

Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success

by BUCK PERRY
Education Editor

Part XIII

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.

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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"Buck, would you consider stringing up a couple limits for those boys from Iowa? I talked to them last



Most Of The Time, Most Of The Water Contains No Fish

night. They have only one more day to fish, and they don't have enough fish. They have invited all their friends in for a fish fry when they get back home".

"What kind do they want?"

"They have some walleyes, but no bass or northern".

"OK".

The above conversation occurred a few weeks ago, when Don Nichols and I were fishing the chain of lakes on the Winnipeg River in western Ontario. We had gone there primarily to catch Smallmouth bass, on popping bugs (flyrods). Since we both like to catch most anything that swims, we had located the walleyes and northern, and were also keeping tabs on them.

Don made the above request, shortly after we had released the 34th smallmouth for the morning. We were heading in, as we had promised to take our wives fishing right after breakfast.

This particular area on the Winnipeg is well known for its great fishing, and there was quite a large number of fishermen at the resort. Many were from the United States.

The majority of the parties were using guides. The weather wasn't cooperating very well, and fishing

was considered pretty bad at the time. Most were taking off, scattering in all directions, for areas miles and miles away from the dock. Later I heard them talking about the number of miles they had traveled that day. A dozen or more boats, with guides, would pull into the dock in the evening with only one or two having any fish.

Don and I had already decided the area within sight of the Lodge and dock was as good, if not better, than anything we could possibly find in other areas. We couldn't ask for any better structure or better fishing than we were having in the immediate area.

We were not surprised that the guides were zooming away for parts unknown — we had been witnessing it for years. It gave the fishermen a feeling of "getting his monies worth", and that was going to some remote, "secret" fishing hole. After all, the guide isn't stupid. Going long distances eats up a lot of time. Besides if he took the fishermen to a spot within sight of the dock, he would find the next day the party had decided not to use a guide.

Working out the area within sight of the dock, allowed us to do our fishing as we felt the urge. We could take short trips before breakfast, after breakfast, before lunch, after lunch or after dinner. Food and drink, or even a short nap, was only moments away. We had a ball.

When we first arrived, it didn't take long to see the fish were not "jumping", so to speak, in the boat. We had to go after them. Sometimes it was shallow, sometimes it was deep. Sometimes here, sometimes there. It didn't matter to us where they were, we enjoy and prefer different presentations, and different type lures. We had "mapped" the area and knew what areas and what structures we had to work to be successful — and in what way.

I can't recall the number of fish we gave to parties to help fill their cool-

Knowledge Key *cont.*

ers, but it was quite a few. On several occasions (when asked) we would advise fishermen to move their boat just a short distance. Those that followed our advice caught fish — and we would know when they left for home, several days later, as their boat was no longer sitting on the spot.

Although Don and I were using artificials exclusively, most fishermen were using minnows and fishing for walleyes. Their choice of bait was a wise move — for the time (Depth and Speed Control). The problem most were having was the fact they were *fishing water that contained no fish*.

I doubt if any of those fishermen (or guides) gave as an excuse for not catching fish, the fact they were fishing *water that contained no fish*! I am sure that the guides, at times, were fishing *potentially* productive water, and they had caught fish there in the past. The excuses I heard were; "the weather is bad", "The fish are just not biting" — "You should have been here earlier", etc.

If this was what they thought was the cause of their failure, why were they burning up tank after tank of gas running all over the area **DOING THE SAME THING**. What were they hunting? A fish that would 'bite'? A fish? You figure it out, I can't.

The boats out of position, were probably using the same excuses for not catching fish.

A couple days ago I got a call from a fisherman in Texas. He stated he had just read something on me, and after reading what I had said about the fish, he thought he would just call me, as "*there just might be something to it.*" He also said that the picture he saw, showed I just used "simple" tackle, and had only a small motor on a "crude" fishing skiff. Then he went into a long spiel about his gear — Bass boat, big power plant, electric motor, electric anchor, high cushioned seats, forward control, etc. etc. etc.

My part of the conversation was, "Yes" — "Yeh" and "Uh-huh".

He told me he had just returned from a fishing trip to Toledo Bend. Before he could continue, I butted in and said, "Yeh, a place so full of yearlings, it's like shooting fish in a barrel".

