

Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY

Part X

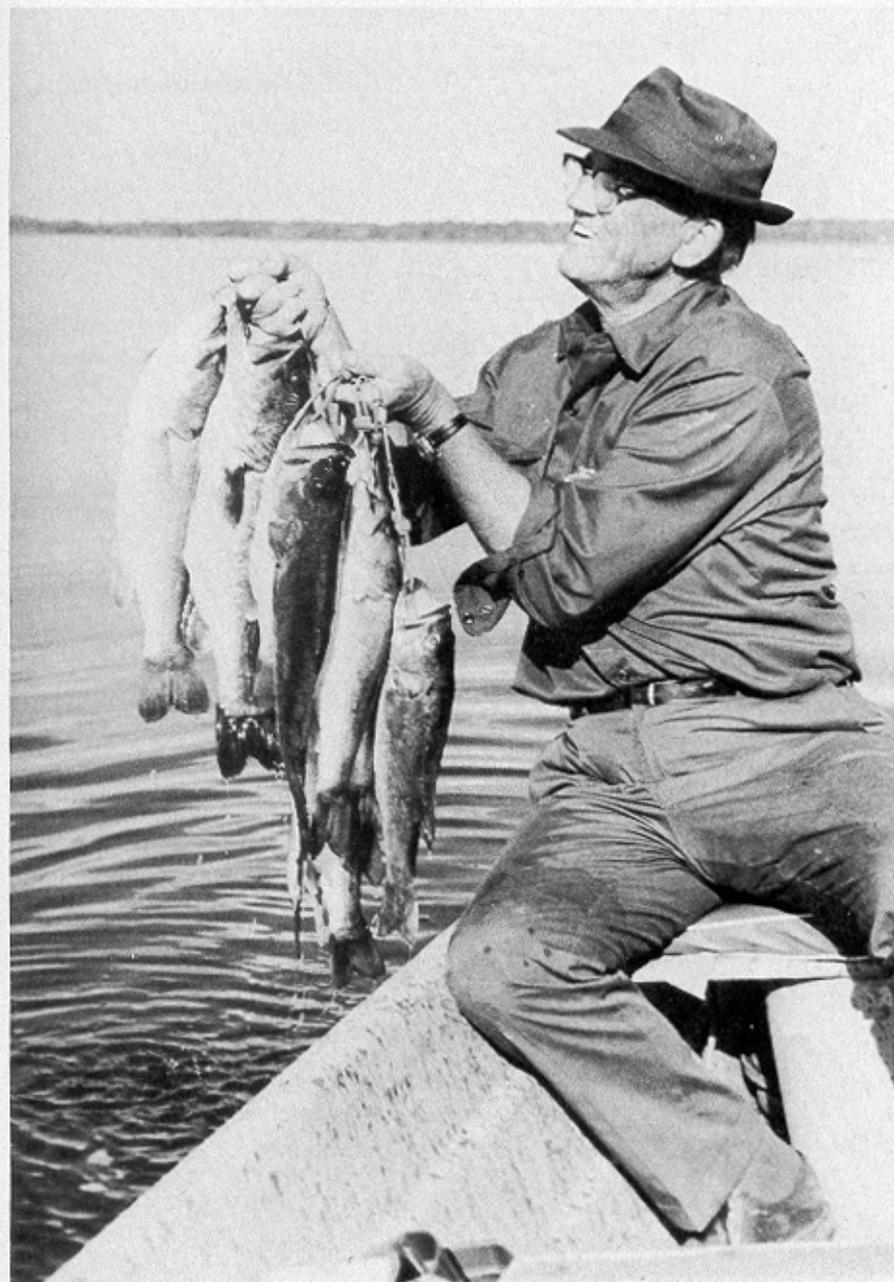
We better look at structure from a seasonal standpoint.

Early season can be tough for many fishermen. Most rush the season and forget that water does not warm up as fast as "fishing fever". Under the colder or early season fishing conditions, we often forget also, that fishing can be quite different from that experienced last summer.

In our study of structure, weather and water conditions, we normally think in terms of a DAILY observation. After all, we are interested in the condition that exists the day we go fishing.

