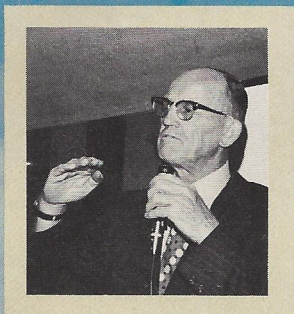


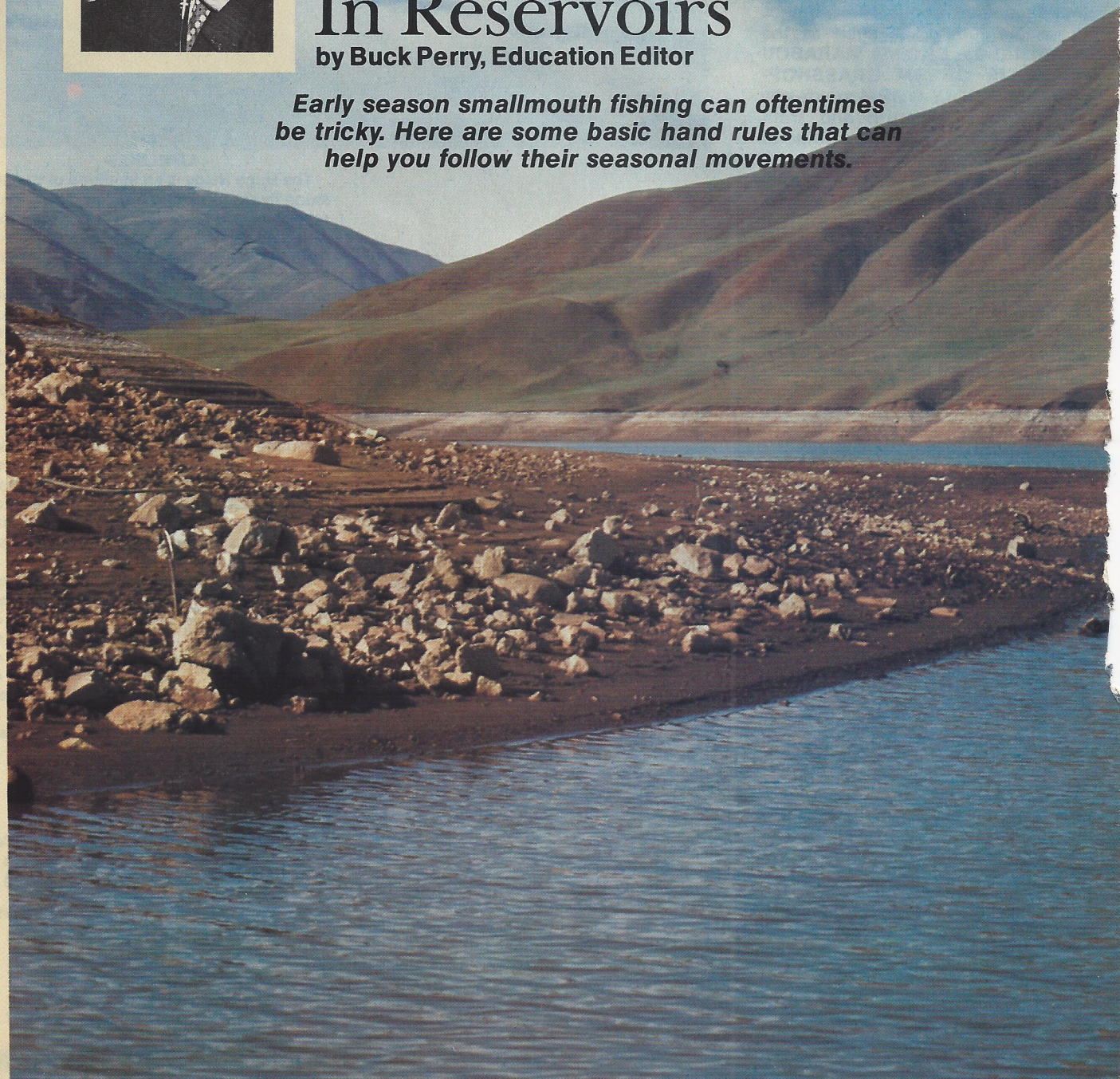
Buck Talks Fishing



Solving The Riddle Of Early Season Smallmouth In Reservoirs

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

Early season smallmouth fishing can oftentimes be tricky. Here are some basic hand rules that can help you follow their seasonal movements.



