Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY

Part II

When I was requested by Fishing Facts to write some articles on fishing, with special emphasis on Artificial Reservoirs, a great big question mark arose in my mind — where do you start on a subject as involved as this one is?

I can certainly understand why their emphasis was placed on these man-made reservoirs, because here is where the men are separated from the boys. Probably less knowledge is universally known about these waters than any other. Complete interpretation of structure, weather and water conditions, and movements of fish is a must, if they are to be mastered consistently.

For the first few years after a reservoir is constructed, they offer little challenge; as young, fast-growing fish are abundant and can be caught easily in many areas. But as the lake gets older, the fish get larger and scarcer, and the water and bottom conditions change — you have a whole new ball game. Empty stringers can be the *rule*, rather than the exception! A fisherman may find an area *in early spring* that produces fish, but when *summer* rolls around a blank is drawn!

Since Reservoirs are built in all types of terrain, in all sections of the country, with widely varying structures, and different weather and water conditions, you can readily understand why this type of water can provide challenges and problems to the average fisherman. He probably finds it easier to abandon a particular reservoir when fishing begins to get tough, and find himself a new one. The only problem this presents is running out of new reservoirs.

Where do we start?

We must — as with all fishing — start with basic knowledge of how fish move, basic weather and water conditions, basic presentation of lures, and basic fishing of structure. This is the key to successful fishing, regardless of the water being fished.

For those who need to be reminded of basic knowledge I'll state it in its simplest form: the home of fish is deep water. In most waters, this home (or sanctuary) is too deep and the fish while there are too inactive for lures to be presented *effectively*. As fishermen, we are saved by the fact that periodically these fish become active and move toward the shallows. When they move, *they do not move in a haphazard manner*, but move on well-defined paths or *migration routes* called structure. As fish move on structure, they either pause or stop at a "break" in the structure. How far they move and how long they stay is dependent upon the weather and water *conditions* that exist at that particular time. The fisherman's job is to *control his fishing*, both casting and trolling, in such a way so as to make contact and put fish on the stringer.

"It takes far more skill to be a good troller than it takes to be a good caster! There is a big difference between trolling and dragging a lure through the water.

(Editor's Note: In case you missed last month's article, Part I, by Buck Perry, we are repeating the fact that Perry's booklet, "Spoonplugging For Fresh Water Bass And All Game Fish" is available from Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., at $2. Wis. residents please add 8c for state sales tax.)

We must be sure, also, that the words or terms used in talking about the different subjects are fully understood. For only in this way can the basic information be expanded. The Spoonplugger's Glossary which follows will explain the terms used. Study these terms so that we can be on common ground and speak the same language. At first, some of the terms may not be fully understood, but before the subject is finished you will know what they mean.

BOW — Excess line, in the form of a curve, which occurs between the rod tip and lure.

BREAK IN STRUCTURE — Where structure is no longer uniform due to dips, or a quick drop in depth; rocks, stumps, etc.

BREAKLINE — A line on structure where there is a definite increase in depth, either sudden or gradual; weedline, brushline; edge of channels or holes; where two bodies of water meet which differ in temperature and/or color.

BRUSHLINE — The deep-water edge of a line of brush.

CHECKED — When an area has been thoroughly fished correctly.

CLEAN BOTTOM — Bottoms free of debris, muck, moss, etc.

COLD FRONT — A weather condition. (Description and position obtainable from daily weather maps and reports.)

CONTACT POINT — The position on structure where contact is first made by fish on their migration from deep water.

CONTROLS — Factors to be considered and used for successful fishing.

CONTROL — To present lures in an orderly and correct manner.

DEEP WATER — Water that has a depth greater than eight to ten feet.

DIRTY BOTTOM — Bottoms covered with debris, muck, moss, etc.

DROP-OFF — The place on structure where there is a sudden or

rapid drop into the deepest water, such as a hole or channel.

ELIMINATED WATER — Water that has been fished correctly and has produced no action.

FAN CAST — A series of casts that covers the water in an arc.

FREE SWIMMING LURE — A lure moving or swimming through open water.

GAME FISH — Any fish considered worthy of pursuit, either for its pugnacious disposition or for its flesh.

