



# Buck talks fishing

## Learning To 'Read' Water Tells You Where To Fish In Any Body Of Water

by BUCK PERRY  
Education Editor

### Editors Foreword:

Words cannot be found to state how privileged we are that Buck Perry has agreed to accept the title of Fishing Facts Education Editor.

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.

In June of 1972, Fishing Facts began publishing a series of articles written by Buck and titled, "Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success". The articles covered many of the BASIC concepts which lead to successful fishing. How fish live, his habits, his instincts, his reaction to stimuli, how weather and water conditions affect him, and what it takes to put him on the stringer, are all subjects which can only be answered through KNOWLEDGE. With the publication of our September 1973 issue the 13th and last article by this great teacher brought this series to a close. We do not consider the conclusion of this series as an ending. Rather, it is a beginning.

Each month Fishing Facts is introduced to new readers and subscribers. For many of them the subject of structure fishing will be totally new and unheard of. For these new readers we will, from time to time, contin-

ue to emphasize the very basic concepts of structure, fish habits, instincts, etc.

However, for those of you who have already read, studied and observed much of the basic material presented in past issues, it is time to progress. In a sense it is time to leave elementary school and progress to further study. With this objective in mind, no one is better suited nor more qualified to lead us toward that goal than the "Dean" and "Daddy" of structure fishing, Buck Perry himself.

It is with great pride that we present this new series of articles by Buck titled "Buck Talks Fishing". In this new program he will continue to share with us his vast warehouse of fishing knowledge, as he presents more advanced material.

In order to progress however, the series will begin at a point where the student should have a clear understanding of basic knowledge and be able to comprehend the meaning of the nomenclature used.

If you are a new reader, may we suggest several steps which will allow you to "catch up" or achieve a better and more meaningful understanding of this new series.

May we suggest that you:

1. Study a copy of Buck's great new book, "Spoonplugging, Your Guide To Lunker Catches". This book contains all the basic facts of fish movements, basic structures, basic weather and water conditions, basic presentation of lures, and much much more. This book was 25 years in the making, a quarter century of fishing knowledge put down on paper for the first time so that fishermen everywhere could share in

better fish. This book has just gone on sale this month, for \$9.90 in soft cover and \$19.90 in hard cover, limited edition. Available on an unconditional money back guarantee from us, Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 4169, Milwaukee, Wis. 53210.

2. Familiarize yourself with our glossary of terms titled "Fishing Talk — Our Language of Structure Fishing", which can be found near the beginning of each issue of Fishing Facts.

3. Reprints of Buck Perry's series on "Knowledge Is The Key To Fishing Success" are available from us at 25¢ each. There are thirteen of them. Order only those you missed, of course.

No other publication is privileged to have Buck on its staff. We hope this series of articles and all future issues of Fishing Facts will allow each fisherman to expand his fishing horizons to a point where he becomes as great a fisherman as he wishes to be.

For the past several months I have traveled thousands of miles over many States, fishing and observing fishermen. Most of this time was spent on Reservoirs (man-made lakes) rather than Natural lakes. This was due in part to the fact some of these reservoirs had been built since I was in the area last. In fact, most all my fishing was in bodies of water I had never fished before. These were scattered over great distances, and in some cases only one per State.

In some of these reservoirs, the fishing was tough, due to weather and water conditions at the time. But, in no case did I find anything of unusual nature, or conditions that were unique. In one Highland type lake that was deep and clear, I had to go to wire line on the troll before I had success. The fish were found on



a structure at 45 feet. In another instance, in a Flatland type reservoir, I had to go to wire again to find the fish along the breaklines of the channel at 35 feet. But in most cases the fishing situations were routine, or just normal conditions expected, and the fishing was much easier, with no extremes of depth or speed control.

In ALL of the waters fished, the features of structure, depths, water color, and weather conditions were different. I can't recall any two that had exactly the same conditions. But, in EVERY case, the fish were the same. They were reacting to weather and water conditions, the structures available, and to my lure presentations, in the same manner.

When I started out on these trips, I did not expect to find anything new, or anything I had not experienced many times before. But I did expect to see many new fishermen, and observe just how they were fishing. I expected to find out some of their problems, and especially I hoped to find out the things that are not clearly understood by the average fisherman. Further I wanted to be able to talk intelligently about any particular reservoir, if the occasion ever arose.

The things I observed were little different from what I have observed over the years. I did see more sophistication of equipment, and at times I couldn't believe my eyes at the expense fishermen will go in trying to buy success in some fancy wrapped package. I even asked some, if they ever found any time to "fish", after going through all the gadgets? As in the past, I found the majority of fishermen having trouble making a catch, and in no instance did I find a fisherman that stated he was *satisfied* with his catches. But, I did see some good fishermen who were putting their knowledge to work successfully.

