

# Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY

## Part XII

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*We no longer accept challenges to "prove it to me on my lake", because the facts of structure fishing don't have to be proven any more, they are facts. Those who won't accept them as facts are just that much poorer. The loss is theirs, not ours.*

*Still, it has been said that if a pupil doesn't learn it is the fault of the teacher. That's not always true, we have found. Some mule-headed fishermen never will learn, no matter what the "teacher" does or says. I guess that's a fishing fact, too!*

*We never get entirely used to the doubters and unbelievers, however, even though we know it is sometimes hopeless to try to reach them. We still continue to try, of course. This article by Buck Perry is part of that continuing effort.*

*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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**"For year after year, I ran the boat with a "critic" and a determined "crucifier" sitting up in the front . . ."**

Before you read any farther, let me state that this is not an editorial. From what I can see and read, there's only one Editorial writer on the staff of this magazine, and I might add, a great one. In fact, the best I know. (I hope he doesn't cut this out, for a truth like this never hurt anyone.)

I have often been asked — "What particular thing down through the years has "bugged" you the most about fishing?"

Without any doubt, the thing that concerned me most, and which told me repeatedly to stop this nonsense of trying to teach people how to catch fish, was the reluctance of the fishermen to BELIEVE.

I can't recall all the times I have heard a person say, "I'm standing here looking at it, but I still don't believe it" after I had thrown a lunker catch up on the dock. Last fall, when fishing in Arkansas, I had found a nice school of fish, and was casually sitting there catching a bass on practically every cast, when I noticed a boat moving in close. It contained two Bass fishermen, who ap-

parently hadn't been doing so well. I caught between 40 and 50 before I spooked the group. Later, at the dock, I heard them talking "... we saw it, it was unbelievable".

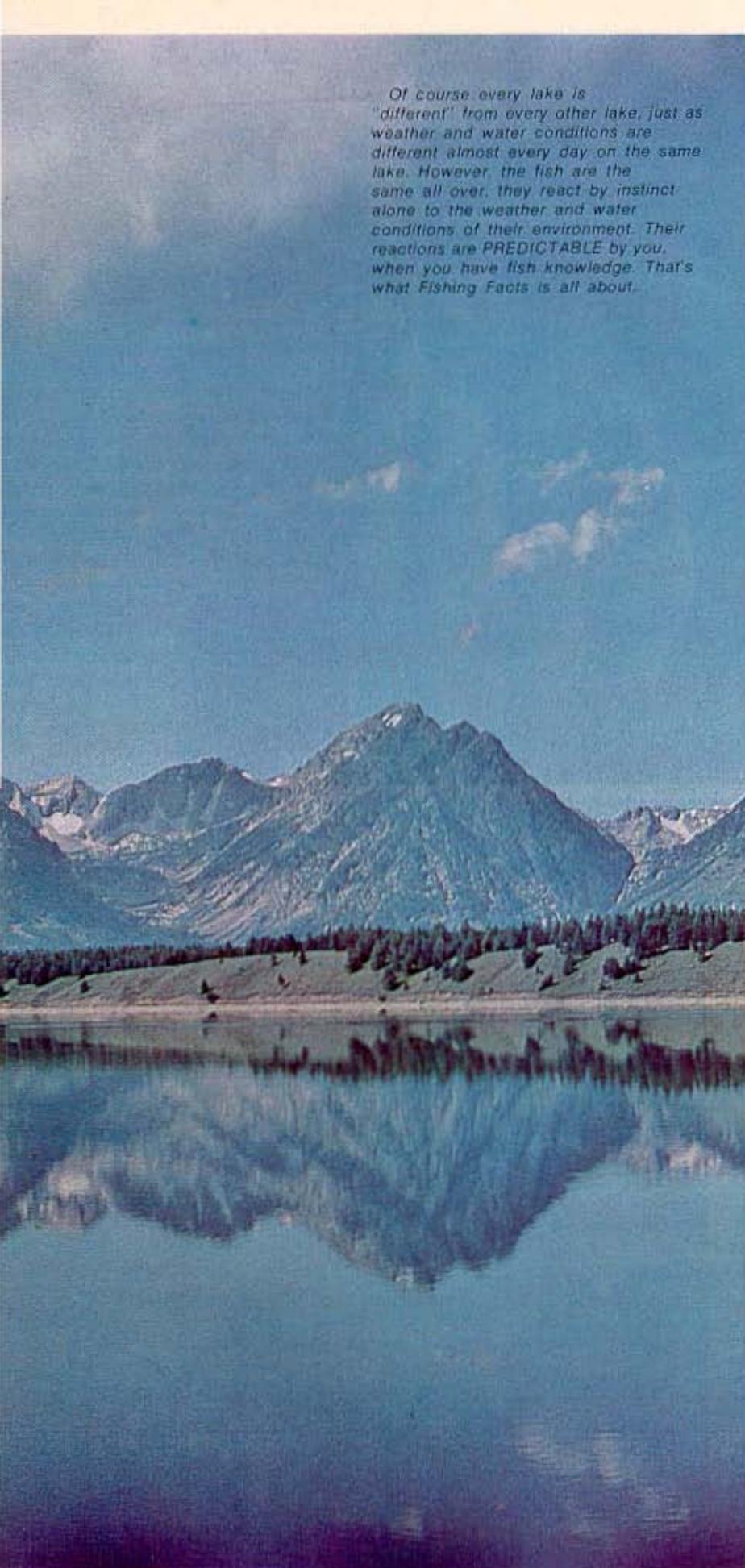
This is *not* the kind of unbelief, I have in mind, when talking about the thing that "bugged" me most. I spent a quarter of a century fishing from one end of this country to the other. In each area, enough time was spent to "shake" the locals up. In each case I TOLD them what I had done, and WHY I had caught the fish there. I also told them of the same results in other areas. I can't recall a place where I did not take fishermen and writers out and SHOW them what I was talking about.