HARD BOTTOM — Bottoms with a firm condition, usually associated with sand, clay, rocks, gravel, etc.

HOME — The deep water areas where fish spend most of their time.

HOT-SPOT — An area where fish are caught consistently when fish are said to be 'biting'.

JUMP LURE — Normally, weighted lures used for bottom work, whose speed and action is obtained by rod or reel movement in the form of a jump or jerk.

MIGRATION — Movement of fish from one section of water to another. Normally used when speaking of a depth change.

MIGRATION ROUTE — The path fish take as they move from deep water to shallow water, or vice versa.

MOVEMENT — Closely associated with migration, but also meaning when fish become active (opposite of dormant.

OPEN WATER — Water free from vegetation growth, and away from shoreline.

POINT — An extrusion in the shoreline that extends into and under the water.

SANCTUARY — The section of water, in the home area, where fish spend most of their time.

SCATTERPOINT — The depth, on the bottom, where fish start to separate and scatter and are no longer grouped together.

SCHOOL OF FISH — A number of fish that are grouped close together.

SCHOOLING — A school of fish feeding on the surface, visibly tearing up the water.

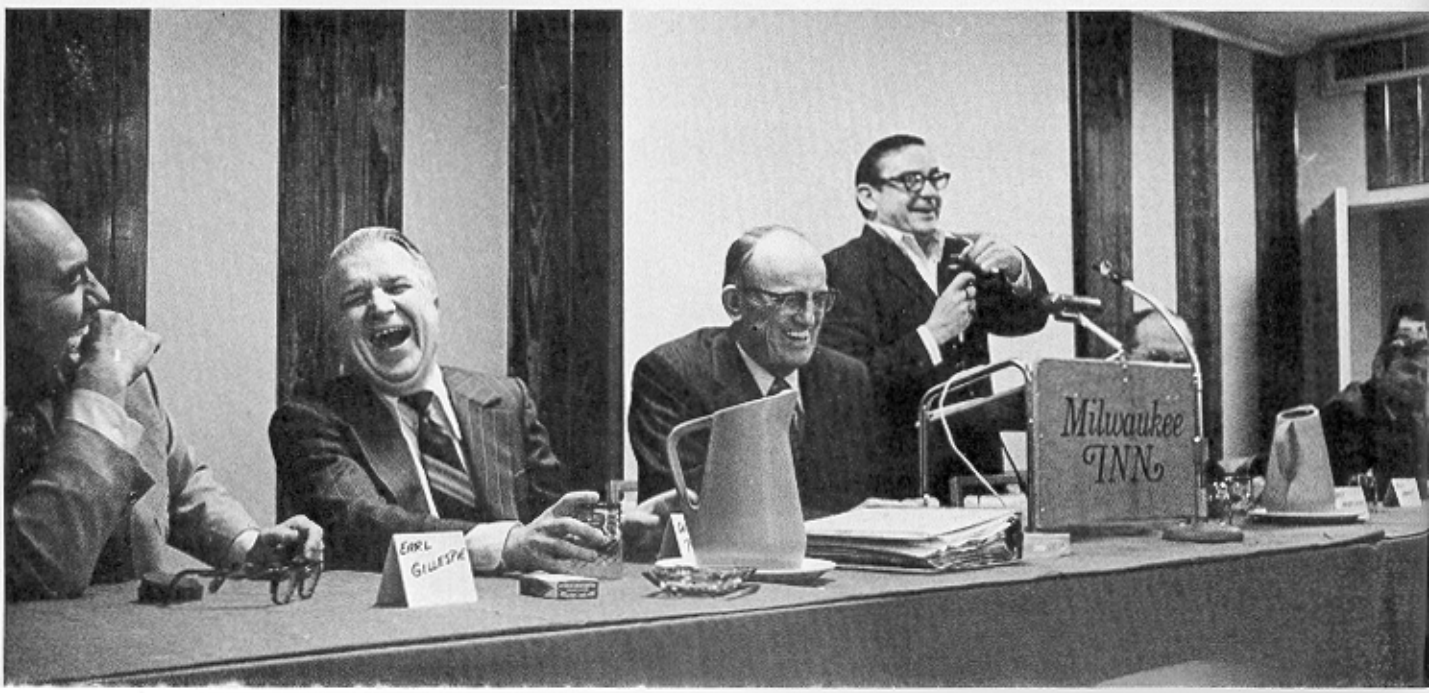
SHALLOW WATER — Water less

What's that old dead tree doing out there all by itself? That must be a shallow spot there. Is it part of a long bar? Does it connect to the shoreline? Does it lead to the deepest water in the area? What is the principal species of fish in this body of water? What time of the year is it? Is the water clear or murky? Is it a bright clear day or a dark and cloudy day? These are some of the questions you should be asking when you see a sight like this. It's all a part of being able to "read" water.

Editor's Note

"Blessed are those who share their knowledge with others for they shall be called teachers". E. L. (Buck) Perry, of Hickory, North Carolina, is the man we credit with being the father and teacher of structure fishing. It was Buck's discoveries about the habits and movement of game fish that made possible the entire modern era of angling. We also consider him to be America's greatest living fisherman, a man who has become a legend in his own time. Recently one of the giant national magazines wanted to do a feature article on Buck, but wanted to bill him as the inventor of the Spoonplug. Buck refused by saying he didn't want to be remembered as the inventor of a "piece of tin". The Spoonplug which he invented is only a tool of his trade like a hammer or a saw to a carpenter. It is Buck's discoveries and fantastic fishing knowledge that will make him immortal in the world of angling. We are privileged to have Buck as a frequent contributor to Fishing Facts. This is his second article. Read it well, you are receiving some of the basic knowledge that started the whole era of structure fishing.

