good weather and water conditions.

Figure 8-B is the same view of the same fish when weather and water conditions AREN'T favorable. You can hardly tell which is rock or which is fish.

Figure 8-C is the same spot in the lake. In this case we have removed all structure, breaks and breaklines. I can't show any fish in this figure, for there wouldn't be any.

FIGURES 9-A, 9-B, and 9-C

Figure 9-A is a side view of suspended walleyes moving in deep water horizontally along large boulders during a good weather and water condition. This could be big "dips" (or depressions) in the bottom instead of boulders. Figure 9-B shows the same fish under marginal weather conditions. Figure 9-C is the same area, but in this case, I have removed the bottom features (rocks,

FIGURE 7

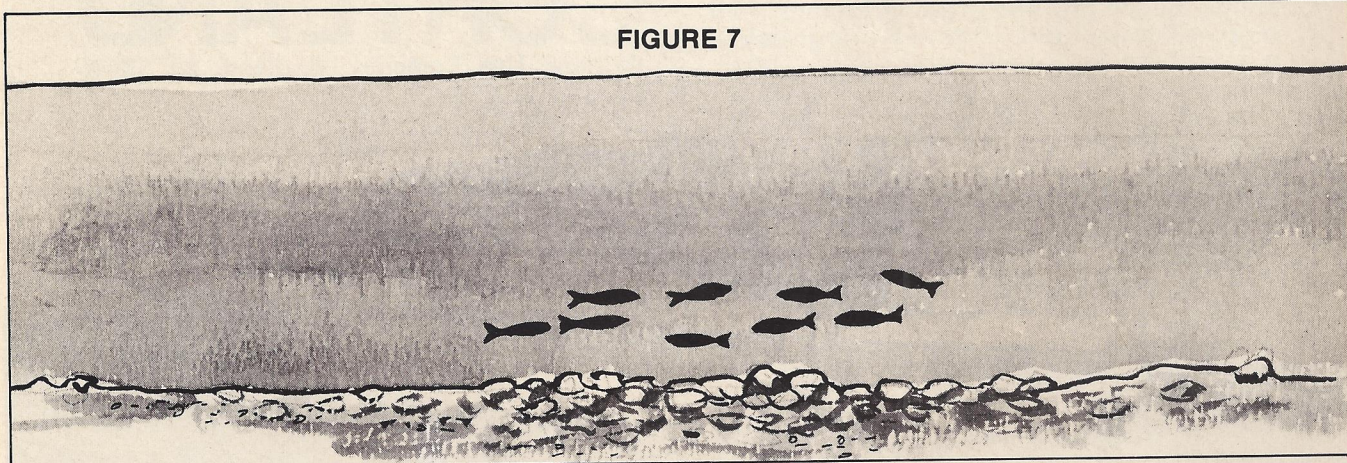


FIGURE 8-A

FIGURE 8-B

FIGURE 8-C

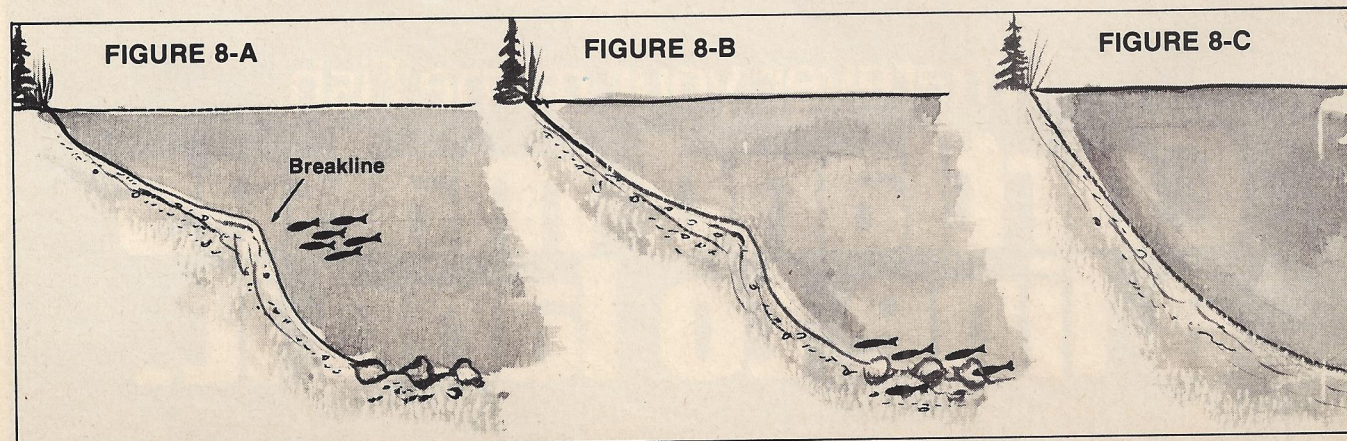
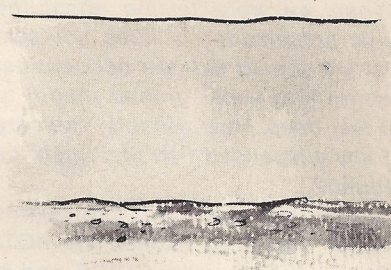
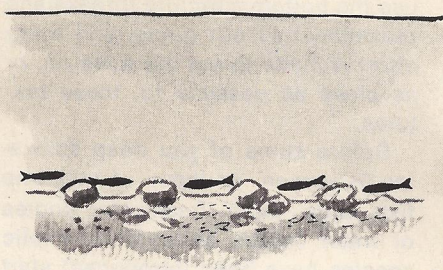
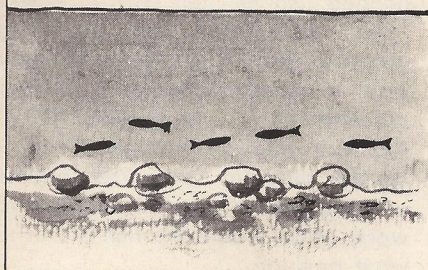


FIGURE 9-A

FIGURE 9-B

FIGURE 9-C



etc.). Please note what is also missing . . . fish.

FIGURES 10-A AND 10-B

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 the deeper water in the main body of the lake to this narrower section of the feeder stream channel. If you were to see these suspended fish on your depth sounder, you may not be able to relate them to the deep water sanctuary, structure, breaks and breaklines, although the total **MOVEMENT** pattern was controlled by these features.

Figure 10-B is the same cove (or

bay), but I have removed the structure, breaks and breaklines. Look at the figure; can you see anything that would indicate this is a good place to fish?

Let's look at another figure to show you what I mean about suspended fish (or movement) being related to structure, breaks and breaklines.

FIGURE 11

Figure 11 is a side view of a group of suspended fish **BEFORE** (or could be **AFTER**) movement. You will note that they are suspended, in this case, in relationship to a **BREAK-LINE**. In fact, they are related to a breakline both horizontally **AND** vertically. Quite often this might occur. Different species of fish may sus-

pend more often on the horizontal, while other species will suspend more on the vertical. For instance, some saltwater fish, trout, salmon, panfish, etc., may have a tendency to suspend more on the vertical, while a species like the bass, walleye, northern pike, etc., may have a tendency to the horizontal. But, at **ALL** times you should figure their position (and movement) is related to structure, breaks or breaklines. A better way to view suspension, **IF ANY OCCURS**, is to expect a horizontal suspension in the shallower sections, and a vertical suspension in the deep. Here again (Figure 11), if you were to remove the structure, breaks or breaklines, see how many fish you would have suspended in the area.

