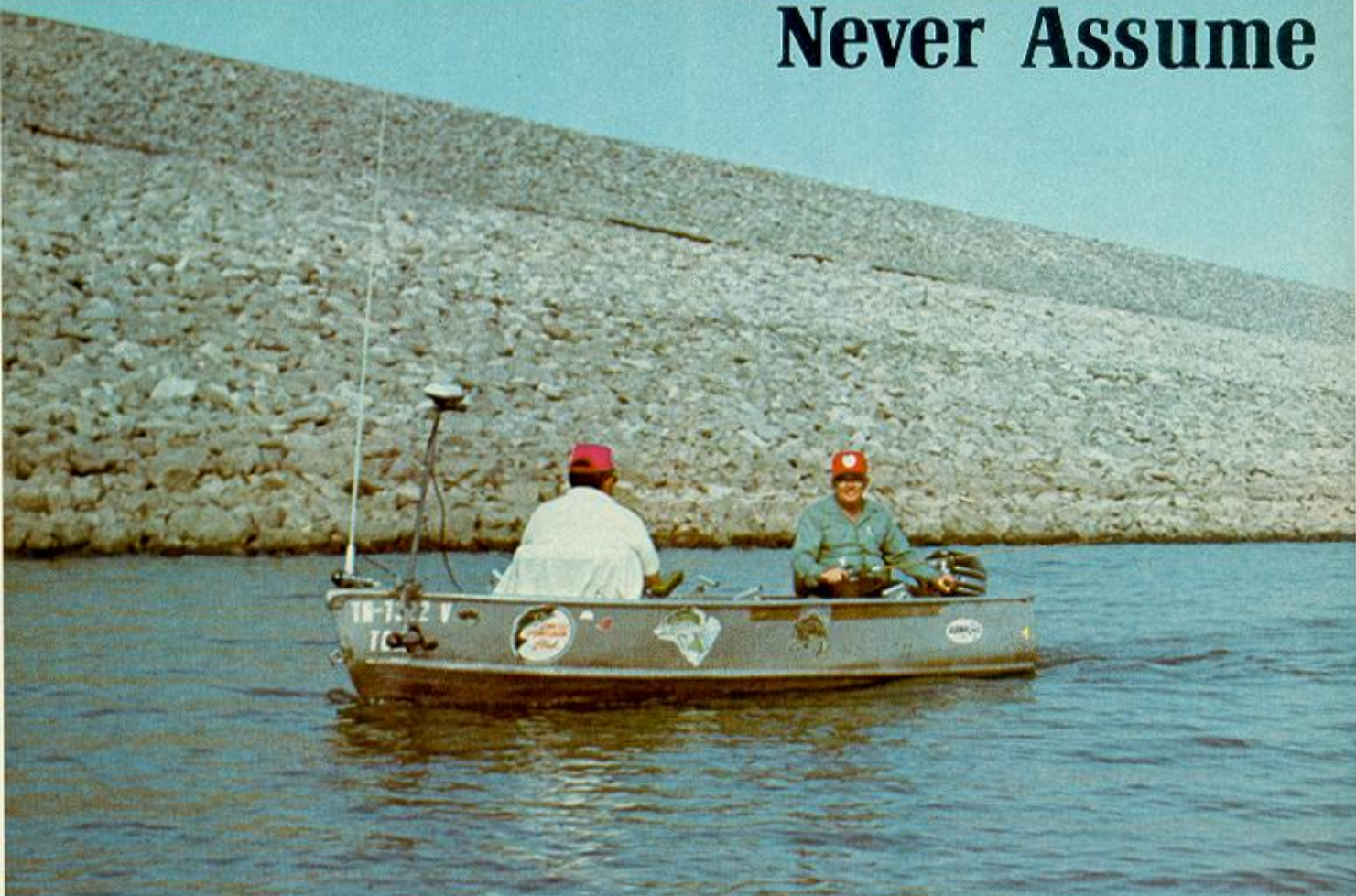


Never Assume



During the past several years the term, "structure fishing", has become an important part of a language used by many thousands of serious-minded sport fishermen. Where once the word "structure" was almost totally unheard of by a majority of anglers, we now see an increasing number of outdoor publications printing articles written (either directly or indirectly), about so-called "structure fishing".

