

How and Where to Fish

Many anglers ask, "How do I know I am fishing in the right place?"

In our last talk (October '83 *Fishing Facts*) the majority of our comments were directed toward a Flatland reservoir (man-made lake) practically covered with brush, bushes and standing trees. The purpose of the discussion was to help us "interpret" a body of water from the things we could see above the water. It was pointed out that our above water observations are a major factor in determining whether we spend our time where we have the best chance to catch a fish. And, this does not mean all the "fishy looking" places along the shoreline! It means our observations must lead us to the features of the lake that fish use in their movements and migrations (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water). Our observations should also tell us if we cannot control the depth and speed of our lures correctly in an area (due to debris, etc.) we should spend little time trying.

The response to our last article was as great as any we have had in the past. It was obvious the majority were very familiar with brush and tree-infested reservoirs and the trouble they cause, since the reaction from readers came in the form of questions. Many thoughts were involved, and the variety was about as great as the number received. (Some sent a drawing.) There were some who said, "My lake has weeds, not brush." (They had apparently missed our earlier talk (August '83 *Fishing Facts*).

At this time let's talk about the questions, thoughts and concerns of

fishermen over brush or tree-infested reservoirs. (Those with a weed problem can substitute the word "weed" where the words "brush," "bush" or "tree" are used.) In this discussion I will use a composite approach and try to cover as many questions as possible, using as few figures as possible. Some of the questions and things talked about may seem to be repetitious. My observations show all fishermen do not look at a situation in the same way. Neither will the comprehension of what I say be the same. *If I get one question from a fisherman about what I have said, I may receive a dozen questions from fishermen about what they "think" I said.* To be sure a particular message gets across, it must be approached from many different directions.

With these thoughts in mind, let us look at a few figures we can use to discuss some of the questions raised. *These questions are rather a summation of many about the same subject.* Basically, there are two things fishermen are concerned with: 1. "How do I fish it?" 2. "How do I know I am fishing the best place?" Give some thought to each question before jumping to a conclusion—or to what I have to say about it. I will label the questions A, B, C, etc.

Figure 1 is a side view of a situation that can be used to cover quite a few points. It is a Flatland reservoir containing bushes and standing trees. In this case, no timber was taken out. The lake was formed in a dry, desert-like area. The vegetation was more

like brush (mesquite) rather than tall timber. But some visible rows of large standing trees do exist at different places in the lake. Some depth-of-water figures were put in to better show the situation.

QUESTION A—"How would you control your depth while trolling in ALL areas in this situation?"

In exposed trees in the shallows, depths can be worked with different lure sizes (that run at different depths) to check in and around the bushes.

When trolling the submerged bushes (or trees), the trolling is conducted with lure size and line length to barely skip the lure through the tallest twigs and branches. If the lure hangs or snags too much, either too large a lure is being used or too much line is being run.

Better depth control is maintained if the trolling pass is made parallel to the shoreline. The object is to stay in approximately the same depth of water. If a depth sounder is available, the boat can be kept on a certain depth level. In a situation such as this, once the correct lure depth is obtained, the lure should not hang too often and should be close enough when running free. A good practice (to thoroughly check the depths) is to make enough trolling passes so little space exists between them. When working deeper water, lure size and line length may have to be increased.

When trolling the big exposed trees out near the deeper channel, various lure sizes and line lengths should be used to check all depths in and