*They didn't get the message. Maybe I should say, they didn't WANT to get the message.*

Generations of habit and beliefs are not easily dispelled. Each, in his own mind, had his pet ideas as to what made a fish tick, and what he did to catch him. Since there were so many ideas floating around, possibly each felt his was just as good as the next one. I am sure most felt, here was just another "Con artist" in town to peddle some lures.

I saw many a man, who for some reason — probably due to his having to uphold some sort of reputation — made light of the situation. They usually left the gathering with a quirk of a smile on their face, with some comment about all those "suckers" buying lures. It was always quite amusing to see him come sneaking back in later — after the crowd had left — and purchase some lures. Quite a few would come back in saying: "Give me a couple samples, and I'll test them out. If they catch fish, you might sell quite a few in this area" I only shook my head later — when removing the tray of lunker fish that had been on display.

For year after year, I ran the boat with a "critic" and a determined "crucifier" sitting up in the front of



*Of course every lake is "different" from every other lake, just as weather and water conditions are different almost every day on the same lake. However, the fish are the same all over, they react by instinct alone to the weather and water conditions of their environment. Their reactions are PREDICTABLE by you, when you have fish knowledge. That's what Fishing Facts is all about.*

the boat. "Show ME, — I'm not going to take those other guys' word for it. It might work in *their* lake, but it won't work in mine. It might work up north, but it won't work down here, for OUR fishing is DIFFERENT." (In the north they told me it might work down south, etc.)

When it's all boiled down, this THINKING that HIS area, or HIS fishing was unique, bugged me more than anything else. His skepticism as to whether I could show him, or catch his fish was no chore at all, it didn't bother me for one moment. What bothered me was — *it was the same old story* — over and over again, a neverending thing. With a stack of testimonials a foot thick, he still thought it couldn't be done in HIS particular area!

I finally came to the conclusion I was spinning my wheels, and that a pioneer was a stupid jerk. HE could go jump in HIS lake, and I'd go find myself something else to do. I hadn't been running for some kind of office, and I certainly hadn't claimed to be some sort of fishing expert. I had found out at a very early age I could never be a fishing expert — there was too much to learn, and I would never get to the point I couldn't get better. I hadn't worn gaudy patches on tailored clothes, nor run fancy boats saying to the world — "hey, look at me, I'm a Master at this fishing game".

