

Buck talks fishing

by BUCK PERRY, Education Editor

What To Do When You Must Fish Deeper Water

For some time now, we have talked about what you and I should use as guides in locating fish, and what we should do in getting them to take our lures. We discussed how it is often difficult for the fisherman to decide for himself what is important and what is NOT important. And, how he is often confused by differences of opinion pertaining to the same subject.

In previous talks we discussed the things we have to learn in the presentation of lures. We said we had to learn how to cast and troll the shallows, and how to cast and troll the deeper water. We talked about how to go about our "on the water training". The last time (July '77 Fishing Facts) we used a "fish story" as an example where our major concern was to find proper structure (breaks, breaklines, deep water), and then to obtain proper depth and speed control for the time and place.

Let us continue our thoughts with another "fish story" that occurred last season.

During the spring of 1976, longtime friends Don Nichols, Connie Vergis, and I took our wives to western Ontario, Canada. We planned to fish the Winnipeg River area with its many connected lakes and channels. The purpose was to be there during the spawning season of the smallmouth bass. We were all prepared to have a ball with flyrods and popping bugs.

When we arrived we were told the warm weather had produced an early spawn. Reports indicated the smallmouth had moved away from the shallower spawning areas, and were back in the deeper portions of the channels and larger lakes. It appeared we were in for a post spawn period with very little fish movements and migrations.

We also were told that the walleye and northern pike fishing was at a standstill. The period, plus the

weather conditions, had ALL the fish inactive and very difficult to catch. Most guide boats were traveling up to 20 miles each day trying to find some fish. The results were hardly worth

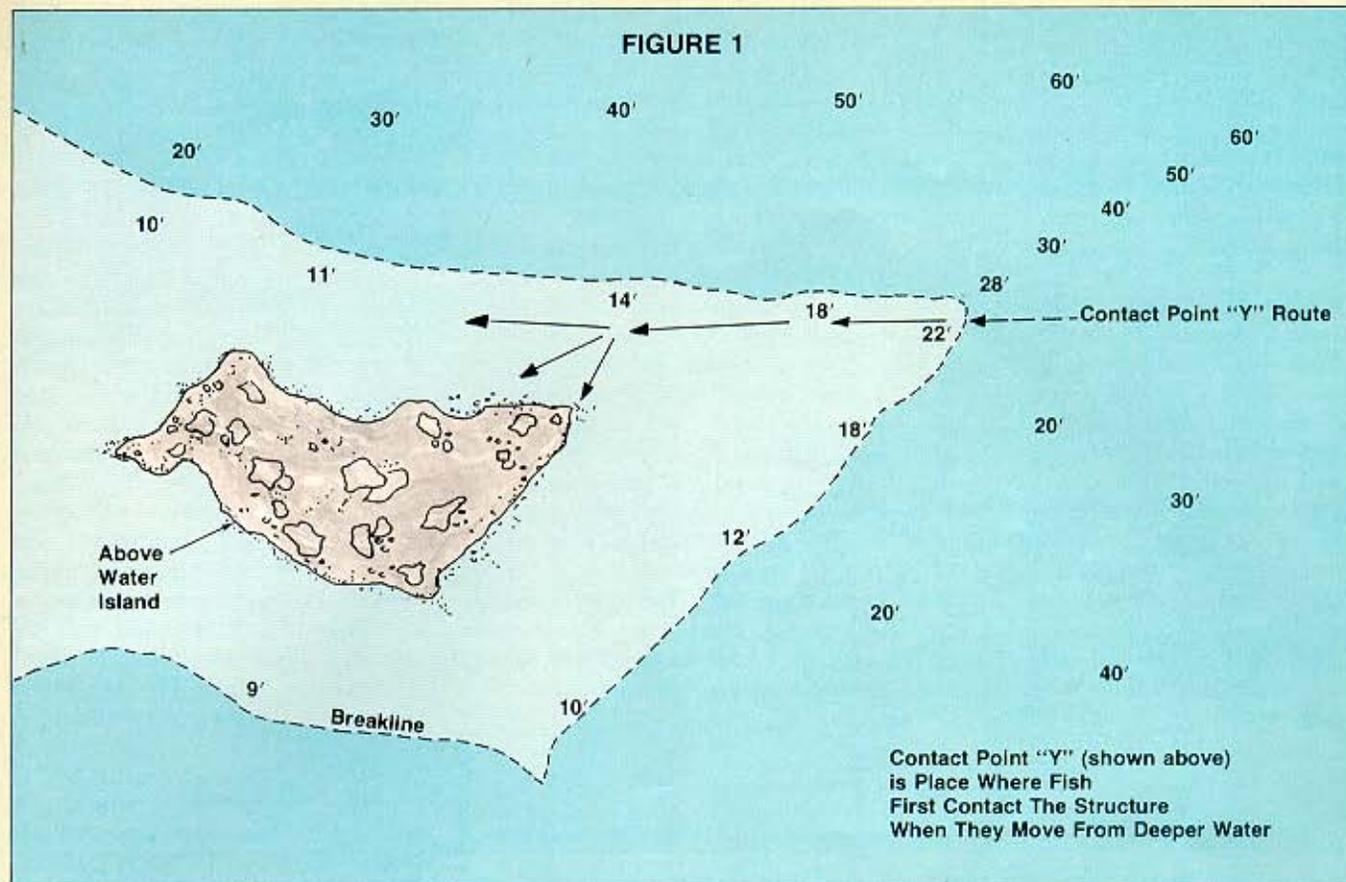
the effort. Only a few small walleyes were counted among the 20 to 25 boats that left the dock daily. The message was loud and clear — we should have gotten there earlier.