In many hill and mountain country reservoirs, the smallmouth angler would be wise to look for "dirt" (sand, gravel, clay, etc.) in combination with rocky rubble, instead of searching for pure rock-covered sections. A prime spot (shown above) is exposed during a low water period.



This gulley (or "wash") was created by erosion of the land above. Note how flat gravel bar (structure) was created when earth, sand and gravel collected at base of hillside.

As you might recall, earlier this year (May, '79 Fishing Facts), we talked about a conversation I had with my son-in-law, Stanley Smith. To refresh our memory as to what the discussion was about, let me repeat what Stan said in the beginning.

"I have two things bugging me. First, I'm not sure about my interpretation of a particular fishing situation I ran into last fall. And, secondly, I'm running sorta scared on the seasonal interpretation of the lake you told me to work for pre-spawning smallmouth bass. I plan to take Sharon and the kids (wife and children) on this trip. The water's cold, and there's no telling what the weather will be like. I might come pretty close to a correct answer on this drawing of the lake I have here, but I don't think I can handle some of the questions on early season smallmouth without help."

The first situation Stan was concerned about was a particular feature (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water) off a point of land where two major feeder streams come together in a reservoir (man-made lake). His question was, "On which side of the point would we most likely find the fish when they are in deep water?"

His second uncertainty (as you note above) was about a planned early season (pre-spawn) fishing trip with his family. His lack of confidence was due to the interpretation of the features in the lake (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water, etc.) *from a seasonal point of view as far as the smallmouth bass were concerned.*

The lake he planned to fish was a highland (or canyon) type reservoir — a normal thing when seeking the

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BUCK TALKS FISHING, continued

smallmouth in reservoirs. The lake contained other type game fish, but he was encouraged to think only in terms of bass. If the other species got in the way, so much the better.

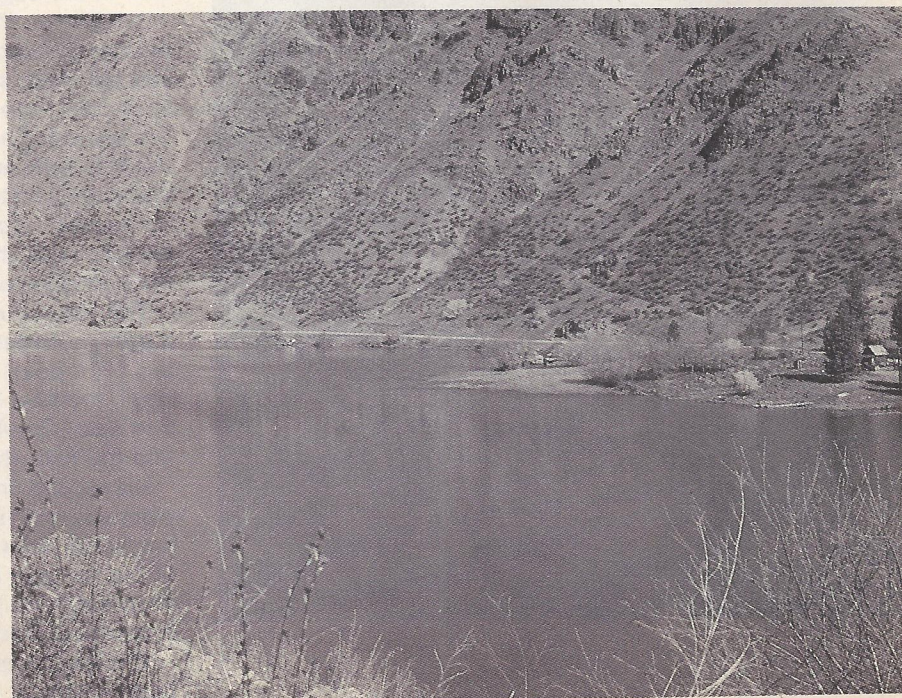
Stan and I did not finish the conversation at that particular time on the seasonal movements, or rather the

seasonal interpretation of the features in the reservoir in light of the smallmouth bass. However, we did get together later and this is about what was said at that time.

As has been said before, a fish can be caught by most anyone at some time or other, most any place, most any way, and on most anything. However, this is not the name of the game if you and I



Observing the terrain will frequently reveal signs of excellent underwater structure. Note rock slide at center of photo.



Flatter section surrounded by canyon-like terrain would be a very good place for fishermen to begin searching for fish.

expect to consistently catch them whenever and wherever we might fish. There is much more to it. And, this is not saying we can go down to the store and buy success in some fancy wrapped package. Knowledge is the key to fishing success, and this involves a great many things. We have talked about some of these things in the past. We have spent a great deal of time talking about the bottom features found in various bodies of water, and their importance in serving as guides to where the fish might be. Interpretation of a body of water is of greatest importance, and it is in this area that we can always become better.