On several occasions, with no thought or planning on my part, I found a "Tournament" in progress at the time I fished the lake. This gave

*We talk a lot about lunkers and "hawgs" in Fishing Facts. If you really want to know the meaning of the word, take a look at this picture. This bass weighs 12 pounds plus. Education Editor Buck Perry puts fish like this on the stringer with regularity. We urge you to study Buck's article so you may some day do the same.*

## Buck Talks *cont.*

me an opportunity to observe a great number of fishermen at one time. Only in one instance was I recognized. I tried to stay clear and observe. I would not have been on the lake at that time, if I had known in advance that a contest was in progress.

When talking to the many fishermen, their interest was shown mainly in the form of questions. These questions came in many forms and on many different subjects. As I think back over these questions, they were no different from those I have heard for most of my life. The greatest difference was that most had heard of "structure". Some had heard of a "cold front". But, it was apparent very few knew what structure was, and what part it played in successful fishing. Most were not aware of the lake make-up, movements of fish, or what part weather and water conditions played.

The question that stands out most in my mind was asked by quite a few fishermen. Little did they know that their question was a **SUMMATION** of all the questions asked on this trip, as well as those asked down through the years. The question was usually asked in a statement such as this: "I just don't understand it. Here you come onto a lake you have never seen before, and you go straight to the area, or structure, that produces, while I, who considers this 'My.lake', have been drawing a blank on the areas that have produced for me in the past. Just how do you do it?"

I couldn't answer his question, at that time. There is no short or simple answer to this question. I could have explained that I was looking for a particular type structure, located in a particular position on the lake bottom, at a particular depth, and that I had to use particular type lures, presented in a particular manner, in order to catch fish. **BUT**, this was no answer to his question, but only the answer to catching fish on *that* particular day, at *that* particular place and time. This information would have been worthless. Besides he would have come right back at me with, "WHY?"

He would have said, "Why did you look for that particular place? Why were the fish there? Why did the lure work in that particular case? Why? Why? Why?"

In the first place I didn't go "Straight" to the area or structure that produced. I **HAD TO FIND IT**. My observations of the lake and its features gave me a pretty good idea what was present in the way of structure, depths, etc. My observations of weather and water conditions gave me a pretty good idea of the movements of the fish. These observations plus knowledge and past experience gave me a pretty good idea what I must look for and how I must present my lures. I spent little time in areas or on structures that did not indicate the presence of features I was looking for. When I located what I was looking for, I went to work and found the fish.

At this point, you should see that the question as to how a fisherman can go into a strange lake and come up with some answers in short order, involves a great deal of information. It demands a ready answer to a great many questions. It demands a great deal of knowledge that must be understood, and put together so that proper interpretation of the fishing situation can result in finding the fish, and then putting them on the stringer.

When the **BASICS** of fish behavior, structure, weather, water, and lure presentation is fully understood, the fisherman can then put this knowledge to work and come up with some answers to the many fishing conditions he is faced with.

Quite often some of us in Fishing Facts try to cover too much material, too fast. At times we are hesitant to spend time on individual questions or problems. Probably we try to stick too closely to the text, or instructional material — due to the fact, there is lots to cover, and there is limited time and space. Probably we should take more time on individual problems, and in the long run reach, and teach more than we would by any other approach.

In the past, I have stressed "Structure" primarily. But structure, although very important, is only *one* of the Basic Fishing Facts that you and I must be concerned with. Since the advent of my new book on the basics of fish behavior, structure, weather, water, and lure presentation, etc. I feel it is now time for me to change my approach in these articles. This change must not only cover the Basics (of fish behavior, structure, weather, water, and lure presenta-

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tion), but it *must* also "Tie" all these facts together.

Quite often when a fisherman gets a fact now, then later gets another, still later another, by the time he gets on the water, he has forgotten, or he cannot mesh, or tie together, these facts to come up with an answer to the condition he faces.

With this thought in mind, let us for a spell, approach the answer to the major questions before the house, by taking a look at fishing situations, and particular questions.

This "question-answer" series, will be slightly different from most, as I WILL ASK THE QUESTIONS. Remember now, in these discussions, we have two major things to consider. (1) — A fisherman being able to go to strange water, and in short order find the fish and make a catch. (2) — And/or, although this is "your" lake, you fail to catch fish at that particular time.

In these discussions, I am going to stick primarily to Fishing Facts. I am not going into detail — why one fisherman has success, and the other fails. This is your job. *In each fishing situation, or questions discussed, you answer the "why" to both.*

You are going to fish a "Highland" reservoir in the central part of the country. Figure 1 is a top view of this

reservoir. The dam was built in a deep rough gorge. All the area in the lower section of the lake is steep hilly country covered with forest. The lake stretches for miles with deep coves running in many directions.

