Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY

Part XI

Today you hear and read a great deal about structure, or structure fishing as some call it. When I coined the word "structure," more than a quarter of a century ago, and began using it in seminars and lectures to explain its use and importance in fish migration, I was like a voice crying in the wilderness. Not so today. Today the word has become an integral part of most writers' and fishermen's concept of successful fishing. Most fishermen understand that structures are important to both fish and fisherman. But, I find they are not fully aware of the different types of structures present in a particular reservoir. They do not know their location, nor can they distinguish between those which will effect fish movements to a lesser or greater degree. In other words; the more important ones for that *particular* reservoir. Just remember — you can have structure and no fish, but you can't have fish without structure.

One of the most important structures to be found in reservoirs is one I call "DELTA."

DELTA is a word I applied to describe a lake bottom condition. In my estimation this particular type is the most important of all. I call it the most important because this particular situation exists in so many different types of reservoirs. It is also the most difficult to find and even more difficult to interpret. It's a structure that the majority of you do not know exists. There is no way to "SEE" that such a situation is present, and your knowledge of fish movements is so meager that you fail to realize why a blank is drawn along the shoreline bars, and in areas that you consider "fishey looking."

The discussion of DELTA situations is important for many reasons.

Buck Perry has been taking stringers of bass (and all game fish) like this for more than thirty years. They are caught on tools called lures, but his success is based on Fishing Knowledge.

