

KNOWLEDGE Is Still The Key To Fishing Success

Can successful fishing actually be taught? For the answer to that question, you might ask students who attended Buck Perry's fishing schools this past summer. Many of them discovered that a combination of classroom and on-the-water instruction can go a long way in answering questions that have puzzled many fishermen for generations.



A lot of new fishing friends were made. They were scattered from all over the United States — North, South, East and West. These fishermen shouldn't have much trouble finding a fishing partner, whatever part of the country they might happen to fish.

(Part 1 of 2 parts)

COMMENT

Numerous readers have expressed curiosity over the outcome of Education Editor Buck Perry's fishing schools held in Ontario, Canada during the past summer season. Although a good number of Fishing Facts readers did attend these highly informative training sessions, others were unable to attend due to busy summer schedules, traveling distances, conflicting commitments, etc.

In the following (two part) interview, Managing Editor, Carl Malz, asks Education Editor Buck Perry to highlight some of the important subjects that were covered at the schools, and also to describe how student fishermen fared while undertaking various on-the-water fishing assignments.

by Carl Malz, Managing Editor & Buck Perry, Education Editor

QUESTION: Buck, I'd like to discuss, to some degree, all phases of the schools, and especially the "on-the-water" assignments of the students. We don't have to discuss this in any particular fashion, but since you have lots of drawings and pictures, why don't we relate the greater part of our talk to these things rather than to the basic written material that was covered in the classroom sessions.

It might be of interest to our readers to know something about the time and location of the summer schools held in Canada.

BUCK: Each school period lasted a week; and they were held during the months of July and August. Our location was the Holst Point Lodge, Minaki, Ontario, Canada. This is located in northwestern Ontario on the Winnipeg River chain of lakes. It's approximately 35 miles north of Kenora and about 150 miles east of Winnipeg, Manitoba. All of the water from the Lake Of The Woods area flows past Minaki. Needless to say there exists lots of fishing water. The

continued



Instructor Tommy Ferencek says, "Look what a couple of my students did while learning to use wire line in deep water. How about that?"



Buck Perry — "We assigned two students to each boat. At first you would see them putt-putting away slowly, never getting out of sight of the lodge. A few days later they would be seen roaring away at full throttle and move to the assignment area without a backward glance."

predominate large game fish are wall-eye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, and musky.

QUESTION: I notice you have used the words "Spoonplugging" and "Spoonplugger" at times in your schools. Let's talk about these words so our readers may have a clearer understanding of what these terms mean.

BUCK: I coined the word "Spoonplugging" many years ago. It is a word that

covered a lot of things. It represented what I thought was necessary to become a great fisherman. To state the meaning very briefly, it means that we must learn what makes a fish tick; how he lives, how he reacts to his environment, etc. It also means what you and I must DO to catch him consistently. Another way of stating it would be, "If we expect to catch fish consistently, wherever we fish, we must be at the right place, at the right time, fishing in the right manner."

We refer to a fisherman who believes

the key to fishing success is knowledge of the sport, as a Spoonplugger. We also call our major "tools" or equipment Spoonplugging equipment.

QUESTION: Then Spoonplugging is not just a method of fishing, such as the use of a particular lure, or just a particular presentation of lures, such as motor trolling?

BUCK: (Laughter) Far from it. I know there are many fishermen who think that Spoonplugging is just some method of presenting a particular type of lure in a certain way. This is too bad, as they may be missing out on some knowledge that would clear up the whole picture of fishing for them. There are also those who spread such thoughts for their own personal gain. Some would even go so far as to say that Spoonplugging is "out-of-date." In my lifetime of fishing, I have not seen any change in the reaction of the fish to his environment. In fact, I believe a fish is going to be a fish, long after all of us are dead and gone.

Spoonplugging is not a course in physics, biology or chemistry. It is concerned ONLY with helping a fisherman to understand and get better at the game.

The environment of the fish is changing all the time; temperature, light, oxygen, pressure, etc., you name it. I don't suppose I will ever find any two days the same in my lifetime. The fish, a cold-blooded creature, has been able to survive by adapting to a changing environment. If he had not been able to adapt, he would have disappeared along with the dinosaurs and all the other creatures not seen today.

