Use Your Eyes To Find Potential Hot-Spots

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

Not long ago I had a rather lengthy conversation with a fisherman named "Joe." Our chat had gotten started when Joe said, "I continually go over the structure fisherman's study material and think I understand the guidelines fairly well. But, when I get on the water my mind seems to go blank and I don't even know where to start. If it's a big body of water, it scares me half to death."

We gave a lot of thought to Joe's problem. Our conclusion was that Joe's "hang-up" was primarily due to his not being able to recognize a "structure situation" when he got on the water. It was apparent Joe knew what was meant by "structure," and he seemed to be able to "interpret" a situation (structure, breaks, breakline, deep water, etc.) once it was pointed out to him. It was also apparent he had done a good job in his "study" (books, home study series, etc.), but when he got on the water he became lost. The shoreline features had no meaning for him. The things his lures and depth finder showed didn't jive with what he thought the study material said. In other words, Joe was unable to recognize a structure situation when he saw it.

I also gathered from our talk that Joe probably hadn't fully grasped why it was said he must locate, recognize and interpret structure situations in any body of water he might fish—if he expected to be successful consistently. He hadn't gotten the message that in order to be successful CONSISTENTLY **he must spend his time where he has the best chance to catch a fish**. Only by doing this, would he be able to **consistently be at the right place, at the right time, fishing in the right manner.**

To help Joe relate his study material to the things observed on the water, I asked him to study a top view of a **Lowland** (Type 2) reservoir (**Figure 1**). The figure showed the dam built in a narrow gorge-like area. The major portion of the lake was wide with **Lowland** features . . . a *minimum* of flats between the channel and the shoreline features—with structure (breaks, breaklines) "going all the way" (into shallow water). It was pointed out that some **Flatland** reservoir features may exist in the headwaters. The figure showed some roads and SOME channels existing in the lake. These were put in to help him get started. My request was that he study the figure carefully and see how many TYPE structure situations he could visualize as being present, and possibly used by the fish in their movements and migrations.

I did not ask him to "interpret" any structure situation as to whether it was good or bad. I did not ask him to point out every situation that may exist in the lake. I asked him to point out only one of each TYPE that may be present.

The next time Joe and I had a chat, he showed me the notes he had made on the top view of the Lowland (Type 2) reservoir (**Figure 1**). He had noted some

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Education Editor Buck Perry (left) stresses the importance of recognizing structure situations in any body of water. In order to be successful consistently, fishermen must spend their time where they have the BEST chance to catch a fish.

FIGURE 1

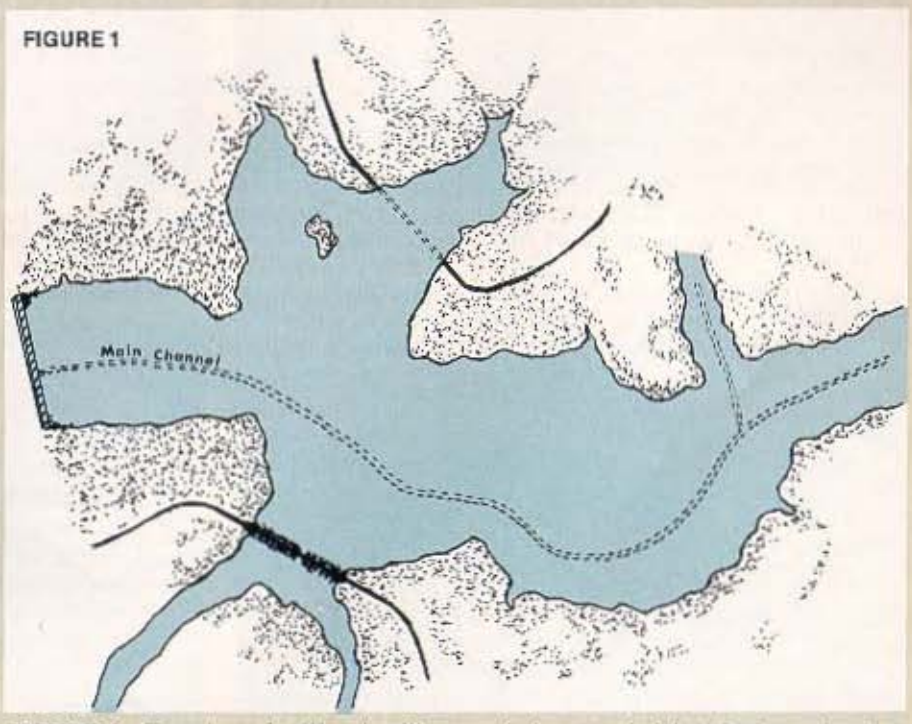

FIGURE 1—Top view of a "Lowland" reservoir (man-made lake). It shows the dam built in a narrow gorge-like area, also some channels and roadbeds. Study the figure carefully. See how many type structure situations you can visualize being present.

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underwater "bars" out from the "points," but other than these he had goofed in his efforts to visualize what type structure situations probably existed in the reservoir. **He seemed unable to visualize what is likely to occur under the water if this or that occurred above the water.** He had primarily overlooked the fact that the deepest water in the area is the home of the fish, and that the deepest water (the channel in this case) **is the starting point in the development of a structure situation.** He had left out most of the channels and, on the ones he did put in, he seemed to have forgotten that water flows in a straight line until diverted by some obstruction.