Mauri Marasco of M-M Sporting Goods, Milwaukee, at the microphone at a recent Buck Perry Seminar in Milwaukee. Whatever it was he said, it must have been funny to cause our publisher to crack up like that. From left to right; Earl Gillespie, famed sportscaster of WITI-TV, Milwaukee; George Pazik our publisher; Buck Perry; Mauri Marasco; (partially hidden by the podium), Art Mercier, the outstanding outdoorsman of WBBM-CBS Radio, Chicago; and ace sportswriter, Don Johnson, of the Milwaukee Sentinel.



than eight to ten feet in depth.

SIZE OF LURE — Normally, the length in inches rather than by weight.

SOFT BOTTOM — Bottoms covered with soft silt, mud, muck, marl, etc.

SPOOKED — Fish which have become alerted or have become scared. Their reaction is to drop into deeper water or to become very inactive.

STRAGGLERS — An occasional fish, which is usually found apart from the others. (Yearlings are often in this category.)

STRUCTURE — The bottom of the lake extending from shallow water to deep water, with some unusual features that distinguish it from the surrounding bottom area.

TRAFFIC — The amount of fishing pressure, or water skiers, large boats and motors, and fast boats in a given area.

WALKING OR BUMPING — A lure moving along the bottom and actually coming into contact with it in this manner.

WATER COLOR — The degree of clarity.

WEEDLINE — The deep-water edge of a line of weeds.

YEARLINGS — One to three year old fish.

There is another term that should perhaps be clarified, as it will be used often and is not listed in the glossary — PRESENTATION OF LURES. This term is used to designate that casting or trolling, or both, be used as indicated.

There may be some who classify themselves as 'purists' of some sort who *belittle* the art of trolling. It takes far more skill to be a good troller than it takes to be a good caster! There is a big difference between trolling and *dragging a lure through the water*. Every *moment* of a trolling pass is for a *definite reason*, if you know what you are doing. Trolling will tell a fisherman a great many things — namely, WHEN, WHERE, WHAT and HOW to cast. There will be occasions when speed control will be so critical, and at times so fast, that casting will not be productive. Depth control over muck and brush must be so exact *at times* that it would be impossible to control it perfectly enough by casting and trolling is the only way a lure can be properly presented under such conditions. Fish will be located on certain types of structure where correct presentation can only be made by trolling; also, this same type of situation can exist where casting and casting alone is necessary. I have found no way that will allow mapping and interpretation to be done in a better manner than by trolling; and if all of the other reasons were eliminated, this alone should point out the need to learn trolling.

