



Buck talks fishing

by BUCK PERRY, Education Editor

Catching Fish Under Tough Conditions

Editors Foreword:

Words cannot be found to state how privileged we are that Buck Perry has agreed to accept the title of Fishing Facts Education Editor.

E. L. (Buck) Perry is the father of structure fishing. This modest, soft-spoken former Physics Professor from North Carolina State has become a legend in his own time. His discoveries about the basic movements of fish have revolutionized all fishing, and are the basis of modern fishing as we know it today. In addition, he has given us the vocabulary

of modern fishing by coining such words as "structure", "breakline", "sanctuary", "migration route", etc. To put it mildly, all of today's freshwater fishermen owe him a great debt.

In June of 1972, Fishing Facts began publishing a series of articles written by Buck and titled, "Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success". The articles covered many of the BASIC concepts which lead to successful fishing. How fish live, his habits, his instincts, his reaction to stimuli, how weather and water con-

ditions affect him, and what it takes to put him on the stringer, are all subjects which can only be answered through **knowledge**. With the publication of our September 1973 issue the 13th and last article by this great teacher brought this series to a close. We do not consider the conclusion of this series as an ending. Rather, it is a beginning.

Each month Fishing Facts is introduced to new readers and subscribers. For many of them the subject of structure fishing will be totally new and unheard of. For these new readers we will, from time to time, continue to emphasize the very basic concepts of structure, fish habits, instincts, etc.

However, for those of you who have already read, studied and observed much of the basic material presented in past issues, it is time to progress. In a sense it is time to leave elementary school and progress to further study. With this objective in mind, no one is better suited nor more qualified to lead us toward that goal than the "Dean" and "Daddy" of structure fishing,



Buck Perry himself.

It is with great pride that we present this new series of articles by Buck titled "Buck Talks Fishing". In this new program he will continue to share with us his vast warehouse of fishing knowledge, as he presents more advanced material.

In order to progress however, the series will begin at a point where the student should have a clear understanding of basic knowledge and be able to comprehend the meaning of the nomenclature used.

If you are a new reader, may we suggest several steps which will allow you to "catch up" or achieve a better and more meaningful understanding of this new series.

May we suggest that you:

1. Study a copy of Buck's great new book, "Spoonplugging, Your Guide To Lunker Catches". This book contains all the basic facts of fish movements, basic structures, basic weather and water conditions, basic presentation of lures, and much much more. This book was 25 years in the making, a quarter century of fishing knowledge put down

on paper for the first time so that fishermen everywhere could share in better fishing. This book has just gone on sale for \$9.90 in soft cover and \$19.80 in deluxe cover, limited edition. Available on an unconditional money back guarantee from us, Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 4169, Milwaukee, Wis. 53210. (The books are the same in content.)

2. Familiarize yourself with our glossary of terms titled "Fishing Talk — Our Language of Structure Fishing", which can be found near the beginning of each issue of Fishing Facts.

3. Reprints of Buck Perry's series on "Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success" are available from us at 25¢ each. Order only those of the thirteen you missed, of course.

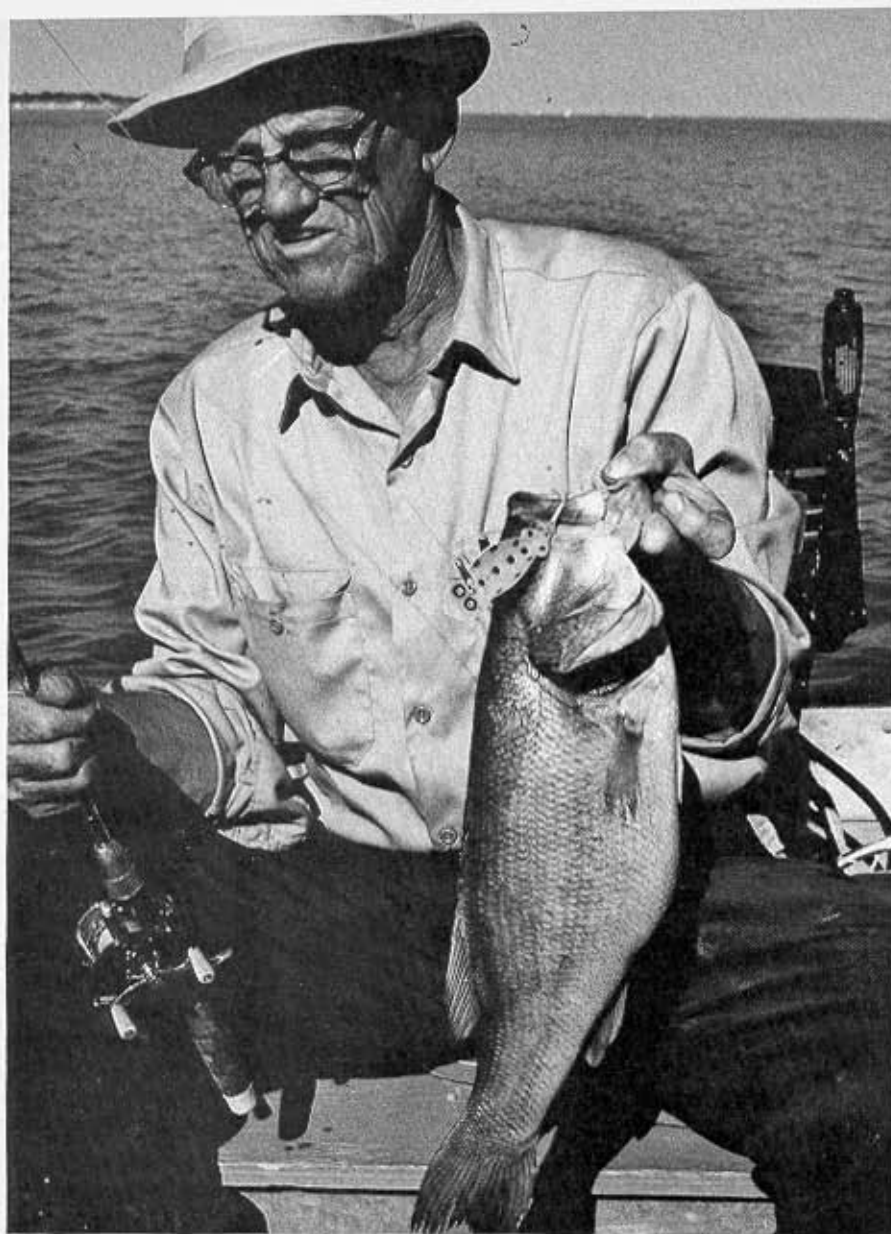
No other publication is privileged to have Buck on its staff. We hope this series of articles and all future issues of Fishing Facts will allow each fisherman to expand his fishing horizons to a point where he becomes as great a fisherman as he wishes to be.

