

Buck talks fishing

Take The Lake As A Whole And Separate It Into Two Types Of Water Part 2 of a series

Not too long ago, Tommy Ferencek and Don Dickson, two fine Spoonplugging instructors, were sent to the Midwest to "check out" a couple artificial reservoirs (man-made lakes). The major assignment was to map and interpret the lakes (structures, depths, bottom conditions, water colors, etc.). But, they were to also find out if the reports of the fish species found in the waters were correct. One reservoir was reported to contain quite a few muskie. It was said the other lake contained a variety of species.

During our discussion after their return, Tommy and Don made a sketch showing a portion of the reservoir which contained the muskie. The drawing showed a long point located at the junction of a large feeder stream and the main river channel (Figure 1 on page 76).

When they finished drawing the

sketch (showing only a few contour lines) they asked the question: "Where, around this point, do you think we caught the big muskie?" My reply was: "That's easy. You caught the fish on the 'inside' — at position X." (I made the mark as shown.)

"How did you know?"

"For the simple reason the inside is the only place you show any structure!"

"We should have known better than to ask!"

For quite awhile now, we have been discussing how you and I should use the features found in a body of water as our guide to where the fish will be. At the same time we have been saying in order to consistently catch fish, we must control the depth and speed of our lures on or around these features. We have called these features "structure," "breaks," "breaklines," and "deep

water." To simplify our talks we have reduced these down to the term **STRUCTURE**.

It was pointed out very emphatically the term "structure" meant features of the **BOTTOM**, not things such as logs, stumps, stick-ups, weed patches, bushes, sunken boats, etc. It was said things of this nature were called "breaks," and are secondary to the "structure" (bottom). The "breaks" (and breaklines) **ON, OR CONNECTED TO**, structure is where we pinpoint the fish. All of which said: if you and I use only "breaks" as our guide to where the fish will be, then we better develop a strong casting arm, for we're gonna need it.

We have stressed the fact that approaching our fishing in this manner is the only reliable way to take care of the many variables, and constant changes, that occur in the environment of the fish. And, there just isn't any way we can predict in advance just where and how active (or dormant) the critter might be.

In order to clear up this subject (using structure as our guide, and controlling depth and speed) in many fishermen's minds, we have approached the subject in several different ways. The last time we talked, we were discussing it from the standpoint of interpreting the **WHOLE** body of water in order to determine where the fish will be (our best place to catch a fish). Then,



Tom Ferencek holds a good sized musky he caught while working an area of excellent looking bottom structure. It didn't take Tom long to find this productive structure since it was the best potential "fishing area" in an entire section of lake. Education Editor, Buck Perry, explains why one particular section was chosen over others.

rather than talk about the presentation of lures on one particular feature, we would approach lure presentation from the standpoint of approaching a WHOLE fishing situation (lake, reservoir, pond, stream, etc.).