But from my point of view, the most important thing that Joe's notes revealed was the fact that he did not fully understand what type structure could exist and, more importantly, **he seemed to have given little thought as to what caused them.** However, I was not disappointed with his efforts. It was obvious the study of the figure was starting to "open his eyes," and with a little more help Joe should be on his way.

I did not "interpret" the figure for Joe (as to structure situations), as I felt it would do little for him at the time. In fact, if he didn't learn to make above water observations and visualize what is likely to exist under the water, he'd still be lost regardless what I might say or do. I did tell him to draw in all the channels that may exist in the reservoir, being sure to connect all of them to the main channel. I told him he could get back to this figure after we looked at some additional ones.

To start the discussion, I reminded Joe that his study material, if examined carefully, said the STRUCTURE the fish used in their movements and migrations could boil down to *bars, reefs, humps,* and *man-made* features. Some may want to call a "hump" a different type "bar," but it's better to leave humps as a separate structure situation. The following figures and short discussions were what Joe and I talked about during our second meeting.

The **most common** structure situation (features in a body of water the fish will use in their movements and migrations) is a ridge-like bar that extends out (under water) from the shoreline. They will vary in size and shape. Short bars **(Figure 2)** can occur all over a reservoir. They can occur along the shoreline in the steeper, deeper section of the lake, along the shorelines in the wider, flatter parts, or in the coves and feeder streams. This feature is an "all season" type structure situation.

For all practical purposes the shoreline will indicate any ridge-like "bars" that exist in the lake. The most common indicator is a "point" or extrusion in the shoreline (or weedline). To be sure you are not confused at a later period, let's look at a shoreline bar situation that may exist, but is not indicated by a "point" or extrusion in the shoreline.

In some cases a bar will be indicated (and formed) by a "slide" or "wash"

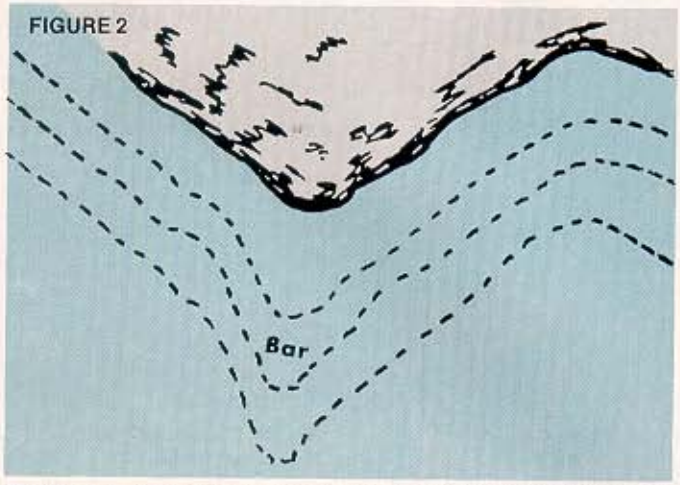


FIGURE 2—The most common structure situation is a ridge-like bar that extends out (under water) from the shoreline.

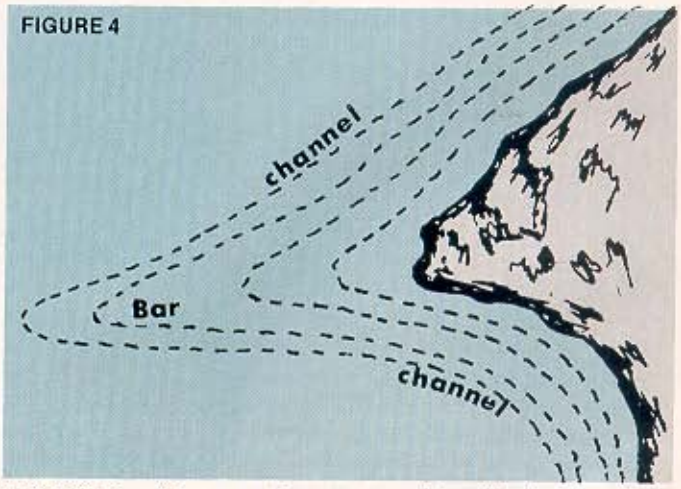


FIGURE 4—A long, rather narrow, ridge-like bar formation formed by two channels running together for a distance before they meet.

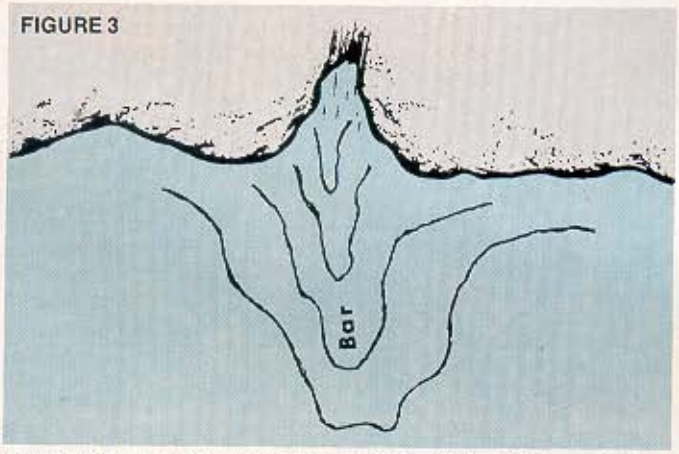


FIGURE 3—In some cases a bar will be indicated (formed) by a "slide" or "wash" (erosion) quite visible along a shoreline.