The last time you and I were talking fishing, we decided to fish four lakes. Two of these lakes were natural lakes, and two were manmade (reservoirs). The lakes were widely scattered, in fact, each being in a different state. Neither of us had ever fished the lakes before. As would be our luck, in each case we arrived at the lake during a bad weather condition, and found the fish movements practically non-existent. And, in each case, we knew we could not wait around for conditions to improve. It was to be a quick poke at each.

Both of us started out equipped with a depth sounder, but I dropped mine in the lake the first day — before we got the boat loaded. Shortly after getting on the first lake, your sounder went on the blink.

We could not find any contour maps of the lakes, and our efforts to find out anything about the lakes (hot spots, depths, structure, etc.) from the local people proved worthless. All we had to go by was the general condition of each body of water. To say the least, we were ill-





When weather and water conditions become unfavorable, a fisherman should be familiar with "straggler" fishing tactics. In this article, Education Editor Buck Perry describes a few such tactics.

equipped to tackle these lakes. Oh sure, we had plenty of "tools" (with the exception of depth sounders), but we were starting our fishing as blind as bats.

Since we were unable to get better organized, and since the weather and lake conditions were so unfavorable for good movements of fish and since you had to catch a fish, we did the only thing advisable under the circumstances. We would spend most of our time "straggler" fishing. That is, fishing in such a way as to make as good a catch as possible by picking up a fish here, and another one there, and hope the time and distance between each fish wasn't too great.

Before we get to the actual fishing in these lakes, let me pause a spell, and make some "What It's Worth" comments.

My observations over the years has shown me that MOST fishermen are ALWAYS STRAGGLER FISHING. They are always fishing in a hit-or-miss fashion. They are always fishing BLIND and just hoping they will catch a fish. I would further state, that most fishermen are fishing the shallows, casting to visible objects such as weeds, bushes, rocks, stumps, logs, etc. and switching lure sizes, colors, and actions — hoping to present something the fish might like. THEY ARE STRAGGLER FISHING BLINDLY. Few realize — most of the time most of these "breaks" will never hold a fish, even under the best weather and water conditions! As far as their changing lures — they're putting their faith in AIDS. Serve up to them a bad weather condition, and their goose is cooked in most instances.

I am not saying that blind straggler fishing will not catch fish. If it didn't, most fishermen would never catch one. Even a blind hog will come upon a snake occasionally. What I am saying is, the blind straggler fisherman will seldom make a good catch and will seldom have many big fish. Most successful fishermen will wind up with yearlings, and if he does this, he has been fishing for yearlings, and not for lunker fish. Take a gander at your past fishing successes. Just how often did you make a limit catch and ALL of them were lunker size? How many good catches did you make and ALL of them were yearlings? How many times did you go, and did not catch ANY? Can you explain "why" in each case?

I am also not necessarily saying that blind straggler fishing is completely out of order. What I am saying is, why fish for stragglers *blindly* all the time? There exists certain weather and water conditions where the movements of the fish are so bad that we have to "straggler" fish — if we want some "meat" for the table, or have to catch a fish.

The greatest difference between a good fisherman's "straggler" fishing, and most "straggler" fishermen, is one is *planned*, and the other is not. Weather and water conditions, plus presentation of lures and bait, will spell the difference whether the planner makes a great catch, a fair catch, or a scrawny catch. The non-planner MAY make a little catch, but more likely, NO catch at all. When conditions are bad, and I have to make a "straggler" catch, I feel just as satisfied with a scrawny catch, as I would with a great catch under better conditions.