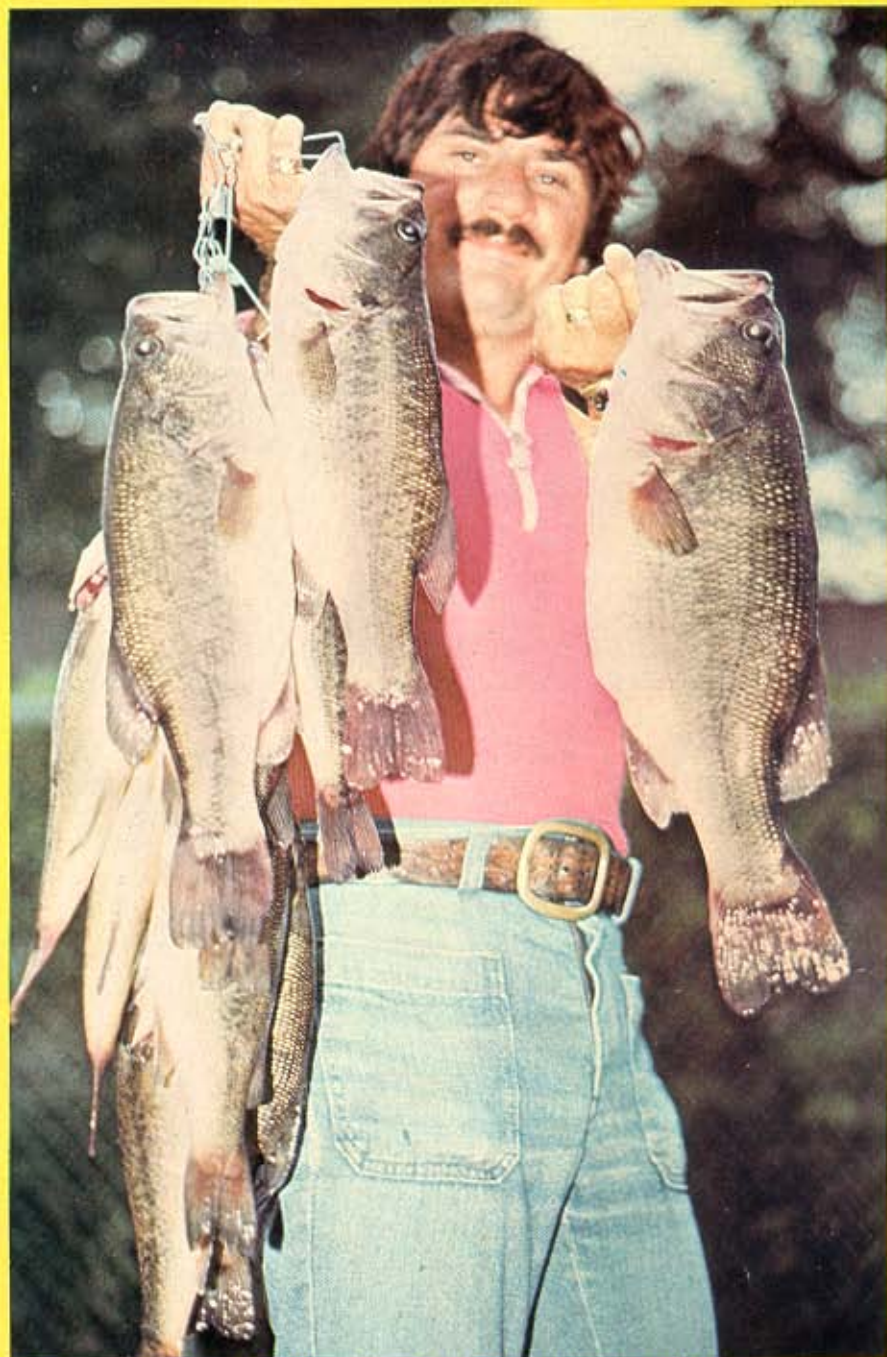
Figure 2 is a repeat of the natural lake drawing we were discussing in our last talk (Feb. '78 *Fishing Facts*). The lake was divided into two sections of water. One section was referred to as "fishing water," the balance was called "trolling water." It is hoped what was said about this division is remembered. The whole purpose of the division was to not only make more clear our original thought (structure as the guide, and control of depth and speed), but to help in answering the important question, "What do we DO when we get on the water?"

In Figure 2 all major "structures" (bars, humps, etc.) have been marked as "fishing water" (B & C, Figure 2). All areas that do not show structure (BOTTOM features different from surrounding BOTTOM area) we have labeled as being "trolling water" until we prove otherwise. In separating the water in this manner we have marked off the features (structure, breaks, breaklines) in the lake as to where the fish will be, or where we have the best chance to catch a fish. We have also set up the things we are going to DO. The basic presentation of lures has now been set up.

We have already determined it would be unwise to "take off" to the other end of the lake or to some "fishing" spot marked on the map. When we leave the launching ramp (or dock) our aim is to finally arrive at the "fishing" spots, so we head in that direction. However, we immediately start (right at the dock) our basic presentation of lures. We begin our "fishing" by trolling.