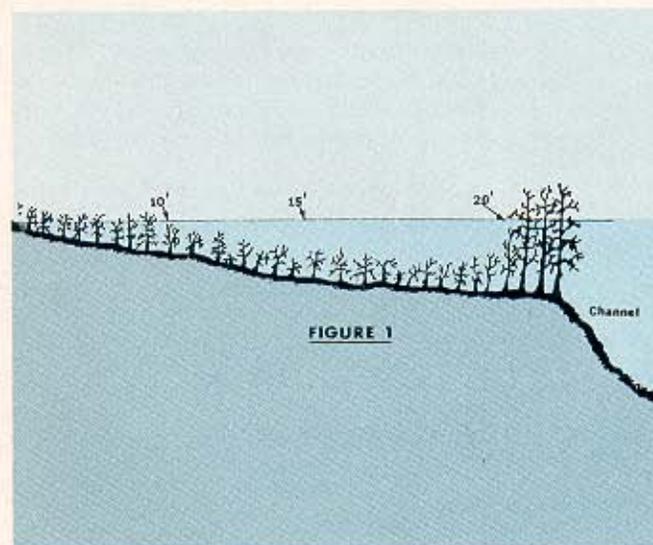


FIGURE 1—"Flatland" reservoir containing bushes and trees. How would you fish it?

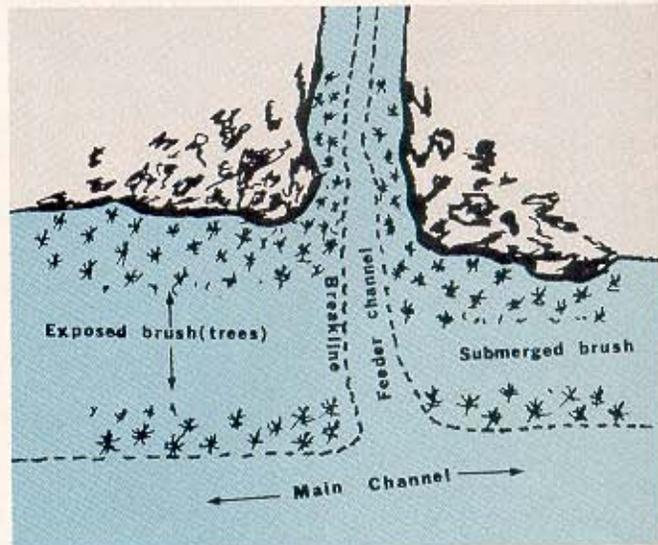


FIGURE 2—Side feeder stream channel joins the main channel. One of the major situations to look for in all reservoirs.

A Brush-Infested Lake

Part One
of Two

Here are some answers to get you started. by Buck Perry, Education Editor

around the trees. If the tall trees are found to be along the channel, the final trolling passes should be made parallel to the treeline and as deep as possible at the trees and the breaklines (drop-off) of the channel.

QUESTION B— "How would you find the areas to cast?"

If I were unfamiliar with the lake, I would troll until I observed a definite structure situation of some type OR I would troll until I caught a fish (See **Question C** below).

QUESTION C— "What shallow shoreline observations can you make to show shallower areas to be checked both casting and trolling? In other words, if you were to pick out an area to fish, say 200 yards of shoreline shallows, what area would you pick?"

I will point out only a few shoreline features I might choose to work the shallows. These should be enough to remind all that the spots picked MUST indicate clearly a potentially good "Structure Situation" exists and the fish may use it in their movements and migrations. However, I must use enough to cover all the questions and concerns about the fishing situation we are talking about. To do this, I may say more about one than another.

Figure 2 represents one of the major situations to look for in all reservoirs. It shows where a side feeder stream channel joins the main channel. A lot has been said in the past about this "Structure Situation." There's no guesswork about the structure, breaks, breaklines going all the way from deep water to the shallows.

"Coves," or bays, are indicators and the channels are usually free of brush. All the parts of this situation can be seen except the breaklines, which you know are there.

Figure 3 is a top view of another version of a side feeder stream entering the main part of a reservoir. These may often be seen better than the one in **Figure 2**. This is especially true if the lake is miles across.

If I were fishing this lake my policy would be to check out both sides of the feeder "cut." But the situation indicates the left side (facing figure) is the better of the two (better bar, sharper break, greater depths, etc.).