The greatest, and most important difference between the "planner" and the "non-planner", is the planner will learn something on the trip, whereas the non-planner will not. If you and I come off of a lake after fishing, and we do not come off knowing more than when we started, the trip was wasted effort in my book.

On these trips, you and I are going to do a lot of "straggler" fishing, but we are going to do it in such a way to have the best chance to make a great catch, but above all we will go about it in such a way as to add to our knowledge. This will hold true as far as each lake is concerned. Who

knows, you and I might fish these lakes again under better conditions and then we would "knock their tails off" in short order.

If you will bear with me, let me spout off a little more before we start on the actual fishing trips.

These trips are going to be a real chore for me. I do not cater too much to straggler fishing — probably the "chase" or the "learning" means more to me than the "meat". It takes little effort, skill, or thought to be back in the shallows, some slough, or some "fishy-looking" place, casting to visible objects hoping some yearling might like what is thrown at him. Besides, *you and I could fish for a hundred years in this manner, and we would be no better fishermen the day we quit, than the day we started.* Probably some of you recall fishing with me, and when we moved into such a place casting (straggler fishing), you noticed I spent a great deal of the time fiddling with my gear, changing lures, or probably letting you do the casting while I handled the boat.

When I am by myself, I will work and hunt for big numbers in lunker size, *at the expense of no catch at all.* I will often be doing some "straggler" fishing during this process, as this will give me some "keys". When allowed, I will do it trolling rather than casting. In most cases I can learn very little by casting, but I am learning all the time when trolling. The trolling will also tell me when, where and how to cast. This gives me a chance to be at the right place at the right time, and presenting my lures in a correct manner.

My reluctance to be off in some shallow area casting for "stragglers", may in some way explain why in the past I "shook" up a lot of people on "their" lake. By my stating the above, do not think I never cast the shallows. I do, but only when I am sure the area contains a lot of fish worthy of pursuit. Many times during the spawning season or when I find a good movement toward the shallows, I will work the shallow water casting, but the fish have gotta be there before I will do it.

Now I think it is about time to get back to the question at hand. Let us recall the fishing trips just as they happened. Since you are along on the trips, we will go for "meat", but we won't spend all of our time fishing blind for "stragglers". When we

fish a lake in a particular manner, there are three reasons for doing it. 1. To get you some meat, 2. It gives us a chance to make a lunker catch regardless of the weather and water conditions, 3. To learn all we can about the lake.

Since we are making these four fishing trips over an extended period of time, and since the lakes are widely scattered, (they may be in the north or south) we had better consider our straggler fishing for a cold water condition (prespawn and spawn) and for a warm water period (post spawn).

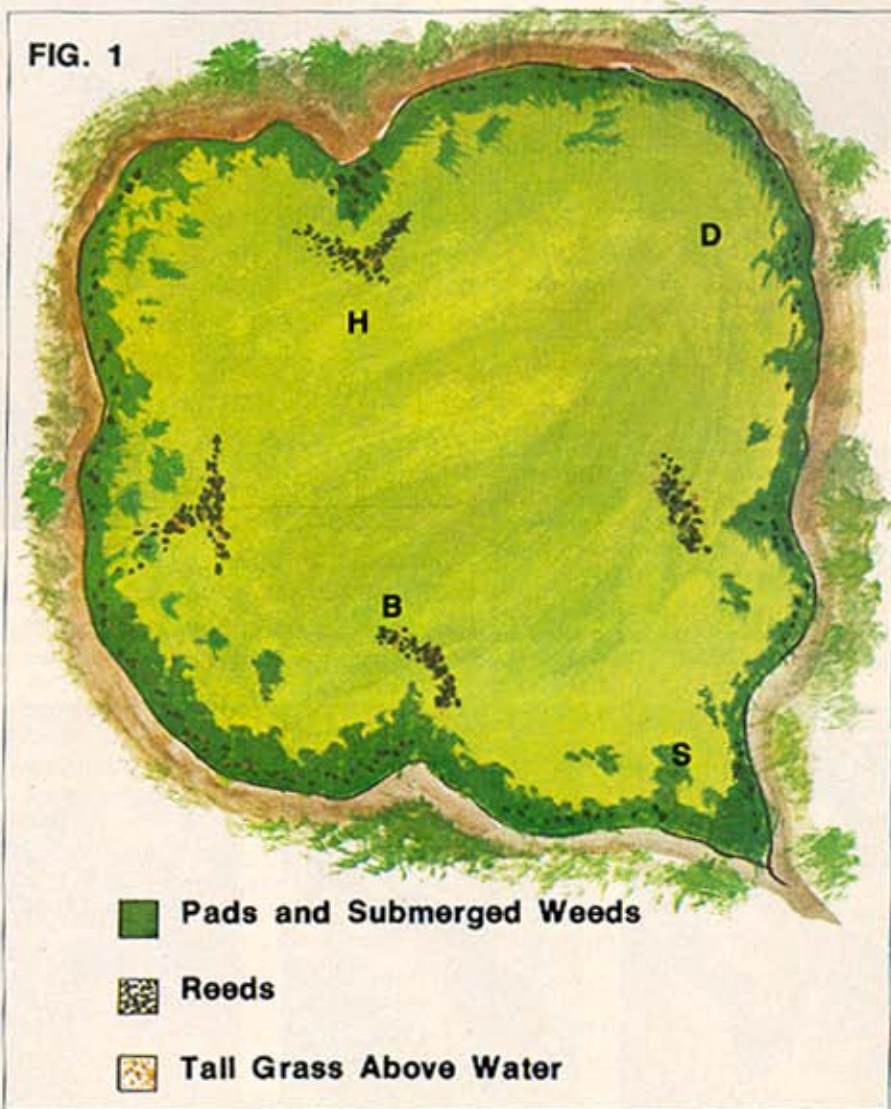
Figure 1 shows a top view of the first natural lake we are going to fish. As stated previously, it is a big shallow "saucer" type lake. The water near the shoreline is covered solid with weeds, grass and pads. This extends out to a depth of 3-4 feet. Farther out to about 6-7 feet in depth, are scattered patches of weeds, pads, grass or reeds. The

