

RESERVOIR BASS

Here Are Some Good Spots

There's really no mystery to finding good potential bass fishing spots in an artificial reservoir. Education Editor, Buck Perry, tells you where to begin and how to go about finding them.





To Find 'Em

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

This past season while having lunch in the restaurant of a large marina, comments of a group of bass fishermen came through loud and clear. Most had returned to the dock with little to show for their morning's efforts. Observations made during the first part of the day had shown the fishermen spending the majority of their time "riding around," or working the visible cover in the shallows. The fish I had seen came from well-defined breaklines in deep water, with the greater part coming from below 15 feet.

I remember especially the remarks of one particular fisherman whom I had seen several times during the morning. He would be observed going swiftly up the lake with a "rooster tail" behind the boat that looked to be 20 feet long. A short time later he would be going down, or across, the lake with one that appeared even bigger. To say the least, he had covered a lot of ground (or water) the first part of the day.

The comment that has stuck in my craw went something like this: "I know where there's a stump up the lake, about ten miles, which always produces big fish. If they are in a striking mood, you never get a small fish, they're always big. Come on Joe, let's go up there and catch us a big-un."

The last I saw of this pair was when they roared away, apparently thinking someone else would beat them to a particular stump ten miles up the lake.

Quite some time ago we were discussing how, as a teacher or writer, we often may pay too much attention to "details" in fishing, rather than the broad view, or the "birdseye" view of a situation. Often we get overly concerned with a particular feature in a body of water, or some specific detail on the presentation of lures, etc. This may make it very difficult to get the overall points across to the beginning fisherman.

In earlier talks we tried to show the "big picture" of a fishing situation in a *natural* lake. At that time we divided the water into two sections. One we called "trolling water," and the other we referred to as "fishing water." This was done for several reasons. The obvious one being that we should not spend much time where the chances of catching a fish are slim. We must spend the greater part of our time where the odds are better. However, the main purpose was to help clear up in our minds what is meant by the statement, "To catch fish consistently, the fisherman must use "structure" (breaks, breaklines) as his guide to where the fish will be. Then, use his fishing gear to control the depth and speed of his lures (or bait) on or around these features to put the fish on the stringer. [Editor's note: For definition of terms such as "breaks" and "breaklines," see page titled, "Fishing Talk —

continued

The sunset ushers in quiet and peaceful solitude. A number of fishermen will return home with smiles while others may find fishing rather difficult. Both circumstances are typical of reservoir bass fishing.

our language of structure fishing."

With the great number of variables found in various weather and water conditions, at any given time, and due to the great number of "moods" and positions the fish will be in, there is no way you or I can depend upon such things as: lure size, color, action, odor, rattles, temperature, oxygen, casting ability, etc., etc., as any sort of GUIDE as to where the fish might be, or as to how he feels, or how he might desire the lure. We might use such things as "aids," but never as a guide, or a major

any particular day.

We also divide the waters up to show how we can control the depths and speeds of our lures to find answers to our fishing questions, and to arrive at the fish in the shortest time possible.

We must stress the importance of "getting better at the game," and not reaching what we might call a peak or a plateau in our fishing skills. It should be remembered — "If we don't get better, we are likely to get worse." There is no chance that our progress will stand still. Proper interpretation of the fishing situation and proper presentation of lures (both casting and trolling) will



This fisherman may be passing up good fishing water in his haste to reach the next spot.

control. If we use the correct features (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water, etc.) in a lake (reservoir, stream, pond, etc.) as our guides and then control the depth and speed of our lures, it matters little where he is or what state he may be in at the time.

In previous articles we divided our fishing water into two parts, "trolling water" and "fishing water." One important reason was to show what we will DO when we get on a body of water we have fished before, or one we have never seen. We divide the water into "trolling water" and "fishing water," not only to know what to do on different lakes and reservoirs, but for different species, different weather, different water conditions, and different moods of the fish — which are not likely to be the same any two days running or for that matter for any length of time on

see that we do not stop growing or fall backwards in our abilities. If by any means we get into a rut in our presentation of lures, such as only jumping from spot to spot casting to visible objects with one particular lure style, rest assured we are on the downward path. Some modern day practices breed ruts, and there is little wonder the so-called "masters" change from time to time.

