

Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY

PART IX

EDITOR'S FOREWORD:

We can never say enough how privileged we are that Buck Perry has chosen *Fishing Facts* to be the vehicle through which he is sharing his knowledge with fishermen everywhere.

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.

We have had countless requests for reprints of this entire series of Buck's articles which began in our June 1972 issue. We are pleased to announce that reprints ARE NOW AVAILABLE at 25¢ for each part, postpaid.

To some, the price of 25¢ for a comparatively few pages of printed matter may seem high as compared to this entire magazine for the single copy price of 75¢ and the subscription copy at about 50¢. That difference is easily understood by those who know about the high cost per each for printing small quantities of anything. The information they contain is, of course, priceless.

If you wish to order reprints of any or all parts of this series, please enclose 25¢ for each part desired, and send your order to Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., P. O. Box 4169, Milwaukee, Wis. 53210.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, I was covering most of the south "preachin'" fish behavior, the importance of structure, how weather and water played an important part in successful fishing and what was



Get the heck out of the trees!

necessary to catch big fish consistently. During this period, I ran into many 'Yankees' from the north who were in the south for the winter. Many of them were shown what SPOONPLUGGING would do.

It took several years for me to find out why I never heard from any of them when they returned north and fished their local waters. It seems that some of them had reasoned that bass in the south were different from those of the north, so the same techniques would not apply. But the main reason given for not applying Spoonplugging to their local fishing was because their natural lakes were full of weeds, and it simply "would not go over in their type of lakes." (See Fishing Talk on page 6 of this issue)

I asked many if they had tried it. Most of them admitted that they hadn't bothered. Those that had made an attempt reported that all they could catch was weeds.

My reply was, "Why didn't you get the heck out of the weeds?"

It took quite a few years, and a great number of eye-opening luncheon catches from their waters, to show them that Spoonplugging WAS the answer to fishing their natural lakes, even with weeds.

For a number of years I have pointed out to the shoreline fisher-

man and the dyed-in-the-wool weed caster, that the day would come when they would be forced to leave the shorelines and weeds in many of the natural lakes, whether they wanted to or not. Since many of the lakes are completely ringed with vacation homes and fishing piers, the waters so full of vacationers and joy-riders that unless drastic changes were forthcoming, they could even be forced from the lake completely, as far as fishing was concerned.

Unfortunately, this situation has come to pass in too many areas where natural lakes are the predominant fishing waters. It is for this reason that I stress the importance of reservoirs. For the foreseeable future, reservoirs (man-made lakes) will be the fishing waters for this country. Those of you who have done most of your fishing in the smaller natural lakes will find it tough sledding when faced with huge impoundments. Just looking out across that large expanse of water will give many of you the shakes. Your first reaction will be, "Where in the heck do I start?"

In recent years, many reservoirs have been built where huge areas of

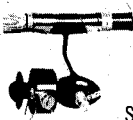
On the following page, the picture that is truly worth a thousand words in describing some of the joys of fishing.

Because we spend so much time trying to teach you the METHODS which will enable you to become a successful catcher of fish, some of our readers may get the impression that we have no appreciation for the other things which make our wonderful sport so unique and so great. Not so! However, as Buck Perry points out (and we agree), a degree of success is essential to the enjoyment of any sport, and knowledge is the KEY to fishing success!

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trees were left standing, and these trees were practically covered, by the rising water. For the mass of you, facing a reservoir covered with trees presents a formidable problem. It brings to mind the old adage, "You can't see the forest for the trees."

I recall vividly the first time I took Mama (my Good Wife) fishing in a reservoir where the trees had been left standing. We were fishing the trees and forest areas in South Carolina's Lake Marion, in the Santee-Cooper complex. I refer to it as a complex due to the fact that this large body of water is made up of two reservoirs. One is Lake Marion, the so-called upper reservoir built on the Santee River, and the lower Lake Moultrie located on the Cooper River. The two bodies of water are joined by a large man-made canal. The water flows from Lake Marion through the canal to Lake Moultrie. When the reservoirs were built most of the lower lake was cleared of trees, but in Lake Marion, large forest areas were left standing and subsequently flooded.

Santee-Cooper has long been renowned, not only for black bass fishing, but for the land-locked salt water strippers which it contains. The thought of catching some lunker fish, however, was not uppermost in Mama's mind as we fished the tree areas many years ago.

Her constant complaint was, "Dern it, I've got a dang hang again", or, "For heaven's sake, can't we get out of these trees?", and, "Why are we beating our brains out blind casting. We know so little about this reservoir, and with the present weather we should be trolling to locate some fish instead of playing snag-and-peek among the trees."