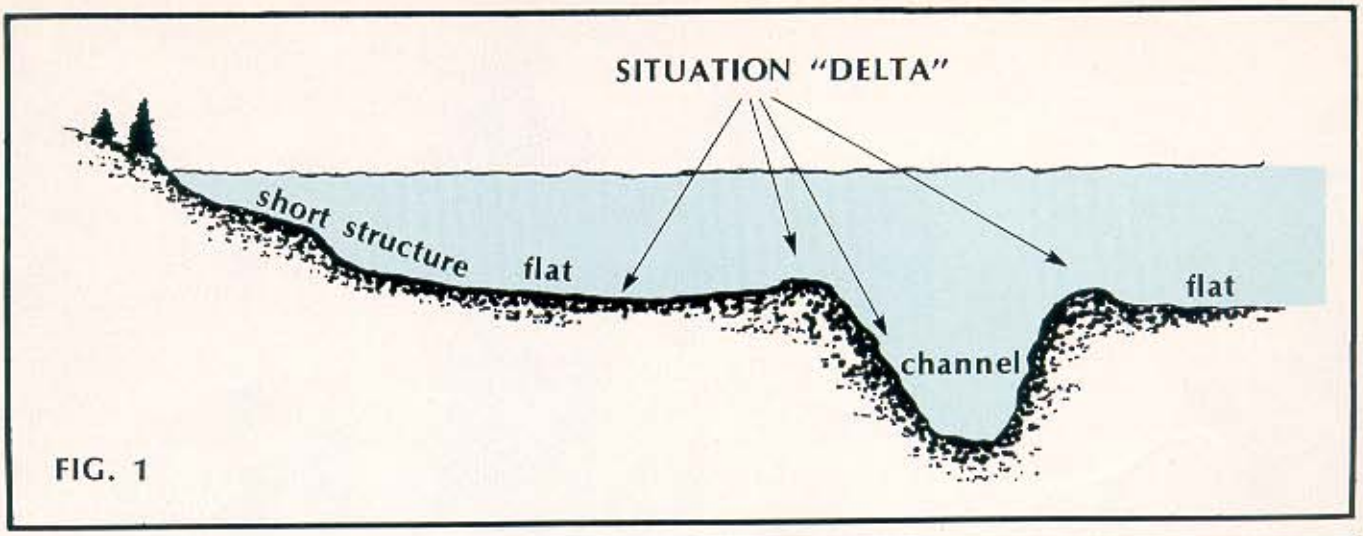

FIG. 1

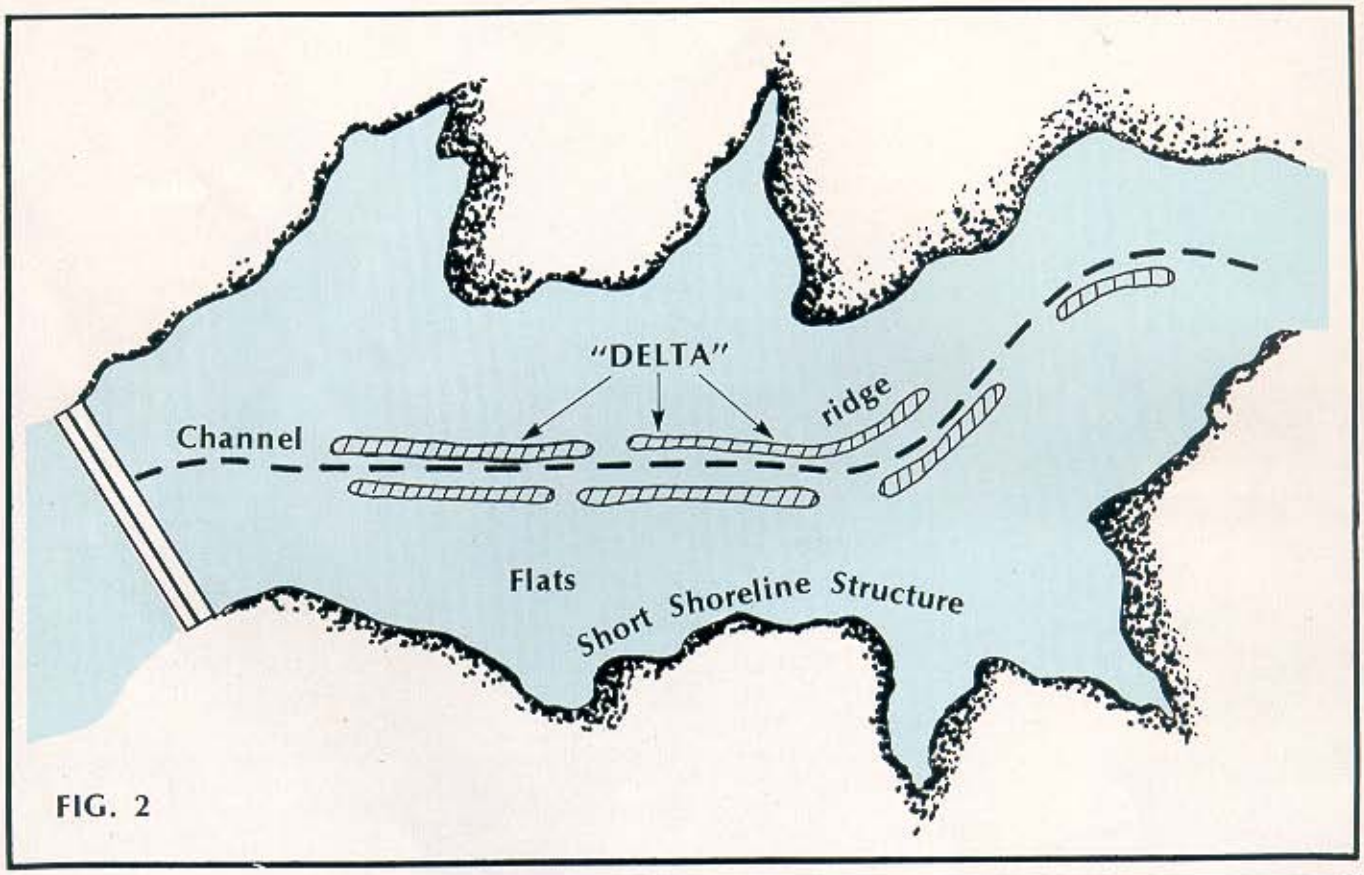

FIG. 2

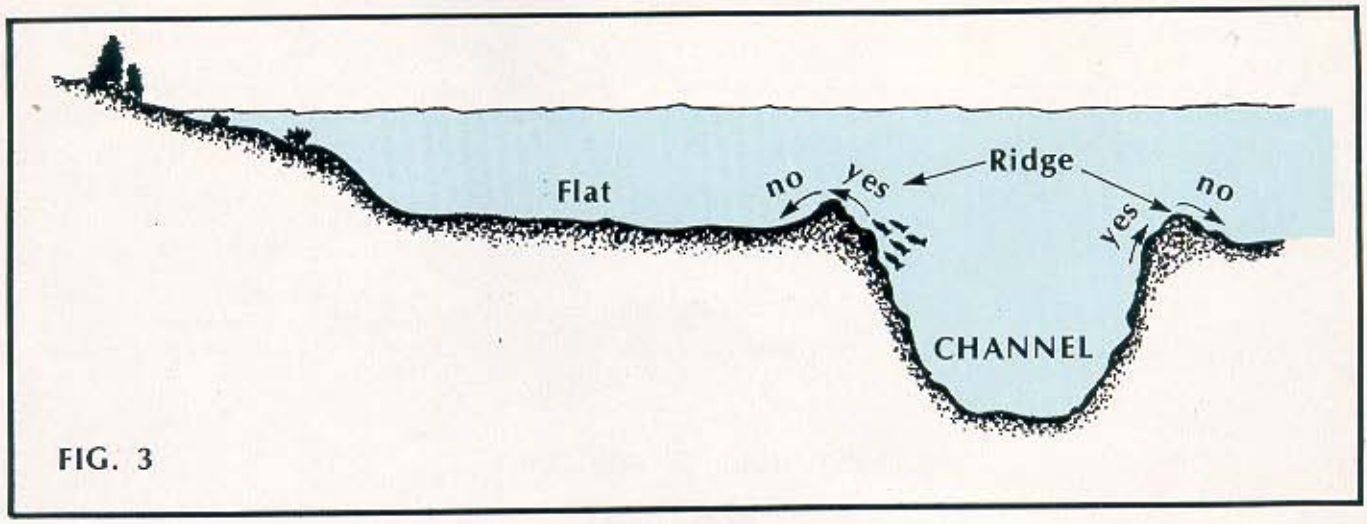

FIG. 3

However, there are two main reasons why you should fully understand this situation. (1) — In many lowland or flatland reservoirs this particular structure will be the ONLY one which will produce fish in quality and quantity. (2) — It will help you clear up the BASIC movements of fish, and how "breaklines" and "breaks" control these movements. It should again refresh your memory on the primary, basic fact: you can't catch fish where they ain't.

Because of the importance of DELTA situations we will use more sketches, and give greater detail, than normally given on most structure discussions. Thus, when the word DELTA appears, these conditions should immediately come to mind.

Reservoirs having what I call DELTA type structures are normally constructed in lowland or flatland regions. They are normally in a valley where wide, flat areas existed on both sides of a stream. These flat "bottoms" were often prime farming lands before the area was flooded. However, while a DELTA situation primarily refers to reservoirs built in these areas, you will seldom fish a lake that does not have this situation to some extent.

In Figures No. 1 and 2 you see a typical DELTA situation. Figure No. 1 is a cross section; Figure No. 2 is a top view.

This is the basic picture of a DELTA SITUATION: (1) — a channel (old riverbed): (2) — a hump or ridge running along the edge of the channel: (3) — a big flat behind the ridge or hump: (4) — short structure along the shoreline.

The ridge "A" — (Figure No. 1) found along the edge of the old river channel is a natural condition. Weather and water conditions, plus the growth normally found along the bank of a stream, will in time build up a ridgelike structure. At times the ridge is pronounced, at other times very slight.

The widths of the flats can vary. Often both sides will be quite wide, while at other times one side will have a much larger or wider flat than will the other side. This is due to the wandering of the stream bed.

There will be times when the ridge and flat will occur only on one side of the stream, with the opposite side being rather steep and close to shore.

Reservoirs, built in different terrains, will have DELTA situations in various locations. In some flatland reservoirs it will occur practically all over the lake. In many it will occur only in the lower, wider sections of the lake. It may occur only in the upper section of some reservoirs. However, if you do not fully realize that the *channel* is the "HOME" of the fish, and if you are not fully aware of the habits and movements of fish, the DELTA impoundments can give you fits.

Many of the channels are located far from shore, and the average fisherman never comes close to them — much less finds them. And if you have no idea as to how to figure out where the fish will be WHEN they move out of the channel, during their migration periods, then you will not know WHERE to fish.

The depths involved in DELTA situations can vary also. But normally, when referring to a reservoir as a DELTA type, most of the structure throughout the reservoir can be reached by the average fisherman.