You might say: "Rather than troll, why not start by casting the shoreline? This would let us work all the little pockets, weeds, stick-ups, etc."

My reply might be something like this: "You can start casting the shoreline if you choose, but this shoreline shows no 'structure' and to me, it is purely 'trolling' water. We'll 'fish' it alright, but we'll fish it while we're heading toward the 'fishing water.' I don't plan on it taking us all day to get there. And, I expect to have some answers by the time we get there. By this afternoon we should know what makes this lake



Tom Ferencek (shown above) and fellow Spoonplugging instructor, Don Dickson, made this fine catch of bass by concentrating their efforts in two specific areas. The following article describes the strategy that was used to locate these "hot-spots" and also describes how a similar catch can be made by anglers who are willing to put forth sufficient effort to do so.

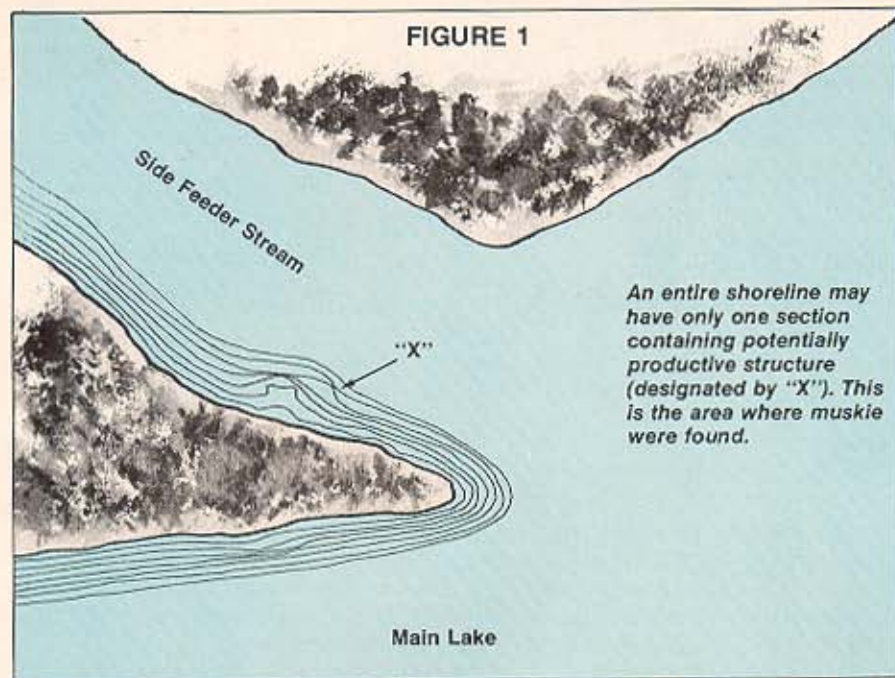
tick, and also know exactly where the true 'fishing spots' are."

We start trolling with our shallowest running lure. In the event we were using Spoonplugs (tools) this would be the 500 series. We proceed to keep this lure in position; that is, in the shallowest water possible. Since it runs at 2-3 feet deep, we try our best to keep it in these depths at all times. The lure would be bumping the bottom or ripping through weeds part of the time. During this trolling run we would change speeds at

times. At all times we keep our eyes open, observing the terrain, the shoreline, projections in any weed-line, shallower areas, "washes," feeder streams, dredgings, deeper water closer to shore, etc., that might indicate "structure" (breaks, breaklines). We would keep all these observations in mind for future consideration if the situation calls for more detailed investigation (mapping-interpretation).

We keep the shallow running lure on until we have covered quite a dis-

FIGURE 1



An entire shoreline may have only one section containing potentially productive structure (designated by "X"). This is the area where muskie were found.

tance, or until we feel we have covered water that should contain a fish at one time or another (one half mile or so). Let's say we keep it on until we have covered the water to the area marked "d" (Figure 2). If at any time we had caught a fish making this run, we might make a return pass by the spot to check for additional fish, or to see if we missed something (structure, breaks, breaklines).