I tried to explain to her that in many instances the trees were standing on good structure and, regardless of the trees, the fish still used the structure for basic movements and migrations. Also, the trees themselves served as breaks for the fish to pause or stop at — and, in turn, the fisherman could see these breaks, so here the fisherman and the fish could come together.

A Good Wife doesn't always accept fishing facts. Her comment was, "Let's get out of these dang trees, or you can take me home."

It just so happened that this reservoir was typical of most where many

trees were left standing, we COULD get out of the trees quite easily. We got out of the trees and shortly after were in a group of lunker fish where we both had one coming at the same time. "I told you so", she remarked, "And don't you ever take me back into another blind jungle again."

I haven't.

I later had to admit to her that in most cases, the best structure and most productive water is in those areas where you would *not* be bothered with trees.

Today, many fishermen have the same reaction as did my wife, when faced with the problem of standing trees. Please note that I said "standing trees", not brush or bushes. These are an entirely different subject.

Much has been said and written about the new reservoirs which are being built throughout the country where masses of trees were left standing. Much of it lauding the successful catches made, with much emphasis being placed on fishing in the trees. Many fine pictures have been made which show the fishermen out among the trees. As a consequence, many fishermen have flocked to these new reservoirs with great expectations, but often with less spectacular results.

In talking about reservoirs of this particular type, let us consider them in a similar light such as I faced when fishing natural lakes which contained a heavy growth of weeds. The problem is not only when to start, but is also *where not to start*. A common denominator prevails in all fishing waters which gives to each a sameness, and you must know exactly what to do in order to arrive at productive structure and then make a decent catch. You must have an understanding of structure and the ability to put this understanding to work successfully, regardless of the water or the problem encountered.

In any new reservoir the water is very rich in food content. This condition produces very fast growing fish. A *growing* fish strikes, or grabs, most anything that looks like food. In this yearling stage, the fish are many in numbers, widely distributed and eager to take most anything thrown at them. Large schools of these yearling fish can be found throughout most areas of the reservoir. Thus, most any fisherman able to see and dunk a bait catches at least some yearling fish.

Some of the areas in a newly formed reservoir produce better than others, as is natural; but, as the reservoir gets older and the fish get bigger, the most productive areas become increasingly less in number. This is the time when the mass of you face quite a few problems. You have no idea where to fish, are limited to blind casting, and in most cases are limited to certain types of lures that may not give good depth or speed control. Many of you have been so "brainwashed" with trees that you go straight to them, blundering around among them like a lost dog as far as structure and fish are concerned.

As the reservoir gets older, structure becomes all the more important as it is the key to fish movement. This same rule holds true whether fishing in or out of trees. So if you fish the forest areas, you must be able to locate the most productive areas; and the tree areas that will produce fish are located on structure.

At this time, two things stand out in my mind. First, as these reservoirs get older, less will be said and written about them, and fewer and fewer fishermen will be flocking to them. Second, now is the time to start stressing the importance of structure, and to put trees in their right perspective. If this is not done, then the time will come when truly you — as a fisherman — will find that you really "can't see the forest for the trees". In other words, now is the time to start getting you OUT OF THE TREES. In doing this, I am not saying that areas with trees do not produce. What I am saying is that the day comes in the life of any reservoir when it gets some age and the fish get "sot" in their ways. The bonanza is over for those who could not see the "reservoir for the trees." And now, instead of telling you to get the heck out of the weeds, I am now going to say, "Get the heck out of the trees."

When thinking about reservoirs where trees were left standing, I put them in three categories:

- (1) Those COMPLETELY covered with trees and vegetation.
- (2) Those where areas were cleared of trees except in the upper shallower-end areas, or in coves, bays, or feeder streams.
- (3) Those where the major portions are covered with exposed

standing trees, but do contain some clear areas.

To clarify these somewhat, a little more detail may be in order.

When thinking about No. 1, where the lakes or reservoirs are COMPLETELY covered with trees, I put little emphasis on these, as they are usually shallow and the total area covered with water is small. These should be put more into the category of a pond. They are usually found in flat, swampy areas and cannot be classified as a major source of fishing water.

In this type of water, you would have to follow the old stream bed to locate any appreciable structure or water depths. In some, you will not find any indication of a channel or deeper water. In this case, it would be necessary to move back into the growth and observe the shoreline. There may be times when the shallow shoreline is difficult to reach, but most of the time enough can be seen so that any extrusion or other features of the shoreline would indicate structure.