This is good, and necessary — even essential. But when we consider the many weather and water conditions that exist from one part of the season to another, and the many different types of structure found in reservoirs, we are faced with the fact that if we want to be fishing the most productive structures, at all times, in reservoirs (man-made lakes) we better look at structure from a SEASONAL standpoint. In other words — are we on the best structure *for this time of year?*

The makeup of most natural lakes, and especially those of small acreage, is such that they do not have as many types of structure as do reservoirs (man-made lakes.) Normally, in natural lakes, the deep water is in the form of a hole rather than a channel. This hole, or deep water, may be limited in area and may be located in only one small area of the lake. The contours of the bottom, in



Buck Perry has been catching stringers of fish like this for more than 30 years. Our files are so full of pictures of Buck's catches that once last year we goofed and ran several pictures of the same catch. That sure was a mistake. We could fill an entire issue with Buck's pictures of successful catches, there's no need to run duplicates!

Photo by Carol Pazik

Most average anglers make most of their catches in the shallows in the spring when the fish are most vulnerable. They then spend the rest of the year fishing the same places they caught fish successfully in the spring . . . and the rest of the year they wonder why they're not catching fish. Buck Perry tells WHY in this article.

natural lakes, are more uniform without the abruptness and changes of a reservoir.

Most natural lakes are also quite predictable in regard to what is present. The deep water consists of a hole or holes, most structure is in the form of 'bars' which run out from the shoreline, and some lakes may have humps or underwater islands. If you go from one side of the lake to

the other, or from one end to the other, there is, in most cases, not a great deal of change in structure types. The depths may vary to some degree, but in the overall picture, the fisherman would not be concerned too much with which good structure he should fish — regardless of what time of year it is.

This is not the case when we consider reservoirs (man-made lakes).

Here we must consider structure from the SEASONAL point of view if we want to be on the most productive ones. In reservoirs we have a multitude of different types of structures. We have steep shores, flats, long bars, river and feeder stream channels, coves, bays, deltas, underwater islands, humps, etc. We have many man-made structures such as; submerged roadbeds, causeways,