A fish is a fish, is a fish, is a fish. He is no different in the north, south, east or west. He's got a pea-sized brain, and never had an original thought in his life. He can't "size" up a situation and measure any consequences of his action. What he does, he does in spite of himself. If he ever does any "thinking" — it's after I get him on the stringer.

Through the years many people have asked me, "Why with all the millions that have heard you, by means of clubs, seminars, radio, television, etc., only a handful, so to speak, got the message and became great fishermen?" I might add here, that many of these same people indicated that I had done it wrong, or that I said it wrong, or that maybe I wasn't reaching enough people. Quite a few let me know, in a subtle way, that THEY could have done a better job and set the guys straight.

Well, after 25-30 years, I do have a lot of good Spoonpluggers, and scads of fishermen whose fishing



*Buck Perry with his 5-year old grandson Jeffrey. Jeffrey caught these fish, "Paw Paw" just ran the boat. They were trolling Spoonplugs. If a 5-year old can do it, surely you can, too!*

*Jet airline Captain Johnny Buoy and a Hawg caught on Topwater out in the middle of the lake! The structure was a shallow "delta structure" such as Buck wrote about last month. Who would fish topwater in the middle of the lake? You would, if you knew this lake and could "read water" the way Buck Perry can. Can you learn this? Definitely and absolutely . . . that's what Fishing Facts is dedicated to . . . teaching you how to become a successful fisherman.*



has taken on new meaning. I see the vocabulary being used once in a while. In fact I hear and see the word "structure" used. You may not believe it, but I see some fishermen calling themselves "Structure Fishermen", (although their total knowledge on the subject is sketchy,) they know where there is a "point" that they catch fish on once in a while. Most of these "structure fishermen," spend their time zooming from "point" to "point" or spot to spot, casting to the visible objects located in the shallows. They may not know that casting to *visible* objects is a waste of time in most cases, but they certainly can put that plug "right on the money". He may not be as thorough as his great grandfather, but he sure gets there faster.

In one sense of the word, it appears George (our publisher) has taken up the burden with this magazine, and I might add, doing a great job.

I have no way of knowing how many fishermen will read this, possibly in the thousands. If a SMALL handful gets the message, I'll consider it a howling success. Now don't get your dander up, and say I am calling you stupid. Far from it — by your reading Fishing Facts eliminates this thought.

What I have reference to is the fact, as fishermen, so many factors enter the picture, we CAN'T get the message across to very many. I have mentioned some above, and will state more later on.

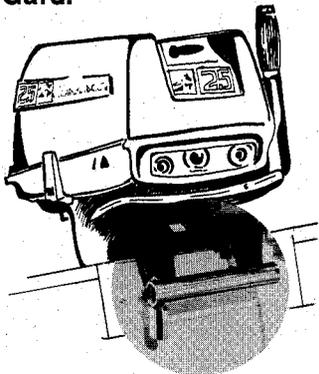
1 — You are not old enough, or haven't cared enough to know the history of Fishing magazines. They come and go like snowfalls. I wouldn't know how many hundreds have gone "busted" during the past quarter century, but there are many. It takes a lot of "guts" to even attempt one. Those that appear to have made it, probably never had to start from scratch, and most likely had something else to take the drain until they got the right format to carry themselves.

2 — Someone is working 14 days a week to produce and keep improving this magazine. I suspect who it is. I doubt if he has time to wipe his nose, much less have a chance to go fishing. Even if he makes a few bucks — which he deserves — for what purpose? He's certainly cutting his life short, and if he thinks those to follow will keep up the pace, he

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better give this some more thought also. For my money, there are too many other ways to make a living, and still have some time to enjoy the benefits derived therefrom.

3 — Fishermen will spend thousands of dollars for fancy fishing gear — and never bat an eye. But, just let someone ask him to spend a few bucks to *enable* him to use the equipment, or learn how to catch fish. He backs off and thinks they're some kind of "fast buck artist".