At this point you might say: "Suppose the shallowest water contained weeds, and we had to troll the lure along the weedline. If we caught a fish along here, why wouldn't we go

back and cast the weeds, instead of just making another trolling pass? Couldn't there be quite a few fish back in the weeds, and none, or only an occasional one, on the outside?"

First, we know this is "trolling" water (as far as the map shows), and any fish is likely to be a small "straggler" with little chance more fish are around, or a "school" which the Spoonplugger is ALWAYS hunting. Second, in most all cases, if there are a number of fish in the weeds, there will be more than one on the outside. The additional trolling pass should give some answers. There might be times (seasonal, lake types, etc.) where a fish may be back in a tall weedline and our sloppy, or incomplete, depth and speed control did not locate any that might have been on the outside. You also have to remember if the fish in the weeds are not active and moving, you are not likely to get any lure, or any presentation, close or exact enough to make contact. Further, if you are in a situation where the fish remain in TALL weeds a major part of the time, some are likely to move to the "outside" during the activity period. However, if the "weed" situations are "bugging" you, and clouding your thinking about the "Basic Movement of Fish" (deep to shallow and vice-

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Versatility is important in becoming a well-rounded fisherman. Yet, there are several basic guidelines which can be used under almost ANY set of fishing circumstances. On-the-water instructor, Don Dickson, and his fishing partner, Tom Ferencek, landed these beauties by utilizing the combination of casting and trolling while presenting their lures.

reels, etc.), we will take this subject up more thoroughly in a later talk. For now, let's get back to the subject at hand.

Let's assume we did not catch a fish with this first size lure (shallow depth). It is time to switch to a (larger) deeper running lure (4 to 8 feet). **WE DO NOT MAKE A RETURN PASS OVER THE SAME WATER WITH THIS DEEPER RUNNING LURE.** Remember we are heading for the first "fishing" water (Area A, Figure 2). We keep this second lure in position and cover additional ground. We keep it on until we have covered water we feel must hold some fish at one time or another (seasonal, long stabilized weather and water conditions, etc.).

Let's say we keep this lure on until we arrive at point "c," Figure 2 (another half mile). If no sign of structure (just shown on map) are found, then we switch to an even deeper running lure and continue on toward the first "fishing" spot (B, Figure 2). By this time we should be following contours that are 8 to 10 feet deep. (This means we have now covered the SHALLOWS. We proceed to run this depth (checking speedily) until we have covered a sizable distance (1/2 mile or so) (point "d," Figure 2).

At this point we have two choices. We can start all over again with the shallowest running lure, then after a spell switch to the next depth, and then the next. Or, we can continue on from point "d" with the same lure (8-10 feet). Obviously it is better to continue on by returning to the use of shallowest running lures once again. If we kept our eyes open we should have seen the shoreline and shallows were not the same in all sections, and this should indicate additional checking at the shallowest water is in order. Besides all this, we have to get in the habit of checking and rechecking all the shallows throughout the day, regardless of the situation. However, running the 8-10 foot depths is not a bad practice. Such depths are not only a good "straggler" zone, but will also show better any "structure" (brush, breaklines) that may exist along the shoreline.

At this time you might say: "Why keep checking the shallows? Why not put on larger (deeper) running lures and proceed from point 'd'?"

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THE LAKE AT THIS TIME. The only time we would go deeper at this stage of the game is when our observations and lures tell us there *must* be some structure (bar, hump, etc.) not shown on the map. Let's say when we arrived at position "d" (Figure 2), our lures (held in position) show a shallow bar running off into deep water. THEN, we may spend a short period checking it out. We might put on longer lures that run deeper than 8-10 feet, and make a few trolling passes; but, the situation says a depth sounder would more quickly tell if the area has potential or not.