Anytime I hear a fisherman downgrading trolling, my answer is not printable. He reminds me of the fisherman whose favorite excuse for failure is, "If I can't catch fish on a surface lure, I'd rather not catch them", or like the expert who builds his reputation on the fact that, "I don't keep any fish under four pounds." (Of course, you seldom see him with a string of four-pounders). So, maybe the lack of trolling skill is the deterrent to those not liking to troll; I suspect so, especially when trolling can add so much to fishing and is such a great teaching tool. If trolling is allowed, by all means learn to troll. The good fisherman (Spoonplugger) will locate the fish by trolling and then proceed to catch them by casting.

Being an expert caster is certainly not a necessity; but it can be an aid in making fishing more enjoyable. A child who has no casting ability but swings the lure around his head, as he would a sling, and tosses the lure to the correct spot, can out-fish any expert caster who doesn't know why or where he should be making those beautiful casts.

In our approach to fishing reservoirs, we will use the complete presentation of lures — both casting and trolling.

Man-made reservoirs, be they Highland, Lowland, or Flatland reservoirs, have certain basic conditions and structures that fishermen must be familiar with if they are to be successful.

This particular discussion will deal with a specific type structure that will be present in most reservoirs. We will not at this time deal with those which are not of the norm, or some unusual or distinctive feature, nor will we go into the many typical structures which may be found. These will come later.