The relatively narrow ridge ("A" — — Figure No. 1) can be uniform and may run for quite a distance along the edge of the channel without any change or break. There is a normal condition which occurs on the channel side of the ridge as shown at "B". These are narrow, shelf-like areas. These are *breaklines.* They can be found along the inside of the ridge — just before the drop-off into the channel. Sometimes these breaklines appear to be a series of steps (due to water levels in the past). Along these breaklines there will likely be many *breaks.* These breaks can be in the form of eroded spots, cave-ins, stumps, or debris which could serve as "contact" points. A normal migration of the fish would be to move up on the ridge (A); via the breakline (B). Contact would occur at a "break" on the "breakline." But, and you can take it from me, unless you have some *prior* knowledge of where to look along this ridge, or where on the breaklines to concentrate your efforts, you may have trouble making a catch. It must be remembered that fish do not move constantly nor consistently. Lucky is the fisherman that checks a structure and finds the fish already up and moving. Therefore, your efforts must be concentrated at potentially, productive spots on structure.

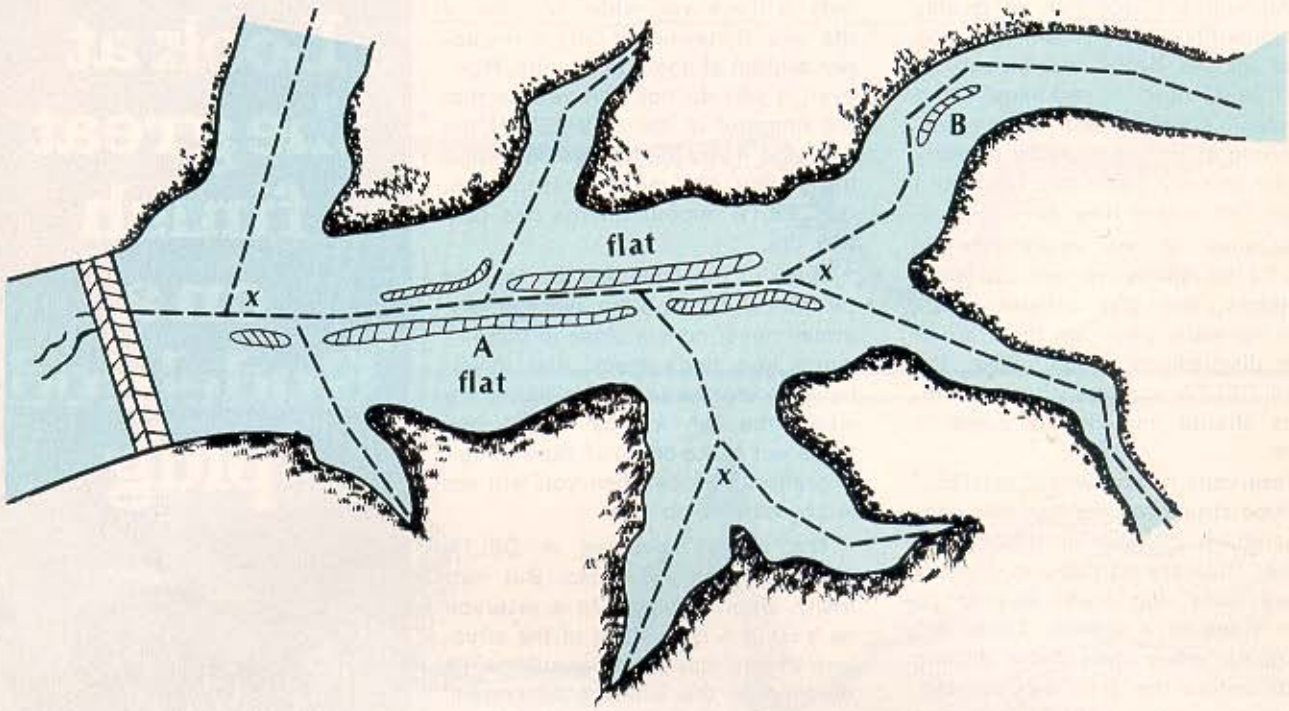
B
flat
x
x
A
flat
x

FIG. 4

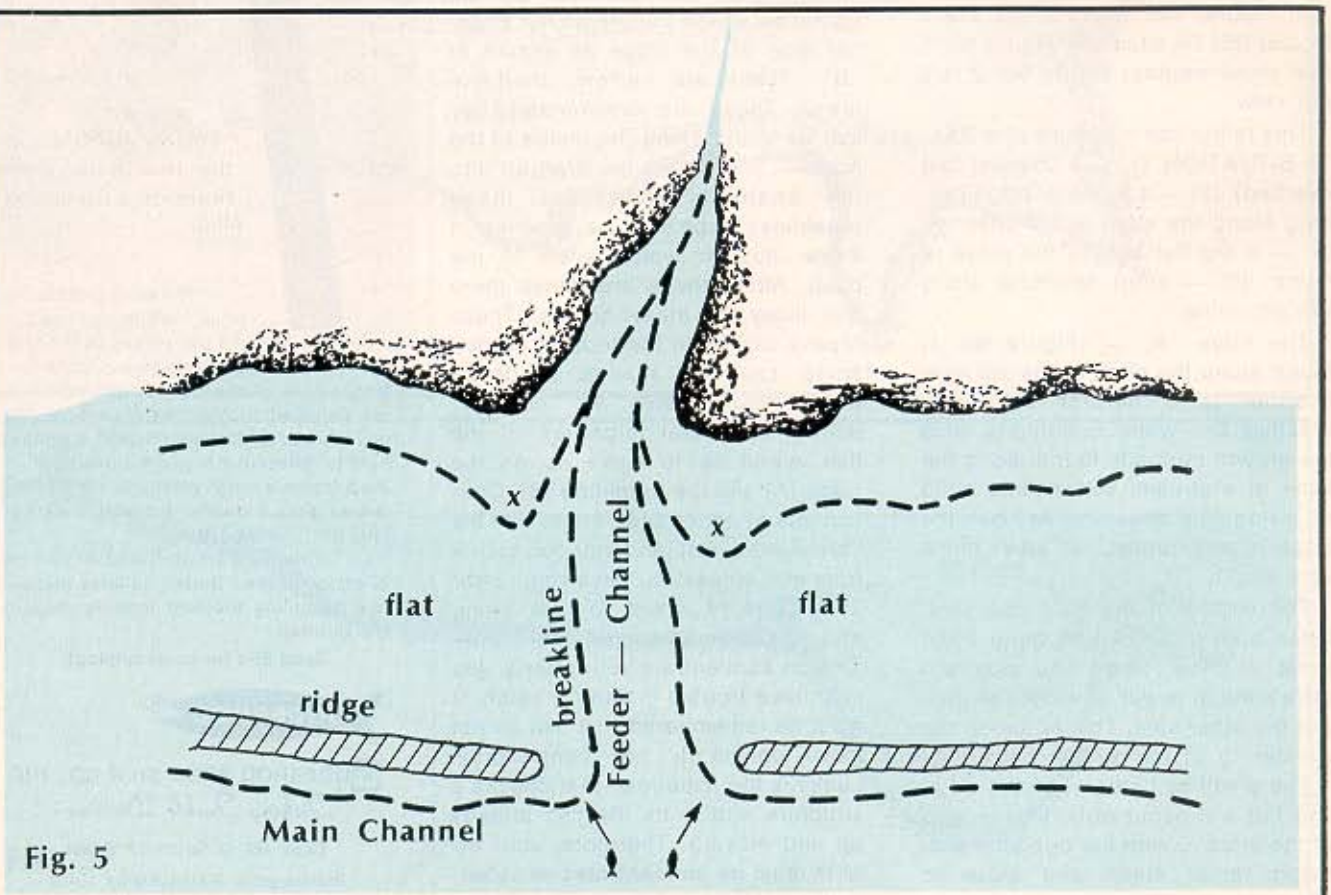
x
x
flat
flat
breakline
Feeder — Channel
ridge
Main Channel

Fig. 5

It is also important for the *shoreline* fisherman to have some *prior* knowledge of fish movement if he expects to catch fish with any degree of consistency from a DELTA type lake.

Let's repeat the sketches, but this time change them slightly, and take another look.

Figure No. 3 shows another cross section of a DELTA situation. Study this sketch carefully as it shows where the fish will go and where they will not go. As you study the sketch, keep in mind that regardless of the type of structure you're fishing, you should never assume that the fish will go down the backside of a hump. You'll note that a nice bar, next to the shoreline, is shown. How would fish get there? Or, which bars or structures, along the shoreline of a DELTA type lake, will produce?