Unfortunately, many writers who contribute such articles have a minimal understanding of structure fishing concepts and, in fact, do not *themselves* understand what structure fishing is (or is not), all about. This is unfortunate, because in many cases the reader becomes misled, misinformed and oftentimes, totally confused. The subject of "Structure Fishing" has become a "hot item", and an increasing number of articles on the subject have begun to appear in numerous outdoor publications.

I have read many of these articles. According to the author, a stump is structure, a rock is structure, a bush is structure, a pier is structure (it

could be), a stick-up is structure; in other words, **EVERYTHING** is structure. Well, let me assure you, **EVERYTHING IS NOT** structure. If this were so, then **EVERYTHING** (or every object), might produce fish, and anyone who has spent much time on the water knows **THAT** certainly isn't true.

In most cases, the misinformed writer who refers to almost **EVERYTHING** as "structure", is usually referring to what we (at Fishing Facts), refer to as "BREAKS" on structure. Breaks are underwater objects (such as: brush, rocks, stumps, fallen trees, a quick change in depth, changes in bottom consistency, an edge, depressions, changes in water color, changes in water temperature, etc., etc.) that can be seen (or detected), by fish in their movements under water. "Structure", as defined by the man who originally coined the word, Education Editor, Buck Perry, is: "The bottom of the lake **EXTENDING FROM THE SHALLOW WATER TO THE DEEP WATER**, with some unusual features that distinguish it from the surrounding bottom area".

You can readily see that a bush, or a rock, or a stick-up (which does not normally extend all the way from the shallows to the deep), is **NOT** structure, but is, or could be, a "break" on structure.

One might say, "Words, words, words! What's the difference? They are only words!"

Well, there's a lot of difference. I can't recall all the times we have seen fishermen (some of them good friends of ours), way up on top of a large flat, casting to a lone bush. "What are you doing up here?" we question. "We're structure fishing", comes the answer. This is followed by, "That structure stuff doesn't work for us. We've been fishing 'structure' all day and haven't caught a thing".

Words you say? These misinformed fishermen had been reading "everything is structure" type articles and, indeed, believed that by casting to bushes and "stick-ups" they were fishing "structure". No way!

My quarrel goes beyond the definition of words, however. Some-

Where The Fish Have To Be

by CARL MALZ, Managing Editor

A pair of bass anglers check a long rip-rap area quickly by motor trolling. The trick here is to leave out just enough line to allow your bottom bumping lure to tick the rocks frequently.



where along the way, the same writers who wrongly refer to "breaks" as "structure", go one step further. Recently, we have witnessed an attempt to make "structure" synonymous with DEEP WATER, or "DEEP WATER STRUCTURE FISHING". Whoever said structure existed ONLY in deep water? You certainly didn't read it in the pages of Fishing Facts. Structure is wherever you find it. Sometimes it's in the deep; sometimes it's in the shallows; sometimes it's in between! It is this continual reference to "DEEP WATER structure fishing", that I wish to devote the major part of this article.

During the past year or two, a large number of fishermen have come to associate "structure fishing" almost exclusively with DEEP WATER fishing. For many years, Fishing Facts has waged (and is still waging), an almost constant effort to convince fishermen to devote more time and more effort toward deeper water and deep water structure. Perhaps in this regard we have been TOO successful. For we now find numerous anglers deserting the

shallows almost ENTIRELY.