"We should spend our time and efforts in the areas where we have the best possible chance to catch a fish."

Most experienced fishermen know that not all sections of a body of water, wherever it may be, will produce fish consistently. Only in certain areas with certain features will you and I consistently make contact with the fish. We have discussed to great length, and in much detail, how you and I must use structure (breaks, breaklines, deep water, etc.) as our guide to where the fish might be. "Structure" (bars, humps, roadbeds, etc.) was pointed out as the areas in a body of water where we have the best chance to be successful. The "breaks" and "breaklines" on or connected to these structures is where we pinpoint the fish.

In the past (April, '79 Fishing Facts) and in our study material, we have discussed the basic seasonal movements of the bass in a reservoir. In the study we placed the fish in the channel during the coldest period (or the beginning of the season) and talked about how their movements may be short, scattered and unpredictable at this time. The movements or migrations of fish were toward the deeper, steeper, shorter features of the bottom near the channels. Then as the season progressed, we found the movements toward the spawning areas such as the bays and coves. These spawning areas are related to the steeper and deeper shorelines, as well as the longer, flatter, well defined features used by the fish during the warmer season.

Many fishermen seem to forget that regardless of the season and the movements of the fish, you and I should still use the well-defined structure (breaks, breaklines) as our guide to where the fish might be. This does not

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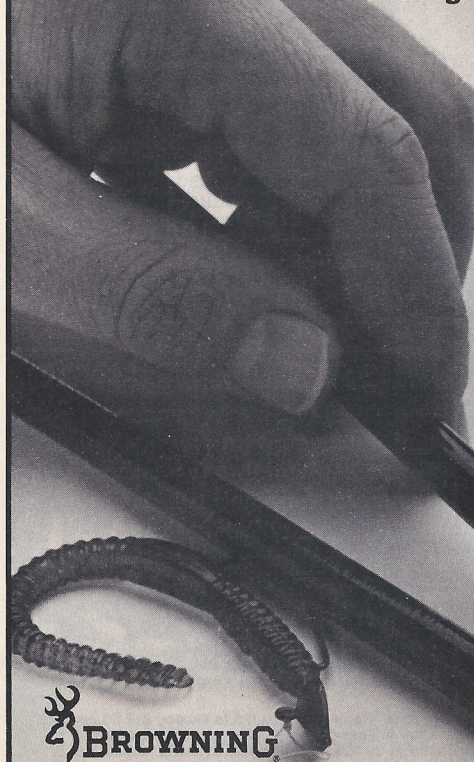
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BUCK TALKS FISHING, continued

mean we disregard the movement pattern of the fish during different seasons of the year. I am sure most have noted when discussing productive structure, or when marking a contour map, we always stress the larger, well-defined bars, humps, etc. Seldom will a steeper (deeper) section of the reservoir (or lake) be marked. However, this does not say we do not consider the fish and the movements during the colder, pre-spawn or spawning season. The deeper waters, breaks, breaklines, steeper shores, coves and bays that you and I must use to consistently catch fish (when these features are being used), must be related to the well-defined structures (breaks, breaklines) that produce during the major part of the season. In other words, not too far away. It would seem rather foolish to expect to find bass on a steep shoreline or back in some cove, miles from any well-defined bar, hump, causeway, etc., that produces fish for most of the year.

Most good fishermen have a set of general hand rules in all phases of fishing. I doubt if any group has more so-called basic "rules of thumb" than does the Spoonplugger. These basic hand rules allow the fisherman to go about his fishing in an orderly manner. But, best of all, they eliminate a great deal of things that he could needlessly be concerned about. They reduce the things for thought and action down to a minimum. The Spoonplugger has basic hand rules he follows at all times. He has rules of movement, structure, weather, water, color, depths, speeds, etc.

At this time, let us look at one of the basic hand rules the Spoonplugger applies to the seasonal movements of the smallmouth in a highland or canyon type reservoir.

As we should know, in reservoirs of this type, the greater part of the shorelines are steep and the waters deep close to shore. At first glance we might think there are no well-defined flatter structures (bars, humps, etc.) anywhere in the lake; however, at a closer look, and maybe some "riding," it becomes obvious that well-defined flatter bars exist. Looking at the terrain will show "slides" or "washes" that have produced excellent structure. The mouths of all coves and smaller pockets should be observed for bars, humps, etc. In many rocky areas, rock slides can be seen above the waterline. The inside of all bends or curves in the

reservoir must be examined. In many highland and canyon lakes the fisherman must look for the "dirt" (sand, gravel, clay, etc.) instead of just the "rock" areas. The "dirt" areas (sand, gravel, clay, etc.) may be miles apart, but they exist. All of the well-defined structure areas (bars, humps, etc.) are the keys to where the fish will be found throughout the season. And this is especially true of the "dirt" areas.