We spent quite some time the first day checking out all the areas that had produced for us in the past when the smallmouth were bedding. It became apparent in short order we had arrived entirely too late for flyrod and popping bug type fishing. The situation suggested to us that if any appreciable movement of fish occurred, it was likely to occur very early in the morning, and in all probability, would be the only shallow movement during the entire day. Additionally, if any early morning movement was occurring, it would likely be for only a short period of time.

Marge and Don Nichols with a fine mixed bag of walleyes and northern pike. This husband and wife team knew what to do when fishing became tough as the fish moved to extra deep water. Other anglers found it next to impossible to make even a small catch during this same time period.



FIGURE 1



Don volunteered to check out some spots in the deeper lakes and channels at daybreak, the following morning. These spots were known to be productive (from previous trips). His report at breakfast was, the fish moved about an hour after the break of day, and the duration of the movement was approximately 30 minutes.

Not only did this report give me the creeps, but the wives let it be known (in no uncertain terms), they weren't about to get up in the middle of the night to catch fish for 30 minutes. We were told, "You guys have gotta do better than that!"

The next morning at daylight, Don and I were sitting (anchored) on a structure that had been mapped, interpreted, and fished previous to this trip. The spot had features that would definitely show us the movement pattern of the fish, if and when it occurred. The area was about a 15 minute run (by boat) from the dock. In order to reach it, we had to cross some big "open" water. Fortunately there was little wind or wave action, but we noted the fact the great expanse of water could become a problem at times, especially with the fishing partners we had on this trip.

Figure 1 is a top view of the area we were fishing. The structure (under-

water bar) and the breakline was located off a small, rocky (above water) island. It was quite a distance away from the main shorelines. The shallowest water contained some vegetation, but most all the area had a hard, clean, rocky bottom. The major breakline and depths off the island were approximately as shown. We were anchored in water about 6 feet deep — position "X" as indicated in the figure.

Our interpretations, and previous experience, had revealed the approximate "contact point" (the place where the fish first contact the structure in their movement from deeper water), and also the route they took toward shallower water. They would come up on the bar, and breakline, at position "Y" (22 feet) and move up along the breakline, before scattering into shallow water. Most of the scattering would be in the area where the boat was anchored.

It was decided Don would use ultralight gear and small jigs (1/32 and 1/16 oz.), and work the shallows all the way to depths of 6 to 8 feet. I would handle heavier casting gear using topwater, free swimming, bottom bumping, and heavy jump type lures to check further depths and faster speeds.