If the condition looked good (structure, brush, breaklines, deep water), it would be in order to "fish" the area at that time. This means, to cover the depths and speeds as completely as possible — casting, trolling or both. If our quick look at the bar (structure) does not show anything of value, we get on with our journey toward the "fishing" area as marked on the map (Figure 2). We continue trolling the "shallows" until we reach the "fishable" spot. (Editor's note: For those who do not understand what makes a bar "good" or "bad," we suggest study-

ing the subject in Buck Perry's book titled *Spoonplugging, Your Guide to Lunker Catches*. For those who do not recall what is meant by "complete control of depth and speed for the area," we suggest a re-study of Buck's article in *Fishing Facts* June, 1977 issue.)

During this run (of the shallows) in the section designated as "trolling water," we have found out quite a few things. We have noted the depths, bottom conditions, weeds, etc. We have also noted the weather and water conditions and the movements of the fish at that time. The

long stretch of water should have produced a fish of some type, if the fish were active and moving. This does not say there are no movements taking place somewhere in deeper water or in the "fishing" areas. However, it does say we may not get by with sloppy depth and speed control (presentation of lures) when we reach the "fishing" water. Our trolling run also revealed just how accurate our contour map was, and whether we were wise in designating the long stretch as "trolling" water rather than some of it as "fishing" water.

We are now at the area we had marked on the map as "fishing water" (structure shown on map, position B, Figure 2). It is at this time we "strain" the water to get the final answers as to where the fish are, and how they are reacting to the present weather and water conditions. We go to our COMPLETE control of depth and speed in the area, both casting and trolling.

As a brief refresher on the basic presentation of lures, and for COMPLETE depth and speed control, let's "fish" the area. Let's start with the shallowest running lure again on the troll. We'll make our "shallow" water (0 to 8-10 ft.) trolling passes from "h" to "i" (note Figure 2). This distance should cover the structure (breaks, breaklines) and test the area. The actual distance would be determined by the width of the structure and the activity and movements of the fish.