In category No. 2 you will find many large reservoirs, which are major sources of fishing water. As stated, the major portion of the reservoir has been cleared. Only the upper shallower areas, coves, feeder streams, etc., have standing trees.

In most instances, the area with trees should *not* be considered as the major area to fish. For those of you who have knowledge of the seasonal migration and movements of fish, you are aware that you would use these areas for short periods during the season. These periods being during the colder and earlier parts of the season.

The above statement will no doubt raise a round of questions. But this is a subject that requires another time. For the present, and in the overall picture, these areas are "off" season; and, for all practical purposes are of less importance as fishing water when viewed in the light of the rest of the reservoir.

Category No. 3 is the (major) reservoir for our discussion. A number of these have been built over the country during the past years. This type is usually built in rather flat country, and should be classified more as a Flatland Reservoir, rather than a Lowland or a Highland type.

These reservoirs, and the subsequent lake, covers a large acreage



It's pretty hard to satisfy the curiosity of a five year old and a seven year old! That's Buck's grandson, Jeffrey Smith on the left, and his friend (name unknown at this time) on the right. One thing these two boys have learned and that is that fish like these are in our lakes and can be caught!



Buck holds high a lunker northern, the first that grandson Jeffrey Smith had ever seen. "Just you wait, Paw Paw, I'm going to catch one like that, too!" We'll bet on that; Jeffrey had already caught two of the four bass shown in another picture, and with Buck Perry as his guide . . . well!

ALUAC

of flat or semi-flat country. In most instances, the overall depth is not great and many large *flat areas* exist which are completely covered with exposed standing trees.

At first glance, it appears that the whole dang lake is covered with trees; and, if you are not in the frame of mind to cope with trees or do not know how to go about fishing them, it would appear that this is a body of water that should be passed up.

But, if you will take a closer look at the whole reservoir, then you begin to see that you CAN get out of the trees, AND, a still closer observation will show that better structure and good fishing can be found in the cleared areas, more so than in the areas completely covered with trees. One look out across that dense growth of trees can show just how flat and void of structure the area is. You may not see a single indication that a ridge or any other type of structure exists. It appears that all of the trees are standing on a great big solid flat. Your observation may not be far wrong, as in most cases this is absolutely true.

I prefer to think of reservoirs, where standing trees are present, as having three (3) main areas where productive structure is located, and where any type of lures or bait can be presented in any desired manner. AND these areas are free of trees.

- (1) Former farming lands.
- (2) River and feeder stream channels
- (3) Man-made structures.

In the case of former farming lands, you should take the time to drive around the impoundment to see where any former cleared lands existed. This will not only show you areas where trees are lacking, but will show the potential structure in the area. This journey will also give one of the most important observations that you can make, and that observation is the COLOR of the water that is present in the different parts of the reservoir. In the final analysis, fishing the best available (darker) water color could be the control as to whether or not fish are caught on that particular fishing trip.

Working the former farming lands, both casting and trolling, would present no problem. Finding good productive structure could also be done easily, if available.

The importance of the old river or feeder stream channels (No. 2),

cannot be stressed too much. They represent the deepest water in the reservoir and in most all of the reservoirs of this type and nature, these channels ARE THE HOME OF THE FISH. There will be very few instances where the deep water sanctuary is outside of these channels. As stated previously, reservoirs that appear to be covered with standing trees are relatively shallow impoundments which are located in flatlands, and the only deep water in the entire lake will be found in the old stream channels.

The breaklines, breaks, structures and trees that will produce fish are found along the edges, or near edges of these channels. Note that this includes the tree areas that will be productive.

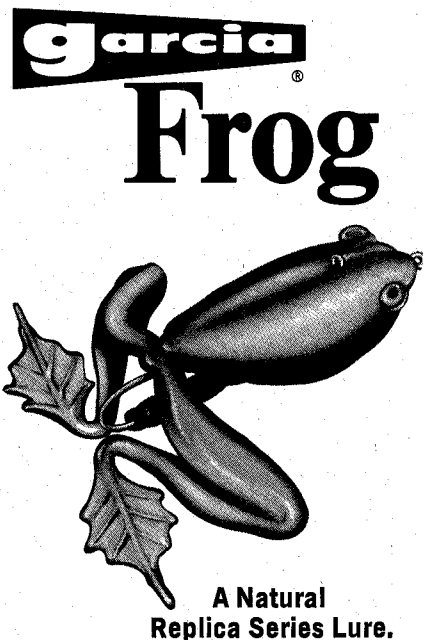
In No. 3, man-made structures produce some of the better structures found in reservoirs. These structures are usually very easily observed and located, and are usually cleaner of brush and debris than any other areas to be found. Presenting lures on man-made structures, both casting and trolling, normally requires less skill and presents fewer problems than on natural structures.