FIGURE 10-A

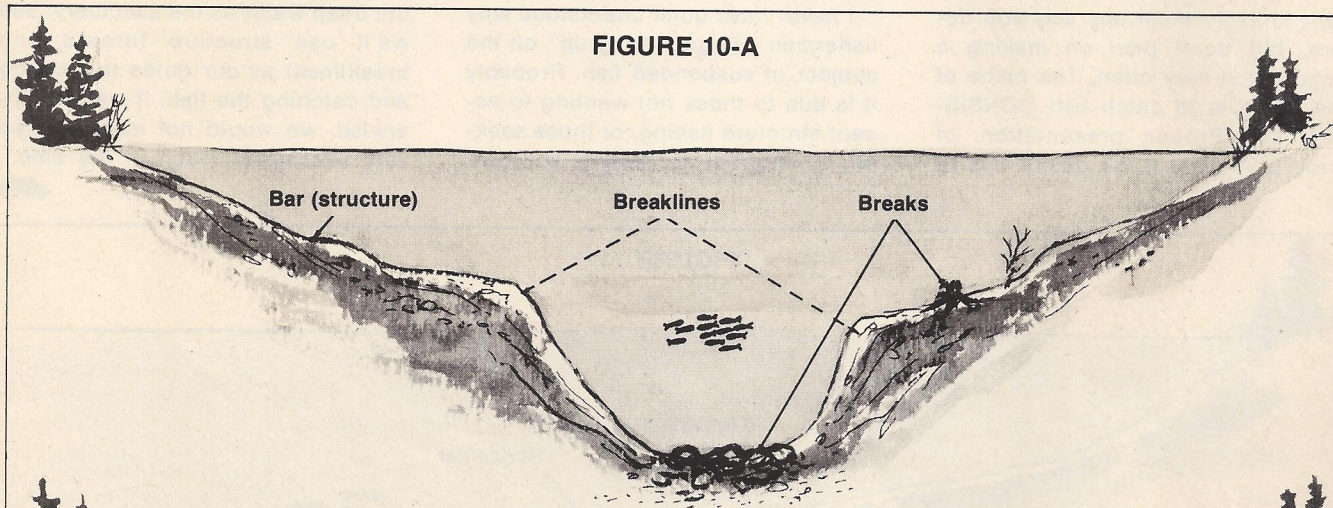
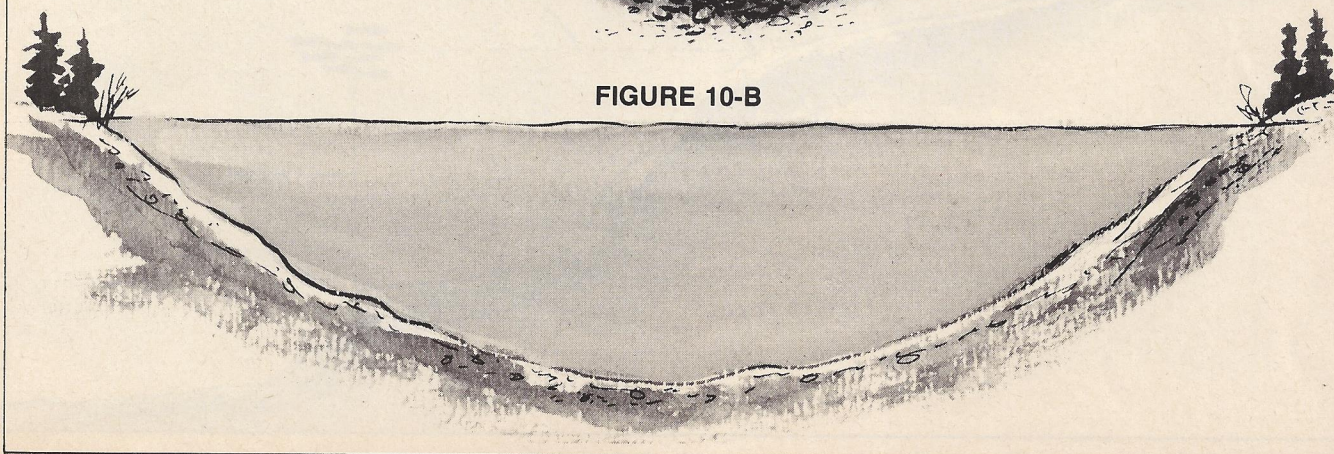