The secret to a DELTA type lake is the side, feeder streams or the cuts which have been made through the ridges and the flat bottom land. In Figure No. 4 we see a top view. The dam is quite long, and the body of water quite wide. This drawing shows the side, feeder streams, plus the area where they cut through the flats and ridges at the main channel "Y". These cuts and breaks would be prime spots where the fish would make contact with the bank of the old channel. Normally, the movement would be up to the breaks on the upstream side of these cuts. However, you must not consider this to be true in all cases. When checking or testing an area, all portions of the cut should be gone over thoroughly.

When checking the area by trolling, the passes should be made from many directions, with each pass covering a couple hundred feet on each side of the cut. They should cover the tops of the ridges, the breaklines of the main channel, and the feeder stream channels.

The normal position in casting would be to place the boat on the upstream side of the cut (Position "Y") Casts must reach both sides of the cut and the ridge and breaks along the channel. If all areas cannot be reached from this position, then the boat must be moved to different locations. Quite often, the best position is directly on the ridge, and many times the whole area can be thoroughly checked from this one position.

Anytime two streams or channels, regardless of size, come together they represent a key area for fish migration. In Figure No. 4 you will note these areas have been marked with an "X". The DELTA or ridges along some areas have been omitted from this drawing, but in most cases there will be a DELTA, or a hump, to some degree, wherever two streams come together.

"B" represents a DELTA situation where the ridge occurs on only one side. In this case, with no feeder stream cut, fish movements to the breaklines would be determined by the "breaks" in the area. And, as stated before, this could be in the form of a projection, eroded spot, stump, etc. Many of these isolated ridges or humps might not be productive. They might produce early in the life of the lake, but as time passes many will be eliminated. You must then be able to locate those areas which are cut by a feeder stream or a channel. "A" shows the ridge can extend for quite a distance. Sometimes they may go for miles without a cut or a break, or a very noticeable variance.

Figure No. 5 is a closer look at an area where a feeder stream or flow of water cuts through the flat and through the bank of the old river channel. As stated earlier, these areas will become important contact points. The importance of this drawing is to show *where to locate the productive structures along the shoreline.* This is very important for at times the ridges and cuts of the main stream are so deep they can't be worked and you *have to* work the shoreline structures. At other times, although the structure at the main channel can be reached, the movements of the fish are so good that they move from the main channel area to areas closer to the shoreline.

Figure No. 5 illustrates a couple of shoreline bars that could produce at ("X"). This would be caused by the fish migrating along the *breaks* and *breaklines* of the smaller channel, ditch or gully to cross the flat.

You might wonder — how are the feeder cuts found? Or, you might think your lake doesn't have any feeder streams due to it being in a dry section of the country. Believe me — you have feeder cuts. There has never been a lake built where heavy rains or erosion hasn't created feeder cuts to some extent. All you