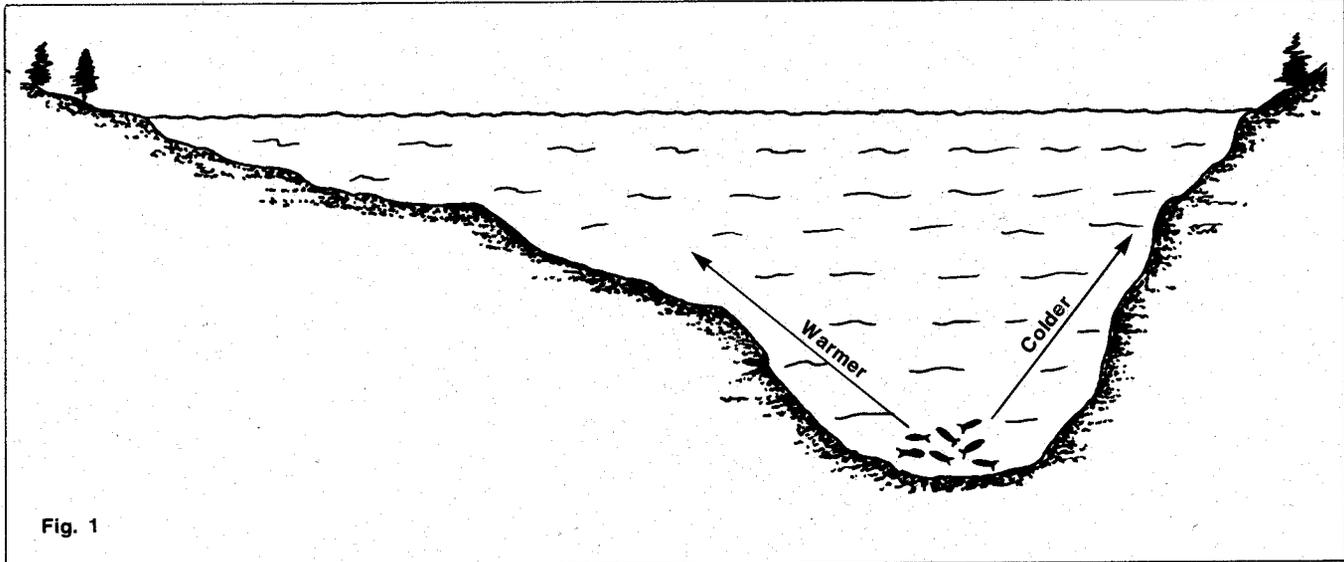


Fig. 1

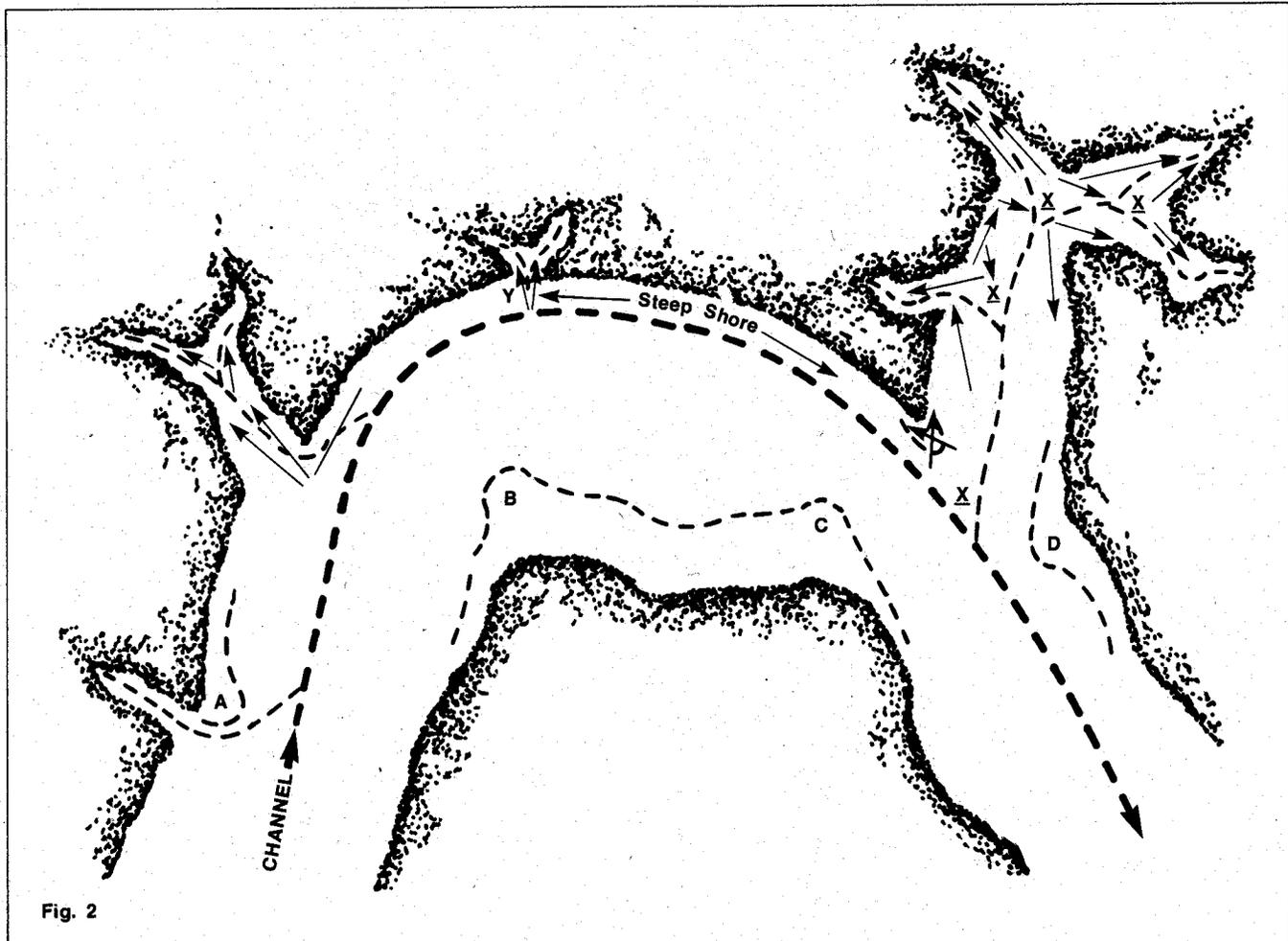


Fig. 2

dams, borrow pits, etc. All of which means that in most parts of a reservoir the structure may, or will be completely different from those in another part of the reservoir. AND that this need not only be true from the lower end, up to the upper end, but could be true in just a short hop across the channel. It is for this rea-

In this study we will concern ourselves primarily with largemouth bass rather than other species. However, *it would be well to view all species in the light of the following.* Largemouth bass, as a rule, do not venture any great distance from a particular home area. We will *view our study as his growing up in a particular area, then dying of old age in this one, home area.*

In order for us to arrive at the best structure, from a SEASONAL point of view, let us review or recall some of the basic movements or migration habits of the fish.