If the environment of the fish is bad or the fishing pressures become too great, what are we to do as fishermen? Should we wait until someone comes along waving a magic wand to make it better for us? Should we let our success and satisfaction stop or decline? Or should we keep adding to our knowledge and skills to offset the conditions as they are or as they might develop?

As a fisherman, I must do my fishing regardless of what the conditions may be at a particular time and place. To do this I must use the features (structures, breaks, breaklines, deep water, etc.) as my guide as to where the fish will be. Then I must control the depth and speed of my lures (or bait) to take care of the changing (and often bad) environment and the "mood" of the fish at that particular time. In no way can I base my efforts for success upon trying to find one or two satisfactory or better



Dr. Charles Yates (at left), Dallas, Texas Spoonplugging Club, was a bit shook up when Buck Perry put him into a casting position on a structure, within sight of the lodge, that contained both walleyes and northern pike.

environmental conditions. There is no way I can put words in a fish's mouth and say where he will be or what mood he will be in at the time. There are just too many changing variables in the life of a fish for me to do this.

Carl, I could talk a long time about what the word Spoonplugging means, such as unselfishness, the desire to help others, fellowship, etc.

QUESTION: Did you have full classes during the two month period?

BUCK: Most of the time we had full classes. We had 14 boats of our own, and we assigned two students to each boat. This number of boats was just about the maximum the instructors could handle and still do a good job. A couple of times we could have handled a few more students but we were unable to register them due to previous commitments of the lodge.

QUESTION: Where did your students come from? I would think the energy situation would create problems for people trying to reach this area of Canada.

BUCK: If you recall what we said about the selection of Minaki and how it had to have accessibility, you can see we certainly took into consideration the energy situation.

The majority came from the United States. Most all the states were represented. Some states had more than others, such as Texas, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, but it appeared distance and the price of gasoline didn't have much effect. However, I must admit we could only register a limited number due to the number of instructors, boats, facilities, etc.

QUESTION: You supplied your own boats and motors for the school. Why did you do this?

BUCK: Not only did we supply our own boats and motors, but we also supplied the depth sounders, anchors, nets, cushions, etc.

First, we had to be sure these items were available at all times. We were teaching proper handling of these things, and we had to be sure the students had the right "tools." Also, we had to be sure each and every student got the same opportunity for proper instruction.

QUESTION: I notice your Spoonplugger boats are wide with plenty of room and have a seating arrangement quite different from most. I understand the boat handles quite well for the "beginner," and the speed is very good with the small motor (9.9 HP).

BUCK: We have worked on this boat for quite a long period of time. We are continually working on it, as we feel there has never been anything said, or built that can't be improved upon. However, everyone who now has the boat appears to be satisfied. I might add we have a custom-built trailer (also called a Spoonplugger) that makes launching and loading of the boat an easy chore for a single person. This is a fishing "tool," and I think you understand what I mean when I say your "tools" have to be right if you expect to present your

lures properly.

QUESTION: I know you may not like to point out any particular student, but I was wondering if you took any pictures of students with fish?

BUCK: While on the subject (of fish pictures) let me say something further. Modern day fishing trends seem to be at odds with my way of thinking. I do not know who is right or who is wrong, but I believe fishing should be for fun, fellowship, enjoyment, etc. And, until a person gives up his selfishness he will

continued



Roger Stanley, of Streamwood, Illinois (a legislative representative for the state of Illinois) was one of the excellent student-fishermen who demonstrated extreme effort to learn and overcome the difficult assignments, find the fish, and put them on the stringer.

never become a completely satisfied fisherman. (For that matter, I consider selfishness as the root of all evil.)

We approached our picture taking as if each class was one big family off on a fishing trip. I'm sure some of the students didn't fully grasp why we did this. We did have a token gift for the individual who caught the biggest fish on our "fun fishing" day, but that was the extent of any type competition.