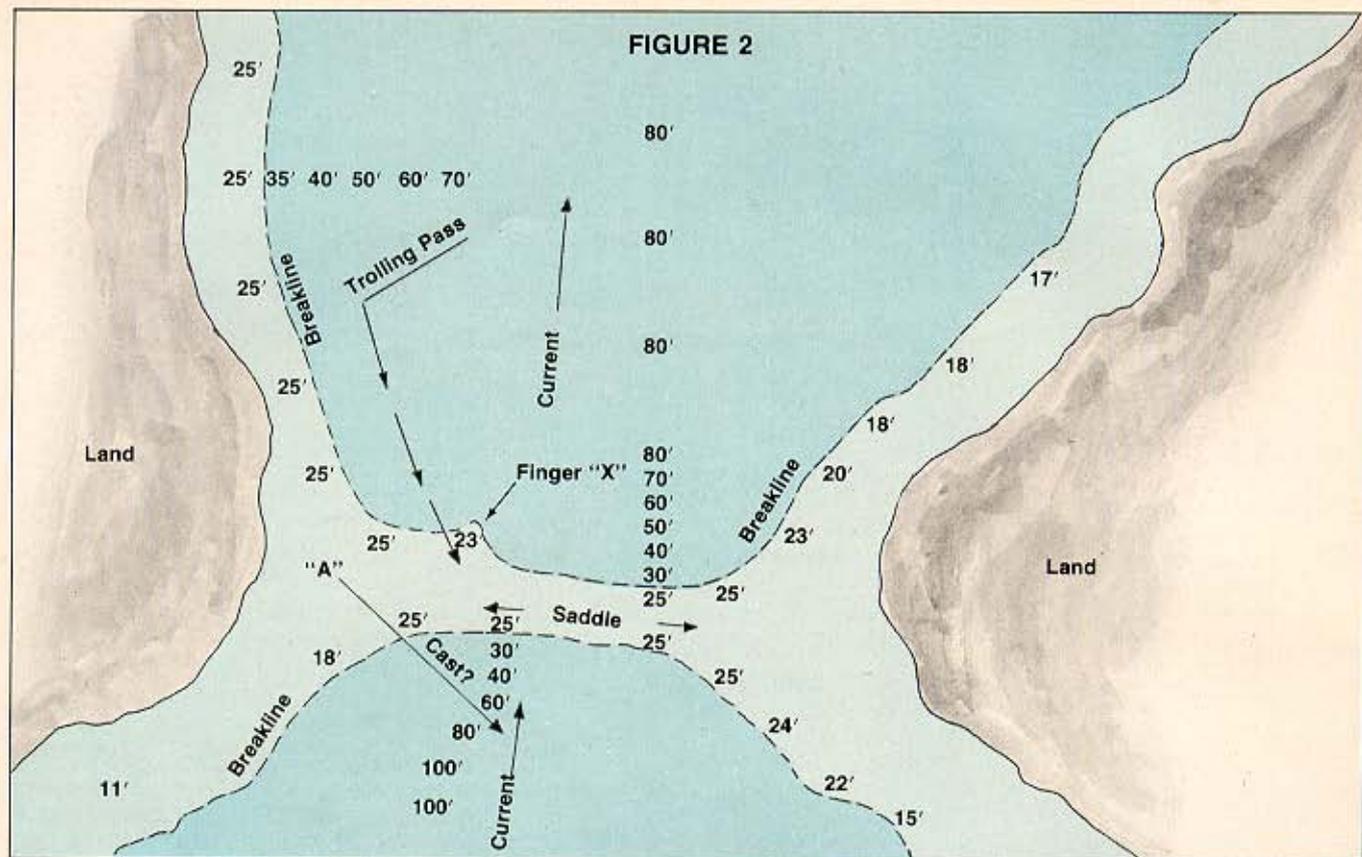
We covered the whole area thoroughly around the boat, but no contact was made with any species. This didn't bother us much as we were probably there ahead of time (as per Don's experience the previous day). We were also hoping the movement pattern had changed so we would not get such a short, early movement. Probably if the time of movement changed, we would also get a longer period of activity.

By using a heavy jig (3/8 to 1/2 oz.), I was able to reach position "Y" (the drop-off) with an extra long cast. Don was unable to reach this spot with the gear he was using at the time. The light lures he was working would not have allowed good depth and speed control in the deeper water even if he had been able to cast that far.

We continued to work all around the boat, and periodically I would snap on one of the heavier jigs and make a long cast to the contact point (22 feet — position "Y"). About an hour after we had arrived, I made a long cast to the deep water beyond position "Y" (drop-off — contact point), and as the lure came "jumping" over the breakline, a good fish lapped it up. It proved to be an 8 lb. northern pike.

Don switched rods, and we both

FIGURE 2



directed our casts toward the spot. We caught two more fish, one a walleye, and the other a northern pike. Both of these fish were well along the breakline toward shallower water when they struck. By the time we removed them from the lures, additional fish were all around the boat. Don switched back to the ultralight, and we both caught fish about as fast as we could cast. Don was knocking them up to 9 lbs. (walleyes and northern pike) on the ultralight, and I was doing the same with heavier free running and bottom bumping lures. The color, size, action and speed of the lures made little difference, but the depth control had to be fairly accurate, or as close as possible to the bottom (both "jump type" or "free running" lures).

During this action we had either a smallmouth, walleye, or northern pike on the line most of the time. But, it wasn't long until we noticed the fish were moving back downstairs. The last fish was caught on a heavy jig on the long cast to the "contact point" (position "Y", Figure 1). Then the action was over. We checked our wrist-watches and found the total time of the movement (up on structure) had lasted for approximately 25 minutes — about the same period of time Don had experienced the previous morning.

Our report to the wives did not make them jump for joy.

The situation demanded we find the fish in deeper water. The movement pattern told us the spots to fish should be near the average sanctuary depths (30 - 35 feet). The unfavorable weather outlook also told us these spots should be near the boat dock. If found close to the dock, the nearby structures would allow us (weather permitting) to take our wives out for a short spell after breakfast, again after lunch, and after dinner if they so desired. Don, Connie, and I could fish whenever and however we got the urge.

From Don's past experience in the area, we were able to locate three spots less than a mile from the dock. One was only a couple blocks from the ramp; another 1/2 mile; the other approximately 3/4 of a mile. One spot (structure, breaks, breaklines) was 25 feet deep, one 30 feet, and the other, 33 feet. The productivity of each was different: the shallowest being the poorest, and the deepest being the best. The size of the fish varied, but the largest fish were caught in the deepest water.

In this instance, the speed of the lures wasn't too critical. The main thing that produced the fish was "exact" depth control. Some fish were caught on a free swimming lure,

but only an instant before the lure started bumping bottom, or directly after it came bumping off the "spots".