Let us draw a typical area in a highland or canyon type reservoir and give a basic hand rule to the seasonal movement of the smallmouth in a lake of this nature.

Figure 1 is a top view of a flatter bar (sand, clay, gravel, etc.) that was pro-

duced by a "wash," or erosion from a steep hillside along the shore. Most all the adjoining area consists of steep rocky shorelines, with no well-defined bars, ledges or breaklines. In the near vicinity is a steep, deep cove produced by a side feeder stream.

The bar (structure) ("A" — Figure 1) is the key (in our hand rule) as to where the fish might be during the colder, pre-spawn, and spawning period as well as the warmer weather movements. In other words — all year.

We first place the fish in the deep water along the steep shoreline. We do not know exactly where the fish are along this shoreline, nor do we know

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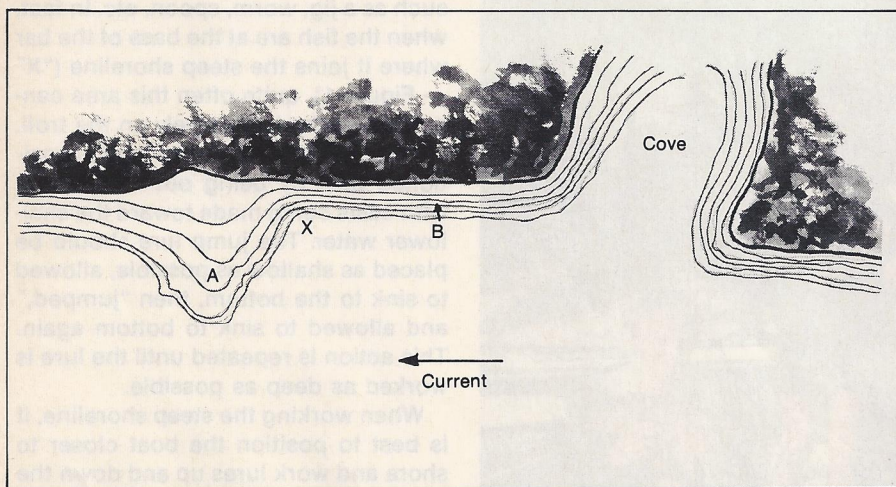
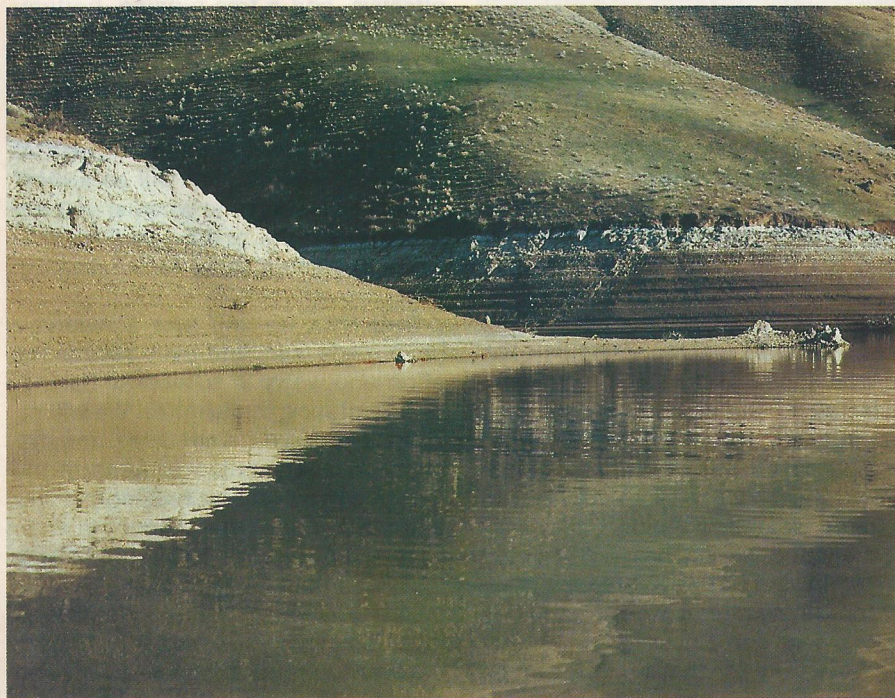


Figure 1 — Top view of flat bar produced by erosion from shore ("A"). Note cove nearby. This bar is a key to where the smallmouth might be during the colder, pre-spawn, and spawning period as well as the warmer season.