I would first troll with lure sizes (and line length) to check the depths. Since it is a Flatland reservoir, I'd probably find just a couple small, shallow running lures would be sufficient to check all the exposed brush. There would be no hesitation about getting the lures back into any opening or passage big enough for the boat. [Most likely I'd chop off a few small limbs and twigs with my prop to get the boat through some places.] Proper line length and rod movement should keep "hangs" to a minimum.

My final trolling passes would be over the submerged timber. However, if the lake is large and the main river or creek channel is quite a distance away, I would not go very far out over the submerged brush. I'd limit it to 100 feet or so. (We are talking about the shallow area—see question.)

My total coverage on the trolling passes (or casting) would be just

about like that shown in the figure. I would not go too far up the feeder stream (couple hundred feet). The same would hold true of the shoreline on each side of the "cut."

If I saw fit to cast the situation, I would cover about the same area. If the season and other observations indicated the area should be checked with surface lures, then I'd get with it. However, the minimum coverage would require two style lures. A free-running lure on a steady retrieve, for checking faster speeds, would be used first. Then a "jump-type" lure (jig, soft plastic, etc.) would be used for the slower.

I would fancast the open water (submerged brush) with appropriate lure and depth control (see below). But, in all areas, I would limit the boat to a position close to the exposed bushes. I would not move the boat and cast farther out unless I made contact with a fish.

To be sure we cover all the angles (questions, etc.) let's look at another situation that can be observed. It is still another version of a side feeder stream or "wash" such as a large cove or large bay (**Figure 4-A**).

The first observation would show the big bay. The second thing observed is the "point" at the entrance and the brushline around it. This point and the exposed brushline indicates a channel or wash of some type has swung in close to the point in the past. The visible evidence suggests that here may exist the most produc-

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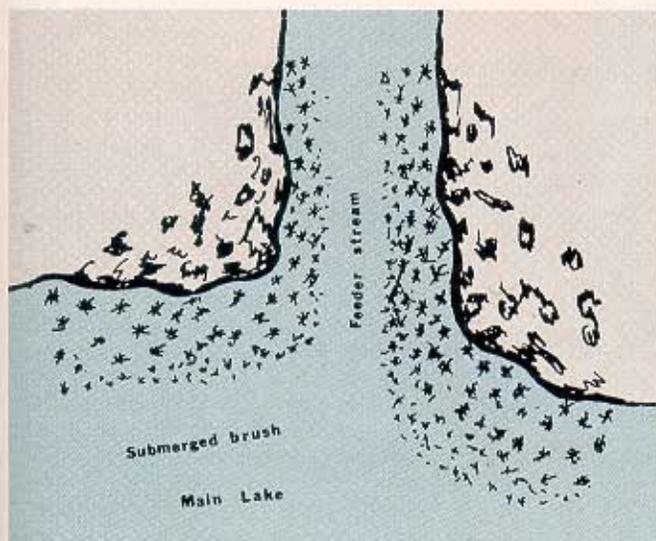


FIGURE 3—Top view of another version of side feeder stream entering the main part of reservoir.

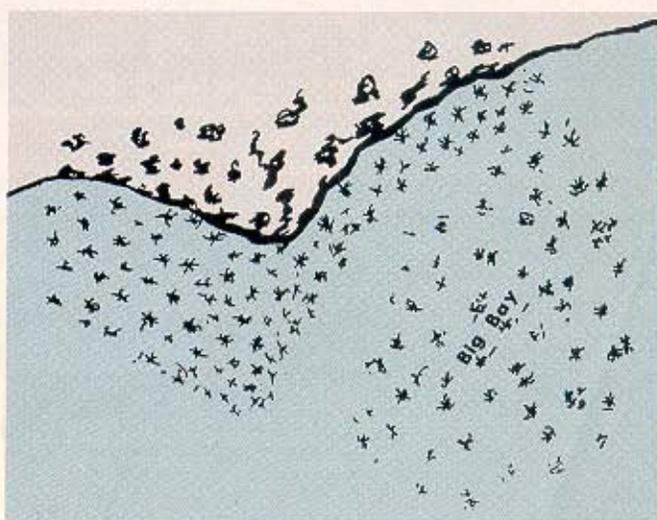


FIGURE 4A—A "wash" or side feeder stream cutting through large cove or bay. Note the "point" at the entrance of the bay and the brushline around it.