The area being fished was where the Winnipeg Flowage narrows, and where less lakes and channels are found. This condition created quite a heavy CURRENT in all three spots. The best control could be obtained on the troll. Working (motor trolling) against the current (going upstream) gave the best control. However, in this case, since the speed wasn't too critical, we could catch some fish going downstream as well.

Due to the depths and the current, it was very difficult to position the boat properly to have much success on the cast. One cast out of 10 might reach the correct position. However, with proper shoreline sightings (making our trolling passes in relationship to visible objects on shore), and with the aid of a depth sounder, a trolling pass could be made "right on the money". Normally when two people were in the boat, both would get a fish if the pass was exact enough. However, if the pass was "off" slightly, only one would get a fish. If the pass was several feet away, no one got a strike.

In all three spots it was necessary that we use wire line on the troll due to the depths involved. It was obvious during the entire trip that the fish

became active and some movement occurred twice daily. The shallow water movement at daybreak probably didn't occur all the time, but there was a definite activity period early and late in the day. Neither of these periods produced much shallow movement on the three spots we were fishing. The best movement of fish was to a depth of about 25 feet.

Let's look at each of the three spots and see why one was better than the other, or produced more and bigger fish. At the same time note carefully why trolling was better than casting, and why certain lure types had to be used.

Figure 2 is a top view of one situation. Shown here is a "slot" of water running between two large islands where a main channel, or main flow of the river occurred. There exists a 25 foot "saddle" between the two shorelines (the saddle is shown in Figure 2). Note the shape and depths in the area.

The current here was very strong, and proper presentation of lures on the cast was next to impossible. The "contact point" of the fish moving to the "saddle" appeared to be a small finger (projection) marked "X" in the figure. This was established by the fact this was where contact was made with larger fish as our deep running lures approached the "saddle". Most larger fish were taken around 30 - 35 feet as the lures started bumping up onto the saddle (before we reached the breakline.)

At periods of good fish movement, some fish were caught up on a 25 foot saddle, but in all cases these fish were smaller walleyes and northern pike. The larger fish, from 6 to 9 lbs., were caught BELOW the breakline, off the finger marked "X". There was no "spot" in the deeper water that we could determine held fish during the non-active period. We had no definite guidelines (structure, breaks, breaklines) below the 25 foot breakline. This particular fishing area was not the best, due to the fact we had to WAIT for a movement to occur before we made contact with many fish.

Let's look at Figure 2 again. Imagine you are trying to cast the area effectively. Let's suppose you position your boat at position "A". First you desire to check the top of the "saddle". What type lure would you use? It is obvious it would have to be some heavy "jump" type lure, (such

as a heavy jig). If you were to cast toward the "saddle", the heavy current would have the lure in 80 feet of water before it had sunk to 25 feet. If you were to cast downstream and then worked the jig up against the heavy current, the lure would seldom be near the saddle upon completion of the retrieve. The only way to hit the saddle would be to cast upstream and "hope" your lure was on the saddle by the time it had sunk to 25 feet. As indicated earlier, MAYBE one out of ten casts might have placed the lure on the saddle. Even in this case, the current would sweep the lure off position after a couple "jumps".

If we had used extra heavy jigs (1-1/2 to 2 oz.) we might have been able to partially work the "finger" (position "X"), but here again the current would have produced sloppy depth and speed control.

Trolling the area effectively pre-

sented no problems and accurate depth and speed control could be maintained. To secure the depths, wire line and appropriate size lures allowed us to check the area easily.

This particular area produced some fine fish, but they had to be active and moving toward the (shallow) saddle. But, this movement did not occur *all the time*.

Figure 3 is a top view of the second productive area. Again, it was an area with a fairly strong current. The "contact point" to the rocky underwater bar was on the downstream side at position "X". This had been established by Don and Connie on previous trips. Here again, many of the bigger fish were not on the bar or breakline during a non-movement period. However, due to the depth (30 ft.), there were quite a few "stragglers" present throughout the day. The overall size of the fish here was

Education Editor Buck Perry (left) and Connie Vergis found these walleyes becoming active in deep water, with little or no movement into the shallows. Due to prevailing depths, currents and conditions, it took a special lure presentation to reach these golden beauties. In the article, Buck explains how it was done.



larger than those on the 25 foot saddle (Figure 2).

Here again, it was very difficult to present lures properly on the cast. By positioning the boat at position "A", about one out of ten effective casts could be made with a heavy (1 to 2 oz.) jig. The cast had to be made upstream, and if gauged accurately enough, it would hit the "bar" by the time it had sunk to the bottom. However, before the lure could work much of the area, the current swept the jig off into deeper water below the bar. Not only was this difficult casting, but it was only effective when quite a few fish made contact during the activity periods — which only occurred early and late in the day (for short periods of time). Positioning the boat up-

stream, and making casts downstream, made it even more difficult to obtain proper depth and speed control.