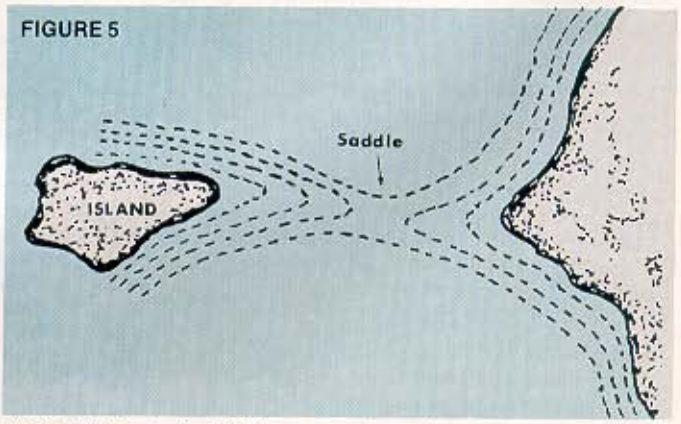
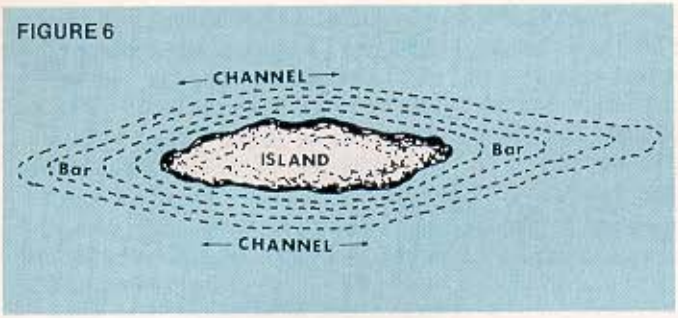


FIGURE 5—A "saddle" connecting a long bar (off an island) with a similar bar running out from the shoreline.



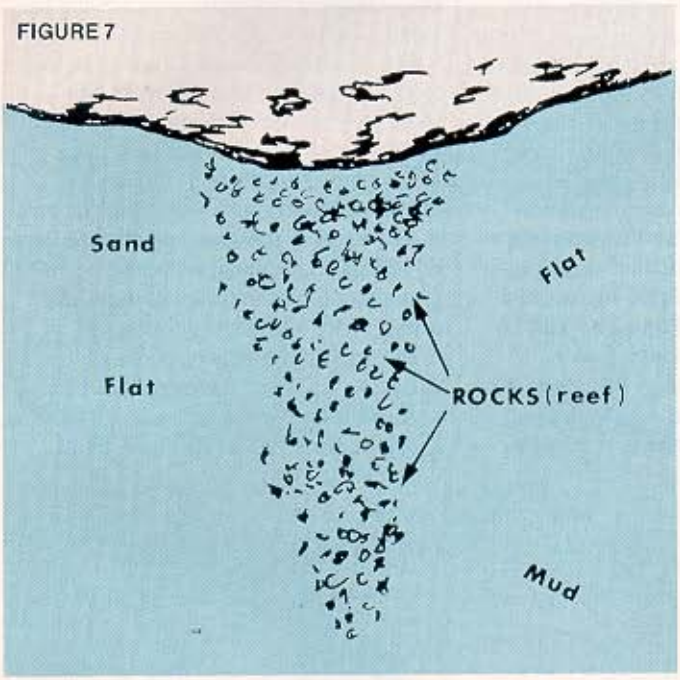
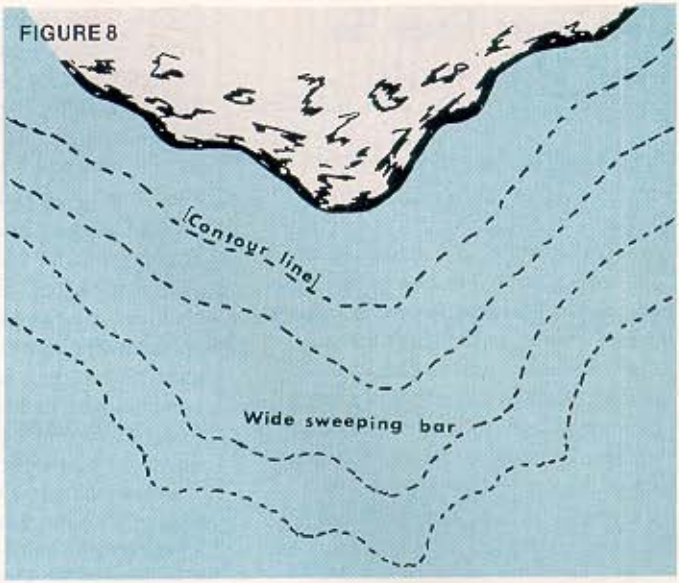
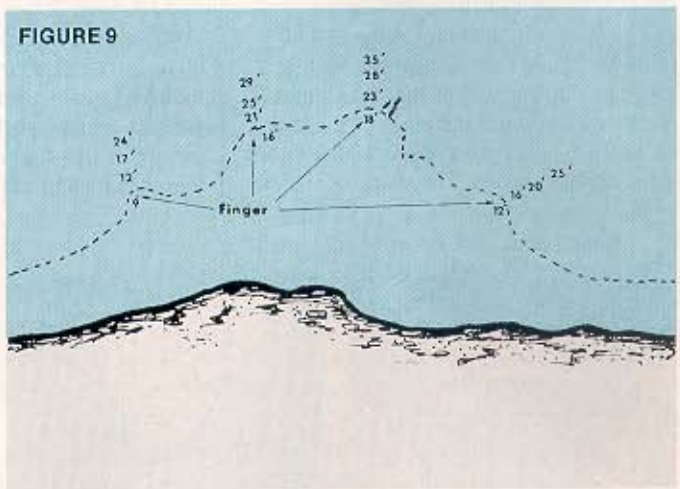