In Figure No. 1 we have a cross section of a typical reservoir. There will be areas with long, sloping bottoms — with long structures. A channel of some description, and areas that have steep, short structure with a quick drop off into deep water.

We have placed the fish in the channel in a typical winter or colder season position. *During these colder parts of the season* (late fall, winter, and early spring), there will be short, scattered migrations from the deep channel towards the *steep* shoreline and *short* structures. This, as you should see, would provide the shortest route to the shallows for a limited, scattered migration. This area would provide immediate access back to deep water. The fish would never be very far from home.

In the warmer part of the season (late spring, summer, or early fall) the movements of the fish will be toward the *longer* routes and flatter structures.

The fish is a cold-blooded creature. His activity, movements, growth, digestion, and all other functions, will change with the season. It is not our purpose in this article to discuss the whats, whys and wherefores of weather and water nor its effects on fish behavior. Suffice to say, Figure No. 1 is the mental picture you should have in mind for the SEASONAL migration of fish. With this in mind we can now proceed to the question of staying on the best

structure from a SEASONAL point of view.

In Figure No. 2 we are looking at a section of a reservoir. This particular section shows where the original river channel made a swing or a bend. The flow of water was from left to right. In studying this sketch you will note three sections; (1) — The "inside" of the curve has produced a wide, flat area with long, flatter, structures. (2) — The "outside" of the bend in the channel has produced a steeper, deeper section close to shore, with short, deep structure. (3) — The feeder stream has produced a "cove", or bays with varied bottom conditions and short structure.

Let's assume that in fishing the longer, flatter structures (A,B,C and D) during the past summer they were found to be productive. BUT, when they were checked in the colder part of the season, little success was had. What gives? What do we do?

During the colder period, structures A,B,C and D should be checked because at times they may yield a fish or two. In some areas fishermen use high speed boats to run from one end of the lake to another, checking and rechecking these longer, warmer season structures without giving any thought to other areas that might be more productive. This procedure produces a lot of action (boat that is) with questionable results. Weather and water conditions would have to be very cooperative to produce a nice string of fish on these structures during this early or colder part of the season. Short, scattered movements, which these areas might produce, would easily be missed by a "constant rider." That's called boating, we're interested in fishing.

The above procedure is not recommended. After a short check of structures A,B,C, and D the fisherman should move to the other types of structure in the area — Figure No. 2.

With Figure No. 1 still in mind, the first section a fisherman should check would be that found along the deep, steep shoreline. The first casting or trolling pass might not produce a single fish, or it could produce a "loner" fish. This would be quite normal for this part of the season. Several additional passes could be made before another fish is caught. Then a subsequent pass

EDITOR'S NOTE:

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.

could produce a limit catch. The fisherman should consider himself very lucky if he finds a large number of fish moving at any one time.

The next area to check would be the feeder streams and coves found off the deeper sections. When weather and water conditions are good, the fish will move at times into the channel of feeder streams. From there they will migrate into the shallows. This is especially true if the water color is different from that in the main body of water. The short bars, found in the coves, can at times be highly productive in the colder part of the season.

son we have to look at structure from a SEASONAL standpoint if we want to be on the best ones at all times.

The migration of fish from the main channel into the feeder stream channels is the reason why many fishermen score in bays and coves early in the season. These areas must be checked. They can be checked by trolling or casting. Casting, however would allow this area to be checked more thoroughly. The troller could check some of the breaks marked (X) without too much trouble. He would, however have trouble keeping the lures in position in the small bays and congested areas. Casting, as indicated by the small arrows, would be better and would give better coverage.

There are several things that should be kept in mind when fishing these areas in colder or early seasons. (1) — Migration is mostly spotty. (2) — When a productive area has been found, considerable time should be spent working it over thoroughly. (3) — If a particular area

such as a small bay off a steep shoreline (as in 'Y') has proven productive, other spots of similar nature should be looked for and tested. This would hold true for ANY area found to be productive at this particular time.

Early season success in these areas can be bad for the average fisherman! He will spend too much time in these areas *later on* in the season. He will never realize what has happened to his good fishing, and will have to wait until the season rolls around again to once again have any appreciable success.