The mouths of all coves and pockets should be observed for signs of bars, humps, etc. Here a ridgelike bar is exposed during water drawdown period.

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how deep they might be. However, we do know we are not likely to find them unless some sort of activity, movement, or migration occurs. However, our basic hand rule would say the fish are somewhere between the bar and the head of the cove.

In the coldest and earliest part of the season, our first expectation would be to find the fish somewhere along the steep shoreline (B) if any movement occurred. But, we would not expect many fish to move within range even if some sort of activity did occur. How-

day. Not only may the major part of the fish caught be limited to the inside bend of the bar, next to the steep shoreline ("X" — Figure 1); in all probability it will only be on the "upstream" side of the bar (see direction of current, Figure 1). The upstream side of the structure is likely to be much steeper, or sharper breaking, than the downstream side.


Our basic "rule of thumb" as we get farther and farther toward the spawning season is to have the fish moving along the steep shoreline toward the cove (or spawning area). At times we may not find any fish on the side of the

In all probability the activity and movement periods before the spawn will be during the middle of the day. After the spawning season, our basic hand rule would be to expect early and/or late movement to the ends and deeper sections of the bars. With clearer water we would look for shorter movements with some occurring only after dark. Little time or effort would be spent on the steep shoreline or in the coves.

Presentation of lures in an area of this nature can be made both casting and trolling. However, in the earlier and colder part of the season, trolling may be too fast and the presentation may have to be limited to casting, and in many cases, limited to a jump type lure such as a jig, worm, spoon, etc. In fact, when the fish are at the base of the bar where it joins the steep shoreline ("X" — Figure 1), quite often this area cannot be reached effectively on the troll. This is one area where the boat is positioned best by being out from shore with casts being made toward the shallower water. The jump lure should be placed as shallow as possible, allowed to sink to the bottom, then "jumped," and allowed to sink to bottom again. This action is repeated until the lure is worked as deep as possible.

When working the steep shoreline, it is best to position the boat closer to shore and work lures up and down the shoreline, checking all depths. It is important to remember as the water warms and the fish start moving toward the coves, trolling will become more effective, and a free-running, bottom-bumping lure on the cast (with a faster, steady retrieve) *must not be passed up*.

This basic hand rule when viewing the seasonal movement of the smallmouth in a reservoir will save a lot of time and effort, and will be a most important factor as to whether you are at the right place, at the right time, fishing in the right manner for smallmouth bass.

Next time we will take a reservoir (man-made lake) and try to reduce the effort and worry in successful fishing, by interpreting the features. We will divide them into different types, and discuss the presentation of lures in the best and most orderly manner to arrive at the fish in the least amount of time. Here again we say, "Fishing is usually lousy and then it gets worse." And this means you and I should not spend much time in areas where the chances are slim. We should spend our time and efforts in the areas where we have the best chance to catch a fish. 



After a brief discussion with Education Editor, Buck Perry (at left), Stanley Smith took his wife and kids out for some fast-paced smallmouth action. These youngsters won't soon forget the thrills a spunky bronzeback can provide.

ever, as we move farther into the season toward the pre-spawn and spawning season, we would expect better movements with a quantity of fish.

As we get into the better fishing conditions (warmer, better weather, but far in advance of the actual spawn), it is not likely we would get much migration at any time to the flatter sections of the bar, and probably no movements to the ends of the bar (however, we would check it out). Some fish may move to the "side" of the bar but most likely any major movement of fish would be limited to the base or bend of the bar where it joins the steep shoreline ("X" — Figure 1). The only way to determine at what depth the fish move is to "check it out." The movement could be to 1 or 2 feet in depth, or below the 20 foot level. The depth may change throughout the

bar (A) or at the base ("X"), but will find them scattered along the steep shoreline in "pockets" or indentations and at major breaks and breaklines. Later we may find them well up into the cove.

However, let us say we come back later and find a weather condition has pushed them back out to the deep water along the steep shoreline, and our success is limited to the small pockets or deeper breaks and breaklines along the steep shoreline. After an extreme weather condition, they may be bunched at the base of the bar again. However, as we approach the actual spawning period, we expect to find them closer and closer to the head of the cove. (Any fish that might spawn on the flatter sections of the bar will show up in our presentation of lures.)