Pictures are a reminder of a fishing experience by oneself, another person, or a group that may not come but once in a lifetime. Pictures will allow this event to be relived time and time again. *Fish pictures can stimulate a fisherman to put forth greater effort to become better at the game, and in turn get more satisfaction.*

What difference does it make how many fish a particular person in a group might have caught or didn't catch? As stated earlier, some of our pictures show individual effort, deter-

mination, dedication, etc., but most show enjoyment, fellowship, and "our fish," not "my fish." These are the things that help us become better fishermen and get more satisfaction from our efforts. And *this* (satisfaction) makes fishing a greater recreational sport. It's too bad many fishermen do not realize this fact.

QUESTION: How did the fishermen fare on Friday (the last day of each school session), the so-called "fishing day," or contest day?

BUCK: In the first place be careful how you use the word "contest" day. I probably wouldn't answer you at all if you had used the word "tournament." I'd rather not talk about this at this time. I have some pictures and you can draw your own conclusions. However, here is a picture of a "fishing day" catch. It is a picture of one of our finest students during the school, Roger Stanley, of Streamwood, Illinois. Roger happens to be a legislative representative in the state of Illinois. We were all quite impressed to have a politician turn out to

be such a fine person and such an excellent student and fisherman. I understand he is an outstanding representative of his district. I'd like to say more about Roger later on when we might talk about how some students were outstanding and went to the extreme effort to learn and overcome the difficult assignments, find the fish, and put them on the stringer.

QUESTION: I notice you had classroom periods scheduled for four days. Did you have any particular subject matter for these days?

BUCK: Yes, we had definite subject matter to cover on those days. In addition to the students' classroom study material, we had many slides for discussion. We had written questions already prepared to be sure the student understood fully the subject matter. We also had a quiz on the subject. These were not quizzes to "measure," but quizzes designed to "teach."

Here again, let me list the subject matter and schedule:

MONDAY: (a) Movement of fish; (b)