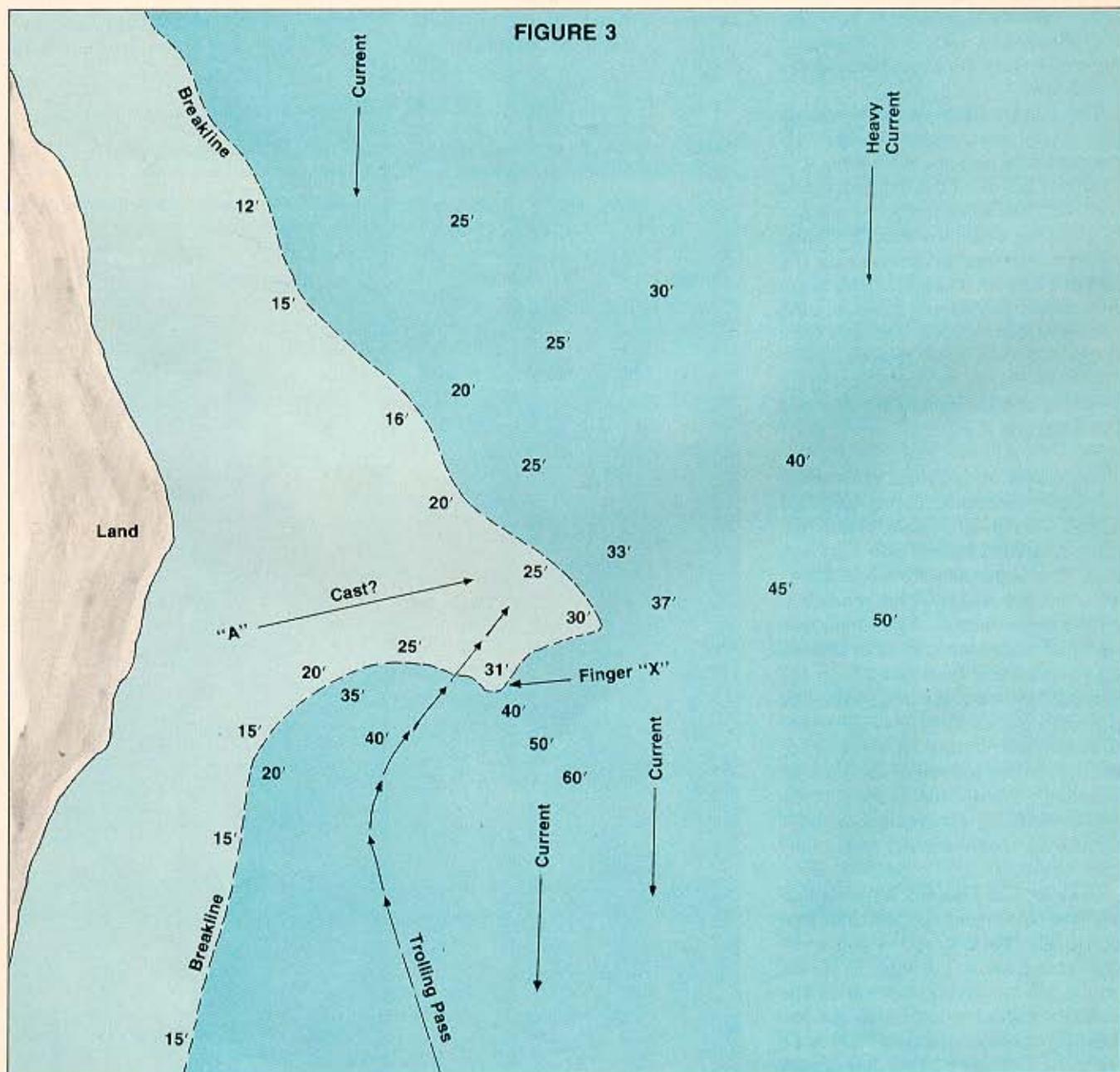
Trolling with wire line presented an entirely different picture. Since the speed factor was not too critical, the bar could be worked effectively from both directions. But, the best control (depth, speed) could be maintained while trolling against the current. An effective trolling pass downstream was difficult to make due to the current. Quite often the boat and the lure were out of position. However, by making a swinging turn behind the bar on the upstream pass (note Figure 3), the inside contact point could be hit, and the lure would walk up and over the end of the bar. This

type presentation not only caught fish in quantity and quality during the activity periods, but it provided excellent "straggler" fishing throughout the day. Most all the fish were caught below 25 feet.

Figure 4 is a top view of the third and best spot. This particular spot (structure, breaks, breakline, deep water) was in a wider portion of the river (connected lakes), but there still existed a sizable current. This particular spot had been found by Don the year before when the weather turned sour and sent all fish to deep water for an extended stay.

The "contact point" was at position "X" (Figure 4). Not only was it the contact point, but for most of the time we were there, it was near the area of

FIGURE 3



the deep water sanctuary. Very seldom would a trolling pass be made at the turn in the breakline (position "X") without a fish being taken (if lures were in correct position). The structure was not well defined, such as a ridgelike bar, but the "breakline" (drop-off) was, and the "sharper break" (quickest change in depth) occurred at position "X". The "contact point" stood out like a sore thumb. Very few fish migrated toward the 15 - 20 foot breakline (Figure 4). Most of all the movement toward the shallows occurred along the breakline going upstream. Movements along this breakline only occurred to

some degree during the activity periods (early and late). Very few fish moved shallower than 25 feet along the breakline during our stay.