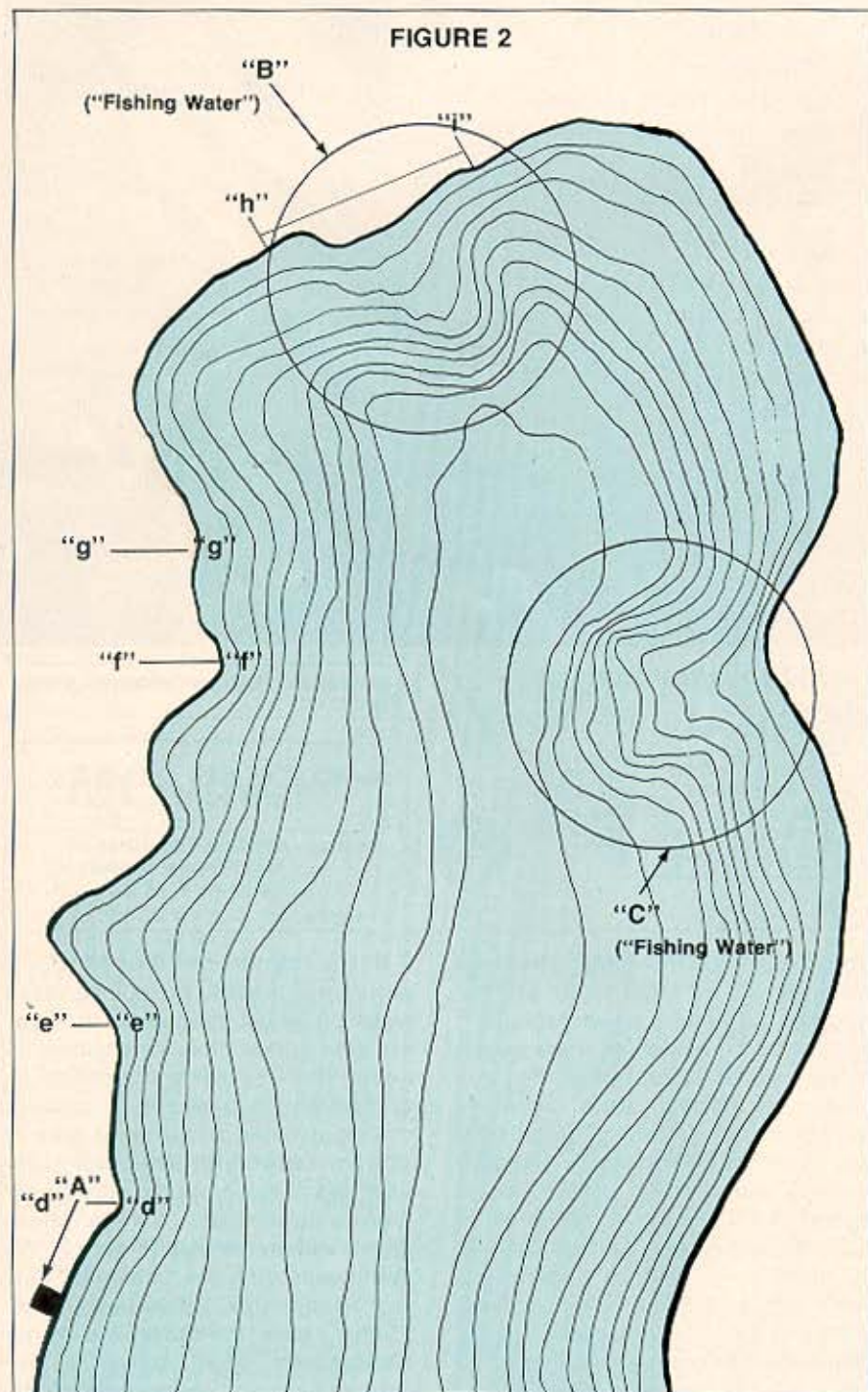
The first trolling pass is made with the shallowest lure. The return pass (trolling pass No. 2) is made with the next size (deeper running) lure. The next pass (No. 3) is made with line length and lure size in the 8 to 10 ft. depth range. On all these passes the lures are kept in position (at times bumping and tipping the bottom, etc.), and the speed is varied. After this is done, we can either stop trolling and check out the depths and speeds in the shallows by casting, or, we can continue the trolling in deeper water. We will assume we desire to get the trolling out of the way at this time.

To fully cover the structure (breaks, breaklines) in deeper water, several size lures (running depths) will be used. Several trolling passes will be made with each lure size. These passes will be made from several directions. The object is to keep each trolling pass and each lure on, or as close to the bottom as possible. This means that the lure will be bumping bottom most of the time when it is on the structure (bar, humps, breaklines, etc.).

These deeper trolling passes may not be as long as the ones previously made in the shallows (from "h" to "i"). When the lure comes off the bar or hump (structure) it is time to turn around and make another pass. Each pass should progressively get deeper. When the lure size and line length will no longer bump, walk, or tip the bottom, it is time to switch to a deeper running lure.

It must be remembered that on all these deeper trolling runs, the path

FIGURE 2



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of the troll should be STRAIGHT. If we try to follow contours (crooked trolling pass), our lures will not be in position much of the time. AND, we will not "learn" what is down there. We will be unable to interpret the structure, or position of the fish if we should find them. It is very important that we know "where we are."