Man-made structures would be listed as:

- (1) Old submerged roadbeds.
- (2) Causeways, or roads, that were constructed across certain portions of the reservoir during construction.
- (3) The dam area.
- (4) Power lines or boat trails.

It is surprising how the old roadbeds (1) in the immediate area of the newly formed reservoirs were constructed on good structure. Long sloping bars and ridges that led out to the channel of the gullies, creeks, or rivers were used since this was the easiest approach to crossing these areas. Then when the area was flooded, these old roadbeds became ideal structure and migration routes for the fish to use. They produced visible structure and breaks from the deepest water to the shallowest. Some of my fondest memories are those of fine catches made while trolling a clanking lure up or down one of these old roadbeds. Some of the hard roadbeds give walking lures a lot of abuse, but this is much better than staying continually hung up and losing lures in a tangle of trees or brush.

When trolling these areas, there is



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no doubt as to whether or not your lures are in position. All that is necessary is to make straight line runs, covering all sections. It is hardly possible to cast the wrong areas when casting an old roadbed, provided you cast all sections and work all depth with different retrieve speeds. Efforts, both casting and trolling, should be concentrated where the roadbed crosses any channel. The fish movement originates here, and most of the time the migration will not reach far from the channel.

(2) the causeways and roads that cross portions of the reservoir are too often overlooked. You will find in many instances that entrance to the dock facilities is located adjacent to an existing causeway or road; and often these are passed up as you zoom across the water headed for the trees. Not only will the adjacent areas of the causeway be clear of trees, due to construction procedures, but the structure and riprap may be the most productive fishing spot in the whole lake. Normally, these causeways will have a bridge at some point, and usually the bridge spans the old river channel. There are cases where the bridge portion does not cross the old channel, but it crosses a man-made or a dug channel, and the surrounding water will be the deepest in the area. These causeways give structure immediately from the deepest water in the area to the shallows. The causeway and its riprap gives a clear route for migration.

I normally look at a road map before arriving at the reservoir to see if a service road (causeway) crosses the reservoir at any place; and the longer it is, the better. If one exists, this is normally the area I head for. Working the causeway and riprap is one sure way to be assured of good structure — structure that is clean and workable. Many times, I do not have to go to any other area to get fish. There have been times when other areas would not produce, and I would ride quite a distance to locate a causeway, and fish. These are also excellent areas to escape from heavy wind and wave action; in fact, at times these are the only areas that can be fished if extremely high winds prevail.

To fish these causeways trolling, each size lure is "jammed" right up against the rocks, with each one

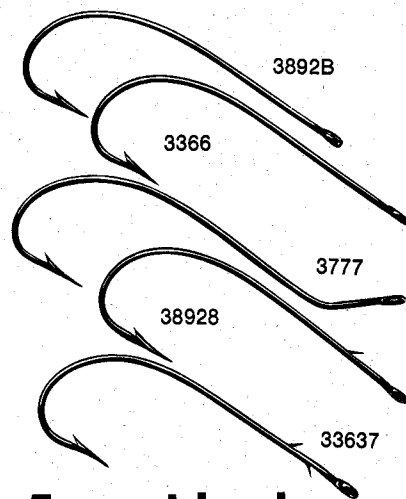
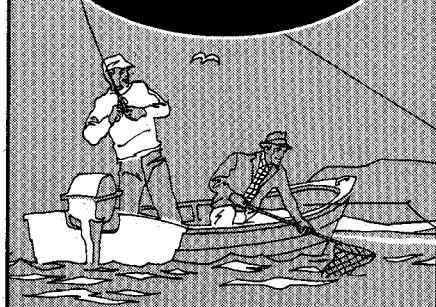
walked or skipped along the top of the rocks, or whatever material was used in construction. You will soon find that a certain section, or sections (depending upon the length of the riprap) will be more productive. This is due to a bottom condition being created during construction that made that particular area a little different from the surrounding area, causing the fish to move up to or on these particular spots.