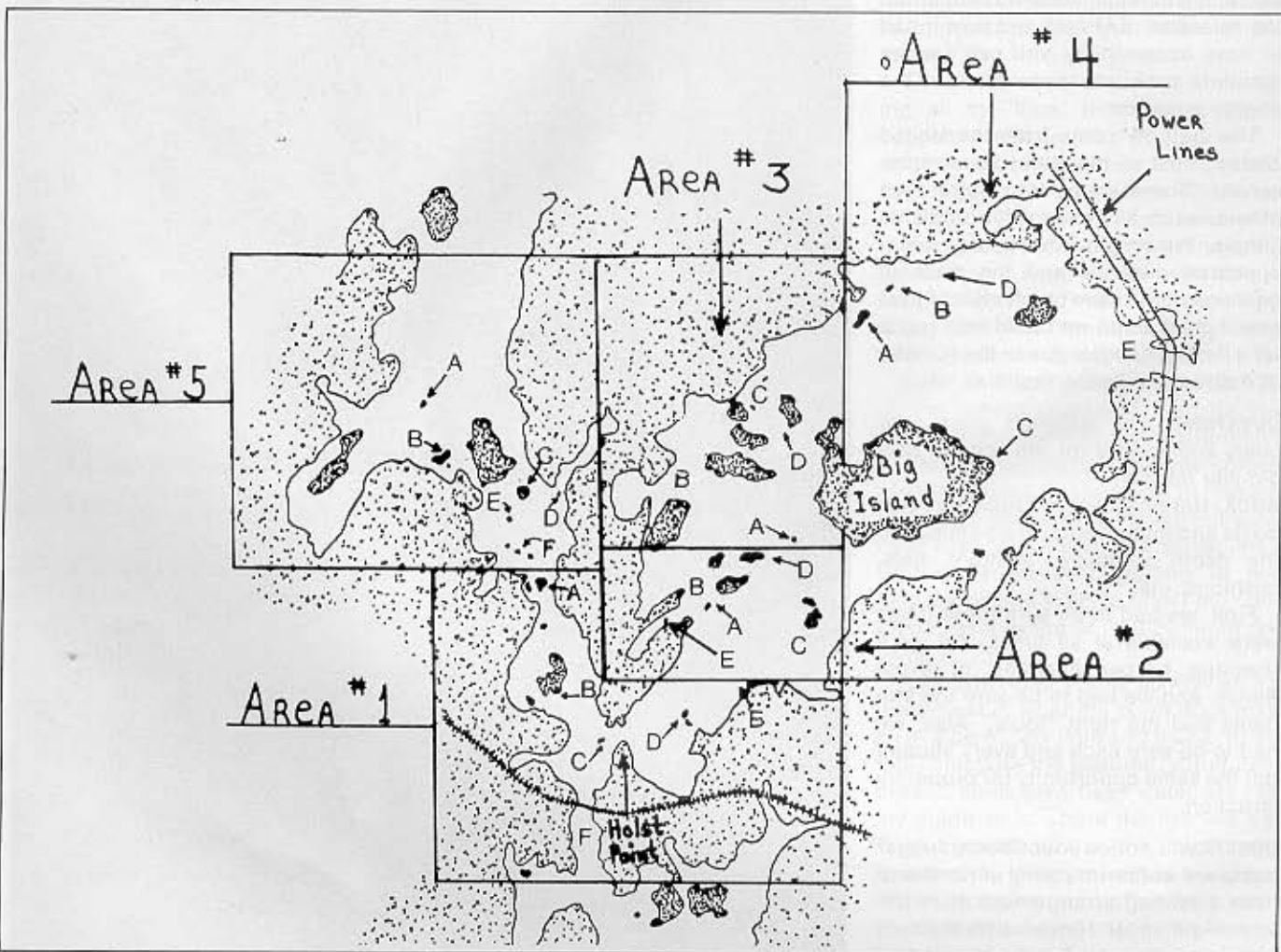


FIGURE 1 - Each student was supplied with a general map of the water to be fished. The student also received a map showing the location of each area to be worked (Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) on consecutive days.

Structure.

TUESDAY: (a) Structure (continuation); (b) Weather and water.

WEDNESDAY: (a) Lake types; (b) Tools and controls.

THURSDAY: (a) Presentation of lures; (b) Mapping and interpretation.

QUESTION: How did you schedule or handle the students for the "on-the-water" instruction?

BUCK: As stated earlier, we had 14 of our own boats. Each boat was numbered, and two people (students) were assigned to a boat which was theirs for the total week.

Then, so many boats were assigned to an instructor. We found it better to assign the same boats to a particular instructor for the total week. However, we did take into account the experi-

ence the students had had before assigning the boat and instructor.

QUESTION: What kind of fishing experience did most of your students have?

BUCK: They varied over a wide range. Many students were fishing for the first time. Many had years of fishing experience, but only a few came who considered themselves "experts." There were quite a number of young fishermen, and many older couples who were taking up fishing after retiring from long years of hard work. I must say, some of our better students were the youngsters, the older couples and especially the ladies.

QUESTION: Which type of fisherman would you rather have in your classes; those with lots of experience or those with limited or none?

BUCK: I think the students themselves will decide this. We welcome all students, but I am reminded at times of the words of an old first or second century Greek philosopher who said — "It is impossible for anyone to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows."

QUESTION: With all those boats out there running around, and individuals possessing varying degrees of experience, I would think things would become rather unmanageable and chaotic. How could the limited number of instructors handle all those boats and still get across the instructions called for on the water?

BUCK: It wasn't easy, Carl. But as you know we have been handling these schools for quite a few years, and you can't beat experience.

First of all, we went to the area a couple of weeks before the school started to finalize arrangements and schedules with the lodge. We also had to know thoroughly the area for our "on-the-water" instruction. We had to locate, map, and interpret the different water for our instructions in the boats. We had to locate the areas for casting the shallows, for the different type lures used, such as surface, weedless, free-running, jump type, etc. (we had to explain WHY those particular areas were chosen). We had to have different areas for CONTOUR trolling, PATTERN trolling, etc. We had to choose the best structure for teaching the total presentation of lures, for placing markers, shoreline sightings, learning how to read and interpret depth sounders, anchoring positions, mapping, interpretation, and how fish moved during different weather and water conditions. We had to have areas for teaching the use of wire line on the troll, and in turn