In the past, we divided the waters of a *natural* lake. Let's now continue our line of thought with a different type body of water. This time we will use a *reservoir* (man-made lake).

It is very difficult to show a large portion of a reservoir with much detail on a page of this size. However, we do not need great detail; we need only to distinguish the difference between "trolling water" and "fishing water." Proper presentation of lures will take care of

any small or missing details.

Figure 1 is a top view of part of a reservoir we plan to fish for bass. If other species get in the way, so much the better. We could say this is a "highland" (hill or mountain) type lake with many "lowland" features. Enough contour lines have been drawn in for us to have a pretty good idea what the features are, and where the most obvious structure (breaks, breaklines) exist and what they look like.

The first thing to do is to see where to begin our fishing. With this in mind we can plan our direction, and what portions of the lake we are able to work. We note the boat launch is located in a steep shoreline cove. (Position "A" — Figure 1.)

The second thing is to get a good picture in mind (or mark) the structure (breaks, breaklines) within a reasonable distance of the dock. In a lake of this nature there is no need to mark, or label, any small features that might be found (or seen) on the map. We mark as "fishing water" only the most obvious structures (breaks, breaklines) shown. However, on any structure considered to be the best place to catch a fish, we pay close attention to the breaks and breaklines on or connected to it that could serve to lead the fish to the shallows (June '79, Fishing Facts). All the areas left unmarked would be considered as "trolling water" until proven otherwise.

After careful study we have marked only three areas to be considered as "fishing water." These have been circled and labeled "B", "C" and "D". At all times we will be headed in their direction, as they are our final destination. As should be expected in a reservoir of this type (highland-lowland), the major structure areas occur on the "bends" or "turns" in the original stream channel.

You might say at this point, "You have designated as 'fishing water' only the big, long, flatter structures. What if we were fishing for bass on this lake in the early spring when the water is cold, and only short, scattered, unpredictable movements are occurring to the shorter, deeper, steeper features close to the channel; or, for that matter, toward the coves?"

In past talks (May '79 Fishing Facts) we covered fairly well the fact that the best colder seasonal movement patterns will be related to the long, well-defined structure (breaks, breaklines). In other words, you and I should think the seasonal movement will not be a