balance of the lake has a gentle sloping bottom free of weeds, pads, etc., but is covered with a thick layer of muck. As far as we know, there are no deep holes, slots or channels. And, there exists no pronounced structure such as bars, humps, breaks or breaklines. The deepest water in the lake is around 20 feet, supposed to exist some place near the center of the lake. As the weeds suggest, the water color is a darker yellow-green.

First let us approach our straggler fishing as if it were a cold water condition. Since it is cold, our speed control will be slow. We know the weather is bad and that most of the fish should be in or near the 20 foot depth. But, since we have no structure to guide us, and since the fish are in their "sanctuary" and in a "non-chasing" mood, we really have our work cut out for us trying to catch a fish in this deep water.

Since I am running the boat and

FIG. 1



Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

calling the shots, we will do both casting and trolling — as called for. Our purpose is to get you some "meat", and for me to find out what makes this lake tick.

We will start out by trolling. We will use lure sizes with running depths that will allow us to get right back to the solid weedline. We will troll these small shallow running lures just as close to the weeds, pads, grass, etc. as possible. We will run our boat into every little slot between the weed patches. If the opening is large enough to run the boat through — in we go. We will be raising and lowering our rod tips constantly to maneuver the lures through and around the weeds.

We'll continue to do this until we "get the lay of the land". We will find out if any fish are around the weeds and grass, and we will keep our eyes peeled for the most potential spots. It is possible we may do this trolling completely around the lake.

After we have made our trolling passes with shallow running lures next to the weeds, we will then move toward the deeper water. I do not intend to spend a great deal of time working the deeper water (open water away from weeds), for I know the conditions with which we are faced. But, we have to check the major portion of this section for two reasons. 1. Who knows, we might just "stumble" upon the fish, 2.. We have to get a picture of conditions present; we have to know the type of bottom, depths, locations, etc.

It is very important that when trolling this open water that we keep our lures in position. The correct position is when the lures are barely "tipping" the high spots in the muck. We must pay very close attention to lure sizes, running depths, and line length to maintain lure position. The line length would be constantly changing in order to maintain the correct depth as we worked progressively deeper. From your basic study, you would know a lot of rod action would be necessary to keep lures clean. We would not strike out directly toward the center of the lake, but would make our trolling runs rather parallel to the shoreline, or we would crisscross or troll in several directions, progressively getting deeper. At this time I would not be too concerned with covering ev-

ery little section and I would probably do a sloppy job of depth control. But, I would cover enough area, and control my depth well enough to show me if any fish movement was present, and to show me just what and where and how to fish this deep section.

The way to go straggler fishing during this colder season (pre-spawn), would be to work the shallows, both casting and trolling. I would probably put emphasis on casting. In casting I would concentrate my efforts in four particular areas (shown to me by my trolling runs). 1. Any indicated slough, such as area "S" (figure 1). 2. All areas that indicate a cleaner bottom, such as area "H". This is indicated by standing grass and reeds, rather than submerged weeds and pads. 3. All long extrusions, or "fingers" in the weeds, such as "B". This would indicate some sort of "bar" or some change in the bottom. 4. Any particular area along the shoreline where the weeds, grass, pads, etc. do not extend very far into the lake such as area "D". This should indicate deeper water close to the shoreline.

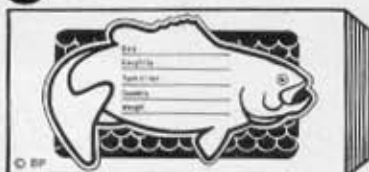
In each area chosen for casting, we will work from the outer weeds all the way back to the extreme shallows. We'll use weedless lures with a slow retrieve — primarily letting the lure slither slowly through the weeds. We'd let it sink into any "pot hole" that might exist. Of course, we would be checking the speed, and at times having the lures crawling or skittering across the top of the weeds and grass. But, in the overall picture during this colder period, and the bad weather condition our retrieve would be slow, and we would work our lures as deep as possible.

If we found ourselves in this lake during a warmer water period (post spawn), then I would spend little time casting. Any casting that I would do, would be limited to the edges of the outer weeds, but only if we had picked up a couple of fish in a particular area on the troll.