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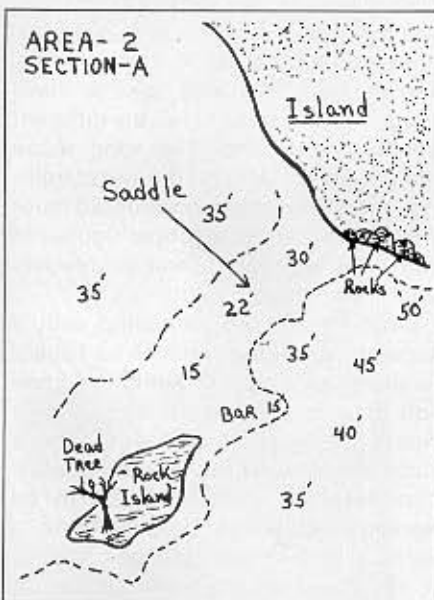


FIGURE 2 - As part of their on-the-water assignments, students were asked to examine the area (shown on the above map) carefully. Then they were asked the following questions: (A) If allowed only one trolling pass, what is the best trolling run in deep water between the two islands? (B) Establish the anchoring position off the rock island to check deep water. What type lures should you use?

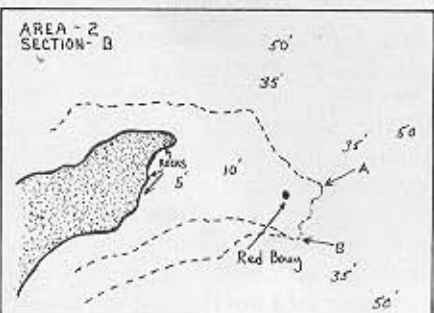


FIGURE 3 - The assignment and questions for this section were: 1. Where is the faster break (quick increase in depth) off the red marker buoy? 2. Should the rocky shoreline behind this bar be good for spawning smallmouth bass?

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BUCK PERRY SCHOOL, continued

show how deep a fisherman must work at times to make contact with the larger fish when weather conditions turn sour. I might add we had weather periods and fish movements that got these points across in good order. There is no doubt in my mind that most students got the message of the importance of interpretation of structure and proper presentation of lures in deep water.

After mapping and interpreting the fishing water within reach for the allotted time, and so the students wouldn't get lost (4-5 miles), we divided the water to be worked into five zones or five areas. In each area we had different or particular shorelines for certain on-the-water procedures. In each area we tried to have as many different type bottom features as possible (steep shores, short and long bars, saddles, humps, breaks, etc.). We also had to have enough areas, so as to handle different weather conditions. The wind alone can play havoc with on-the-water training, if it has not been considered carefully. Let me show a couple figures to more clearly show you and our readers what I am talking about.

Each student was supplied with a general map of the water to be fished. He also had a map showing the location of each area to be worked (see Figure 1 — Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). These maps also showed the location of each "structure" or bottom feature to be worked in each area. Note in Figure 1, we have in each area sections A, B, C, D, etc. These denote a certain feature or structure at that location. The answer to certain questions on each of these points (sections) was in the form of assignments for each student during the week. The student also had a detailed drawing of each section or spot in all five zones. We'll get back to these assignments later, but to answer your question how we managed all the boats, we had a specific schedule for each boat throughout the week.

We had a certain number of boats rotating in a particular area with an instructor to help on the assignments (or anything that might have been missed or incomplete on Monday). I might say here, on Monday's (on-the-water) schedule, each boat had an instructor in the boat for a few hours to show how to operate the boat, and the basic presentation of lures, both casting and trolling. Most of this work was done in Areas 1 and 5 (Figure 1). During the

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period when a particular boat had no instructor, students were kept busy locating and familiarizing themselves with running the boats, the different features, and their location in the specified areas.

Carl, you must keep in mind that in all this training we had to "teach" the student not to be afraid to venture out, *not to get lost*. They were taught how to interpret shoreline and underwater features, etc. It's amazing how timid new fishermen are to just leave the dock themselves. If we can't overcome these things alone, we are failing in our school. At first you would see them putt-putting away slowly, never getting out of sight of the lodge, (a major reason why the first day's instruction was in Areas 1 and 5). A few days later they would be seen roaring away at full throttle and move to the furthest assignment area without a backward glance. Many newcomers would soon stay out until near dark, which came late in those latitudes.