Not too long ago I was associated with one of the finest fishermen I know. He had no equal when it came to interpreting structure — the final peak of fishing ability. He was one of the most hardworking and conscientious *Teachers* I've had the pleasure to meet. He was straddled with the toughest area for fishing in the whole country.

It took him but a few years to see the light. He often asked me how I had stood it all those years. He would "bleed" his heart out on a group of fishermen, and shortly after would see some on the lake, in areas and doing things he never even

heard about. He couldn't take it — he quit. In fact his disgust was so great he hung up his rods — I hope for only a spell.

Some of the above is probably why you never hear about the BEST fishermen in the country. They desire no recognition, and probably care less about whether the other guy listens to HOW and WHY they caught the fish. I am sure in the beginning they tried to help, but were sharp enough to keep their mouths shut after a spell.

Your reaction to this statement might be, "Well, why don't you shut your trap?" This is simple to answer. I'm not as smart as these other guys and besides you can shut me off any time you choose — just flip the page.

Many people have asked me, "Where did you start?" or "What gave you the idea about the habits and instincts of the fish?" etc.

In trying to answer this question I might be able to answer in part the question of why I haven't been "heard" over the years, and why George has picked out a tough row to hoe.

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It all boils down to BASICS. The fishermen just haven't gotten or understood basics. It was so far apart from their previous views and what they WANTED to believe, they unknowingly let it go in one ear and out the other. For years I have printed booklets with a condensed version of basics. Thousands have been read by fishermen. These basics on the movements of the fish, his reaction to weather and water conditions, and how the makeup of the lake (structure) affects his life, MUST be understood before other things in fishing make any sense.

Only a handful, so to speak, got the messages. This is a major reason I am writing a new book on basics. I hope I can this time make it so plain and so convincing a few more will face the truth — whether they desire to or not. Still, I am faced with the fact that people "read" a book of this nature, not "study" it.

People as a whole will not discipline themselves, they prefer to take the easy route. They desire a "short-cut" to success. All you have to do is watch what they do when they hear about a new lure that has caught a fish. Most will not "get" what they read. Most have to be TAUGHT. This was the reason for my formal schools and the reason I am now working on a detailed correspondence course.

Possibly by the time this article gets printed (if George dares to print it), the new book will be off the presses. For the "what's it worth department", the number of books printed will be only a few more than

the standing orders from the OLD Spoonpluggers.

You may have "tongue in cheek" on this last statement also, but you don't know me very well. I thought I had indicated earlier that "I have had it up to here". I couldn't care less whether you know basics or not. Same way I feel about my lures, take it or leave it. If you take it I appreciate it. If you don't, I won't give it a moment's thought. As far as lures are concerned, where I made my mistake so many years ago was not to take the poop that was in my noggin, and instead of trying to TEACH, come out with a NEW lure every year, or on every trip! It would be as easy as falling off a log to design and put in production a lure that would catch a fish — several a week if the situation called for it. Then spend the same time — probably much less time — just *showing the people what I caught the fish on*. I would have become a millionaire in short order.

If you're still with me, you may say. "Well, there is so much to basics I am having some trouble getting the picture. Can't you boil it down a little?"

I've never tried to boil it down, BUT . . . you may just have a good point there. To do this takes me back "to where it all began". It occurred in March 1928, I believe it was the 24th. I was born in July 1915 so you can figure out how old I was at the time.

On that day I stated my views for the first time. I had already noted the many different opinions about the why's and wherefores of fishing. It had

dawned upon me that since there were so MANY ideas floating around about what made a fish tick, and what was necessary to catch him, probably NOBODY had the right answers. So I had started looking into the situation.

On the date mentioned above I was fishing with my Daddy. We had beat the shorelines for several hours without results. I turned to Dad and said, "Dad, you know — the deep water is the home of the fish".

He didn't make a comment, he just sorta rolled his eyeballs at me and made another cast within inches of a root.

A few days later we were fishing the same water again to see if the fish had decided to bite. This time, after throwing everything in the tackle box with no success, I said, "Not only is the deep water the home of the fish, but they migrate on PATHS toward the shallow water. How far they come and how long they stay is controlled by the weather and water conditions . . . Dad, we're fishing *wrong*, and besides this, we ain't in the *right* place."