He sorta hesitated, and then said

he hadn't done so well. "The fish had gone on a hunger strike". He had spent several days running over the lake, beating the waters to a froth, with no success. He had decided that he was going back to fishing a lake closer to home, and that my "theories" just might help him out — at least he was "willing to give it a try." (I no longer get offended when people refer to my stuff as "theories" — instead of fishing facts. At times I do feel some pity though)

I told him I would send him a copy of Fishing Facts, and he could read up on what makes a fish tick. Which I did.

I am quite sure this Texan had covered many miles of surface water. I have little doubt that he had fished over productive structure. BUT, due to weather and water conditions, the water that contained fish had been so drastically reduced he was unable to find them. His knowledge of fish behavior was so meager, he had spent his time fishing water with no fish. (I never did tell him that he had set a limit on his fishing ability, the day he purchased HIS fishing gear.)

One of the basic facts about fishing is; *MOST of the time MOST of the water contains no fish.*

After talking to, and observing fishermen for the greater part of my life, I am convinced that very few understand this fact. When referring to the mass of them, maybe the word "understand" is a bad choice of words. Maybe I should say "don't know" or "don't care". Better still, it may be better to say, "If they do know this fishing fact, they sure don't let it affect their fishing procedures." To bear this out, all you have to do is observe "where" and "how" they do their fishing.

You might say of the average fisherman, "Maybe he doesn't know, maybe he has never been told this fishing fact".

The pleading of "not knowing" is no excuse in this case, for his fishing behavior. *If he's catching no fish, it should be obvious he is fishing water that contains no fish.* If he has had his eyes open at all, he has observed that the fish caught, were caught in particular areas — and in certain ways. I can't swallow the statement about his not knowing or hearing about "structure" and what part it, and weather, plays in fishing. This might have been true 20-25 years ago, but not today.

Although most fishermen today, have heard about these important fishing facts, most take it lightly, and are concerned, and depend, only upon Action, Size and Color of their lures, to put fish on the stringer. Few realize these are *aids* only, and *not* the major controls! They spend hour after hour in certain sections of water, trying all the little twitches, movements, wiggles, colors, or combinations — trying to create a fish right out of thin air (or water)

At times he may "stumble" upon some water that contains a fish, and for the rest of the day tries to duplicate that "certain something" that caught that fish. He can't understand why the other fish refuse his creation. I have often wondered if he ever gave any thought to the idea, that maybe the fish he caught, *was the only one that saw his lure all day!*

Back in the 1920's my Daddy would often hire an ole mountain man to paddle the boat for us as we cast the shorelines. He knew most of the spots where fish had been caught. At the time, I thought he knew more about fishing than any man alive. Later on, I realized he didn't know too much about fishing, but there were several things he taught me that I would never forget. Possibly the things he said and did had an influence on my looking into the facts of fish behavior.

He would paddle us into a "fishy looking" place and say, "Hold up boys, until I get the boat positioned just right". After carefully maneuvering the boat, he would then say, "OK Bob, you cast over there toward that rock, and you Sonny (Me), cast over toward that stump."

Many times before either of us had completed the retrieve, he would say, "Let's get out of here, he ain't there". With this remark, he would move the boat out before we had a chance to make another cast.

At first this caused me to almost cry. I wanted to try all my little pet retrieves, actions, and those great colors, I had spent days creating. Later, I realized, as he did, it would have been a waste of effort to spend any more time there. *If the fish had been there, we would have made contact.* He had taken great care in positioning the boat, so we would be sure we made the correct presentation.

Today, I limit my casts, in an area, to about five, — none of which are to



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Knowledge Key *cont.*

the same spot. At times, when checking the deep parts of a structure, I may fan-cast the area with five (5) casts with one type of lure (free running bottom bumping) and five (5) casts with a jump type lure (jig, worm, spoon, etc.) This amount of casting allows me to check fully Depth and Speed Control for the area. If I know the EXACT spot I am checking, then I reduce the number of casts.

If this doesn't produce, then I am off to another place — unless I decide to wait for the fish to appear. In other words, if I check an area with correct depth and speed, and don't get a fish — *he ain't there*. I have "only" positive proof, that this type of discipline on Depth and Speed control works.