When casting the sides of a causeway, I prefer to locate the boat very close to shore so that I can make the casts up and down the shoreline. In this way, all depths can be checked thoroughly, and the lures held in position for the total length of the retrieve. The boat can be moved along the shoreline with little effort, and if there is a slight wind blowing, the boat will move satisfactorily by itself with little work on the part of the caster. The boat may bump the sides of the riprap once in a while, but, so what. About the only time I position the boat out from the shallows, and make the cast in toward the shoreline, is when I have a group of fish located in the shallows.

No. (3), the dam area. Normally, in reservoirs that contain large areas of standing trees, you can just about assume that the area where the dam is located will be quite a wide area since a long dam is usually constructed. This means that, due to the construction process, this area was cleared of trees, making quite a large area with clean structure available. The dam area will have the deepest water in the lake, and in general will contain older and larger fish.

If at all possible, I try to drive into the dam area and look at the size of the dam, the type of construction used and determine the color of the water. Sometimes, the best water color will be located in the dam area, as well as the cleanest and most productive structures. In very few instances have I found these clean areas not workable, and this was in those isolated instances when moss on the bottom, due to pollution, made presentation of lures difficult. The clean structures found in the dam area allows presentation of lures to be made both casting and trolling with a minimum of trouble. The long dams provide good riprap fishing, the old ramps, borrow pits,

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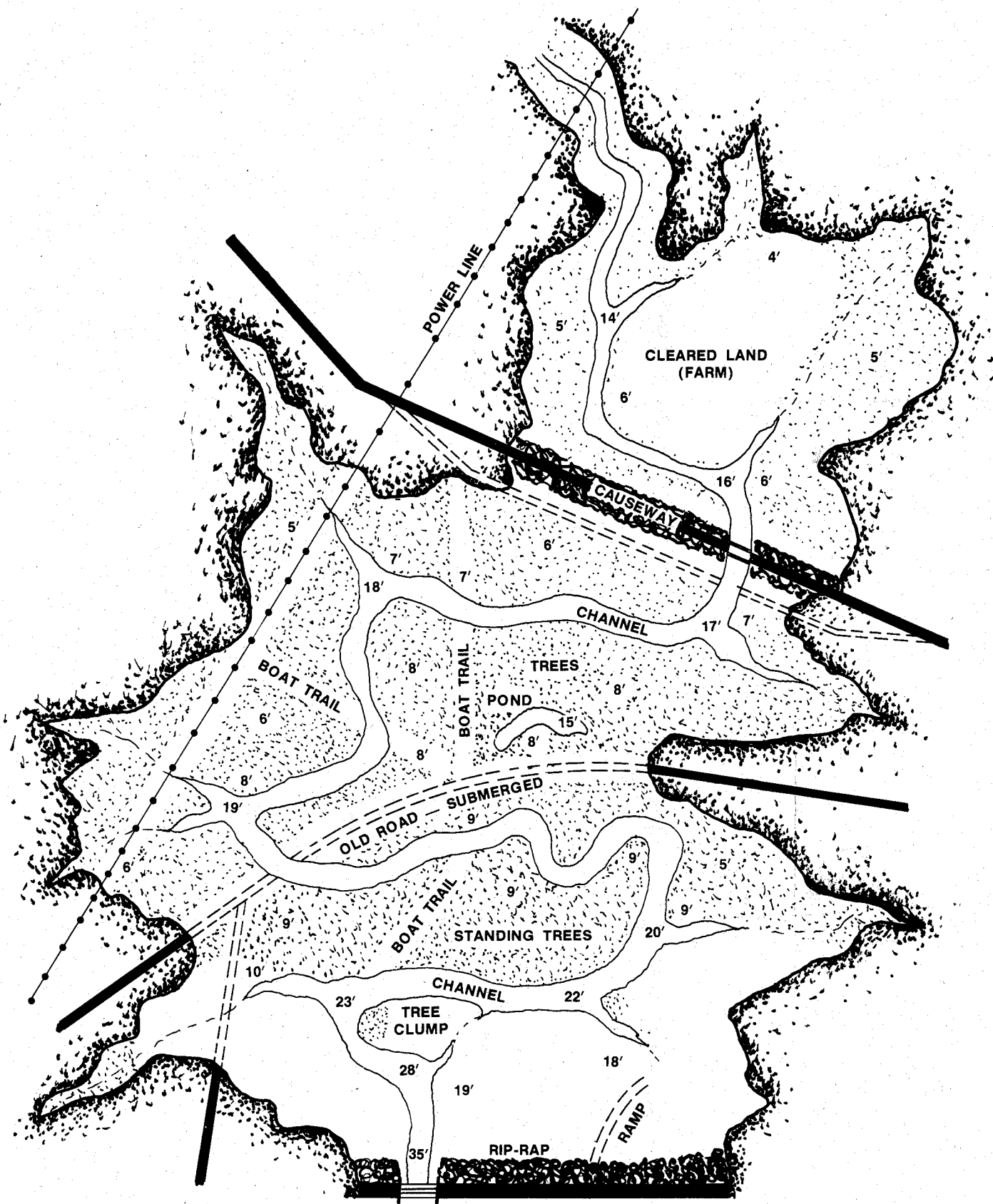
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etc., provide some of the best structure to be found. And, as is often the case in flatlands, when the wind is a problem the dams can serve as sheltered areas when the need arises.