This outburst DID get a reaction. He said, "If you don't stop making those crazy statements I'm going to throw you in the lake". *He set the pattern for the next 45 years!*

Later I explained to him why I had made those statements. I told him I had been looking in the water for a pretty long time. Some days I would see scads of fish swimming around, but most of the time I didn't see many — in fact none at all. Since the fish didn't go up in the woods and hide behind a tree, *they had to be in deep water*.

I also told him, it soon became obvious the fish I DID see were in the areas where we had caught fish, the so-called "hot spots". Although it was natural that I would look in these spots, I had also looked in other spots at the same time. It didn't take me long to see I was wasting my time in the other areas if I expected to see fish. Why would this be? There was only one conclusion — the fish were following a path.

I had also noticed the fish didn't even show up here all the time. Some days I would see a few, at other times none. Then all of a sudden I'd see a big bunch of them. What caused this? Other animals reacted to weather, so why should the fish be any different?

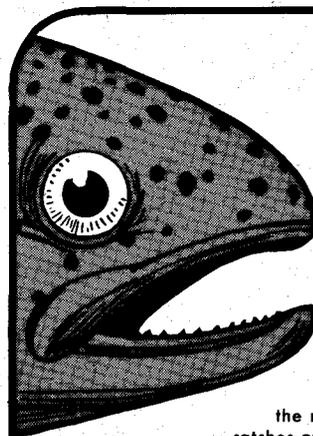
At that time I had no idea what a path looked like, or what caused the fish to take that route. Neither did I know *what* weather and water conditions affected the fish, or in what way, but by the time I finished school I had all the loose ends gathered up on basics. Then it was only a matter of proving them to be facts, by working many waters, under many conditions. This I did.

Now, did you catch the KEY? In case you didn't, it was when I accepted *that the deep water was the home of the fish. Once I had accepted this, the rest was easy.*

You say, "Why would this be so hard to accept?" "I don't see anything so difficult about this".

I could talk a week on this subject, but just a couple sentences should be enough. Why if you had never heard it before, but had been hearing just the opposite from all the so-called experts, and being repeated so often it sounded like a broken record? OR, if the only fish you had ever caught were caught in the shallows beside some log, stump, rock, weed or lily pad? AND, if you had tried fishing the deep water and had never caught a fish, even though you didn't know the difference between deep water and THE deep water? Yes, you've heard it, but did you accept it in all its truth?

One of the fine writers on this magazine's staff wrote an article on walleye fishing in a deep, clear, cold lake, under marginal weather conditions. He goes to great pains to explain that in order for him to control Depth and Speed with the type lures he is using, he has to "backtroll." This "backtrolling" was the best method to cover the structure fully in order to locate the spot where the fish were and still maintain the slow speed. He might have been able to drift the structure with the lures called for at that particular time (speed), but most likely he would never cover the structure thoroughly. He could have possibly trolled the lures in a forward direction, but possibly this would have caused him to lose Depth control due to the speed involved. But, by "backtrolling" he could maintain Depth and Speed control, with the lures he was using, and fully cover the structure at the same time. You don't ever forget a basic fact — depth and speed control MUST be maintained AT THE SAME TIME.



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*You can't sacrifice one to get the other.*

Immediately after this story appeared in the magazine a lot of mail came rolling into the Editor. They were all alike in that each one was telling him to stop writing about those deep clear lakes as it had no bearing on HIS fishing. In the first place he didn't have any walleyes and besides only a small segment of the country has deep lakes. And all that jazz about the deep water being the home of the fish and that he spends a lot of time there is for the birds. *He* caught fish and it wasn't in deep water.

These fishermen are not to be blamed, (although it does cause the blood pressure to rise slightly). The part about the fish having their "home" in deep water has him confused, probably due to his own fishing world being so small. Maybe his whole problem is he doesn't know what deeper water means, or he is confused as to *what deep* water is.