An important notation that should be made on Figure No. 2 is that when working coves and bays in the cooler season, a good hand rule to follow would be; (1) — pick coves and bays that are close to the deepest water in the area (channel.) (2) — DO NOT SPEND TIME IN BAYS AND COVES WHICH DO NOT CONTAIN SOME SORT OF CHANNEL OR FEEDER STREAM. In other words, if a cove or bay is a wide, flat area, with no sign of a channel — stay out.

A good rule of thumb, to apply to SEASONAL movements of bass and fishing in a reservoir, would be to start with the first part of the year. In the colder weather the first consideration would be to the steeper shorelines with the steep, short structures. As the season moves toward the pre-spawning season, check the steeper shores less and increase attention toward coves, bays and short bars in these areas. These coves or bays, with their shorter structures, would be worked heavy during the spawning season. After the spawning season leave the steep shoreline, most of the coves and bays, and direct attention to the longer, flatter structures in the main body of the reservoir. In other words, the spawning season would be the dividing line between the steeper, shorter (cold weather) structures and the flatter, longer (warm weather) structures. In the late fall, head back toward the cold weather side.

In Figure No. 3 we have a top view of a natural lake. When viewing the migration of fish from a SEASONAL

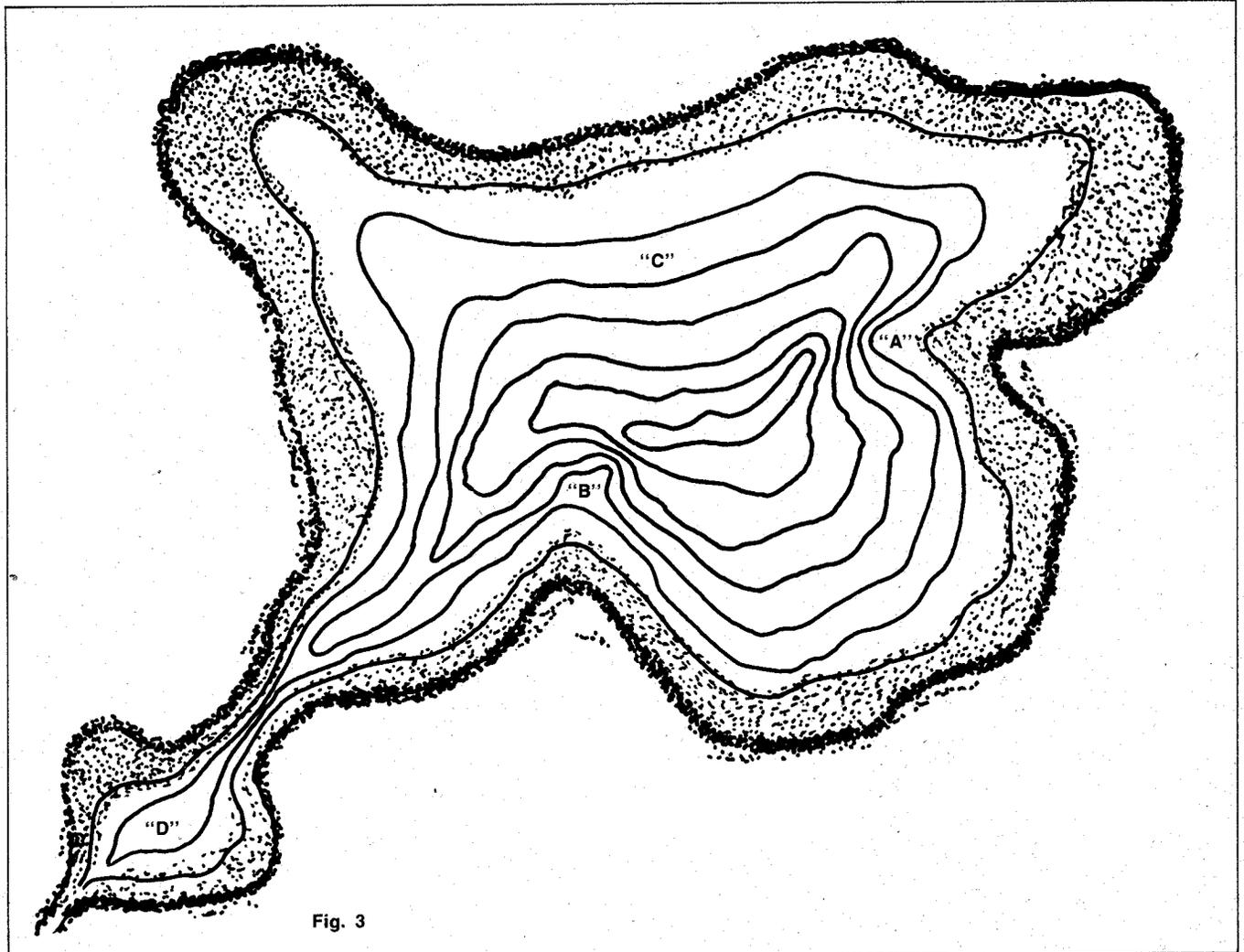


Fig. 3

point of view it is somewhat different from that found in reservoirs. This does not imply that the habits and instincts of fish are different, but that in most natural lakes the STRUCTURES USED DO NOT CHANGE, BUT WILL REMAIN THE SAME THROUGHOUT THE SEASON. However, if by chance your natural lake has the same features as discussed in the reservoir — short structure — steep shoreline, etc., then the same principle would apply. Those natural lakes, with a stream flowing through, such as a lake chain, and some wider sections of streams, at times called lakes, often have features as found in reservoirs. Figure No. 3 is adequate for our study.

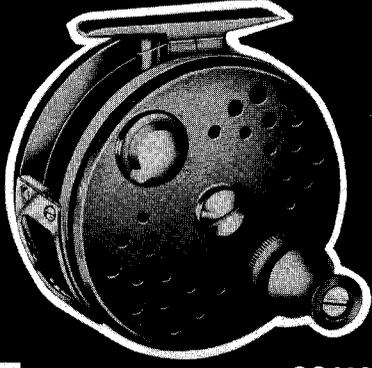
Figure No. 3 shows the contour and structure available in a natural lake. Added to this structure is a shallow channel or slough leading off to a small expanse of water. This could be a small, shallow lake connected to the main lake by a narrow channel.

The deepest water in the lake is a large section in the center of the larger body of water. This would be *the home of the fish*, (winter or summer). In studying the structure available, there are two main structures in the form of a bar (A & B). The section marked "C" has no well defined structure, breakline, nor breaks. It is a flat, sloping bottom. The *breaklines* that occur on each structure (A & B) are the only "steep" bottoms available. Thus, they would be the *shortest* route to shallower water for limited or scattered migrations — just like the steeper sections of a reservoir. These would give the fish an immediate drop-back or access to the *deepest* water. So, in early season, and pre-spawn season, these steeper sections of the structure would be used.