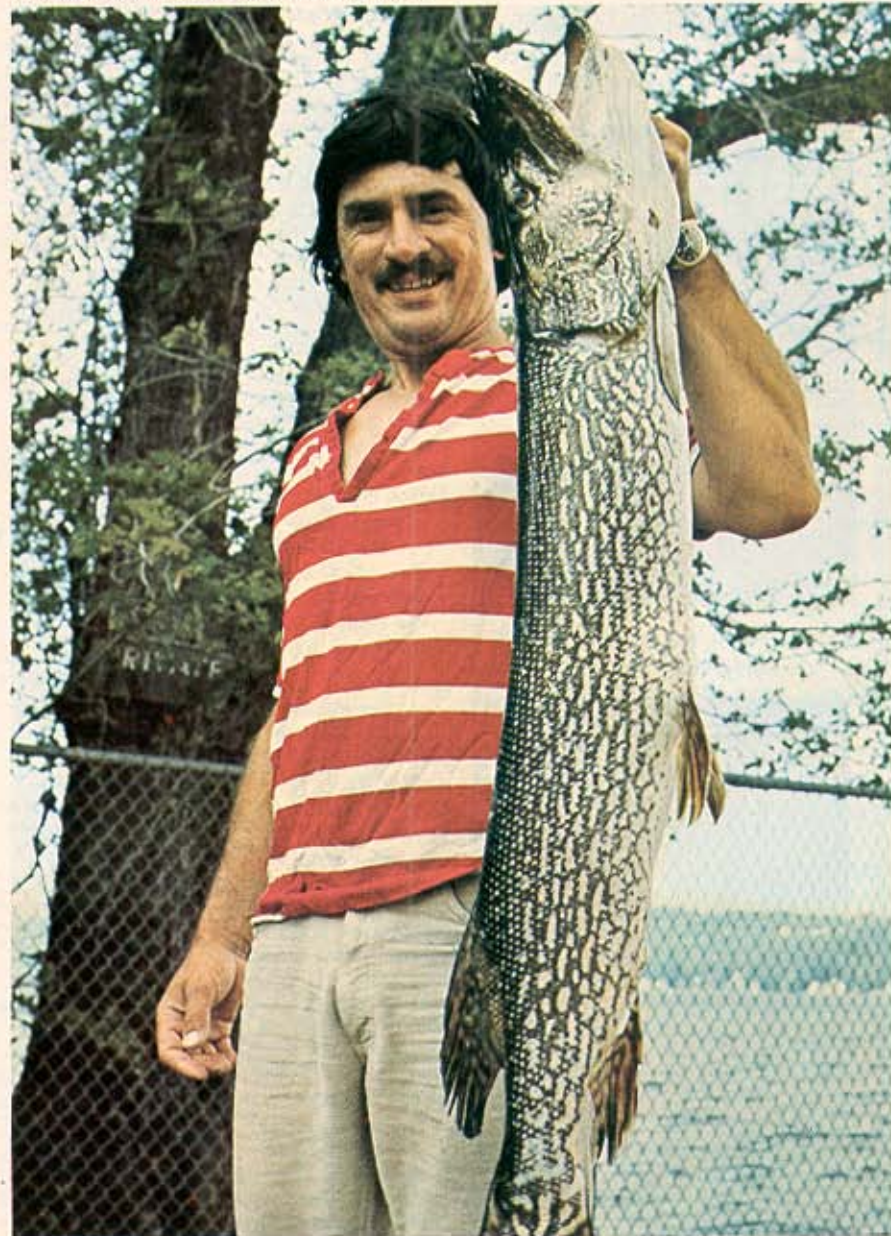
The amount of success (number of fish) is dependent upon the accuracy of additional trolling passes, or the position of the boat when casting. To assist us in "knowing where we are" and to help us interpret the whole area, we should throw one or more floating markers and be sure we establish good shoreline sightings on

each consecutive trolling pass.

On these trolling passes (in deep water) our depth may be limited due to the "gear" we have. If we are using monofilament line on our trolling reels, we may be limited to working no deeper than 20-25 feet. However, if we are equipped with wire trolling line, our depth control is extended tremendously. If at all possible, our trolling passes should reach (at least) to the "drop-off."