Maybe he has heard or read where someone said that deep water was that water deeper than 8 - 10 feet, and all water shallower than this was designated as shallow water. Maybe this has him confused. BUT, if he had "studied" instead of "reading" he would have also seen where it said, "if deeper water isn't available, it will be the deepest available".

If I recall correctly, earlier this year I did an article on "Get The Heck Out of The Trees", and later I covered the "Delta". From these I thought some would get the message on shallow lakes, but I did not expect these articles to make sense

if the reader didn't know basics, especially the part about the deepest water in a particular area being the home of any fish that may be present.

This first KEY to fishing knowledge must be accepted or we can't go forward. Since this is so, let me say more on the subject.

This past fall the wife and I were in Florida for the last Apollo moon shot. While there, I had time to run by and fish a lake I had in some way missed. It was a very large lake, being several miles in diameter. I knew that it was a shallow lake, and when I got there I was informed that the deepest water was 9 to 10 feet in depth. I noted that the water for quite a distance from shore was covered with weeds and lily pads.

After asking a few questions, I told my wife that we would have to find a "break" or a spot that broke from 7 to 9 feet if we wanted to catch some fish. We found three such spots and each was working with big bass. We had a ball. To make it more satisfying we had the whole thing by ourselves, although there were lots of other boats and fishermen on the lake.

Probably you are wondering how I figured we had to find that particular spot. In the first place, I heard the man say 9 - 10 feet was the deepest water in the lake. The second thing he said was fishing hadn't been so good the last week or so. In the third place I had quickly noted all those other fishermen on the lake working the daylights out of the weeds and pads. I figured this had been going on for the last week or so which