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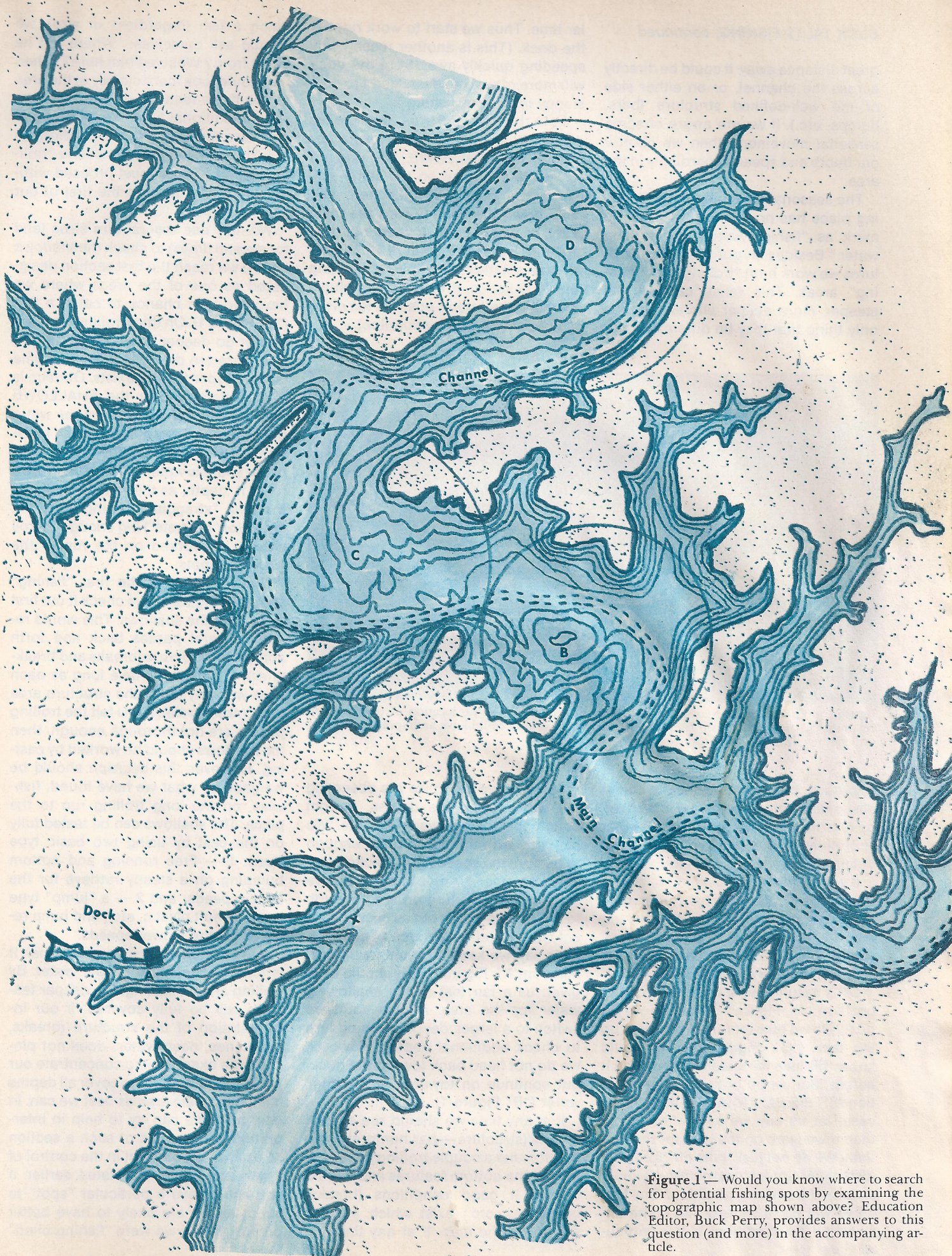


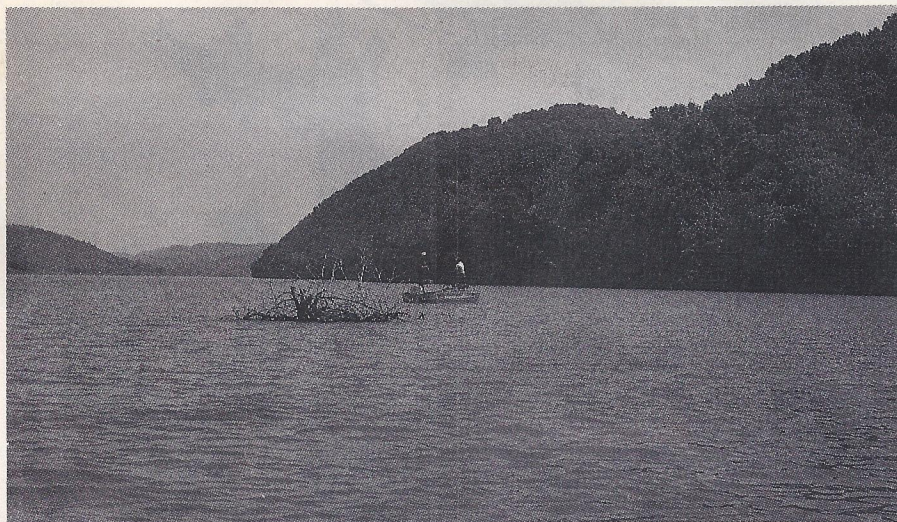
Figure 1 — Would you know where to search for potential fishing spots by examining the topographic map shown above? Education Editor, Buck Perry, provides answers to this question (and more) in the accompanying article.

great distance away. It could be directly across the channel, or on either side of the well-defined structure (bars, humps, etc.). If we are aware of some seasonal movement, then we control our depth and speed accordingly in the area.