Education Editor, Buck Perry, has repeated time and time again, "The fish are either in the SHALLOWS, in the DEEP, or somewhere IN BETWEEN". And while it may be true that the majority of lunker fish most likely will be caught in or near deep water (after the spawning season), it is also true that many fish (including some very large ones), can also be caught in or near the SHALLOWS. The formula states "the shallows, the deep, or somewhere in between"!

Recently, we have observed many Fishing Facts readers deserting the shallows COMPLETELY, rarely taking the time to check shallower water, even briefly. This could be a BIG MISTAKE! Before I am accused of trying to encourage everyone back into the shallows, let me state that I still believe the majority of LUNKER fish will be caught in or near deep water (8 to 10 ft. or deeper), during the majority of the fishing season (or, after the spawning season). However, I also believe an angler may be passing up some fine action

(and some good-sized fish), if he NEVER takes the time to check the shallows before proceeding to deeper water.

Let me cite an example or two, in order to help make my point. On numerous occasions I have had the pleasure and privilege of fishing with the Daddy of Structure Fishing, Buck Perry. In my opinion, he has no equal as a fisherman, or as a teacher. Each time we come off the water, I become increasingly amazed at how much there is to know about this great sport of ours, and all that is YET TO BE LEARNED. It is a never-ending process.

I would like to relate a number of the things I saw, and a few of the lessons I learned while fishing with Buck. These tips have helped my fishing. I believe they might help your fishing, also.

On one occasion, we had launched our boat at a ramp, which was located in a small channel area which led into a huge southern reservoir. Other boats, which had launched in the same area, sped swiftly by us, out into the open lake.

"Snap on your shallowest running lure", Buck urged. "I'd like to check this shallow channel entrance to the lake to see if anything's moving".

We both attached small shallow running lures (#500 Spoonplugs), to our lines and began trolling at moderate speed toward the open lake. We hadn't gone more than 20 yards from the boat ramp, when Buck's rod bent with the strike of a fish. A largemouth bass of about 1 3/4 lbs. was boated quickly and released.

"Let's go back and do that again", Buck suggested. "There might be a few more of them in here."

Again we proceeded away from the boat ramp, with our small lures trailing closely behind. This time we had proceeded about 30 yards, when both rods bent with quivering action. Two more bass (one about 1 1/2 lbs., the other about 2 lbs.), were landed quickly.

"A double header", Buck chuckled. "We better break out our casting rods and see what else is roaming around back here close to the boat ramp."

Well, we didn't exactly fill the boat with lunkers in the next few minutes. But we did catch two more bass that were twins to the previous fish. There, within 30 yards of the boat ramp, we had caught five bass in a period of about four minutes (on a lake neither of us had ever seen before).

"We better head out of this little channel", Buck said, "or we may never get to see the rest of the lake."

This experience was a lesson I'll not soon forget. How many fishermen put a lure into the water approximately half a minute after they launch their boat? Not many I'll bet. Five bass within a few minutes; not "lunkers", to be sure, but nevertheless, they were fair-sized BASS. Incidentally, this event happened in early fall, not during the spring spawning season. Since that time, we have repeated this experience many, many times on several occasions, boating larger bass of 2 1/2 to 4 lbs. within 100 yards of the public boat dock or boat rental.

Another observation worth noting, is that Buck rarely moves from place to place on a body of water without having a lure in the water. In other words, after we have thoroughly checked a particular structure (both casting and trolling), and it becomes time to move on to another structure