This lake is located in a section of the country where many small streams are found. Small, clear, feeder streams enter the lake in most every bay, or cove. There are two main rivers in the upper section that feed the lake. One runs to the southeast into forest-covered country. The other main stream flows out of farming country to the northeast. Both major streams receive about the same rainfall each year.

**QUESTION: Where would you fish in this lake?**

Interpretation of the fishing potential of a *smaller* body of water, be it a Natural or Artificial Lake, is not too difficult for the average fisherman. It is when he is faced with a BIG artificial body of water such as Figure 1, that he begins to run into problems.

Most fishermen just can't wait to get on the water when fishing a strange lake. Most likely the lake was reported to be a real "lunker hole". Anticipation is at a high pitch, so he hurries to get fishing. Later, when his catch is zero, he begins to wonder if there are any fish in the water, and probably he starts lam-

basting those that put out such a lousy fishing report.

*It is a wise fisherman who will take the time to study the "lay of the land" of a selected body of water, before he wets a hook.* Taking a little time to drive around a reservoir, observing the water conditions, the terrain, and the type of bottom conditions likely to exist, is well worth the time and effort. During this trip, he can ask all sorts of questions — of a lot of people. He should never ask questions of just a few in a particular area. He will not get the true picture, if he does. By asking many, the true facts begin to appear, or at least he begins to suspect the true facts.

By this time, you should be well aware that there are good conditions and bad conditions for the fish, and your ability to fish for them in the best manner. It should also be obvious to you that you had better do everything in your power to look the situation over and see if you can't eliminate some of the water and come to a conclusion that conditions appear best in this area or that area, for you to do your fishing. A little thought should also tell you that you gotta stop doing your fishing by wild guesses; but instead, go about it in a sound *intelligent* manner. And, if you do this, you should have the battle at least half won.

Let us look at Figure 1, and see if

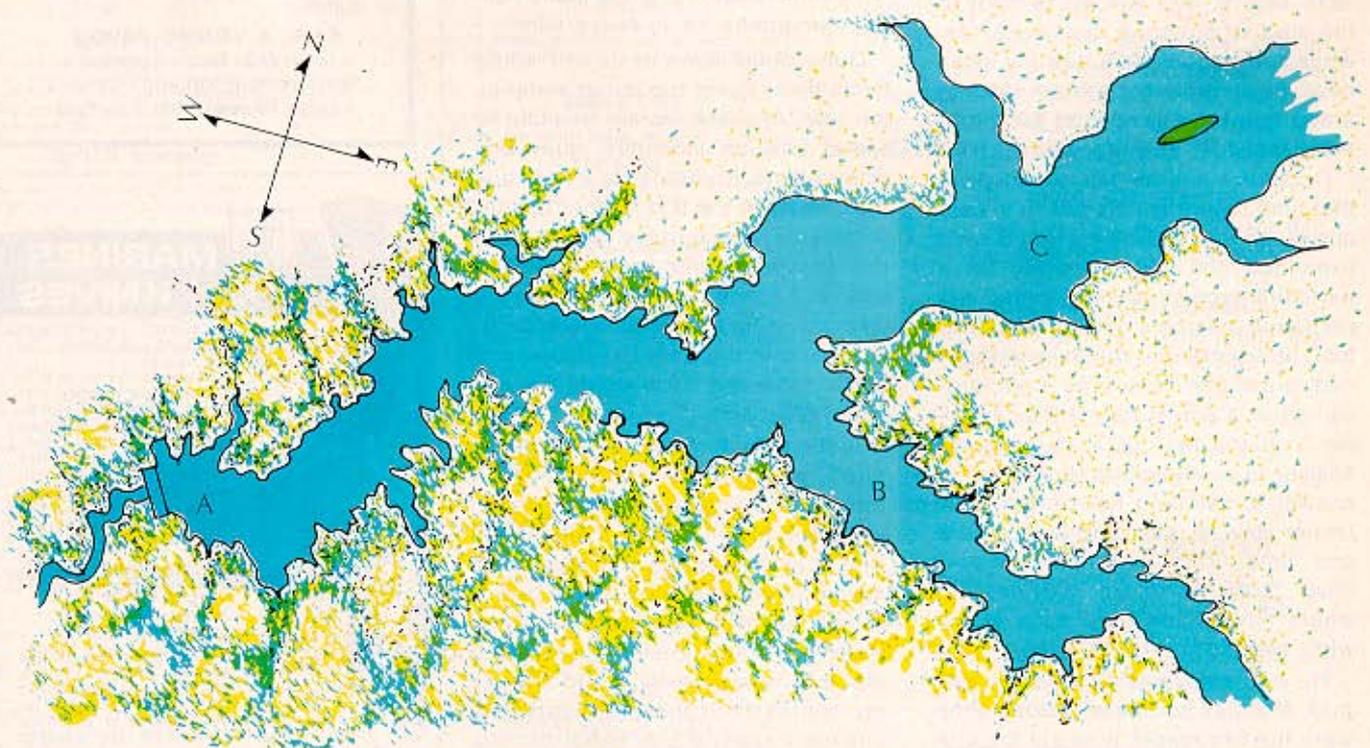


Fig. 1

we can draw some conclusions BEFORE we go fishing.