In order to straggler fish this lake successfully under warmer water conditions, and bad weather — trolling is the way to go. Here again, I would spend more time in the deeper water than I did under the colder

(continued on page 57)

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Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

conditions, but due to the conditions (no structure, mucky, bad weather for fish activity), I'd spend most all my time trolling as close to the weeds as possible. I could, and would, cover a lot of water for I would be "balling the jack", due to the warmer water.

Now, after seeing how I would straggler fish this particular lake, under both cold and warm conditions, you might come back at me and say, "Why did you fish the lake in this manner?"

I have already stated the reason several times — to get you some meat, and for me to learn something about the lake. If I didn't learn something about the lake as I went along, probably I would be unable to get you your meat. In fact, the important thing for me to do was to learn where and how I could get you some fish. So this was the route I took.

You come back at me again with, "But WHY did you fish this lake in this manner to get me some fish and for you to learn something?"

Now, I gotcha. It was simple, I just took the basic fishing facts (truths) expanded them slightly and tied them together to fit the conditions that we faced. I didn't invent this procedure, the facts told me what to do. Review what we did, and I believe you will see this to be true.

Since you asked this question, let me expand this thought by saying we will fish this same lake again in a warm period under a *GOOD weather condition*. Now, I do not plan nor will I do much "straggler" fishing. My plan now is to let you make that lunker catch, just about as fast as you can wind them in.

Under such good conditions, I would start by trolling fast around the outer edges of the weeds. I would not spend too much time doing this (unless contact was made with a fair number of fish about 2, 2½ lbs). I would move to the deeper water and spend *most* all my time trolling with my lures skipping the muck. I'd find the deepest water, and I would concentrate my efforts in this area. I would be looking for a clean spot. It could be sand or shell, soft or hard.

After we had strung our fish, I'd get good shoreline sightings for future trips — at which time I would spend most of my time here, hot or

cold, good weather or bad.

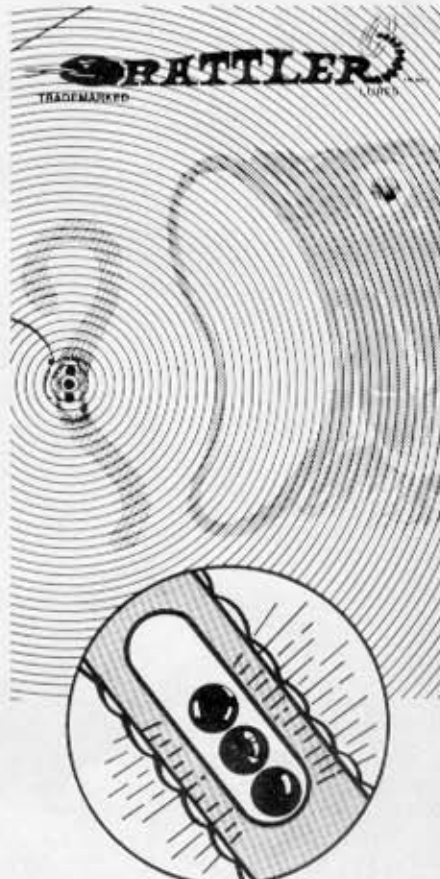
(For heaven's sake, don't ask me why I was looking for that clean spot, or how we were able to quickly string a lunker catch. If you can't figure this one out, you better go back and study your Basics.)

Figure 2 is a top view of the second natural lake we are going to fish. It is a great, big, deep, clear rascal (probably considered better for drinking purposes rather than fishing). Tall weeds go completely around the shoreline. They extend down to a depth of 17 feet. The outermost weeds come almost to the top of the water. Here again we cannot find a contour map and the local people didn't give us anything of value about the lake (hot spots, depths, structure, etc.) This was one of those times where a "working" depth sounder would have been of use. We did get some information from the locals that did "gladden" our hearts. They informed us that we could not motor troll in this lake. This presented quite a few added problems, the least of which wasn't trying to keep the large speed boats and water skiers from swamping our boat. At least we could have dodged some of them if we could have done our fishing with the motor running. At least we could have used the boat to ward off some of them from running *directly over our lures*.

Here again, I must get you some fish under a weather condition that does not promise any degree of fish movements, and I must find out something about the lake (structure, bottom conditions, depths, migration routes, etc.).

About the *only* clue or key, to be had are the extrusions ("fingers") in the weedline. It is at these areas we will do our straggler fishing, mapping, interpretations, etc. These projections indicate some *change* has occurred in the bottom. Normally they show a slight bar ridge or hump. They should also give the best access to deep water for the area. I have marked the areas in Figure 2 (A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,J.).