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How & Where to Fish A Brush-Infested Lake

ties B&B and BREAKLINE in the lake close to the shoreline. To show what is meant, let's look at another figure.

In Figures 4-6, I have removed all the brush and show only the "breakline" that may exist. This breakline would be rather sharp, and it certainly "breaks" into the deepest water in the area. The breakline is actually a drop-off that goes deeper and deeper. Bottom will rise for the fish and a route to the shallows is well defined. The better part is, the fish have no outside access to the deepest water in the area—regardless how shallow it has become.

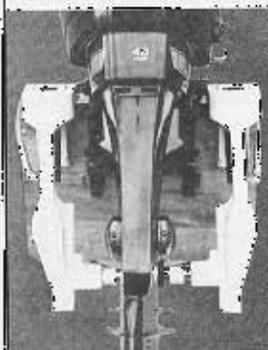
Figure 5 is another obvious feature of the shoreline indicating potentially productive water. It is a top view of a well-defined "point" in the shoreline. The visible bushes indicate a ridge-like, underwater bar structure. Situation extends out from the point.

QUESTION 10—"Do bushes brush and trees, when other 'open' water structures are present, make it any more productive structure, breaks and breaklines?"

Figure 6 is a top view of a Structure Situation. Observations of the shoreline shallows for brush, trees, woodlines show a road once crossed this area of the lake. These are easy to spot and they should be checked out fished thoroughly. This is one of the better and most easily worked Structure Situations in a lake of this nature. There is little doubt that this Structure Situation goes "all the way" from the deepest water in the area to the shallows. Now is there a question about where the "contact point" is likely to be (where it crosses a channel). I'd check this situation first by trailing—from the shallowest to the deepest. To concentrate my efforts at the breaklines on both sides of the road and really give it the works where it crosses a channel. If at any place a fish is caught, I'd stop the trailing and cover the area where the fish was caught by tossing. Top style lures would be used to check the depths and speeds. A free-running, bottom-bouncing lure would be used for the faster speeds, and a "june" type lure for the slower speeds. If I had a partner, he'd use one type and I'd use the other.

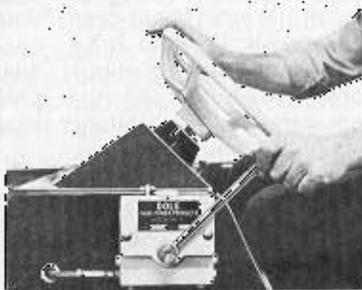
Figure 7 is another easily seen feature. In Flatland reservoirs such as we have under discussion, we can expect visible islands of some place. The exposed bushes (trees or woodlines) around it will indicate quite well the underwater features (bars, deep water, etc.). This is always a good

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place to work thoroughly.

These examples (Figures 3-7) should be enough to again point out that our observations and efforts must be related to the *Structure Situations* available in the lake, if we desire to catch fish consistently whenever and wherever we fish. Our talk in the July '83 issue of *Fishing Facts* pointed out those available and where and how they develop in a body of water. We must not let exposed trees or bushes (or weeds) wipe this fact from our minds.

QUESTION E—"If you were catching a lot of small fish while trolling around the shallow 'exposed' brush located on a well-defined point and bar, what should you do to help locate bigger fish? For most of the season where do you think the largest fish would be found?"

The answer should be obvious; we have to interpret the structure and present our lures deeper. We keep in mind (after we leave the shallows) that we must try by any means to narrow our efforts down to the route ("path" if you will) the fish use in movements toward the shallows, and vice versa. In a situation such as this (bush-infested bar) a perfect inter-

pretation of the route may be difficult. (One of the reasons the submerged roadbed is such a good bet.) This means, when trolling, we have to present each lure size with longer or wider trolling passes. This would also mean wider coverage on the cast.