The seasonal movement pattern taking place has no bearing on what we mark as "fishing water" or "trolling water." Besides, in our presentation of lures we work both "trolling" and "fishing" areas. This takes care of the steeper, more deeper shorelines. The only thing that may be different is our

lar time. Thus we start to work right at the dock. [This is another reason why speeding quickly away from the dock will more often cause you and I to do a sloppy job in our fishing.]

As in the case of the natural lake (as discussed at another time), we start by trolling the SHALLOWS. We start off down the shoreline on the same side where the boat was launched, and head down the cove toward the main body of water; and, toward our first "fishing" water, ("B", Figure 1.). We put on the smallest, shallowest running lure (500 series, if using Spoonplugs) and keep the lure in position (as close as we can get to the shoreline).



Casting to visual objects may produce fish at times. However, the location of this cover in relationship to other features found in the surrounding area could have an important bearing on whether this spot will produce.

approach. If we were aware of a colder seasonal movement, we would be careful to work the "pockets" on the steeper shorelines and any "cove" that might occur. (See June '79 Fishing Facts.)

If you should have in mind the migration of particular species (other than bass) during an early season spawning run, and you were after these species, you probably shouldn't be fishing this part of the reservoir in the first place.

Let's assume we launch our boat at position "A", Figure 1. What do we do next? Do we take off for the first spot up the lake ("B", Figure 1)? We could know this lake fairly well from fishing it before, but we do not know the situation AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME. In this case, let us say we know little more than if we were on the lake for the first time. We do not just "take off" for some distant part (or feature) unless we *know exactly* the present situation. Our first move will be to try and find some answers on the conditions at this particu-

As we move along we are observing the water color, the depths, bottom conditions, fish movements, etc. We continue with this size lure far enough to be sure the speeds are checked out. This may mean 1/4 mile or more, but we should keep this lure on long enough to be sure we check out as many different type shoreline features as possible. Let's say, we keep it on until we reach position "X", Figure 1. This should have given us a fair test of the shallowest water for the area. At this point we switch to a larger, deeper running lure to check additional depths. However, we do not head back toward the dock, but continue on toward the "fishing" water ("B" Figure 1).

If at any time we should see a good feature (structure — bar, hump, etc.) we might make a couple trolling passes or look at the bottom features and depths to see if good conditions (breaks, breaklines, etc.) exist which are not shown on the map. If at any time we

catch a fish (regardless of size), we should ask ourselves: "Where did he come from? What led him here?" Then we should look more closely at the area to see if the features demand that we spend additional time here. If no good structure (breaks, breaklines) show up quickly, we keep in mind this is "trolling" water and we must proceed without too much delay to the first of our "fishing" spots.

We may use several lure sizes (and for several times) to check the *shallows* before we reach the first section designated as one of the areas where we have the best chance to catch a fish ("B" Figure 1). On this "trolling" run, we do not go deeper (below 8-10 ft.), unless there are plenty indications some good, deeper feature exists. Our aim is to completely cover the SHALLOWS (0-8 to 10 ft.). If our *shallowest* water does not show any degree of fish activity, then we may spend the greater part of our shallow water trolling run in the 8 to 10 ft. depth, as this will normally be the best "straggler" fishing zone. All coves (or "pockets") big enough to troll should be worked on the run to the "fishing" spots.