We will position our boat at the end of these weed projections, then "fan-cast" the whole area, such as shown at position "A". We will use sinking lures, and on each cast we will count the time for the lures to reach the bottom (line goes slack when the lure reaches bottom). In this way, we can get a complete pic-



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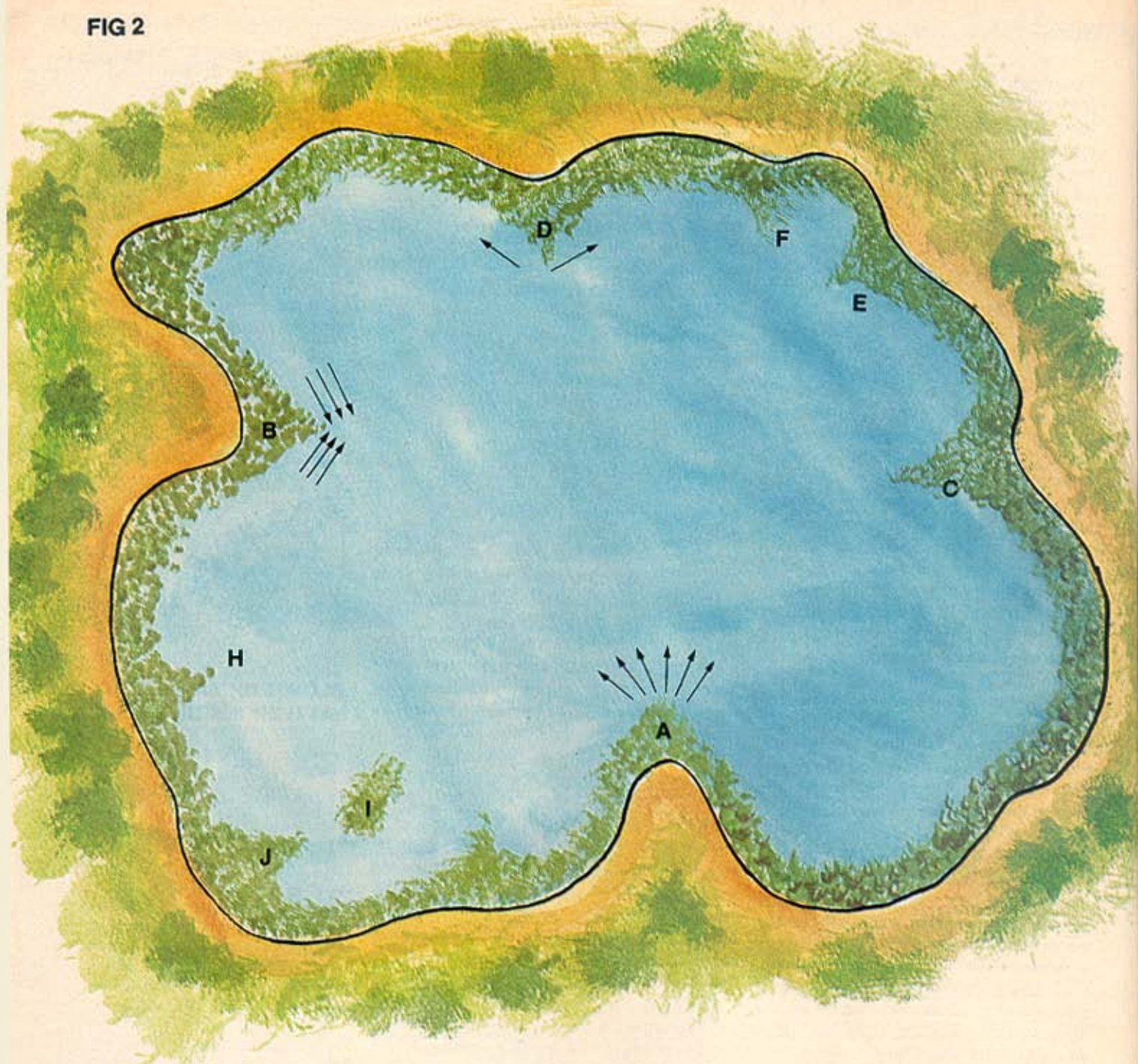
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FIG 2



ture — depths, degree of slope, ridge or bar, breaklines, breaks, type of bottom (clean or dirty, soft or hard), etc. While we are doing this, we are fishing to see if any fish are using the area, and if a straggler has moved up.

Due to the depths under the boat, it will require good control to keep a walking lure on the bottom. Probably our best bet is to stick mostly to a "jump type" lure, such as a jig, spinner, nightcrawler, spoon, etc. If the water was cold, we would work slow. If the water was warm we would work our lures fast. About the ONLY time I would permit you to cast be-

hind me, toward the shoreline, would be if we happened to be there during the peak of the spawning season.

Figure 2-A and Figure 2-B are side views of two of the points in the weeds that we have mapped with our lures. In both cases, we will assume the fish are using the area for migration. In figure 2-A, the bottom drops off rapidly. A breakline occurs just outside the weedline. Four fish have moved up. Two have remained at a slight break, approximately 30 feet down. Two have moved up to the weedline, but not at the tip of the projection, but have moved up on the *side* of the weed finger.

In Figure 2-B the bottom does not drop off very fast. There is a slight break just out from the weedline. But mostly the bottom has a gentle slope toward deeper water, until it reaches the "drop-off", a rather long distance out from the weedline.

Here again, four fish have moved toward the area. Two have remained at the drop-off, but two have moved up to the area at the tip of the weedline. One is at a small break, and the other at the base of the weedline.

