

Lures Can Be Our Eyes

by Buck Perry

In many natural lakes, the features of the bottom (structure, breaks and breaklines) are not always well defined. There may be weeds in the shallow water, but when the bottom is examined beyond the weed line, it appears smooth, clean and rather flat, just tapering off gently into deeper water. At places along the shoreline there may be big, wide bars of sand, mud or clay, but there is no pronounced ridge or anything of that nature. The water just remains shallower for a greater distance from the shoreline. In other words, at some places a depth of 10 feet is farther from shore than at other places.

Figure 1 is a top view of a such a lake. Only a couple of contour lines are shown to indicate that at certain places (areas A and B) there are big, wide bars. As far as we can see, there are no humps or ridge-like features (structures) anywhere in the lake. There are no sudden increases in depth, no sharper drop-offs or breaks, etc. We can't see any small details that could be migration routes for fish. The only

distinctive features we can see are at A and B, where the water is shallower farther from shore. The situation is such that we have no clear indication what route the fish will take when they move toward the shallows.

We know the fish can see details of the bottom not visible to us, regardless of the depth sounders or other electronic aids we might have. If we expect to understand this lake, the only alternative we have is to **get lures down there and find out where the fish might be.** There is little doubt that to obtain this knowledge, we must troll free-running, bottom-bumping lures.

Fish the Bottom

It would be almost impossible to find out what makes this lake tick by casting alone. A depth sounder or graph recorder would not always show or indicate where the catchable fish might be. Sure, we could spend time looking for suspended fish, but catchable fish might not appear on the recorder. Besides, the whole picture could change dramatically with a shift in the weather. The **bottom** is our best guide if we expect to work out this lake.

To "check it out" we would first check the shallows (1 foot to around 8 to 10 feet). If the lake is small or there is time enough, the whole shallows should be worked and observed. (The same would hold true for the deeper sections.) If the lake is large and only specific areas can be worked, spots that run shallower farther into the lake would be good choices (areas A and B). However, the section being checked would include some areas where the deeper water is closer to shore.

The whole area chosen and all depths should be trolled with a variety of lure sizes. Each lure, with different line lengths, would "contour" a portion of the bottom. These bottom-bumping lures would tell us what is down there.

To be completely sure we haven't missed anything, we would use every lure size, and wire line if necessary, to cover the greater depths in the lake.

We would return to the shallows periodically to see if fish had "slipped by" as we contoured the deeper sections. After we had worked as far as we could, we would return to the shallows and check again all the reachable depths. We would do this for the simple reason that we know fish are not consistently active, nor constantly moving toward the shallows.

If and when we find the fish, we should pinpoint the area as well as we can by shoreline sightings. Some fishermen place floating markers for future reference, but most understand that the markers may be gone the next time they get on the water. Depth readings are of little value in relocating a productive area unless used with reference to shoreline sightings.

In many lakes of this nature there will be dirty or trashy bottoms as well as clean bottoms. It is possible that large bars such as A and B will be the only clean areas in the whole lake. However, lakes may have clean bottoms to a particular depth, with muck, moss, etc. covering the rest of the bottom. The breakline between the two will indicate where fish can be found. Only lures are reliable in locating and pinpointing breaks or breaklines of this nature (where the dirty and clean bottoms meet).

It is likely that the migration route of the fish will remain constant for most of the season. But the route may be different if the bottom features change or become vague or little different from the surrounding area. If this happens, we must "contour" the bottom again with lures on the troll to relocate the fish. 

Figure 1