Casting this particular spot effectively was very difficult. It could be reached with an extra long cast with the boat anchored inside the 20 foot breakline. However, the current, depth and rocky bottom, made anchoring next to impossible. If the anchor held for any length of time (approximately 60 feet of anchor rope out, and a "wind" anchor at that), the casts could be made upstream, but it was a guessing game as to where the lure would be when it hit the bottom.

Maybe one cast out of ten would be in position to get a fish.

However, by using wire line on the troll (and appropriate lure sizes) to control the depth, and by using "exact" shoreline sightings for the trolling pass, you could win a bet a fish would be caught (or a double) on the first pass.

Did we locate the fish and catch them by using things such as temperature, oxygen, food, size, color, action, fancy rigs, stick-ups, running 20 miles, etc. as our guide? What actually did we do? Where were our efforts directed? Wonder how much fun and satisfaction we would have had if we had not learned to troll, or refused to do so, or didn't want to?

We had no trouble seeing what type fishing trip we would have had if we had not used structure (breaks, breaklines) as our guide, then used our "tools" to control the depth and speed of our lures.

Many fishermen ask: "How do you use wire line?" "Where can I get the proper wire?"

There are three basic weighted lines sold for securing extra depths. The three types are: lead core line, stranded wire, and solid (single strand) wire. Although it may be slightly more difficult to learn to use solid (single strand) wire, we have found it is desirable over the other two. With proper diameters and proper flexibility the solid wire will give good depth control and is easy to use after brief instruction and experience is gained.

One hundred (100) yards of wire is normally all that is required on the reel. This amount doesn't normally fill the reel, therefore a "backing" should be used (under the wire) to fill the reel spool. The backing should be a good trolling monofilament, such as No-Bo Trolling Line. If and when all the wire runs off the reel, the fisherman is still in business. Quite often some wire will be lost, and the nylon trolling line can be used along with the wire in trolling.

In most fishing, two wire strengths will handle most situations. For the majority of cases a 15 lb. test wire is sufficient (and is recommended). Where numerous "hangs" (rocks, bushes, etc.) exist, strength can be increased by utilizing 20 lb. test wire.

To obtain proper control, it is important that the trolling wire be "rigged" properly.