Now, refer back to Figure 2 (the top view) and carefully note the casting patterns shown on finger "B" and finger "D". In the light of condi-

FIG 2-A

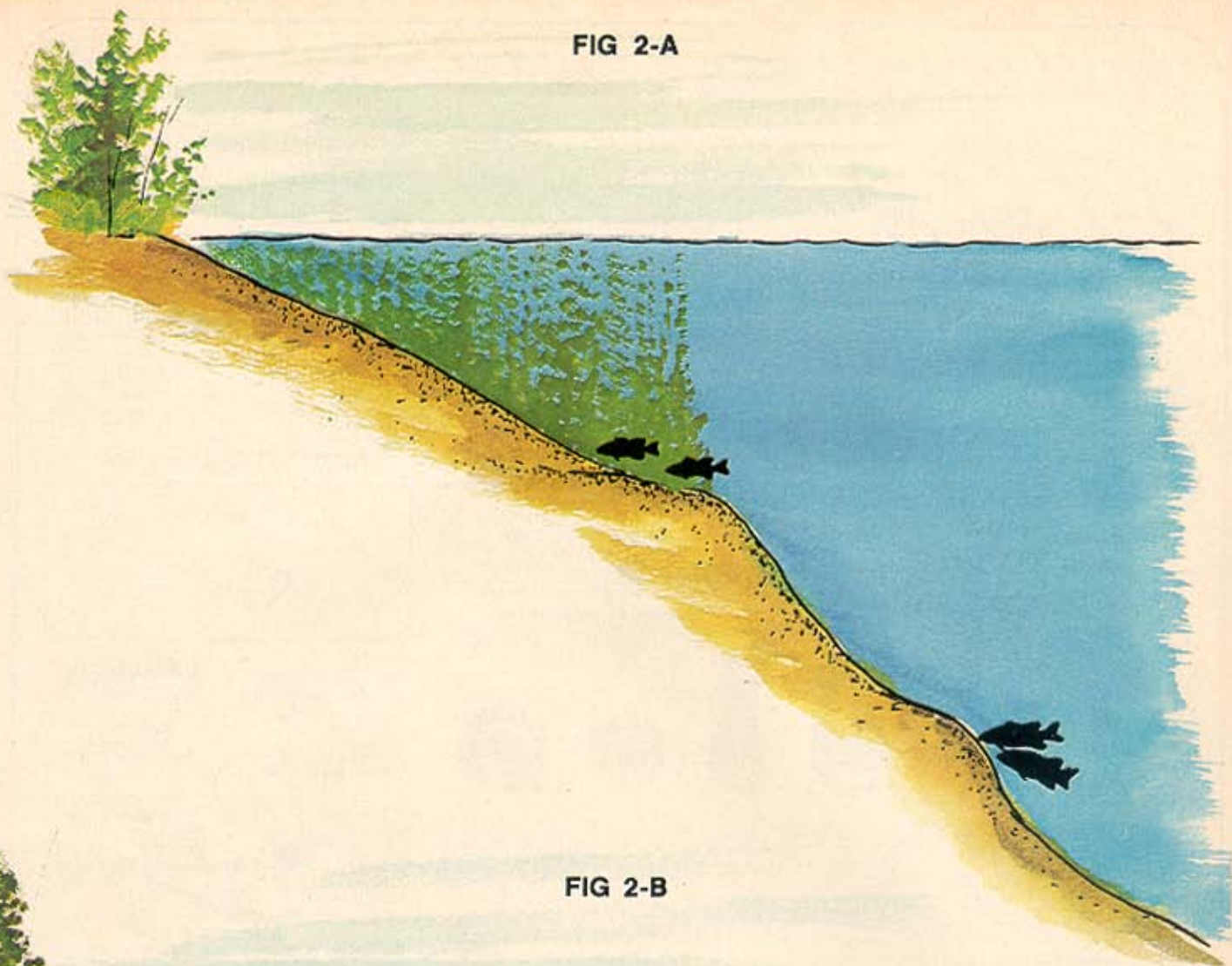
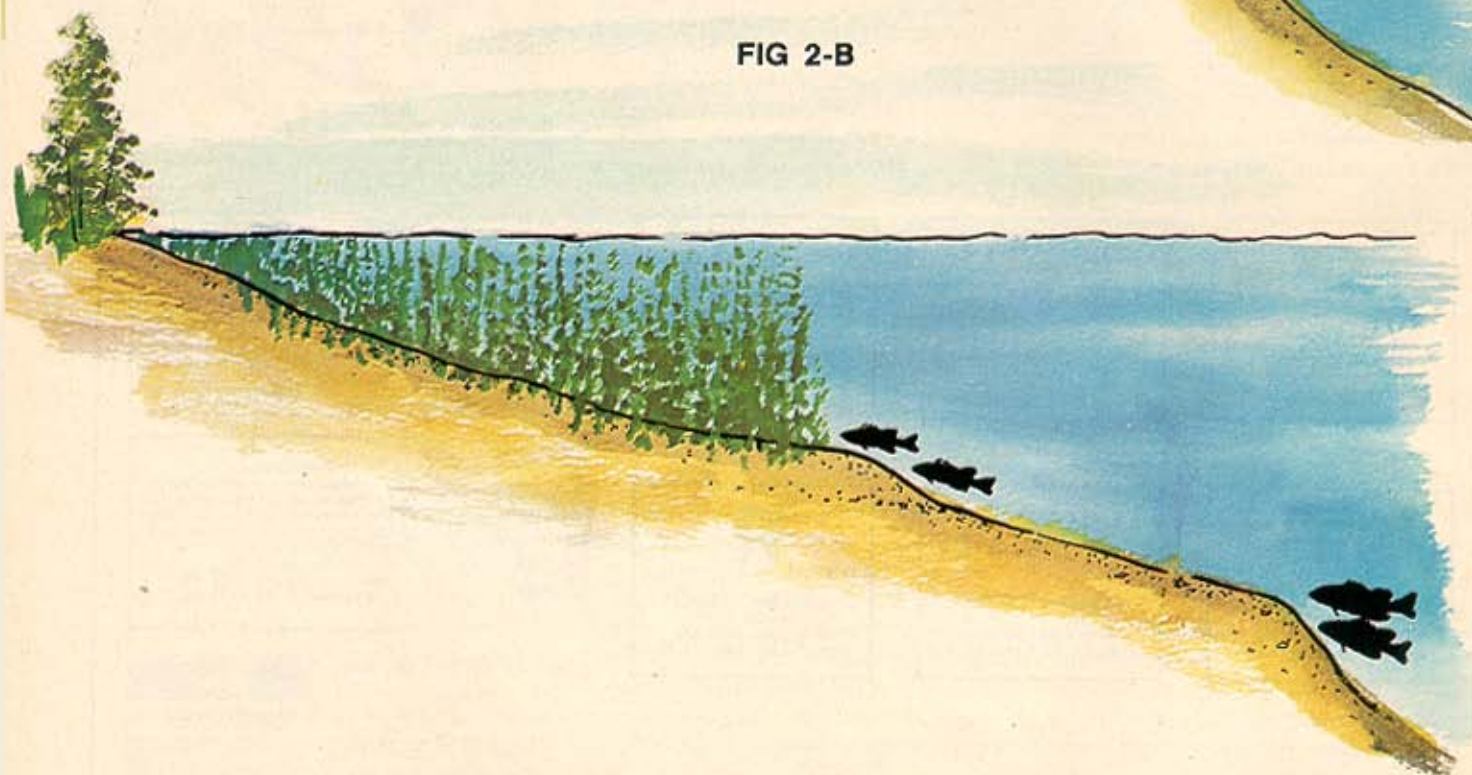