FIGURE 7—In natural lakes, if the shoreline (land) points are rather long and flat, ridge-like underwater bars and/or "reefs" will often exist.





(erosion) quite visible along a shoreline (**Figure 3**). These are usually associated with a **Canyon** or **Highland** type reservoir. However, any time the shoreline is steep with high hills, there is always the possibililty of a "slide" or "wash" depositing enough dirt (sand, rocks, etc.) under water to form a bar. Any bars that may not be indicated by shoreline observations are of little concern, as they will be found during the presentation of lures.

Another "bar" type structure situation to consider is a long, rather narrow, ridge-like formation (**Figure 4**). In some **Highland** and **Lowland** reservoirs (man-made lakes) the structure situation is associated with conditions where deep channels sweep in close to the shoreline where a well-defined, narrow "point" runs into the lake. [Often these bars are mostly rock and may be referred to as "reefs."] At other times two deep channels run close together for a distance before they meet, and often create a long, ridge-like bar between them (as could be the case in **Figure 4**).

Long, narrow, ridge-like bars are associated more often with large **Lowland** type reservoirs where many islands, large "arms," and coves exist. They will occur off many of the points along the main shoreline, as well as off the sharper points of the islands. Quite often a long, narrow bar off an island will connect with a similar bar running out from the main shoreline. This, at times, forms a highly productive "saddle." To clarify this more, see **Figure 5**.

In **Flatland** type reservoirs, the most obvious long, ridge-like bar would be those on the ends of islands formed when the water in the main channel split into two parts (two channels) as it flowed around a high piece of ground. After the lake filled we have an island out in the lake with a deep channel on both sides. Again, to clarify, look at **Figure 6**.

In **natural** lakes the long bar structure situation occurs mostly in deep, rugged, rocky *glacier* lakes. Oftentimes these "reefs" will be marked by a buoy, but the terrain will usually point out where they occur. If the shoreline is rather steep they are not likely to be present. But if the shoreline "points" are rather long and flat, then the long, rocky, ridge-like underwater bar will exist.

In more shallow, "saucer-like" *glacier* lakes the "reef" may not be so ridge-like, but is a narrow (relatively speaking), flat, rocky condition running a distance into the lake, surrounded by flat sand, clay or mud bottom. See **Figure 7**.

There is another important "bar" situation **found in most reservoirs and natural lakes**. It is a big, wide, not so ridge-like bar, as shown in **Figure 8**. These bars may have many shapes with many different depths. Most will have breaklines (a sudden increase in depth) with "fingers" breaking differently, into different depths of water.

In **reservoirs** they can be found off big, rounded "points." They occur on the "inside" of turns or bends in the channels. Often they exist where two

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main channels come together. Frequently they are present at the entrances to large bays or coves. This type structure situation (big, wide bar with breakline, etc.) **is one of the main productive features found in natural lakes.** "Points" in the shoreline will usually indicate areas to check. If the (natural) lake has some sort of channel (due to a stream flowing in and out), this type feature could be found in most any part of the lake. Some may not be indicated by shoreline observations but most of them can be located rather quickly by trolling.

On all structure situations such as this, the most productive part of the wide bar (and where we must concentrate our efforts) is in the area of the "breaklines." To be sure you get the picture let's look at another figure. In **Figure 9** all contour lines are not shown. The shape of the bar is pointed out by the major "breaklines" around it. Depths have been indicated on the figure to help "interpret" what is there (the "contact point"—where the fish first contact the bar—normally being the deepest, sharpest breaking "finger" projecting into the deepest water).

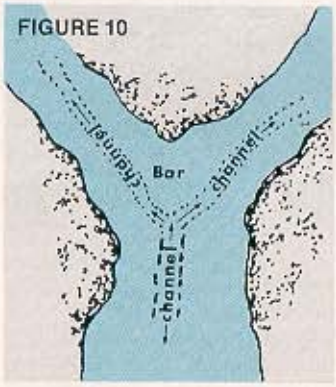
Next we come to a main key in finding productive structure in **reservoirs** (man-made lakes). This is where two channels come together. There are many different situations where two channels meet. But in each instance it points out a potentially productive structure situation. **Figures 10** and **11** show typical situations where two channels meet. This type situation will exist to a greater degree in a **Lowland** type reservoir where a lot of hills, coves, creeks, and branches occur. The "bar" between the two channels is the structure situation.

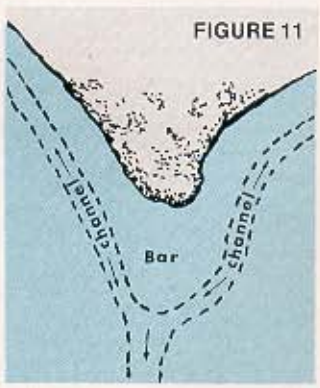
Figure 10 is a condition found quite often in larger coves. **Figure 11** can be found most anyplace where feeder streams are close together. But to get a picture of the *major* structure situation where two channels meet in reservoirs, let's look at another figure.