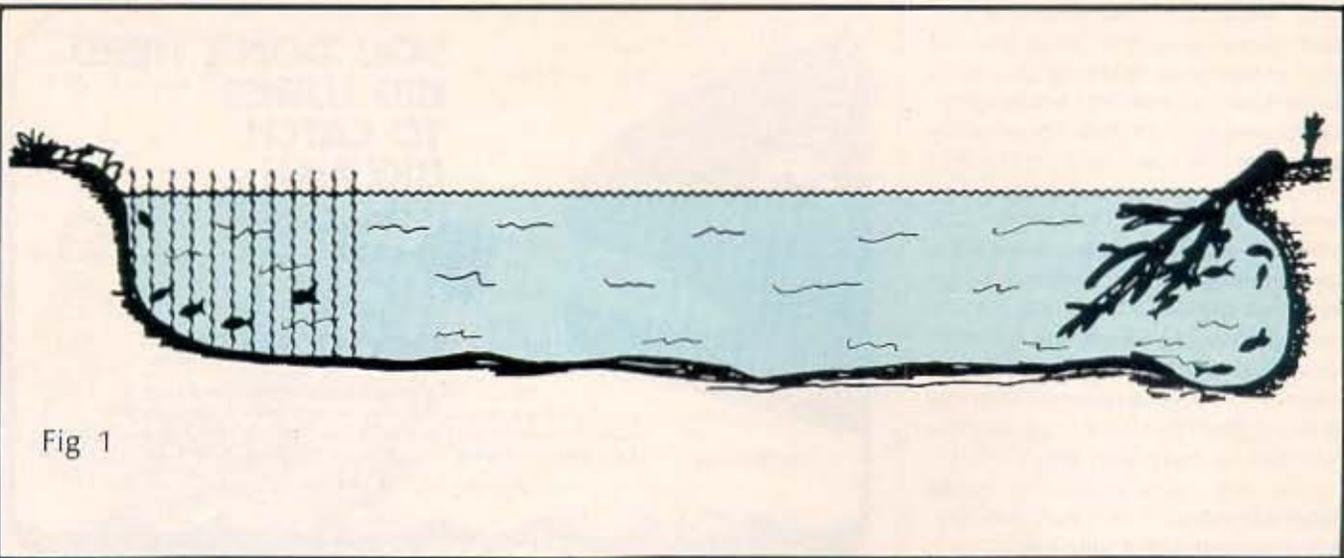


Fig 1

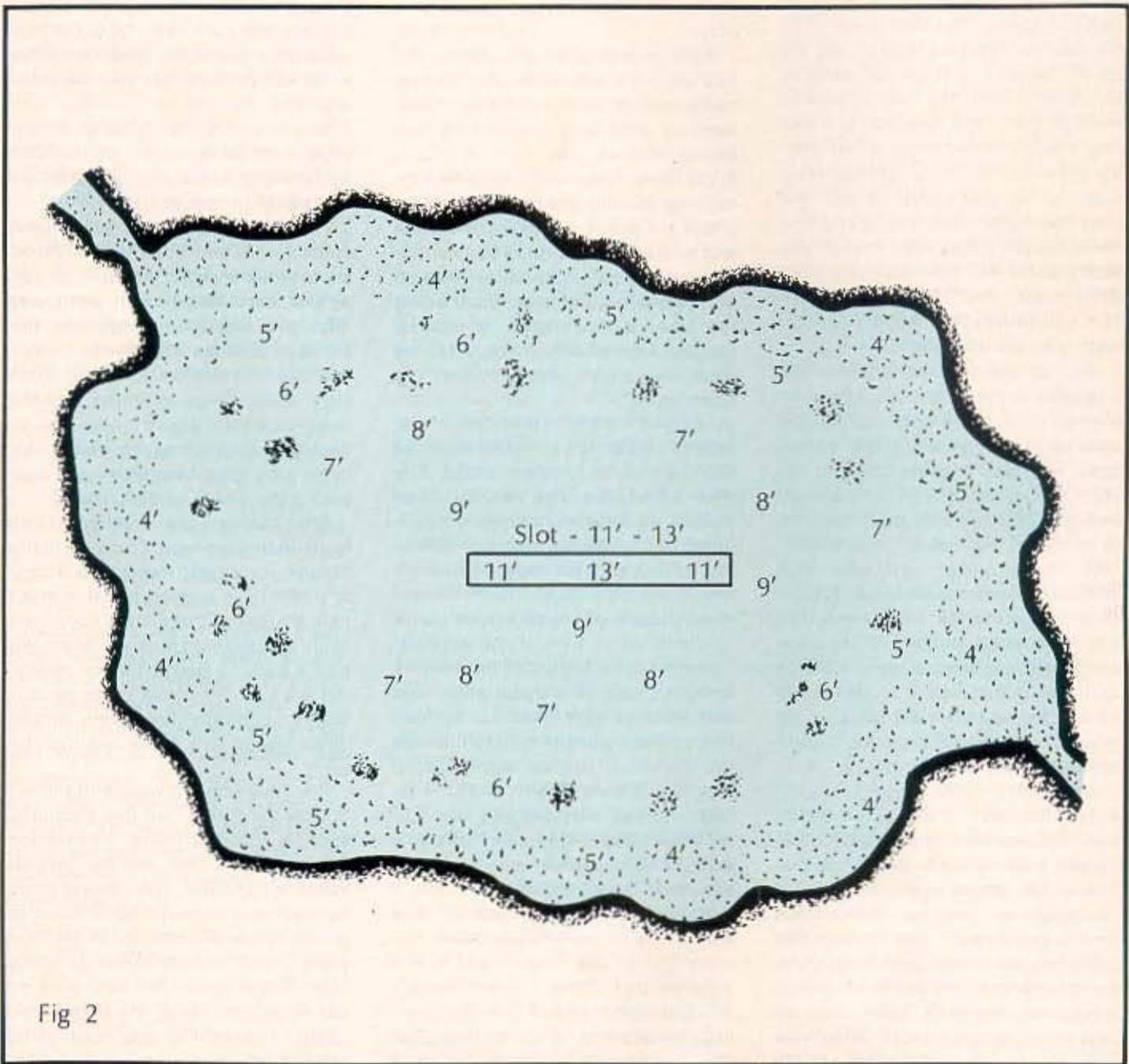


Fig 2

clearly indicated the fish were not in the weeds or pads. I noted also the weeds and pads cut off at 5 - 6 feet, and since the bottom was flat with no "breaks" or structure beyond the weedline, the fish HAD to be in the deepest water. I picked the 7 - 9 foot section as the weather conditions told me the fish *would not move very far*. This type of break would be large enough for me to see, and if there happened to be a deeper break it would be so close by I'd have no difficulty finding it. It was easy pickings. (The spots are so far out in the lake I suppose the only ones who will ever pass over them will be the water skiers.)