FIG 2-B



Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

tions present, such as shown in Figure 2-A and Figure 2-B, you should readily see that in order to fully test each weedline projection, we must

position the boat in different positions.

If we find a structure with a gentle slope, such as found in Figure 2-B, we will have to move the boat position out from the weedline toward

deeper water, and "fan-cast" the area. We could find we have to move the boat toward deeper water several times before we can reach the drop-off or the deepest water in the area. I hope it is thoroughly understood we

would fish the *bottom*, not the water.

These long sloping structures (bars, ridges), etc. are ideal areas to check our slowest speeds with live or dead bait. We can cast, or "drift" it. If you wanted to use the oars, you could troll me across the area.

About the only change that I would make in presentation of lures, good weather or bad, would be to use more free swimming lures during the warmer good weather conditions. I'd be sure to run them at all depths jammed up against the tall weedline from all boat positions. And, I'd not fool around with slow reel or rod action. I'd really wind them up. When working the bottoms in the area, I'd use large and heavier lures so I could increase my speed as much as possible and still maintain my depth control.

When studying Figure 2, you probably noticed I had a weed patch out from the shoreline, and I labeled it "I". You probably wondered why I did not call attention to it during the discussions on the other areas. This was left out on purpose, at that time, because a condition such as this is not likely to occur in a lake of this nature. Further, I wanted to call special attention to such a condition if it *did* exist.

A weed patch such as this would indicate a structure — in the form of a hump, or underwater island. These can be of major importance in a lake of this nature, and you should always be looking for one. In most cases, this structure will produce.

In fishing this, I would go completely around it, "fan-casting" to establish shape, depths, breaks, breaklines, and the "contact point." I would pay very close attention to see if it connects in some manner to the shoreline. In Figure 2, it would appear that it connects to the projection "J", most likely in the form of a ridge, or "saddle". If this is so, then the likelihood of this being a major migration route is increased greatly.

After my casts have definitely established the "contact point," then I would concentrate my fishing in this area.

I am not going to wait until you ask me a "why". I am going to ask you to answer the "why" in the light of our having "straggler" fished these two lakes. It's the same old question we have considered for quite some time now. That is, how a

stranger can come into "your" lake and make a good catch, while you are drawing a blank at the same time. The question is — why?

I hope before we are through with our study, you will be telling your fishing buddies "Regardless of how many fish I catch on any given day, if I do not know more at the end of the

day than I did when I started, I consider the day wasted".

All you have to do is to remember to ask yourself the "why" at all times during your fishing and while you are at it, remember that in the near future we will go back and discuss those two *reservoirs* we fished. And, I Hope this too, is a Fishing Fact.

Straggler fishing can also result in an occasional lunker bass along with several smaller bass and chain pickerel. But wouldn't you be satisfied with such a catch on a "bad" day?