QUESTION: I know you have always stated that if too many fish are caught during the on-the-water instructions, it would be difficult to get the message across to the student. Did this give you much trouble in this school?

BUCK: No, it really didn't. At periods there were some good shallow movements of fish. However, at that time of year the fish were deep most of the time. This didn't bother us much as it allowed us to get the message across better than if we had more shallower movements. I'm sure the students would have desired more shallower movements of fish, but I can't say the instructors would have welcomed them if they had occurred too often. After all, the student had to be trained for things likely to be faced back home.

QUESTION: Let's get back to the features on structures and the assignments you gave the students. Why or how did you select these particular features for the students, and why the particular assignment or questions you asked on each?

BUCK: We haven't discussed very much the material and the discussion in the classroom. However, you know the classroom material is quite extensive on each subject. In our assignments we tried to select not only the best structures (fish used them — so as to teach the subject of fish movements) but to select those that involved knowledge the students would acquire in the classroom. As stated before, many stu-

dents have trouble applying classroom knowledge to a situation they encounter on the water. They seem to forget that what was said *applies directly* to the different situations faced on the water. If the fisherman (student) will look as a situation entirely from the standpoint of the material studied, he should have no trouble interpreting the situation and what to do about it. It is a little difficult and must be brought out repeatedly in the classroom and on the water, that bottom features (structure) are the guides as to where the fish might be. The breaks and breaklines on or connected to these structures are where we pinpoint the fish. And, we must not spend too much time in areas where we do not have the best chance



Denise Absalom and her dad (Dennis) from Crawford, Nebraska were outstanding students and anglers. She proudly displays some of the fish caught during the 4th week classes.

to catch a fish. Before the week was out, most of the students began to realize the difference between areas that would be considered "trolling water" and those that were classified as "fishing water."

Let me get ahead of you at this point and give an example of what I mean, when I say the student (at times) has difficulty applying the classroom material when he gets on the water.

Figure 2 is a detailed drawing (such as was given to each student) of Section A in Area 2. If you refer back to the first map (Figure 1) you should be able to locate this.

The students' on-the-water assignment for this particular feature or sec-

tion was:

(1) Look this area over on the depth sounder and:

(A) What is the best trolling run in deep water between the two islands? (You are allowed only one trolling pass).

(B) Establish the anchoring position off the rock island to check deep water. What type lures should you use?

This particular situation presented no problem for the student who understood the classroom material on the "Basic Movement of Fish" which is, (in essence), "The deepest water in an area being fished is the home of the fish. Periodically the fish become active and may move toward the shallows. The path they take is not in a haphazard manner, but along well established bottom features, which we refer to as structure (breaks, breaklines). How far they go and how long they stay is dependent upon the weather and water conditions at that particular time. For a 'structure' (break, breakline) to be used it must lead all the way to the shallows."

With this thoroughly understood (and accepted), it would dictate the trolling pass be made with a lure that runs at least 22 feet deep and the trolling pass be made from the deepest water (50 feet, along breaklines, up on the saddle with a sweeping turn to the left with the pass going (close to the breakline) over and off the bar (or finger).

The anchoring position should be as shallow as possible between the saddle and the finger (bar) so that the deeper water on the saddle can be reached as well as all sections of the finger (bar). The shallows can be checked by top-water, weedless, free-running, and jump type lures; the deeper section by free-running bottom-bumping lures on a steady retrieve for faster speeds, and a "jump" type lure (jigs, spoons, etc.) for the slower speed.

Carl, I hope you can see why we cannot teach proper procedures on the water without proper in-the-classroom instruction. This is just one of the reasons we keep saying "knowledge is the key to fishing success."

To more clearly show you what I mean about relating the things taught in the classroom to the situation we find on the water, let me take another section from the assignments. Figure 3 is a view of Section B in Area 2. (Refer to Figure 1.) The assignment for this section was as follows:

(1) Where is the faster break off the red marker buoy?