Figure 1 shows a cross section or side view of a canal, slough or stream. If there ever was an excuse for a fisherman not to believe what has been said about the deep water being the home of the fish, this would be it. BUT, if you look closely it is not a contradiction.

The home, or the area where they spend the greater part of their time, is *under* the weeds, brush or undercut in the bank (or shoreline). Close observation will show that there doesn't exist any deeper water to speak of. The whole thing is shallow. It would be natural for the fish to take up housekeeping under the weeds, brush, etc. This gives him the necessary protection from the light. (As does deep water.)

If you ever fish such an area and there is no deep water, and *no cover* you'll not likely find any fish. I also believe if you fished water such as Figure 1, you would find the fish *under the cover* where the movements of the water had "cut" the *deepest*. If you're wondering how to fish it, or how the fish migrate — that's another subject entirely.

Figure 2 is a top view of a large shallow lake. It is several miles across. The area near the shorelines are covered solid with grass, weeds and pads. This extends out to a depth of 4 - 5 feet. Beyond the solid weeds exist scattered weed patches. These are located in water 6 - 7 feet in depth. All the rest of the water, the greater part, is free of any vegetation and for a mile or more only increases in depth to 8 - 9 feet. Then suddenly at 9 feet it breaks to 11 feet, and here exists a long narrow slot. The width is only 50 - 100 feet, but it runs for a mile or more in length. The deepest water in the slot is a

small section that's 13 feet deep.

In my book, just how shallow can you get? Now, where is the home of the fish? You might say, "Well, I catch them up in the solid weeds and around some of the weed patches. In the spring I murder the fish there".

I say, "Where do you catch them after that?"

You say, "Oh I don't fish much after that, it gets too hot and the fish don't bite".

I believe if you would have noted when you found the fish in the areas mentioned, it was in the spring near the spawning season. If you had looked closer you might have seen that you didn't catch them every day. Also, if you did catch them for a few days running, you did not catch them in the same spot every day. In fact, you never did find them in an EXACT spot. It may have been near, but not exactly. This should have told you, the fish were "away from home".

If you had paid close attention to this particular lake for a period of time you would have found the SEASONAL migrations of the fish, due primarily to the spawning urge, would have put them in or close to the solid weeds. The weather and water conditions were good so they drifted around in the area for a spell. After the spawning you could have probably found them, not in the solid weeds, but in or around the weed patches, (sparse weeds). Then shortly thereafter they disappeared.

It was at this time you decided to go home and not go fishing much. Well, the fish did the same thing. They went "home" — the slot. They spend most of their time here, and won't go very far from this area, until about the time you decide to go fishing again — next spring.

These types of shallow lakes are a welcome sight to a Spoonplugger. The fish are all balled up in a small area and ready for the plucking. The depth is so little they can't get away, but the best part is you're way out there *all by yourself!*

I'm ready to cut this thing off, BUT . . . there's something still bugging me. Next month, just four short weeks away, George and his writers have a new bunch of readers, and they're *right back where they started*.

*Of course your waters are different. Every body of water is somewhat*

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*different from every other body of water — and the weather every day is different, too. However, all bodies of water are alike in that they contain water, held in place by the shoreline, and the water is wet, and it (almost always) contains fish. The fish is completely at the mercy of his environment. His body is the same temperature as the water in which he swims. He is a creature of instincts. Those instincts are the same in every body of water, no matter the water or weather conditions. The fish reacts to water and weather conditions according to his instincts. When you understand the fish, you will know how he reacts and when and where he does what.*

*If you don't understand the basic fundamentals of fish behavior, however, then you are in trouble. You are then at the mercy of wind and water conditions, without the knowledge of how to interpret them. Your waters are not different, and you are not so different either. Few fishermen have the knowledge to interpret weather and water conditions in order to know how best to catch fish. And that's a fishing fact.*