In Figure I, we have the most common structure that fish will use on

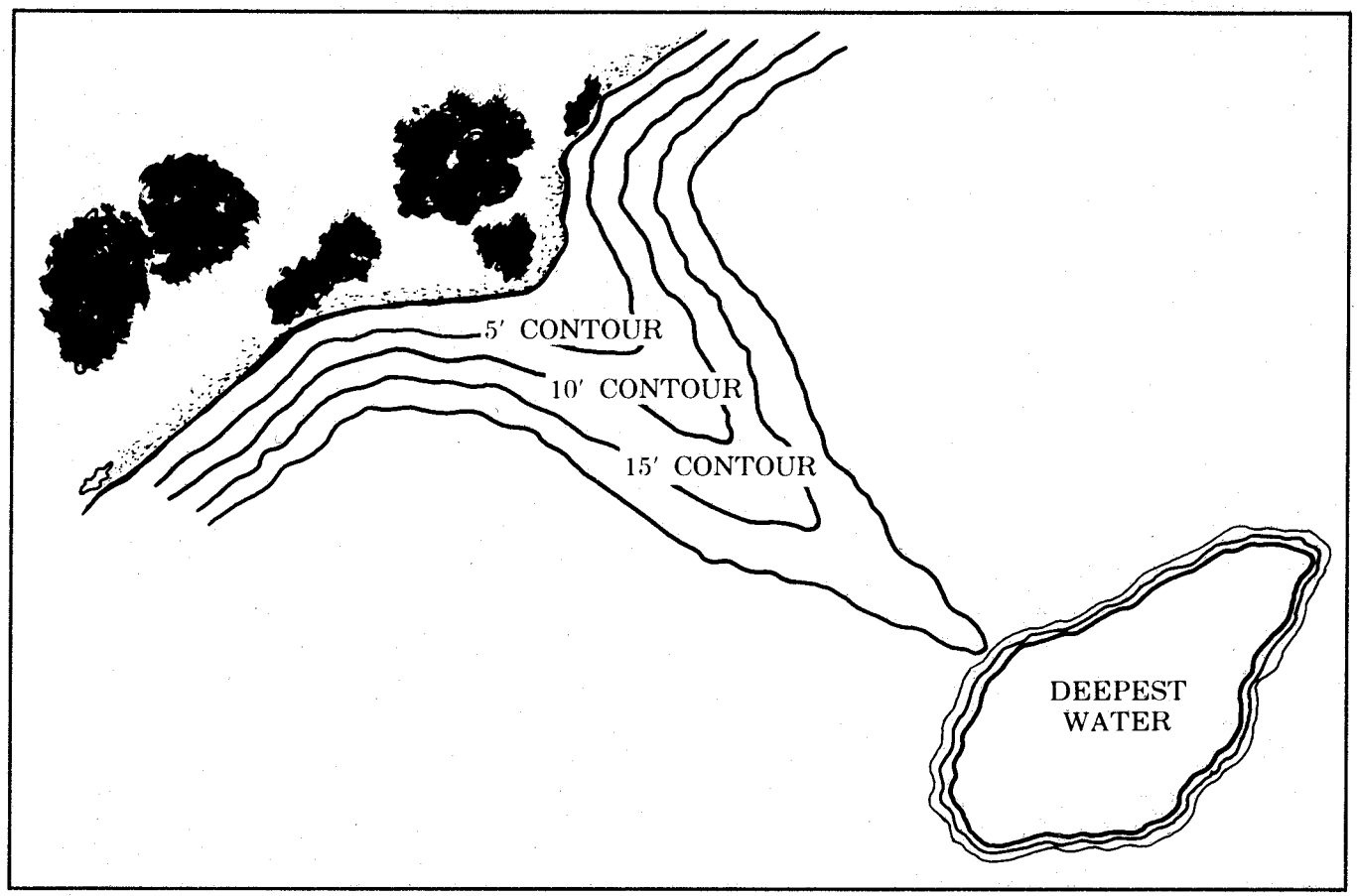


Figure I

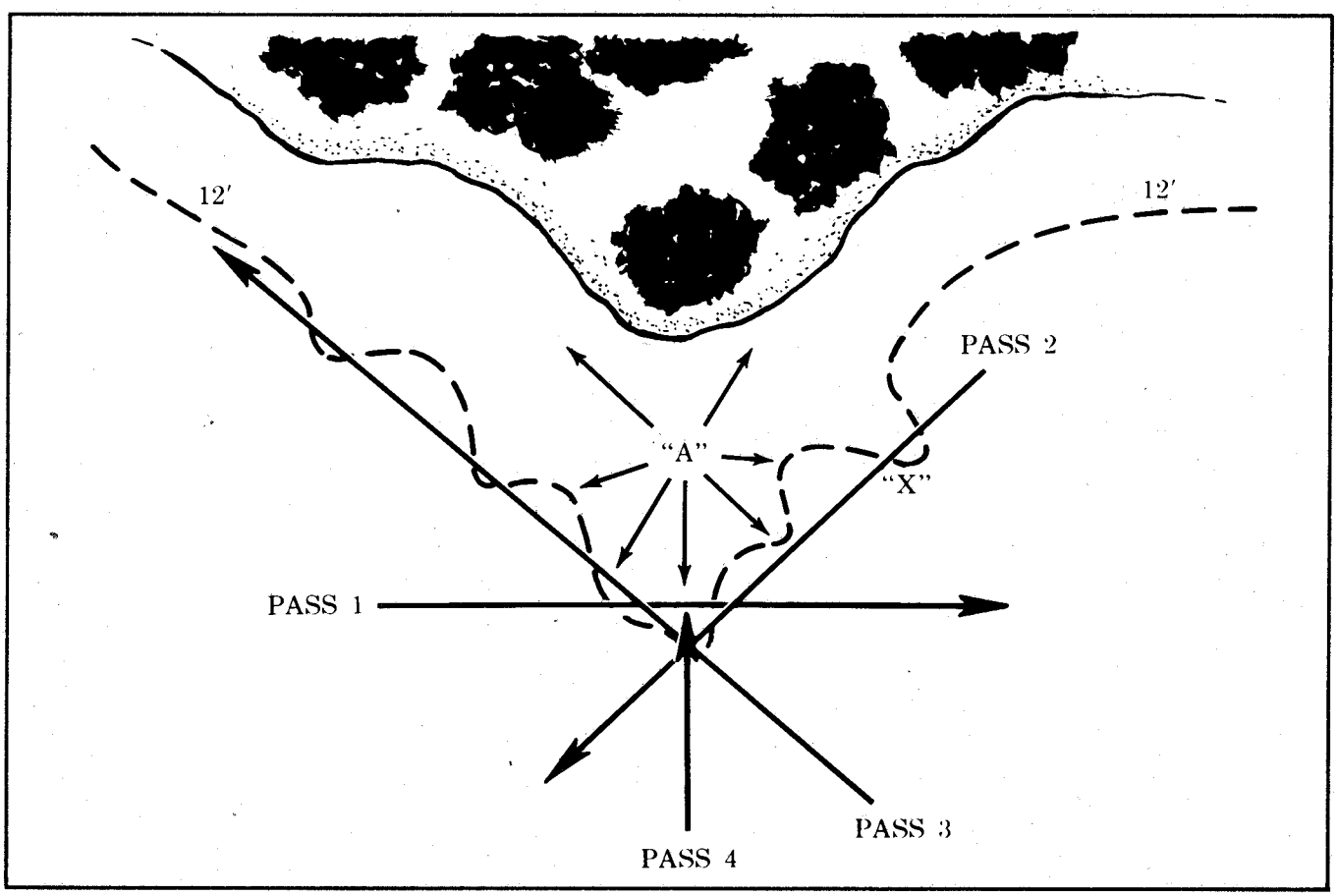


Figure II

their movements and migrations from deep water to shallow, and vice versa. This particular type of structure is usually associated with a point, or an extrusion in the shoreline.

This is a bar, or a ridge-like structure, that extends to the deepest water in the area. For a bar to be good — that is, used by fish as a migration route — *it must extend ALL the way to deep water!* It will *not* be used as a migration route *unless* it extends the *total* distance. This particular feature is true of *any* structure that is productive. Structure MUST have immediate access to deep water! It is this feature that enables us to begin to interpret a structure and determine whether or not it will be good. A fish *must* be able to see, immediately, the route he will take as he begins his movement toward shallower water. He doesn't have the capacity to figure out that if he moved in a southwest direction for a distance of 150 feet he might find the most beautiful structure in the entire lake. Fish will not cross a flat area, with no visible "sign posts," to reach a structure. Likewise, he will not use a structure that does not have immediate access to deep water — his only escape route.

This type of structure comes in all sizes and shapes. Some are short and steep, while others run for distances; some are straight, while others wind and bend; some are clean, while others are dirty; some have soft bottoms, while others are firm and hard; some have weeds to certain depths, while others haven't so much as a blade of grass; some have brush, while others have stumps, rock piles, dips, humps, sunken items, and breaklines; some are uniform in shape (as shown), while others are wide with many "fingers" extruding; some are easily fished, while others are difficult; some will require trolling, while others will require casting; some will produce fish, while others will not.