When considering the fact that **MOST OF THE TIME, MOST OF THE WATER contains no fish**, there are so many factors involved, it is hard to say which is of the greatest importance. As far as the fisherman is concerned, he must be fully aware of this fundamental fact and **WHY IT IS SO**. It is in the answering of the **WHY'S** that we are able to solve the problems created by this fundamental fact. In short, *when we understand why* most of the water is empty of fish most of the time, we will be able to find them.

When a lake is first built, for a while yearling fish can be found in practically all areas of the reservoir. Then after a while, certain areas not suitable for the growth and survival of the fish, are eliminated. After a few years, more and more areas will be eliminated, reducing quite drastically the surface area of the reservoir that contains fish.

The areas that contain fish will be reduced still further when the fish become larger, and adapt to the lake. Now instead of masses of fast growing fish, roaming over vast areas of the lake, we now have *groups of larger fish (and their offspring) adapted to home areas*, with migration limited to certain paths or migration routes. Instead of acres

Buck Perry holding beautiful large sized bass. Fishing knowledge is all it takes for fish like these from a "fished out" lake. Buck has been proving it for thirty years.

and acres of a section producing fish, it is now down to a structure, and in most cases to just a small portion of that structure.

The distance between good structures can be quite large. They can be so limited in number, a fisherman could fish all day without ever passing a productive spot.

In 1971 I spent several months in the State of Indiana fishing all the well-known lakes. I covered the entire state, mapping, filming, taking pictures, and noting the water conditions in all areas. My purpose in doing this was that I planned a series of formal schools in the State in 1972. (This did not come about, as a fire in late 1971 destroyed all my materials.)

After working all the important water in the state, I had no trouble picking out the most productive lakes. *I had the least trouble picking out the BEST bass lake in the State* — as far as I was concerned. *The moment I laid eyes on it, I knew it was THE lake in the state.*

The lake did *not* have a very good reputation as a good fishing lake. The reasons why it was not fished successfully, *were the same reasons why I knew it would be the best one!* The water color was perfect, for maximum growth and movement of the fish. BUT, the terrain, and the make-up of the lake told me that productive structures would be few and far between. It also told me that the migrations on these structures would be very limited. In fact so limited, the fish would seldom come far enough for the average fisherman to make contact. I also knew, if I found the spots, I would find, not only lunker fish, but a lot of them! It turned out just like I figured. It was the best lake in the State for lunker bass.

TWO MONTHS AFTER I FISHED AND MAPPED THIS LAKE IT WAS DRAINED AND POISONED OUT. Why? Because the fishing was so "bad"! When I recall all the good lakes from Canada to Florida, that have been drained or poisoned out due to the complaints of the unknowledgeable fisherman, it troubles me.

It should be obvious to you, that if migration is limited by the nature of the structure, *fishing will be bad for those who know little* about structure and the survival instincts of the fish. At the same time, you can also see it eliminates most of the water that

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contains fish, and is a sitting duck for a Spoonplugger. I have often wondered which would be cheaper for the "State" — educate the fishermen, or drain, poison and restock the lake? I am quite sure the educational route would be cheaper, faster and more lasting. Because, in just a few years they are right back where they started, and the fishermen are "on their backs" again.

I don't react too much anymore when I see a good lake "restocked". I have seen it happen too often. But, I can't say the same thing about some Spoonpluggers who spent a great deal of time working out a lake, and then came back later and found it "killed". I often get a chuckle out of Terry O'Malley of Chicago. He had "worked out" a lake in southern Wisconsin, and was having a ball on a "clean spot" on a 17 foot Breakline. The lake was quite large. It had one deep section in the form of a large round hole. The breakline around this hold was a long distance from shore, and the entire water shallower than 17 ft. was flat, void of breaks, and covered with a thick layer of muck.

I don't know how long it took him

to find the relatively small clean spot, with shells, (on the 17 ft. breakline). He couldn't hit it correctly on the troll, but he found that if he anchored at a certain spot in shallower water, an *extra long* cast would allow him to work a bottom walking lure correctly for a short distance. This was all that was needed to produce the lunker catches desired.

A couple seasons after he had his "secret" lake, it was pulled down and poisoned out. You could have heard his raving in the next township! (It was known as a bad lake).