No. (4), power lines and boat trails. Although, these could not rightly be called structure, they are listed here as they provide areas clear of standing trees and will at times contain or cross productive water. Too often, though, these trails are cut through trees which are located on large flat areas, void of any deep water or structure, and you end up fishing in the trees or the edges of the trees where there are no fish. It's too bad that these trails were not cut to productive structure, and the areas marked in some way to show where fish could be caught. These trails could then serve as great aids. But if you use these trails only in the light of expecting to stumble upon a productive spot, then your chances are very unlikely and these trails will serve no useful purpose. In this case, it would be better if no trails were cut at all. If you gotta fish them, work the areas where they cross a channel of same description.

To emphasize some of the points brought out, note the sketch and comments.

Note that the drawing is a top view of a typical flatland reservoir in which masses of trees were left standing.

In observing the depths on the sketch, they indicate a typical depth situation for a reservoir of this type. While these depths can vary in different reservoirs, the depths among the trees is relatively shallow, very seldom exceeding 15-20 feet. The depths in the trees could be greater or less, and the depths in the channels could vary accordingly. But, in most cases these depths are about what should be expected in reservoirs of this nature.

The normal main stream channel winds and turns as it crosses the reservoir. The overall depth of the channel will not vary a great deal from one section to that of another. The best structure on the channel will exist at all "turns" and where the feeder stream channel enters the main channel. You should check these areas thoroughly.

The deepest water in the channel is found on the turns, and the portion of this structure that normally produces best will be found on the

"outside" of the turn. However, in the overall picture, the structure that will be the most productive spot along the channel is the structure that is adjacent to where the side feeder stream enters the main channel.

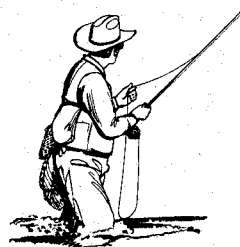
Note the areas where the boat trails were cut through the standing trees. This is typical of most reservoirs. The trails go out across the large flats with no regard to structure or to the most productive spots along the channel. In most reservoirs these tree areas have an overall depth that is normally under 15 feet, and, in many cases, much less?

Often, where a sizeable pond or lake has been submerged, the trails will lead to these areas. At other times they will not. You should be aware of any deep water pond or slough that may be located back among the trees, as they often contain fish.

The two areas that should get a lot of attention are the causeways and the area adjacent to the dam. These areas have clean workable structure. The dam area, especially, requires a lot of attention. The deepest water in the lake occurs here, the structure is normally better and more varied, and it would be in this particular area that clumps of standing trees may be observed. In most instances, these clumps of trees represent a hump or some break in the structure, the meandering of channels, and so on.

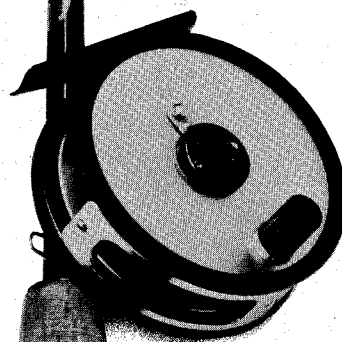
Most of the reservoirs built today have a map of some nature available. Sometimes these maps may be purchased at the dock facilities or at an area sporting goods dealer. Many of the maps show great detail. Some are in color with all of the tree areas, channels, boat trails, causeways, cleared areas and water depths all clearly marked. It is always wise to purchase one of these maps if they are available, and they should be carefully studied before going on the lake.

My closing comment is to take with a grain of salt any suggestions from those around the boat dock who tell you to take off back into the trees if you want to catch fish. In most cases, it's a bum steer, as far as locating the most productive structure in the reservoir. Just keep in mind that you can do a lot better by "getting the heck out of the trees"!



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