Whatever the size or shape, or whatever conditions exist — *interpretation* of the structures must be made to determine whether or not they will be productive, where on structure the fish will be found under certain weather and water conditions, and the proper procedures for testing all sections.

Figure II shown is a top view of a common-type bar which extends out from shore. It has a clean bottom and a "breakline" at the 12 foot depth. The breakline in this case does *not* run around the structure in a smooth, straight line. It has several "fingers", or extrusions, located all around the greater structure. These fingers are found, to some degree, on most good structures. When movement occurs, fish will usually come up on only one of these fingers. It could be the finger at the tip end of the bar, or it could be on one of the others, and it could occur on *either* side of the finger. The actual bottom conditions, and the small breaks that exist, will determine which finger will be used and on which side contact is first made. The situation presented to the fisherman is to find the fish. Therefore, he must cover the whole area completely, and his lures must be in position to do so.

As a fisherman improves in his interpretation, he should be able to look at the structure — either by working lures or with a depth sounder — and immediately know which finger will be used, and the exact spot fish will first make "contact". Determining this is important, for there will be days when conditions put fish on structure for *only a few minutes* and in a very non-chasing mood.

To cast the area, it would be best to place the boat in the shallower water, such as position "A". The caster could then fan-cast the area; taking enough time with different lures to thoroughly check all depths and sections of the structure.

To effectively troll this area and be sure that all areas are worked, several trolling passes would have to be made. The average fisherman, when trolling, will make one half-hearted pass at a structure, then go his merry way, leaving most of the area untouched. It is foolish to find good structure, give it a pass and leave it *unfished*. If fish are not moving in this area, very likely they are *not* moving in another!