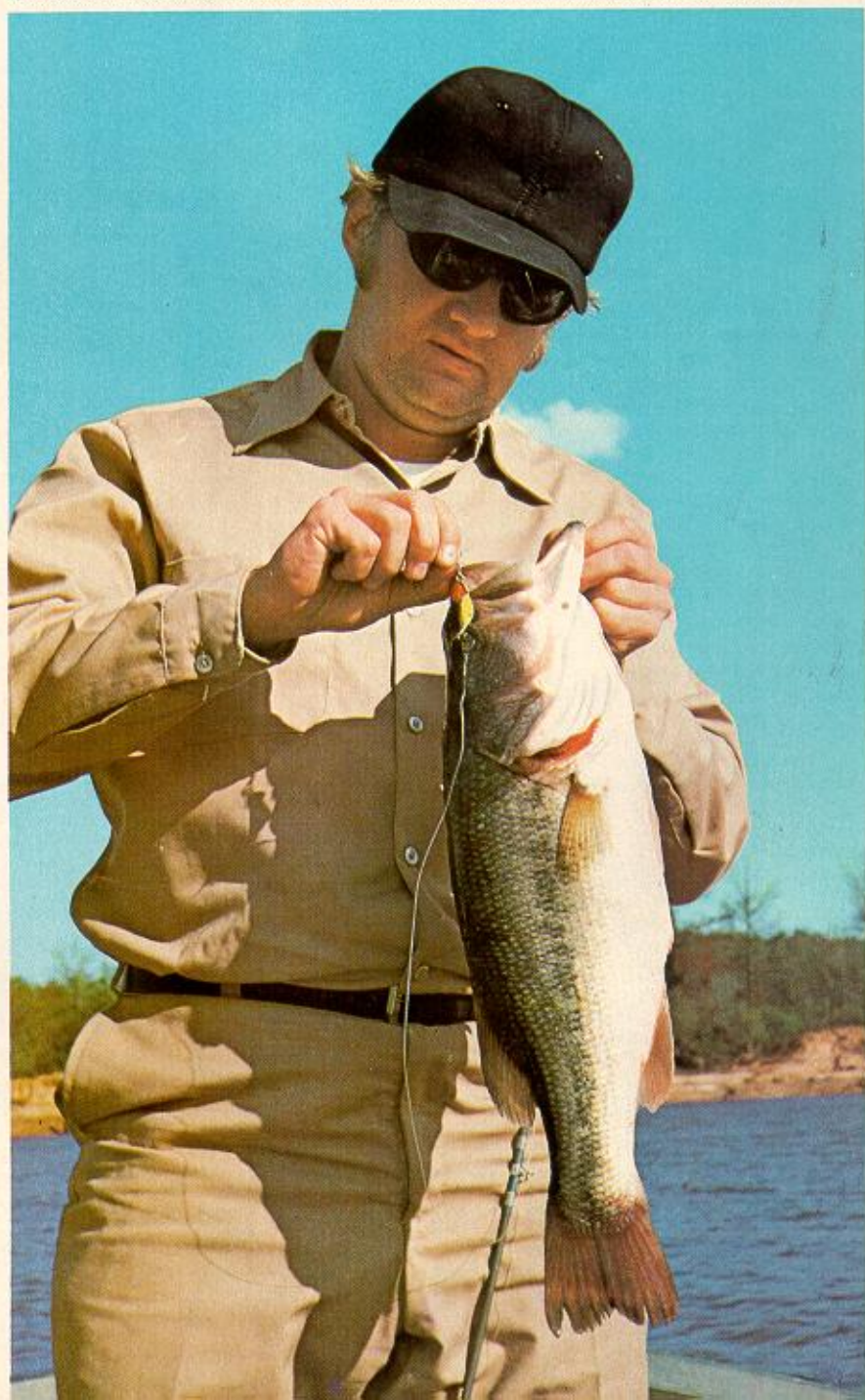
(or another section of the lake), most of the time a shallow running lure is trailed behind the boat while proceeding from one area to the next.