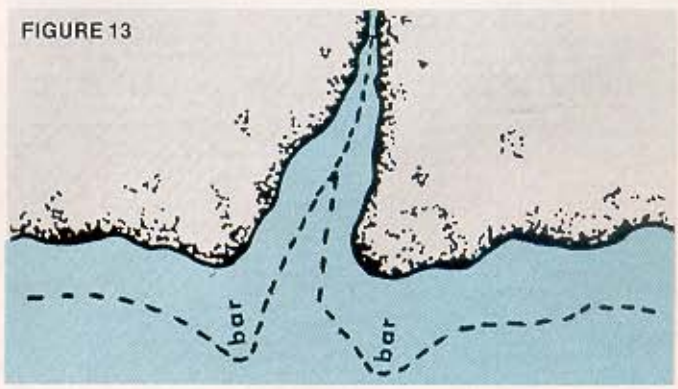
Figure 12 shows a side feeder stream channel meeting (joining) the *main* channel in the lake. The *visible* indications are all the "coves" (or bays) or deep washes along the shoreline. Two "bars" (structure) are formed on both sides of the feeder cut into the deep water. In this case (**Figure 12**), they are where the cut meets the main channel. **Regardless what type or how deep the reservoir**, we must visualize the fish making "contact" at the bars as shown.

Many **natural lakes** do not have side feeder stream cuts and channels. But some with streams flowing through them (stream in, stream out) can have such a structure situation as in **Figure 12.** Shoreline observations will normally show if they exist. If the shoreline observations do not show anything, proper lure presentation on the troll will show any side channel or "wash" developing.

In many of the larger "shallow" *natural* lakes, a small channel has been *dredged* from the deeper water (or deeper channel) to shoreline facilities such as







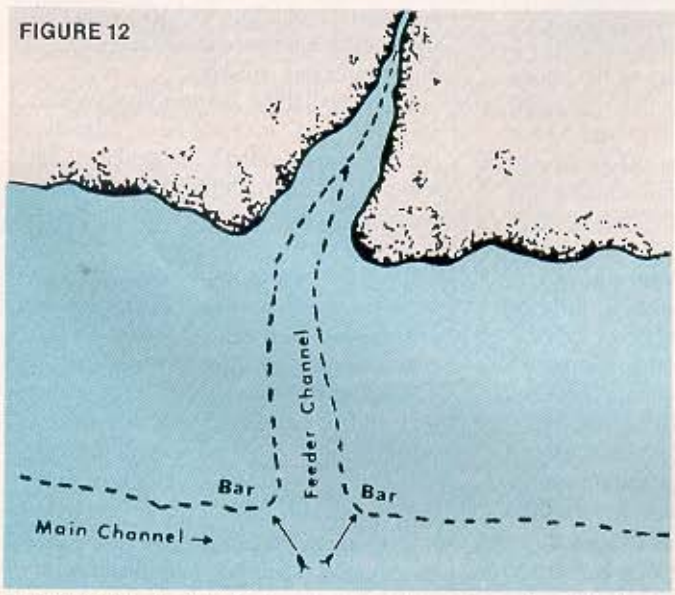


FIGURE 12—A side feeder stream channel meeting (joining) a MAIN channel. The visible indications are cover (or bays) or deep washes along the shoreline.

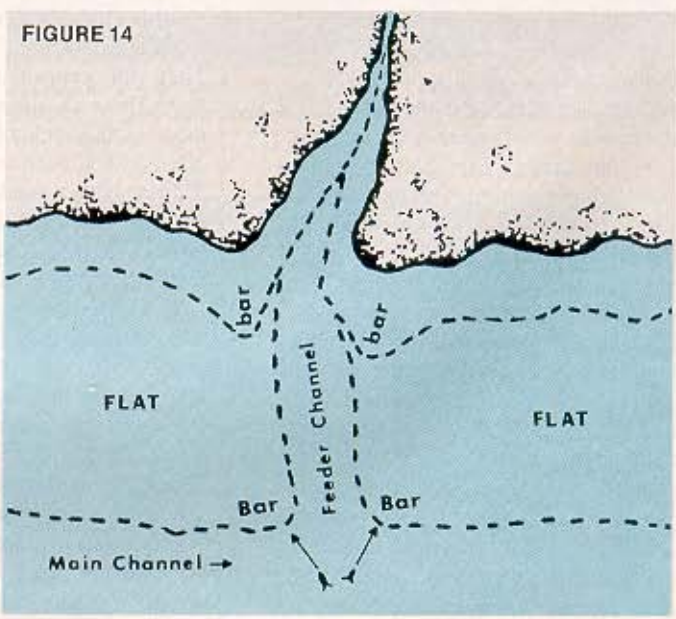


FIGURE 14—A side feeder stream has cut a channel through a flat bottom all the way to the main channel.