As the pre-spawn season approaches, it is highly probable that in certain weather and water conditions, some fish may migrate, for short periods, into the feeder channel leading to the backwaters of the slough or small, shallow lake. The possibility of this would increase as the spawning season neared.

In the overall picture, two main structures (A & B) would be considered as the main migration routes for both cold and warm seasons. In the colder pre-spawn period, the deeper breaks and breaklines would receive the SHORT, SCATTERED, UNPRE-

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DICTABLE migrations. As the season progresses, the movements should become better and better, and be more to the shallow portions of the structures. During the spawning season the most productive, shallow places in the lake, should be in the near shallows of those two, main structures. If the lake has a slough or a small channel leading off into a bay, or a small section such as "D", then this too should be checked. After the spawning season the same, main structures (A & B) would receive the migration as per weather and water conditions that exist.

One further thought might be in order at this time in regards to considering fishing from a SEASONABLE standpoint. Too often, during the pre-spawn and the spawning season, fishermen rush to the water expecting to find the fish in the shallows. They become puzzled when they don't find them there. They tend to forget that how far a fish moves on migration, and how long they stay, is dependent upon weather and water conditions that exist at that particular time. They neglect weath-

er and water, and if the deeper parts of the structures are checked at all — it's a short check — done in a half hearted manner. They return to the shallows *with no regard to where it is* because "the fish just gotta be there — it's that time of the year."

The pre-spawn and spawning season is a period of changing weather and water conditions! Fish *react* to these changes just as they do in any part of the season! Weather and water condition can wreck a spawning season. This is one of the reasons why there are missing age groups in most waters. A good rule to follow during this period is: the closer the spawning season, the more fish can be *expected* in the shallows. Be happy when this occurs. One trip may be good and the next bad. One year might be good and the next bad.

Whatever the time of year it might be, or whatever the weather and water conditions may be, regardless of how short and slow the movement might be, our best chance of catching fish is by fishing the most potentially productive water. *We will never catch fish by fishing where they ain't!*