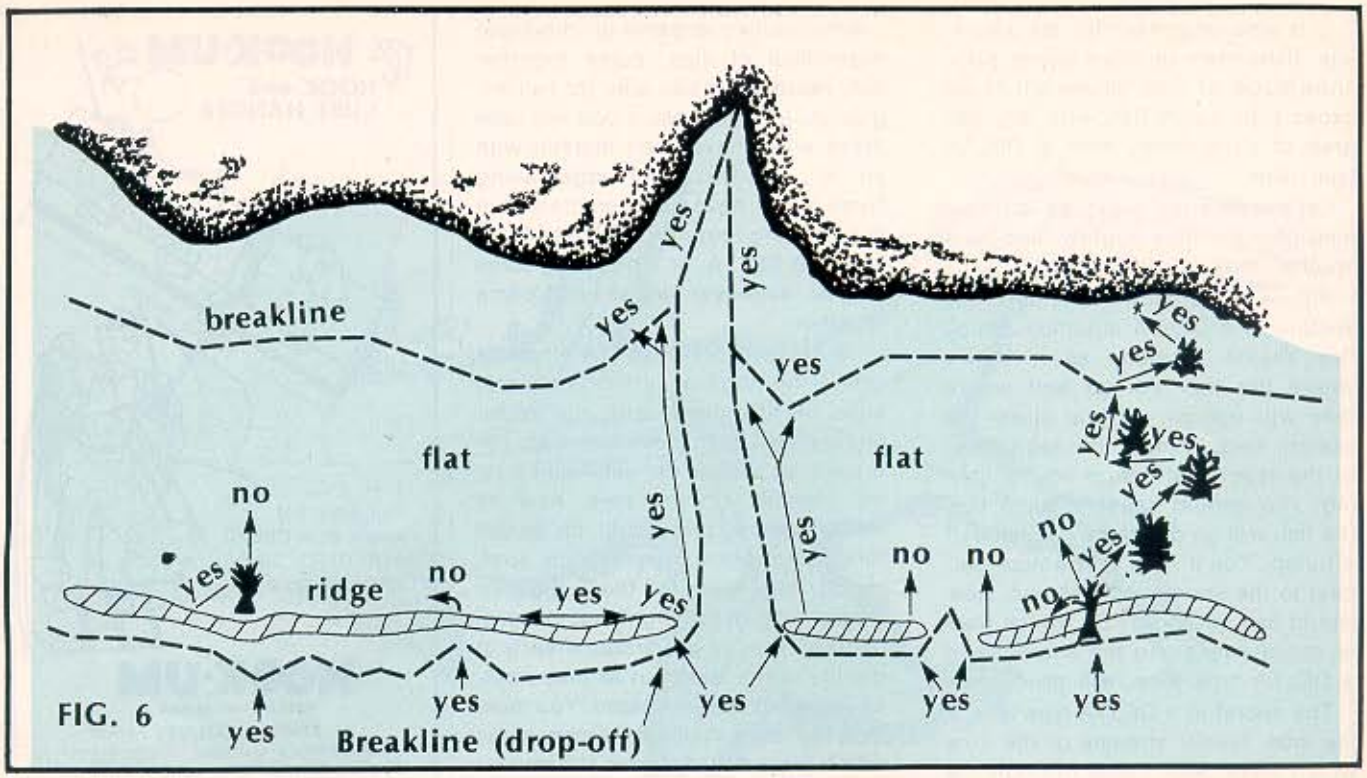

FIG. 6

have to do is look towards shore to see evidence of where water flowed at one time or another. It may be a slight valley, a hollow, a ravine or a cove, but it will show where water has moved toward the main valley at sometime. They may be few and far between, but you can bet they WILL exist.

In years past I have been on DELTA lakes where feeder cuts were practically non-existent. Some fish were found on a slight hump, along the old river channel, or at some break on the breaklines on the edge of the channel. In all cases, I found it wise to take the time to locate the cuts made by the feeder streams. At times they were few in number, but they represented the best spots in the lake and were well worth the time spent in locating them.

Figure No. 6 is a top view of just a portion of a DELTA type reservoir. This drawing shows structure, breaks and breaklines. It shows fish migrations; where they will go (Yes) and where they will not go (No). It again shows the breaks and breaklines that must be considered in a lake of this type. Many times these will be found a long distance from shore. This is one of those situations where you should not be concerned with how far from shore you are. As far as I'm concerned, the shoreline serves only two purposes: (1) — it serves as a reference point, and (2) — it holds the water in the lake. *Fish would never know it existed unless the roads (bottom structure) pointed that-a-way.*

You will note on the right of the drawing the word (YES) goes from bush to bush, then leads up to the short bar along the shoreline. This bar could be productive at times due to the *marked* route across the flat. This is one reason why a newly-constructed reservoir of this type has good fishing in the beginning. Flats and shoreline structures of this type can go bad after a few years — to most for some unexplainable reason. What would happen to these areas after the bushes rotted away? You figure it out.

It must be remembered that in most reservoirs the channel represents the HOME of the fish. Any ridgelike structure that exists along this channel *is a block* for the fish's movement toward the shoreline shallows. The flat (bottom lands) become *another stumbling block*. How the fish moves, the breaks and breaklines they use in a DELTA type lake is a full fishing education in itself. Study the drawings carefully — they can provide the key for working out *all* man-made reservoirs.

Editors note: For those of you who have read Buck's article, ("Get the heck out of the trees") in the March issue, we suggest that you go back and reread that article. In the light of the above, it may give you a better understanding. Reservoirs with masses of standing trees, are typical "delta" reservoirs.

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.

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