This technique may not appeal to anglers who are in a big hurry to get from place to place. But I can tell you this. It is amazing the number of times we have picked up large fish while traveling from one spot to the next. Oftentimes, fish strike near areas that you would swear held no fish. Yet there they were, large fish. On more than one occasion, these "stragglers" led us to structure and "breaks" on structure, that were so well hidden that an angler would al-

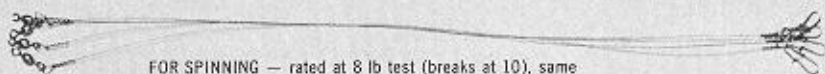
most have to "stumble" onto them in order to find them. Yet, by trailing a small shallow running lure behind the boat, we were able to pick up straggler fish, which THEN brought on the question, "Where did he come from? Why was he there? What led him there?" Upon closer inspection of the surrounding bottom area, we were often able to determine the WHY, WHERE and HOW. This, in turn, led us to productive structure, and even more numbers of fish.

When traveling from spot to spot, many times we move across great expanses of deep water. However,

Managing Editor, Carl Malz, removes a small shallow running lure from the jaws of a hefty largemouth bass which struck while Carl was moving from one hot spot to the next. A lure trailed closely behind the boat will often do the trick.



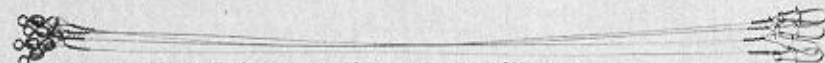
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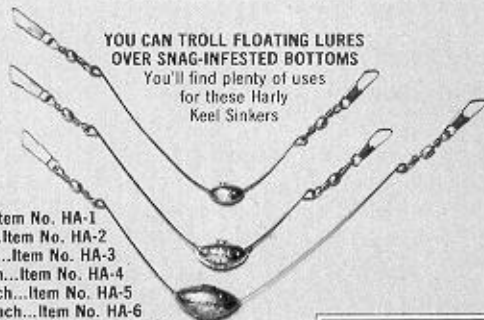


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when practical, we attempt to travel by way of shallower shoreline areas that are in close proximity to deep water. A trailed lure, traveling over 50 or 60 ft. of water, usually won't be very effective. Whereas, the same lure trailed in shallow water (near deep sections), can often lead you to some well hidden, and heretofore, unknown hot spots. Besides, it costs nothing extra to trail a lure behind the boat between hot spots. The longer you have a lure in the water, the better your chances of tying into a fish.

I would NOT run a DEEP running lure over unfamiliar or uncharted waters. Brush, weeds, trees or other bottom objects may gobble up your favorite lures very quickly. This just leads to discouragement. Trail a small shallow running lure about 20 to 25 yards behind the boat as you travel, or as you familiarize yourself with a particular structure or section of lake. And be sure to stay alert. You may be in for a BIG surprise.

In my home area (Illinois and Wisconsin), it is a common practice for

many structure fishermen to skip the shallow water almost completely, while making a mad dash for the deepest edge of the weeds or the drop-off. In most cases, the smaller shallow running lures remain in the tackle box the entire day, while lures which probe depths of 8 to 15 ft. (and deeper), receive constant attention. I believe this is a mistake. Checking shallower areas can be important for several reasons:

First, shallow areas can tell an angler much about the CONDITIONS which may exist in a lake. Sand or rock bottom, muck, marl, brush, vegetation, stick-ups, clean bottom, dirty bottom, water color, light penetration, etc., etc. All these facts and more can be observed.

Second, movements of baitfish, panfish, or small game fish in the shallows can provide a clue as to how ACTIVE the fish may be on that particular day. Some of the worst fishing days I have ever experienced, revealed an almost total absence of baitfish or small panfish in the shallows. This seems to be espe-

cially true following a severe cold front or severe weather condition. When we begin a day's fishing and we notice the complete absence of smaller baitfish in or near the shallows, we know we may be in for a tough day on the water.

Then, too, the appearance of smaller game fish in the shallows can be the signal that larger fish may be on the move in the same immediate area or somewhat deeper. An abundance of small bass in the shallows, for example, could mean that larger bass are within casting distance at a deeper section.

The appearance of smaller fish in the shallows can also provide a clue as to available STRUCTURE in the immediate area. Whenever smaller bass are continually observed using one general area, you can almost win a bet that some form of structure exists in the nearby area. And whenever you have structure, you may also have bigger bass. Be sure to check it.