You might say, "Yeh, but the dang thing is so big, and there is so much water out there. Just where do I begin to make my study?"

You should break your pre-fishing studies down into three (3) headings as you go around the lake observing and asking questions.

- 1 — Water color
- 2 — Available structure
- 3 — Can it be fished properly?

At this time you do not pay too much attention to the weather, except to note the wind, and its affect on the different areas. You just figure the weather won't be too good, and the fishing will be tough under the best of conditions. If you make the best selection of the area to do your fishing, good weather then will just make it better.

In studying water color, you should be aware that most of the time your main concern will be one of too much clarity. In some sections of the country, at certain periods of the year, you may be faced with water being too muddy and you will need to look for water with more clarity. But, *most of the time* you will be faced with finding an area with more dingy water.

It would appear that down in the lower section of the lake toward the dam, (A) the waters would be deep and clear. This is concluded by noting the forest area, the small clear streams, and the length of the lake. Also, one of the major streams comes out of hilly forest lands. (B)

The bottom conditions over most of the area would be steep and rugged. The structures available for fish migration would be short, crooked and steep. In fact, they could be of such nature that you would be unable to pin-point any particular bottom condition as being a potential migration route.

As is done in most Highland reservoirs, the timber was cut and the land cleared before the dam was finished. Again, as in most, saplings and bushes grew up as thick as hair on a hog's back before the lake filled. These submerged bushes can cause plenty of trouble in making a correct presentation of lures.

The main feeder stream to the southeast, (B), would be little different from that of the main body closer to the dam.

The main stream feeding the lake

from the northeast (C), is however another story. It was stated that it flows out of farming country (your trip around the lake would show this). This indicates quite a few things. It indicates the land in that area is no longer steep and rugged. It indicates that the water color will be better for proper lure presentation, richer and dirtier. In all probability the water covers some former farming lands. This means better structure and cleaner bottoms. It should contain structure that you can SEE, such as long bars, flats with channels, islands, humps, or old roadbeds — none of which would be seen in the steep, rugged, forest country.

The third point, "Can it be fished properly", is something you can't ever overlook; but if you do a good job on the first two, you will most likely find the "workable" areas. The relationship between them is too great to miss.

### THE NORTHEAST ARM (C) WOULD BE THE AREA TO FISH?

At this point you may ask, "Which of the three things listed, would you consider the most important?"

Without a moment's hesitation I would say your *water color* observation would be the most important.

After this statement, you might come back and say, "What if I find the best water color in the deep steep sections of the reservoir?"

OK, let's assume that you find the best water color in the lower section due to seasonal rains or runoff (Spring mostly). You would probably be wise in fishing this area, although it is steep and deep with little pronounced structure, and proper lure presentation would be difficult. You are not entirely "dead" due to the fact the fish may be *up and moving* at this particular time. Your *interpretation* of structure, and your presentation of lures would not have to be as precise or "right on the money" under *these* conditions.

You must keep in mind that these normally "too clear" areas, with all of their questionable bottom conditions, are not entirely void of fish. We know the fish are there. It is just a question that for most of the time there will not be sufficient movements, or migrations, or we cannot fish it well enough to make contact. If you should find one of these deep gorge areas with a decent water col-

or, you should fish it — even with all its "toughness" — for you can bet the fish haven't been disturbed or *harvested*.

Each Spring, I fish a particular reservoir in eastern Tennessee for smallmouth bass. The lake is very similar to Figure 1. It is during this period that the lower steep section has good water color. I have no trouble making a good catch. BUT, when and if I fish this lake at any other period of the year, I head directly to the "dirty" arm that comes out of flatter farming lands. For most of the year, I could beat my brains out in the lower section (A) and still not make a decent catch.

So you should see just taking the time to select the area in which to fish, is a practical answer to the questions of why one guy makes a catch, and the other guy gets skunked.

Until next time, let me ask you a question for your consideration and study.

QUESTION: You have fished a particular lake for quite some time. You have found some good bars, and humps that produce for you when the weather cooperates. The water level stays rather constant, but low and behold, you return to the lake after a short absence, and you find the water level is three to four feet lower than you had ever seen it. The weather is fine. You fish your favorite spots for several days, and for all practical purposes you should have been home mowing the lawn — as far as catching any fish. What happened?

BUCK



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