So, he went to work and found himself another lake in the area. This time, he picked one that was completely surrounded with homes, and playground areas. (He'd fix them THIS time). He found the lake "loaded" with big bass and big northern. One particular spot producing most of the big bass, and another producing most of the big northern. Each spot was in such a position that if you didn't know *exactly* how to make the troll, or where to place the boat for casting, you would never make contact with the fish. It was practically impossible for a fisherman to just "stumble" upon the fish!



Knowledge Key *cont.*

TWO YEARS LATER it too, was drained and poisoned out. There just had to be a lot of ears burning in that state, from his reaction.

In order for you to better understand the factors that contribute to *most of the water not being productive*, let's take a lake, and eliminate all the water that does not contain enough fish to warrant any time or effort. When viewing the amount of water in a lake or reservoir, you should view it from all directions. Not just the surface area, but all the water below. In other words, length, width and depth — all the water.

Figure 1 is an aerial view of a well-known lake in the Midwest. I might add that the last time I heard (1972) this particular lake was scheduled to be "restocked". I suppose by this time you know what this entails. If this is done, most Spoonpluggers will pass it up, or mark it off as a

fishing hole in our generation. If everything goes perfectly right, it may *some day* have the amount of BIG fish it has today — *but I doubt it*. I am, though, quite sure the next generation will squawk just as loud and clear for the "State" to do something about it, as they are today. (Too bad they don't keep stocking it each year with young fish, and teach the fishermen where and how to catch them — *after they grow up!*)

You will note the lake is quite large. I do not know how many acres or miles of shoreline it contains, but whatever it is, there's quite a lot of water down there. The maximum depth is around 35 ft. The weedline cuts off at approximately 5 ft. (good water color). Outside the weedline some bottoms are clean, while others are dirty. The predominant large game fish in the lake are Large-mouth Bass, and Northern Pike.

Take a close look at Figure 1, and try to figure out where the good

structure might be. Where would you start, or do your fishing? How would you go about fishing this lake?

Figure 2 is the same view of this lake, but here, I have marked the areas that contain the fish. ("A" and "B") Although big bass and north-erns can be caught in either area, if you wanted to go after big bass in quantity, you would work section "A". If you wanted lunker north-erns, you would concentrate in section "B".

Look at figure 2, wouldn't you say the amount of water to be fished has been *reduced*?

Hold on, we're not thru yet. We gotta reduce the water *that contains fish* still further.

Figure 3 is a top view of Section "A". The solid line represents the breaklines in this section where the fish will be found. Note carefully the depths of the breaklines.

The overall size of this section isn't too big, and the areas that will produce fish are still smaller. You