When working deeper on the troll, our effort is to get as deep as possible, but yet keep our "hangs" to a minimum. Thus (again) the lure size (running depth) and line length must be nearly exact.

When casting with a sinking, free-running lure, the lure size and its running depth must be given some thought, and any "countdown" (how long we let it sink) must be controlled fairly well. The steady retrieve lure MUST be used, but this is one of those times where a weedless, jump-type lure (jig, soft plastic, etc.) also comes in handy.

If we have interpreted where the deepest water in the area exists (a hole - a channel), then our efforts must "GO ALL THE WAY" — from shallow to deep — because for most of the season the largest fish would be in or near the deepest water.

QUESTION F—"Why would you look for the tallest or biggest visible

trees in the lake?"

One reason would be they indicate something different in the area, and most likely some feature of the bottom that is different from the surrounding area. Another reason, and probably the most important, is that tall trees normally indicate a channel (deepest water). The tallest and biggest trees are usually along the main channel. Figure 1 is a typical situation. Note the tallest exposed trees are along the edge of the channel. These tall trees may also indicate a hump or ridge ("delta") exists along the channel. [If a weedline is visible out there, you can be fairly certain a hump or ridge is present.]

Need I talk more about the importance of a channel—especially the main channel?

QUESTION G—"What trees along the channels do you think would be best to cast if you did not troll?"

We should NEVER do a lot of blind casting away from the "Structure Situations." So the obvious thing to do is try to find the spots where the fish move out of the channel (or hole). There are three easily spotted areas to concentrate our efforts on the cast:

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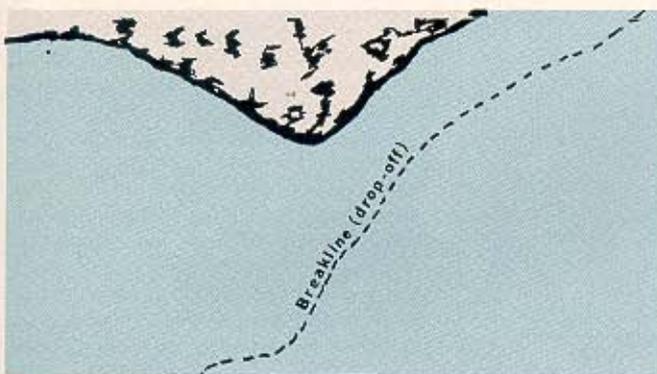


FIGURE 4B—The same area shown in Figure 4A, but here all brush has been removed to show a "breakline" (drop-off) into deep water.

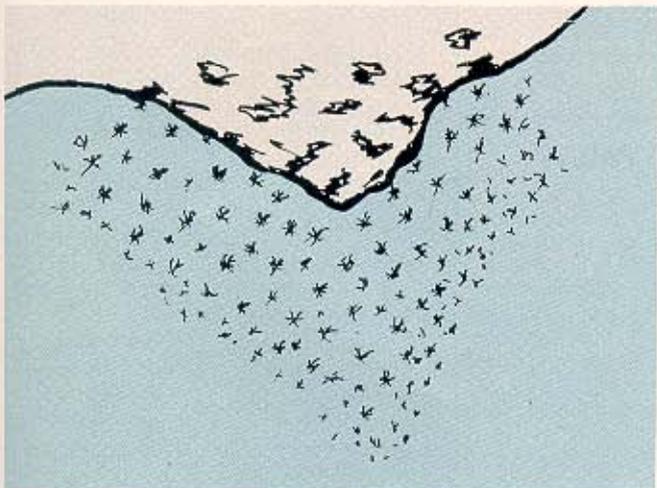


FIGURE 5—Top view of shoreline that indicates potentially productive water. After reading the article, can you tell why?