FIGURE 10-B



After reviewing the above figures and remarks, a student might say: "When we were talking about the basic presentation of lures, you said that we should fish the bottom after getting into water greater than 8 to 10 feet deep. How will this take care of any suspended fish that might be around?"

When you and I get into depths greater than 8 to 10 feet, the **BOTTOM** (structure) is our **GUIDE**, and in most all cases when fishing for freshwater fish (we are primarily interested in bass, walleye, northern pike, muskie, etc.) **WE MUST TRY TO GET OUR LURES ON, OR JUST AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE to, the bottom.** You and I don't (and can't) keep our lures directly "on" the bottom at all times — casting or trolling. But, if we do not make every effort to "fish the bottom" in depths beyond 8 to 10 feet, our lures will be **OUT OF POSITION MOST OF THE TIME.** Presentation of lures in this manner **WILL TAKE CARE OF ANY SUSPENDED FISH THAT MAY BE ON, OR AROUND, THE STRUCTURE, BREAKS OR BREAKLINES.**

If you disregard structure as your guide and use suspended fish as your guide (running all over the lake looking for fish) then you can present lures to them any way you desire, but don't plan on making a good catch very often. The name of the game is to catch fish **CONSISTENTLY!** Proper presentation of lures is a must if we desire this to

happen. Proper presentation of lures in deeper water demands that we use the bottom structure (breaks and breaklines) as our guide, and every effort is made to put the lures on, or as close as possible to, these features.

Before some of you deep saltwater fishermen, or those of you who fish large, deep, freshwater bodies of water (where saltwater or exotic species have been introduced) start a racket, let me add these comments. When the species of fish, or the weather and water conditions, or the season, have these fish in extra deep water and long distances from shoreline features, I know it becomes necessary to work our lures above the bottom (bottom can't always be reached); and, we may expect a "vertical" movement when the fish become active, or they move up after our lures. But, let me add also, you better conduct this type of presentation over bottom structure, breaks or breaklines (refer to Figure 11) if you expect the "free swimming", "above bottom" lures to be effective. You should also remember when conditions are bad, you had better try to get your lures on, or as close to the bottom as possible, if you expect to catch many fish.

I never have quite understood why fishermen will get "hung up" on the subject of suspended fish. Probably it is due to those not wanting to accept structure fishing, or those seeking a shortcut to fishing success.

Whatever the reason might be, they are making mistakes in using suspended fish as their **GUIDE.** If you "see" suspended fish, you can check to see if they are the fish you want — but don't bet on it. If your presentation of lures is **DONE CORRECTLY** (depth and speed control) on the different structures (breaks and breaklines), you won't have to worry about where the fish are or in what position.

"Seeing" the fish, **AT TIMES,** may become an **AID,** but it should never be used as a **GUIDE** to successful fishing. Sure, if you were a "commercial" fisherman and you were fishing for certain species, "seeing" the fish might lead to a catch. If I were a commercial fisherman, I'd still use structure (breaks and breaklines) as my guide, and then try to "see" if any fish were around. In the process, I'd save myself a lot of time and expense. I say again (and I'll keep on saying it) the fish itself is **NOT** your guide. **STRUCTURE** is the guide; and then trying to get our lures on, or as close as possible to, structure (breaks and breaklines) at all times. Then, we call on all the aids at our disposal to locate fish and make them strike (take).

For me and my house, we will use the deep water as the sanctuary, and we'll use structure (breaks and breaklines) as our guide to locating and catching the fish. If we did otherwise, we would not expect to be very successful much of the time.