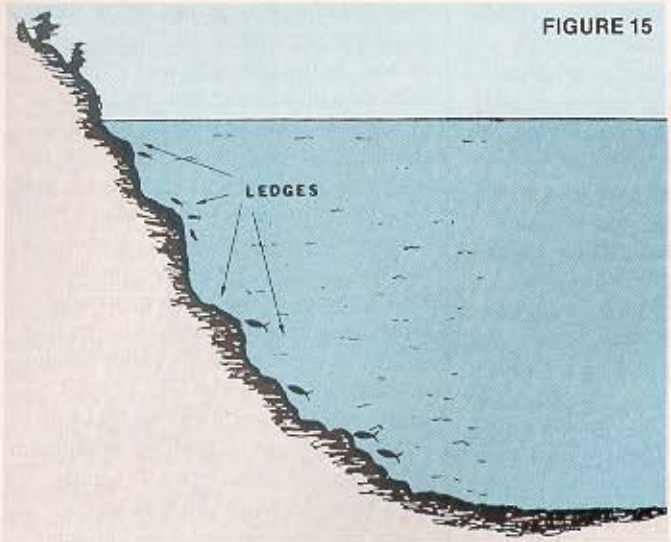


FIGURE 15—During the colder part of the fishing season, steep areas close to shore become more important.

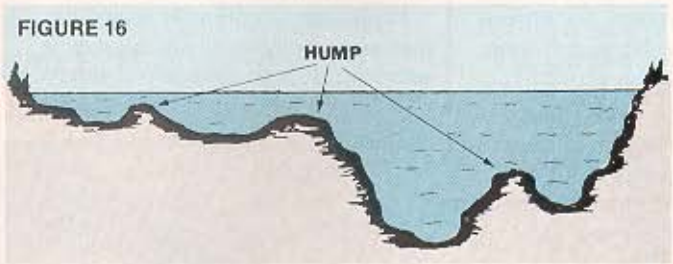


FIGURE 16—Underwater "humps" or islands come in all sizes, shapes and depths.

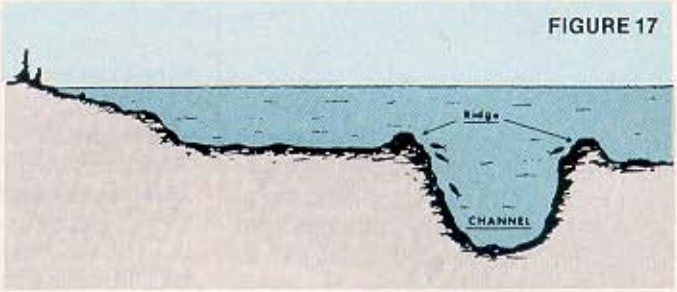


FIGURE 17—A "delta" situation, often found in Lowland or Flatland type reservoirs.

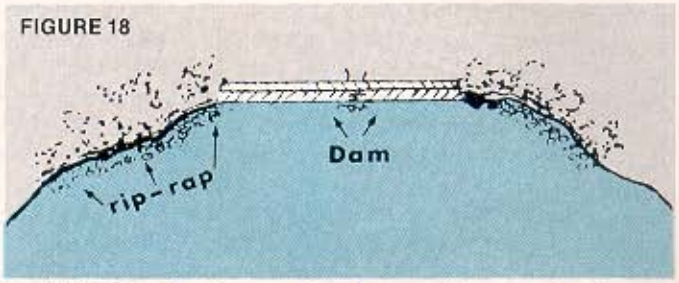


FIGURE 18—The features found near a dam may be the most productive and "easiest" place to fish.

boat docks (anchorages), factories, access areas, houses, etc. This gives a structure situation much like that shown in **Figure 12**. The dugout channel situations can (and will) be the most productive spots in the lake.

Figure 13 shows a "cove" feeder stream, or gully wash, in the shoreline. This is to stress the fact that we MUST figure there may exist some type "bar" or productive feature at the entrance to all coves, bays, feeder streams, etc.

In **Figure 14** I have combined two previous figures (**12** & **13**) to show a structure situation found in flatter sections of some **Lowland** Type 2 and Type 3 reservoirs, and **in almost the entire length of a Flatland reservoir.**

This shows where a side feeder stream has cut a channel through a flat bottom all the way to the main channel. The figure shows the normal "breaklines" associated with such a structure situation. **This structure situation is the key for consistent successful fishing in Flatland reservoirs** (or in any other type water with wide flats between the shoreline and the deepest water).

Being able to "see" where such a situation exists is quite easy. All coves are considered as feeder streams. Big gully washes indicate places where water has flowed in the past. All of these have cut a channel of some description through the flat.

Please note there are four *bars* as well as the *breaklines* that must be considered when working such a structure situation. The "contact points" (where fish first move up from deeper water) would be on the bars at the main channel. Subsequent migration of the fish (if it occurs) on the breaklines of the feeder cut could put them on one, or both, bars at the entrance to the cove.

Figure 15 is a side view of another type structure situation. This is a type we would be interested in during the colder part of the season (early spring, late fall, winter). These steep, deep areas close to shore can occur in most any type body of water. In most cases shoreline observations will point them out. In **Canyon** or **Highland** reservoirs many such areas are present.

In **Lowland** (and Highland) type reservoirs, this situation can exist close to the dam—if built in a narrow, gorge-like place. It can be present at anyplace in the lake where the channel swings in close to the shoreline. It nearly always occurs on the "outside" (or bends) in the channels of streams and in narrow Highland and Lowland type reservoirs. In **Flatland** reservoirs this type structure situation will occur where the **main** channel meanders close to the shoreline.