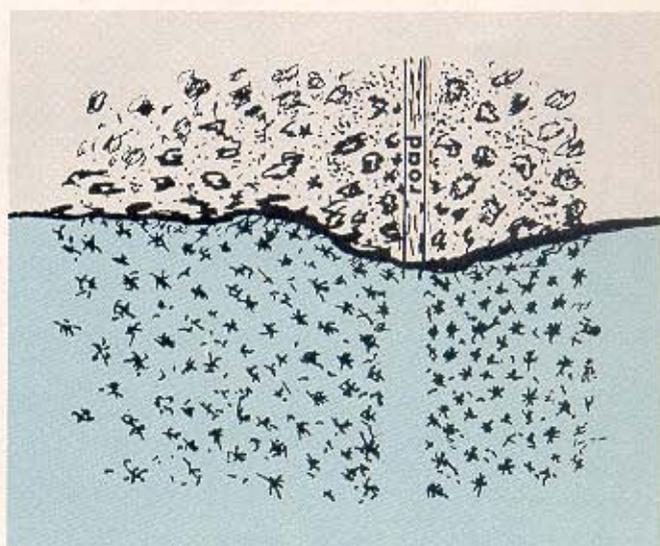


FIGURE 6—Observations of the shoreline shallows may show that a road once crossed this area of the lake.

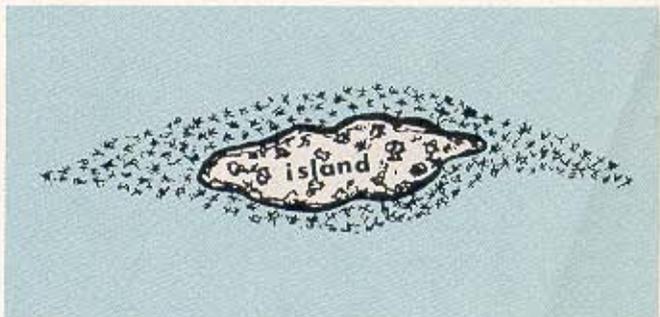


FIGURE 7—Exposed bushes or trees around a visible island will frequently indicate underwater features (bars, deep water, etc.) that should be fished thoroughly.

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How & Where to Fish A Brush-Infested Lake

a) Where the two channels come together. If the tall trees are on the main channel, we look for the area where a side feeder stream (or wash) cut enters the main channel.

b) Where a submerged roadbed crosses the channel.

c) A well-defined "hump" along the edge of the channel.

QUESTION H—"If you were going to cast the tallest trees, how would you go about it?"

Our guidelines say we must control our depth and speed. This normally means we use two style lures to do it thoroughly: a) a free-swimming lure on a steady retrieve for the faster speeds; b) a "jump-type" (jigs, soft plastics, etc.) for the slower. We should know we have to check all depths (to the bottom).

The boat will be moved about to cover the areas (and trees). The steady-retrieve, fast-speed lures should sink. This allows them to reach the depths. At times the lure may be coming *straight up* from the bottom toward the boat. We try to place them so as not to be continually hung.

This is one of those times when the jump-type lure comes into its own. If made (or hooked) weedless, it can be worked to flutter down, slide over, move through, etc. all the branches and twigs. It's easy to check *all* the depths all the way down.

QUESTION I—"After checking the shallows with no luck, let's assume you picked out a particular group of tall trees to fish. You choose a particular tree and give it the works (good depth and speed control). You decide to move when no fish are caught. Where do you go?"

Some may not grasp fully what was said in the question and a quick answer may be, "to find another Structure Situation."

The question clearly stated "a particular tree," it did not say "trees." If the area was left after fishing *one* of the trees in the group, then the area was left "unfished."

The answer (as Contributing Editor Jim Vaughn says), "MOVE TO ANOTHER TREE, THEN ANOTHER, AND ANOTHER, UNTIL YOU GET THEM ALL!" (meaning the "group" of trees at the Structure Situation).

The next time we talk, we'll discuss further some of the questions raised when we talk about "above" water observations for the interpretation of reservoirs where the water covers or surrounds brush, bushes and standing trees. 

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