Figure 5 is a sketch showing how

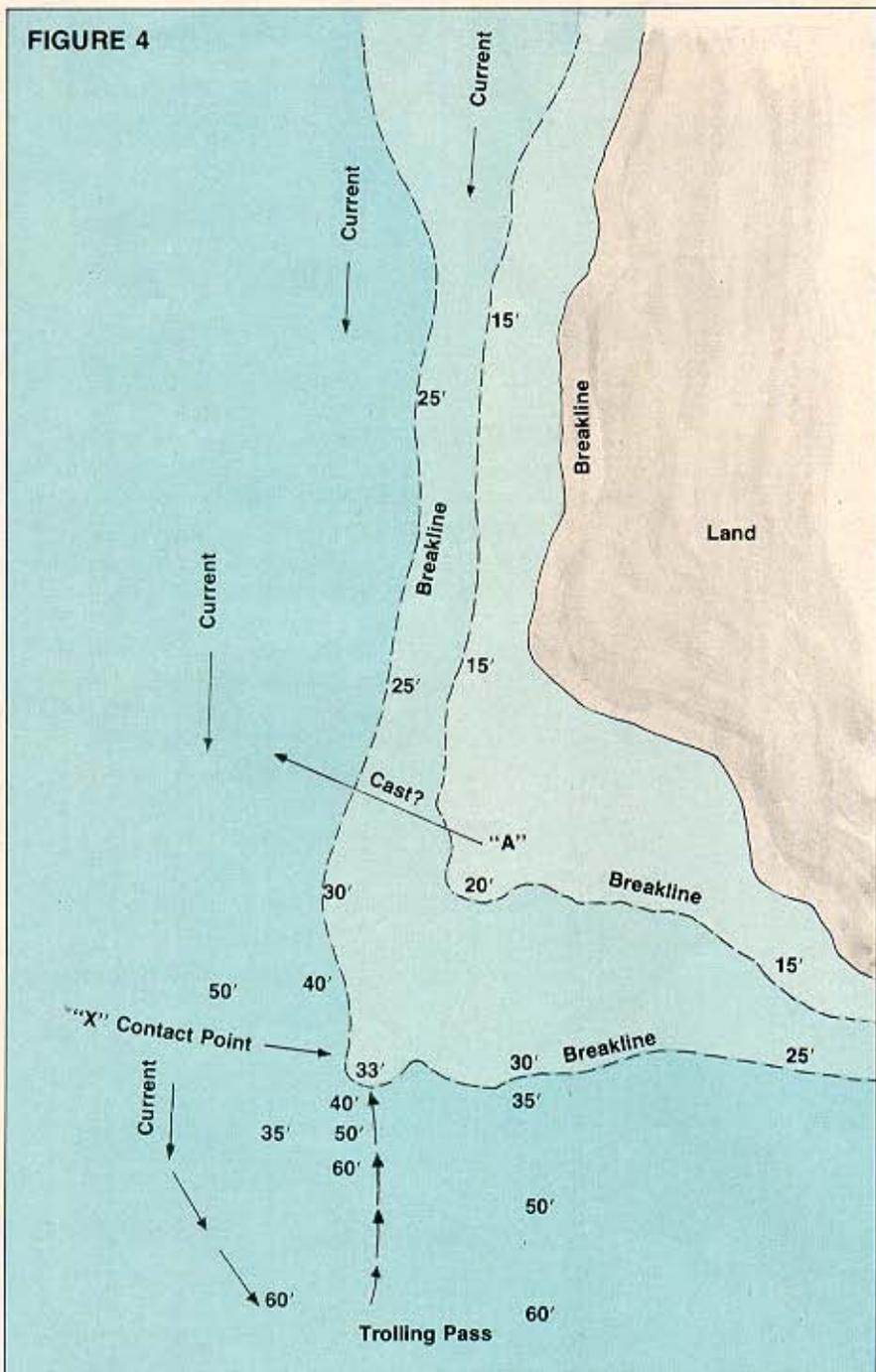
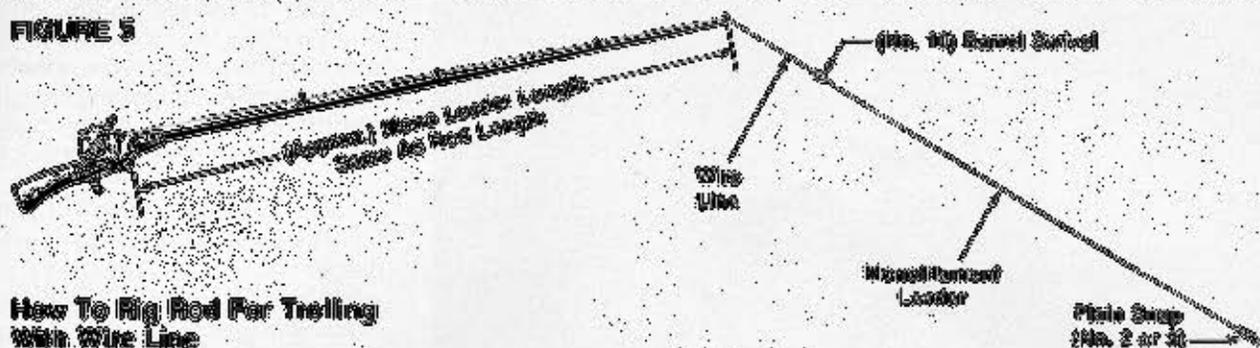


FIGURE 5



How To Rig Rod For Trolling With Wire Line

(the trolling wire should be rigged. The leader should be a good quality monofilament). The test (strength) should be approximately the same as the wire being used. The length of the leader should not be too long, or too short. A good hand rule to follow is to cut the leader the length (or distance) from the front of the reel (level wind) to the tip of the trolling rod. During hard use some of this leader will be lost (dragged, etc.), and when it gets down to about 2 feet in length, it should be replaced with a new leader.

A small barrel swivel should be used to connect the wire line and the monofilament leader. A number 10 size will normally move down thru the reel guides (is used) without too much trouble.

A plain number 2 or a number 3 snap can be used at the end of the leader for attaching (or changing) lures, etc.

An important thing to keep in mind when trolling wire, is **NOT TO HAVE OUT TOO MUCH LINE FOR THE DEPTH BEING WORKED**. If too much line is released behind the boat, control is lost, as well as lure control. The line can be let out at a fairly good speed (at the front). A light "flurrying" of the reel is done as the wire peels off the reel. Or, the "clutter" on the reel can be engaged until several yards of line have been released. This limits any "bleeding" (loss of line, etc.).

A good hand rule to follow (especially when using Spoonplug) is the wire should obtain approximately double the depth obtained with a monofilament line (with the same amount of line released). If extra wire line length is run, it should pick up approximately 5 additional feet. For example, if a medium length of wire (33-40 yds.) is run with a 300 series Spoonplug, the lure should reach 18 to 24 feet in depth. (Normal running depth of this lure with monofilament

is 9-12 feet.) If a long to extra long (30 - 40 yards) wire line is run, it should get the bottom bumping lure close to 30 feet deep. (5 additional feet.)

How full or how empty the reel (with wire) will determine to some extent just how accurate your depth control will be with each size line. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the fisherman (thru practice) to determine the **EXACT** amount of line that may be needed to reach a specific spot (or depth) on structure. However, for all practical purposes, he can secure various depth levels rather easily.

When letting out line, count the "layers" of wire (on the reel) as the line is being released. This is done by counting the passes (or-wards back and forth) of the level wind mechanism. In other words, when the level guide swings from left to right (or vice versa) this is considered one layer of line. In counting, it is easier to count the number of layers by noting the return of the level wind to the original position (2 layers of wire). That is, the count will go: "2, 4, 6, 8 layers of wire," etc.