In many **natural lakes** the deep water (holes, slots, etc) will exist close to shore, producing steep, short bars or fast-breaking breaklines with ledges or "fingers."

Figure 16 is a side view of another structure situation. There are three "humps" (underwater islands) shown. This is to show "humps" come in all sizes, shapes and depths. In some *natural* lakes there may be no humps, while in others there may be quite a few. If it is a "sinkhole" or "spring" type lake, no hump is likely to exist. If it is a *glacier* formed lake, then humps of some nature are likely to be present. This is especially true when many above water islands are present. When shoreline observations do not indicate any exist, lure presentation, depth sounders and contour maps will locate them.

In Highland and Canyon type reservoirs, humps are not *likely* to exist (big slides may produce some). But in the Lowland and Flatland reservoirs, underwater humps should be expected. Above water observations can give indications of submerged humps in an area. If the reservoir spreads out and **islands (above water) are observed, it is likely humps (underwater islands) also exist in the same area.**

In many reservoirs the humps have

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been marked in some manner. It may have a floating marker or pole placed on it. In reservoirs such as the TVA system, where barge traffic occurs, the humps (and channels) are marked by red and black buoys (red on the right, black on left), going *upstream*—the reverse going *downstream*.).

Figure 17 is a side view of a structure situation referred to by many structure fishermen (Spoonpluggers) as a "Delta." This is a ridge-like feature or a **long, ridge-like bar running along the edge of a channel with a flat between it and the shoreline**. This type feature is usually found in **Lowland** and **Flatland** type reservoirs. In Lowland reservoirs, it may be found in different parts, but it **usually occurs in the big, wide, flatter areas of the reservoir**, and where some type "turn" or "bend" occurs in the channel. In **Flatland** reservoirs it is not likely to occur all over the lake but only in certain areas.

A "Delta" structure situation is more likely to occur where the reservoir was built on a large river rather than a small one. In some reservoirs like the TVA chain it can occur practically the entire length of the lake. These lakes were built mostly in big, wide valleys with huge, flat "bottom" lands (flood plain). The "Delta" situations are usually marked with buoys in these lakes.

The "Delta" situation does not normally occur in *natural* lakes, but at times a "hump" of some description may exist at the edge of a hole or deeper slot in glacier lakes (displacement of bottom material).

A thorough study of the "Delta" structure situations as presented in my books and home study series should be made; because this will teach a fisherman more about our fishing guidelines than anything I know.

Among the "man-made" structure situations not to be overlooked in reservoirs occurs at the dam. See **Figure 18**. This dam area has the deepest water in the lake and the features (structure situations) found here may be the most productive, as well as the "easiest" place to work in the lake. The rocky rip-rap and other underwater features found in this area in *some* Lowland reservoirs and ALL Flatland reservoirs may be the key to your success in that body of water.

Figure 19 shows a causeway or raised roadbed crossing the lake. This is one of the first structure situations you should look for in reservoirs. This man-made feature not only gives access to the lake, but it provides one of the better features in the lake used by the fish. In most cases, this area will show the best water color, as the color is likely to be different from one side to the other. A similar man-made structure situation is the "jetty" or "breakwater" found in many different type bodies of water. They should be checked out also, regardless where they might occur.

Figure 20 is a top view of another man-made structure situation found in *reservoirs*. It is an old roadbed covered

FIGURE 19

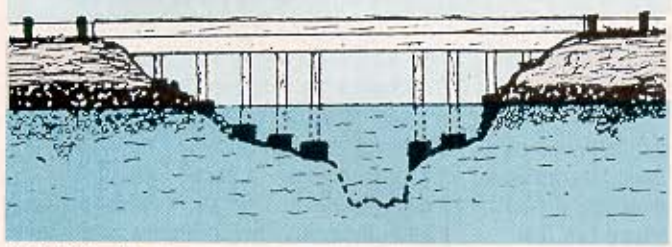

FIGURE 19—A causeway or raised roadbed crossing the lake provides one of the better features in the lake used by the fish.