Lastly (and this may be the most important reason of all for checking



Education Editor, Buck Perry (left) and Managing Editor, Carl Malz, caught this fine stringer of bass during poor fishing conditions. The majority of fish were caught by "straggler" fishing in shallow areas passed up by most other fishermen.

the shallows), from time to time some very large fish move into shallow water; especially in the early morning, and then again just before or after dark. If you fail to check for this movement, you could be passing up some of the biggest fish in the lake.

Many fishermen inquire, "Won't running the outboard motor through the shallows spook the fish?" I can't buy that. We have simply caught too many fish when trolling in 2 to 4 foot depths, to accept that theory.

Perhaps in the spring of the year; or in crystal clear waters; or on lakes where outboard motors are rare; the fish may be a bit skittish at times. But once the warm weather season rolls around, we have popped many a fish by simply trailing a small shallow running vibrating lure 20 to 30 yards behind the boat. If the fish DO spook when the boat moves over them, they must move in once again just as our lures pass by, because, believe me, they hit and hit HARD.

Before closing, I'd like to share an experience with you that I hope will be of interest; but, more importantly, will help to highlight the importance of probing shallow water, especially when fishing *really* gets tough.

On another occasion, Buck and I were fishing a number of medium-sized lakes in the deep South. Extremely cold weather (38 degrees in southern Georgia and northern Florida), had rocked the fish, and the fishermen, back on their heels. Due to poor weather conditions, fishing had all but come to a halt for almost everyone. Everyone but my fishing

partner, that is.

Buck proceeded to demonstrate the importance of "straggler" fishing during poor weather and water conditions. We expected little or no mass movements of fish. In order to make any catch at all during this period, a great deal of water would have to be covered, various depth levels would have to be probed repeatedly, and many long hours of fishing time would be required. This we proceeded to do.

First, shallow areas were checked quickly. The result, two small bass. Then the next depth level (4 to 6 ft.), was strained. Nothing! As we worked our way deeper and deeper, it became increasingly evident that we were in for a very tough day on the water.

Brief conversations with other fishermen on the lake revealed the same sad story for everyone. No Fish!

Buck continued to check several various depth levels, structures, breaks, and many types of cover. Yet, the ONLY places which seemed to produce any fish were located in the shallows (2 to 4 ft. deep).

It wasn't long before primary emphasis was placed on fishing shallow areas, which were adjacent to deep water or to deeper structure. After all, that's where the fish were, (those that would hit at any rate). Fishing remained slow throughout most of the day. But by spending many hours on the water, and picking up a "straggler" every so often, we were able to land a respectable number of fish.

Later that evening, as we pulled up to the launch ramp (we had rented a small 14 ft. aluminum Johnboat), two enormous boats roared alongside and cut their engines.

"What are you fella's doin' in that little boat, 'SPECK' (crappie) FISH-IN'?" chuckled one of the anglers, as he peered down at Buck from his highly elevated seat.

With that, Buck reached into our live well and began stringing the bass we had caught that day. As the first bass was lifted from the live well, the angler in the elevated chair exclaimed:

"Oh, you boys even caught yourselves a bass, didn't you?"

As the second bass went on the stringer he declared, somewhat surprised, "Oh, I see you caught yourselves another bass. My, oh my!"

Then a long pause as another, and another, and another, and ANOTHER, was removed from the live well. Each bass kept getting larger and larger than the previous one. Stone dead SILENCE!

"We didn't get a strike between the four of us today. Man, you guys sure are LUCKY", came the next remark. The hapless angler didn't know it at the time, but he was addressing probably the greatest bass angler who has ever lived.

As each fish was taken from the live well, things became quieter and quieter. Soon all boats were loaded on their respective trailers, and each moved slowly and silently into the night.

Yes sir, we sure were "LUCKY" that day.