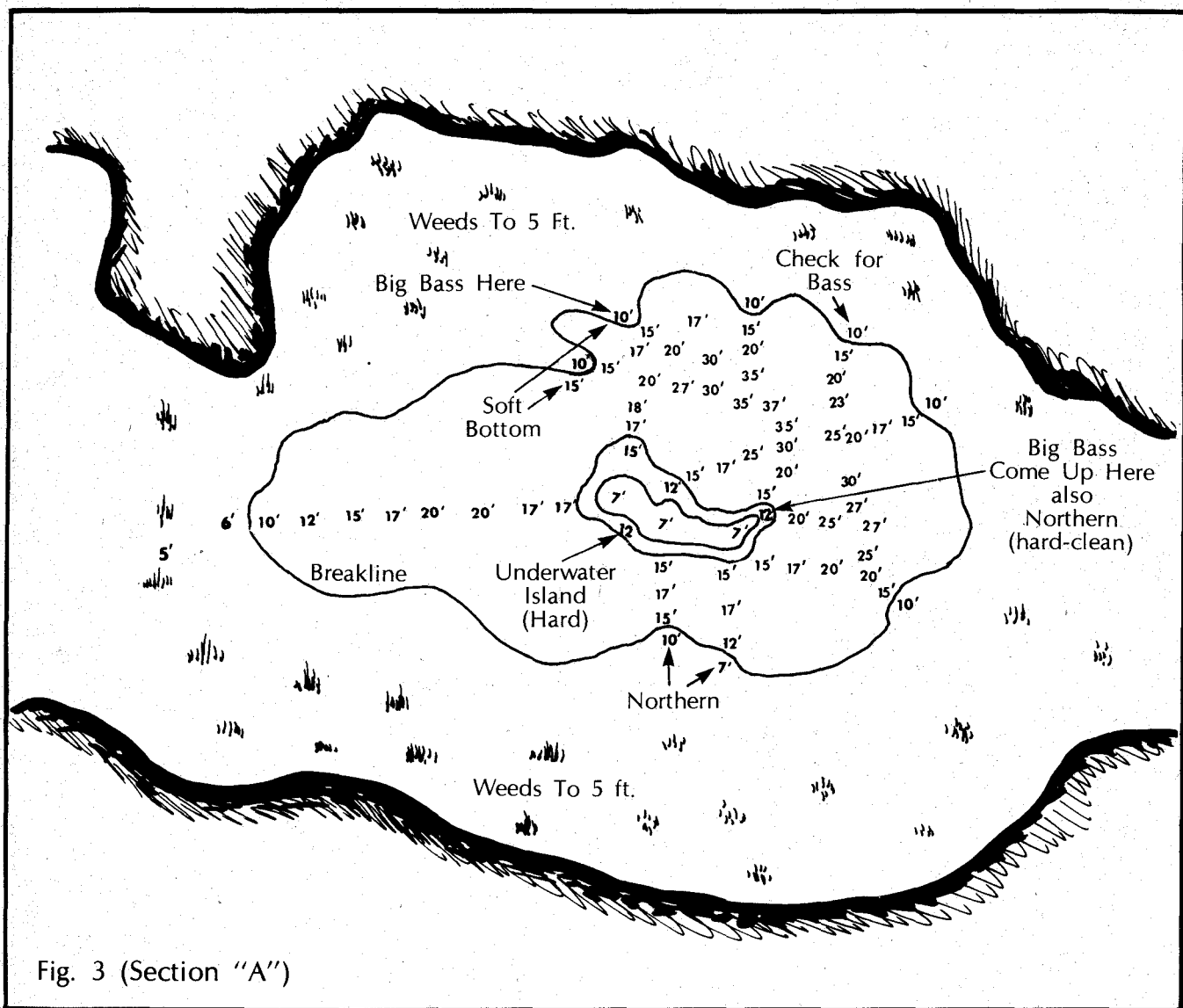


Fig. 3 (Section "A")

Knowledge Key *cont.*

will note that the fish do not come to all parts of the breakline. Neither do they use all the "fingers" or projections.

Wait just a minute, we got a couple more steps to take. First, the fish will not be on these spots all the time. They do not move or migrate constantly or consistently. On a normal fishing day, you can't expect the fish to move to these areas more than one or two times — and for only a short period. Second, weather conditions in the area may be such, that days may pass before any quantity of fish move toward the spots.

Figure 4 is a top view of the larger section "B". Here again, not all the parts of the section produces. If you were to take the areas where fish can be caught in quality and quantity, and overlay them on the total lake (Figure 1) they would most likely appear as small dots.

By this time you should begin to see what I mean when I say, MOST of the time MOST of the water contains no fish. You should also begin to realize why you can't fish blindly, or haphazardly, and expect to "stumble" upon a fish. You should see if you do not understand the instincts and habits of the fish, and what part "structure" plays, MOST of the time, you will be fishing where they AIN'T.

Your reaction to this article might be, "He isn't talking about my fishing water, he is talking about one isolated instance in the Midwest."

You want a bet I'm not talking about your fishing hole? This particular lake is rather a small body of water, when compared with most important fishing lakes and reservoirs. I would go further, and say, if you compared the productive areas for lunker fish in this lake, to the overall size, percentage wise, it has more productive water than your

lake! Furthermore, this particular lake was easy to work out. I can't say the same thing about your lake.

In Part XII of this series (in the July '73 issue of Fishing Facts), I tried to hammer home the fundamental fact that the HOME OF THE FISH IS DEEP WATER. In this part, lucky XIII, I tried to hammer home another fundamental fact: most of the time, most of the water is empty of fish. Both are such basic, fundamental fishing facts, that unless you grasp both of them fully, you will never be a successful fisherman! I'm not using the word "never" carelessly, I mean just that. The word is NEVER.