To check out a structure such as this, at least four trolling passes would have to be made, as indicated. To *fully* check out the structure, two additional passes would have to be made; trolling passes 2 and 3 would be made over, but IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION!

Let us assume that fish actually come up on the short finger at posi-

tion "X". Let us also assume that weather and water conditions are such that they do not come all the way to the top of this particular finger at the time we are trolling. Pass Number 2 comes up on the finger on the opposite side from the fish, the lure hits the top of the bar, but when it comes off it does not reach down on the other side; consequently, the lure passes over the school of fish at the inside base of this finger, *missing them completely!*

Now let us reverse this trolling pass and come from the other direction. It doesn't take much imagination to see where the lure would come in contact with the finger on *this* pass.

When trolling the shallows with the smaller series of lures, the contours of the bottom are followed, and the path of the boat may vary in several directions. BUT, when working deeper on structure, all trolling passes are made *in a straight line;* only in this way can a structure be fished, mapped, or interpreted.

The question is often asked, "How much time should be spent working a bar before leaving it?"

This question cannot be answered with a flat statement of so many minutes or hours. The situations that exist would determine just how much time should be spent on a particular structure. The nearest thing to a flat statement should be, "As long as necessary to be sure it has been thoroughly worked at all depths and all speeds. Then periodically return to the structure and work again to see if migration has occurred."

As we approach this question, we must bear in mind a very important fact — fish do not move constantly nor consistently.

There are several factors that determine just how much time is spent on a particular structure. The time element could differ if the structure was being cast only or trolled only.

In checking a structure by trolling, enough time must be spent to make enough passes so all sections have been worked. The size of the bar would determine the time needed to do the job. A short, straight bar would certainly require less time than a long bar that might veer in another direction at the end, or contain a number of fingers.

In casting, the bar would be worked with the boat in such a position so that all shallows in the near

Often at the end of the day, when the light is almost gone, you will find the fish coming in to the end of a shallow bar such as this. Usually, they will go no further than that tree or the weedline. They act as barriers, "breaks" actually, to keep them from migrating further. If trolling, troll close enough to almost "knock" your lure against the edges of that timber and those weeds. This is a typical structure of an older, mature impoundment.

Buck Perry has the ability to hold an audience spellbound with fishing talk for hours. They just don't want to go home, they want to hear more!

This was a standing-room only crowd for a recent Buck Perry seminar in Milwaukee. The room was hot, stuffy, uncomfortable, smoke-laden and jammed . . . but nobody left before it was over! You are looking at the faces of fishermen hungry for fish-catching knowledge. They came from as far away as Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa and Minnesota. Virtually all of them are our readers.

area could be worked with as few casts as possible. A half-dozen or so casts should cover the shallow water. When working the deep water sections, five or six casts with a walking lure, then the same amount with a jump-type lure, should cover the area for that particular boat position.

Another factor that would determine how long a particular structure is worked is the size of the body of water, and just how many structures are available. Some bodies of water have many potentially productive structures, while others may have only one. If a number of structures exist, then *each* is checked to determine which has the best potential. A more thorough check of the better one, or ones, should then be made. If only one is available, then *all efforts* would be here.

If good productive structure is being worked from a boat without a motor, then the fisherman most likely should spend his time here. Without a motor, it could be difficult to move around fast enough to find another structure.

When weather conditions indicate there will be no mass movement of fish, it would be wise to concentrate on a structure known to be productive. Under these conditions, movements are short and you had better be in position when it occurs. It could be over while you are between structures. If movement occurs on one structure, it should occur on *any* of the other good ones.

The amount of traffic that is present at the time would, also, have a bearing on the time spent on a structure. If it's too great to allow working effectively, move on and work the structure another time when skiers and joy riders are less numerous.

If fishing pressure is heavy, many structures would already be occupied. If you have a good one it might be best to stay with it, or else somebody could take over while you are gone, and a lot of time lost in trying to get another.

Each situation and each structure will determine the amount of time to be spent on a particular one. The main thing is that enough time be spent so that you are confident that you know it thoroughly and that no movement has occurred without you knowing it.