Fourteen (14) to sixteen (16) layers should provide a medium to long line. Twenty-two (22) to twenty-four (24) layers of wire should give a long to extra long line. For instance, let's say you desire to hit a particular spot (or breaking located at 23 feet. A lure (hook) is chosen that normally goes to 12 feet on a medium to long monofilament line (a 300 series Spoonplug, for example). Fourteen (14) to sixteen (16) layers of wire are released at a fairly fast clip of the reel. When the wire length is out, the boat is slowed to a bare **CRANK**. This extremely slow forward motion of the boat is maintained **UNTIL THE LINE BREAKS AND THE LURE MAKES CONTACT WITH THE BOTTOM**. At the first bump, the throttle is advanced to the trolling speed. This will give the desired (or exact) amount of wire in

the water. Do not stop the boat completely in order to allow the lure and line to sink. If this is done, it is not likely the correct amount of line for the depth being worked is released. Normally 5 to 10 seconds wait (with the slow crank) is all that is needed to have the line and lure down correctly. Slight adjustments of line length can be made if the situation calls for it.

If you desire to use the same lure size to reach greater depths (say 28 to 30 feet), additional layers of wire (22 to 24) are let out. Again, with a very slow forward movement of the boat, wait until the first bump of the lure (on bottom) contacts before advancing the throttle. If the "wait" becomes too prolonged, the "slowing" can be speeded up by working the rod (slowly dropping a back), but still maintaining tension on the line. If any problems still exist, or it takes too long (over 10-15 seconds) for the lure to get down, it is time to switch to a larger (deeper running) lure.

The only time the forward motion of the boat is stopped completely is when working extreme depths (30 - 1000 feet). In such cases, an extra long line is run, the boat is stopped until the lure hits the bottom. The boat line length may not be real for real control, but the lure will have the depth.

Never have fears regarding good "feel" while running long to extra long line lengths with wire. Regardless what amount of line is in the water, the "feel" is still there and every little bump or wiggle can be felt. A serious fish can jar the lures.

A word of caution: when the lure "hangs", do not attempt to throw back (hook wire in order to free the lure. Loose wire in the air (or water) can create a "kink" in the line, and subsequent pressure may cause it to break. If handled carefully the line should last a long long time. Any breakage should occur in the



Don Nichols captains a Jumbo Jetliner for United Airlines as a livelihood. During off-duty hours he likes nothing better than to wrestle with mean, knuckle-busting pike. The largest northern in this group came from a depth of 31 feet.

monofilament leader, normally in the knot at the snap.

At times, all who motor troll should practice securing depth control with wire. With practice, greater and more exact depth control can be had with wire than with monofilament. Many times extra depths will be required with a short line (such as running a tall weedline, or when following a crooked shoreline). With wire, a minimum length of line can be used to reach depths with smaller lures, etc.

The use of wire line on the troll opens up a completely new ball game as far as fishing is concerned. Those deep clear lakes will present less

problems, and the many cold fronts will create less fear. Again, the only excuse we have for failure is, we do not know enough yet, or we are not good enough yet.

However, let me repeat what has been stated in an earlier talk. When we move into deeper water, our presentation (both casting and trolling) should be "pinpointed". We cannot just cover an "area" such as a long breakline, ridge, line of bushes, big hump, etc. In deeper water we must concentrate our efforts exactly where the fish will be. If this is not done, it is not likely our 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 fan casting. We use maps, floating markers, shoreline sightings, depth sounders, trolled lures, or anything else to pinpoint the spot.

We can assume that when the fish are shallower than 20 feet (when deeper water is available) lure presentation does not have to be quite so exact. But, when the fish are deeper in the sanctuary depths, our interpretations and presentations must be exact; the deeper we go the more exact (and difficult) it becomes. If you and I can't interpret the SPOT where the fish will be, or, if we are unable to control the depth and speed of our lures at that spot, we have no business spending much time in 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 in a previous article, we run out of recognizable structure (drop-offs, channels, etc.) the deeper we go.

In these last four talks we have discussed some important things we should keep in mind when presenting lures. Most of the "idle chatter" was omitted. We stated flatly that we must use features in the lake as our guide, and that lures must be used as tools to obtain control of depth and speed on or around these features. Probably you did not hear all that was said. You may have no desire to hear this is the way it is. You may want the idle chatter, the magic, the mystery, the intrigue. Quite often we have had others snarl and snap — "Whatcha trying to do, take all the romance out of fishing?"

Many of us concluded years ago, the majority of fishermen do not desire to hear the "truth" about what it may take to catch fish consistently. However, regardless how often we may spin our wheels, our tires are not worn out yet.

Editors Note:

Wire trolling line is available at most popular tackle stores. For those who are interested in trying deep water trolling techniques, but are unable to find dealers carrying wire line, solid wire trolling line can be acquired from Northwoods Tackle Co., U.S. Highways 41-45, P.O. Box 609, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, 53051.