It is only *after* you accept and fully understand these two basic principles of fish behavior that you will be able to go about solving the problems of the waters you fish. Do they apply to your lake? You cannot find any place on this planet where they do not apply to a lake!

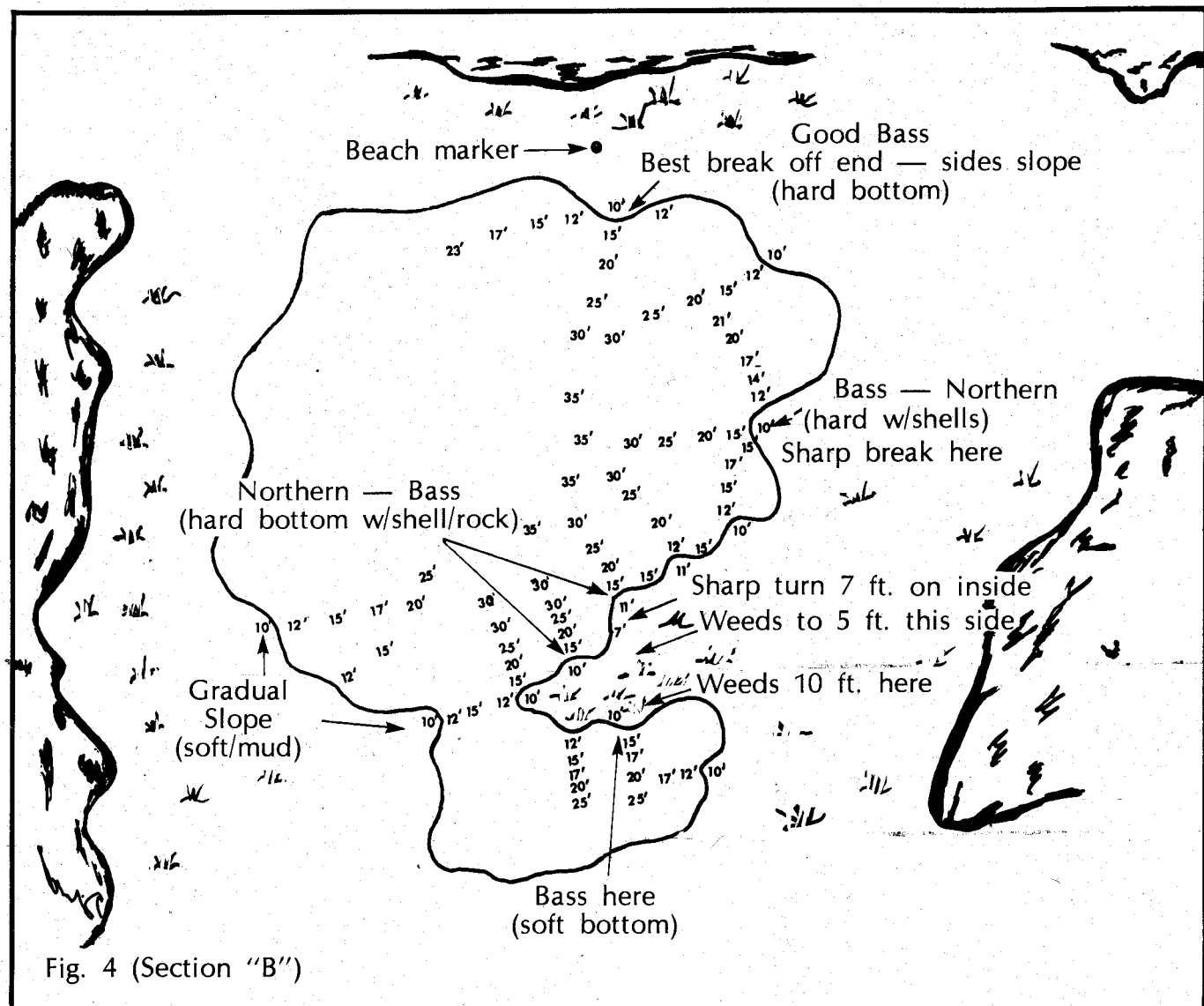


Fig. 4 (Section "B")