If we catch no fish after all these trolling passes, we might think there are no fish there. This may be true, but just up to a point. If the fish were up (active) and moving, most likely some of our trolling passes would

Tom Ferencek with a big northern pike that was found lurking way "downstairs" (30 ft. deep). It took wire trolling line and a deeply trolled lure to fool this lunger. Many anglers fail to realize how deep a trophy northern may move in a deep, clear water lake. Twenty to forty foot depths are not unusual for these fish during the summer months.





Does it take a completely different fishing strategy for each and every game fish species? Not really. The thick bodied walleye Don Dickson examines here was taken in the same manner as all the fish shown in the accompanying article. Education Editor Buck Perry explains why a fisherman doesn't require different tactics on every fishing trip.

have connected. But suppose the mass of the fish were deeper than that reached on the troll? Maybe our trolling passes were not "exact" enough (depth control) or "slow" enough (speed control) for a few dormant, inactive, non-chasing stragglers which might be someplace on the structure?

Since we are going to *completely* control our depth and speed in the "fishing" areas, we must go to the cast. This allows us to cover the structure more thoroughly. We can check out more speeds (especially the slower ones), and greater depths.

In casting both the shallows and the deeper structure (breaks and breaklines) we will employ at least two type lures: (1) Free running and bottom bumping for steady retrieves, (2) "Jump" types (jigs, soft plastics, spoons, etc.) for slower speeds and greater depths. Both shallows and deep would be covered by "fan casting," with proper positioning of the boat. After this type presentation (if we caught no fish), we can honestly

say (and must) there are no fish there — at that particular time.

We are again at a point where we have a choice as to the next thing to do (assuming we caught no fish). We know fish do not move constantly nor consistently, so we can remain at this particular spot, repeating over and over the control of the depth and speed we feel will make contact if the fish move up. Or, we can move on to the next "fishing" area marked on the map (C, Figure 2). In all likelihood we would decide to move on to the next area for it would be the wisest thing to do at this time. Not only would we find out more about the lake (depth, bottoms, etc.), but we may find some structure not shown on the map.

Another reason to move on is the second "fishing" spot may be quite different. It could be the water color is better. The features of the second spot (or the third, or fourth if present) may give better interpretation, deeper features, deeper water, etc. It could be we may find a "short"

movement not possible on the first spot (B, Figure 2). If the fish become active after we move away (from B, Figure 2), there should be a movement on the second spot as well. If we found a movement in progress on the second spot (C, Figure 2) and the structure did not shape up as well as the last one, we can always go back and check the first one again. If we decided to move on to the next "fishing" spot (C, Figure 2), we'd do exactly as we did before in all the "trolling" water between the two spots. When we got to area C, we would fish it *completely* by casting and trolling.

Since the fish are not likely to be up and active when we finish with "fishing area" C (second spot), we would move on. We would check, and recheck, the BEST "trolling" and "fishing" water throughout the day. If a fish moves into range, we aim to catch him. If he doesn't, we aim to know where to catch him at a later date.

You might say at this time, "Suppose I do not have a contour map of the lake, nor a depth sounder, what will I do?"

You change your procedures little. As far as you are concerned, it's ALL "trolling" water until you prove it otherwise. You run the shallows until you note any "structure" (bars, humps, etc.) that indicates "fishing" water. The shallow water trolling (0 to 8-10 ft.) if done right (keeping your eyes open and your lures in position) will show areas where a deeper "look-see" is in order. Your lures on the troll will become your eyes downstairs and provide information for your interpretations. In fact, the best way to learn a lake, (and the fastest in many cases) is to use lures to do the mapping, and show the features present. While "mapping" you are also "fishing;" the *final* interpretation must be made with lures — to see if any fish are present. If you do not have any aids, or do not know how to use them, *how else would you go about your fishing?*

Next time we will use a reservoir (man-made lake) to once again look at a body of water, and give a "birds-eye" view of where the fish might be, and how we must use structure as our guide. We'll talk further why we should separate "trolling" water from "fishing" water so that we might know more what to DO when we get on the lake. Also, we'll try to answer some questions that might be on your mind.