FIGURE 21

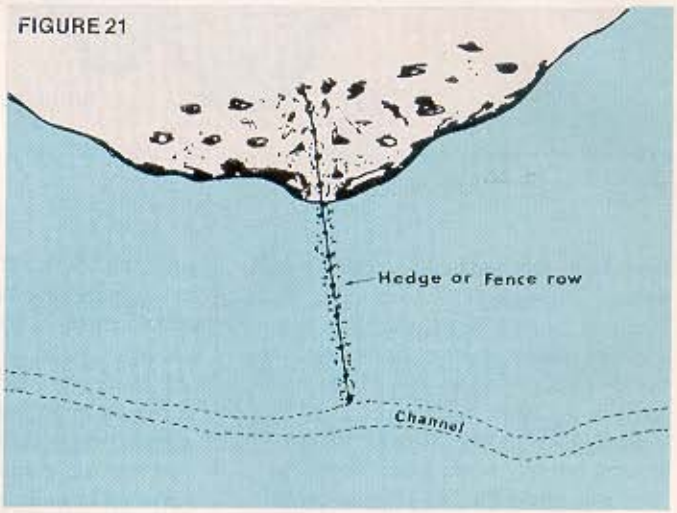

FIGURE 20

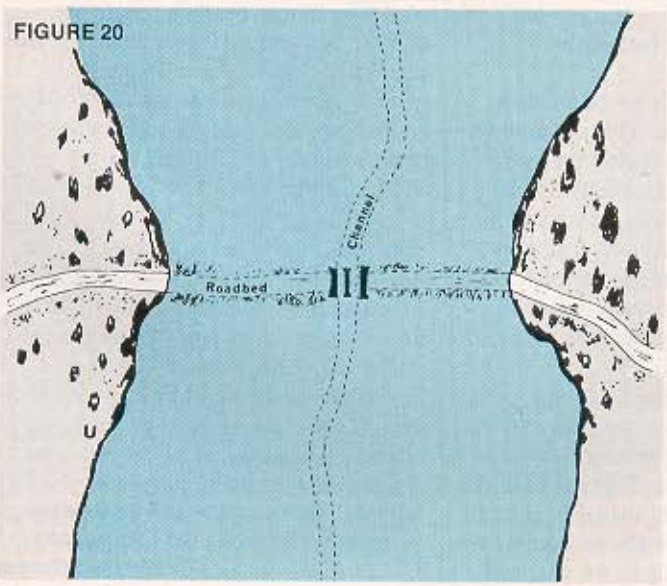

FIGURE 22

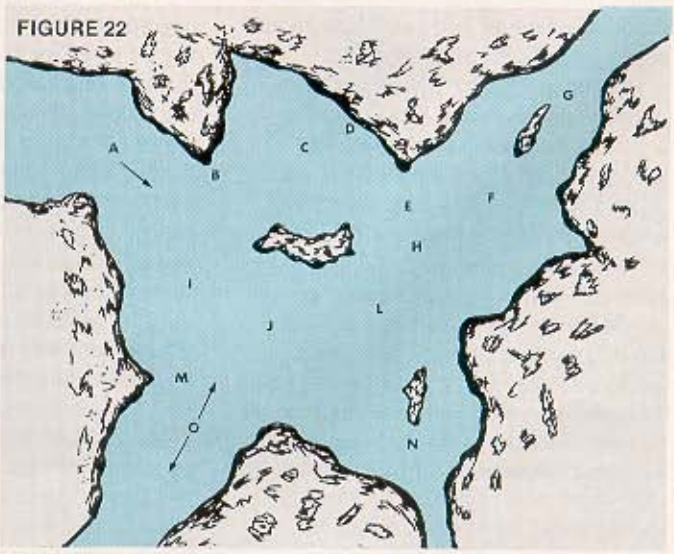

FIGURE 22—After reading this article, see if you can "guess" what structure situations exist in this body of water. (Answers will appear in next month's August issue.)

(submerged) by the water when the reservoir fills. The embankments (ridge-bar-breaklines) are a perfect visible path which "goes all the way" from the deepest water in the area (channel) to the shoreline shallows.

Similar to sunken roadbeds, but different in nature, are old fence or hedge rows covered when farming land was flooded. (**Figure 21**). These man-made features can at times provide the "signposts" for movements and migrations of the fish. As structure fishermen we should be able to tell the difference between these and exposed trees and bushes out on some big flat.

After Joe and I had looked at and discussed **Figures 2-21**, he was asked to take another look at **Figure 1** and see if he couldn't do a better job of pointing out the structure situations that may be present. His immediate reaction was to say, "Yeah, I may be able to draw in channels and point out some structure situations that may exist, but won't I be 'guessing' or merely 'speculating' what may be present?"

Somewhat impatiently I replied, "Of course you would be 'guessing' or 'speculating' as you say, but how else could you get started in your effort to stop sitting around and scared of unfamiliar or new fishing waters? How else will you start looking for 'what's out there'? How else will you start spending your time where you have the BEST chance to catch a fish? How else will you 'learn' to pass up features that represent wasted effort and lost fishing time? **How else would you learn to read a contour map correctly**?

"Joe, you seem to have forgotten entirely the fact that it is in the area of *interpretation* where fishermen can ALWAYS get better. If you keep your eyes open, you will be surprised how often the structure situation present is much like that which is 'guessed' or 'speculated.' You will be surprised how quickly your '*guesses*' become more accurate. In a relatively short time you will begin to quickly eliminate unproductive areas and be able to interpret (better) whether a structure situation is good or bad. Pretty soon you will be spending your time where you have the best chance to catch a fish, and, you will be there at the right time fishing in the right manner. You shouldn't forget, **if you know what structure situations 'look like,' and you develop or relate them to the deepest water in the area**, you can use the aids of contour maps and depth sounders to speed things up.

"Joe, for additional mental exercise and as an additional 'learning' process, look at **Figure 22**. I want you to 'guess' or 'speculate' what structure situations exist in this body of water. This figure represents a part of a lake located in an area of rolling hills. There are many creeks and branches in the area, as well as a main river. It could be a section of a #1 (type) Lowland reservoir. The water color is on the clear side, and a definite 'weedline' exists in all shallow areas. To help the cause, I am going to point out areas I would 'guess' or 'speculate' as being 'fishable.' I have not designated all the potential productive spots, particularly from a seasonal point of view; however, I have pointed out the 'major' structure situations which I think must be checked out thoroughly in this portion of the lake. I am labeling the spots chosen as **A**, **B**, **C**, **D**, etc.

"The next time we meet, we'll check your notes against mine. We'll talk about how I arrived at my 'guess' as to the most important structure situations by the things I could see above the water."