Upon arriving at the first "fishing" spot ("B" Figure 1), we check it out first by trolling the shallows. This would require several passes back and forth across the structure (breaks and breaklines). This will not take long as each pass will only cover the structure area itself (note circle). If it is felt the trolling passes are not thorough enough, then the shallows should be worked by casting. However, this decision should be weighed by what we have found, fish-wise, on the long trolling run to the place. The shallows can be tested fully on the cast by using two basic type lures: 1 — Free running and bottom bumping on a steady retrieve for the faster speeds; and 2 — a "jump" type lure (jig, soft plastic, etc.) and jump retrieve for the slower speeds.

If the shallows fail to produce, then it is time to check the deeper water. By trolling and/or casting, the deeper features will be fully covered. If our interpretation of the structure (breaks, breaklines, deep water) does not pinpoint the exact spot to concentrate our efforts, then we have to cover all depths in the complete area as best we can. In later talks we can try to help in interpreting the features of such a section so as to be more exact in the control of depth and speed. As stated earlier, if you and I have a particular "spot" to shoot at, we are likely to have better control than if we were "fishing blind"

so to speak. Good depth and speed control can be had on the cast with just a couple lure types.

If we find no fish as deep as the structure (breaks, breaklines) shows us where the fish might be, we have a decision to make (and it isn't to go off into the unmarked channel or hole, wandering around like some lost duck). We either continue to check the workable structure (breaks, breaklines) and wait until some sort of movement occurs; or, we can move on toward the next "fishing" spot ("C" Figure 1).

Unless we are completely familiar with the fishing situation, it is wise to move on to the next "fishing water" ("C" Figure 1). Besides, when the next spot is reached we might find structure conditions which give better guidelines to greater depths, and a "short" movement condition existing not available on the last one. We keep this in mind at all times until we have completely familiarized ourselves with the different fishing spots available. Another important thing to remember when fishing a reservoir, there is often a different water color in different areas. If we have not used water color as one of the considerations in choosing the area to fish, it is oftentimes wise to keep traveling for this aspect alone.

So, — we cover the "trolling" water between the two "fishing" spots ("B" & "C", Figure 1). Again we use a number of different size lures for awhile, to check out the depths in the SHALLOWS. As before, we may run the 8-10 ft. depth more than the other shallow depths. Again we do not pause to work deeper than the shallows without some good bar, hump, etc. showing up. By this time we should have a pretty good idea just how much movement or how many straggler fish are present. More than likely if we did not find fish in the depths and areas already worked, there is not likely to be any on some new feature not shown on the map.

When we get to the next "fishing" spot, we FISH the area by controlling our depths and speeds in all areas by trolling and/or casting. This will show us the structure, depths, contact points, bottom conditions, etc. This will give a comparison to the area already worked. This is important, for as we learn more about the reservoir, fish movements, etc., we are able to better concentrate our testing and fishing in the future. In time, we can cut the lake and fishing spots down to a minimum; and, in time we should know exactly which place and what presentation would be better if we have to wait for a

short, deep, movement of fish. The more area we eliminate, the better chance we have to catch a fish. This is especially true when conditions tend to be bad.

In this section of the reservoir (Figure 1) we have marked (or circled three potentially good "fishing waters." If we have time we will work and rework all three areas as discussed. Quite often a fisherman will choose too much water to fish. We should not pick out a section of the lake so large we cannot cover it *thoroughly* in a reasonable length of time. In this case (Figure 1) we have chosen a section several miles long. This amount of water should con-



Buck Perry displays two trophy bass. One was caught in an area designated as "trolling water," the other came from a section designated as "fishing water." It's important to check both.

tain enough fish, and it is not necessary to go long distances in order to find fish that may "bite." If they don't "bite" here, they are not likely to "bite" someplace else. The only time we should have to make long runs is when we desire a better water color (darker, muddier, etc.) or to move to an area of a spawning run; or, as in some cases, we move to escape the traffic. However, we shouldn't be launching our boat in an area where we have to make long runs to find better fishing conditions. It is always wise to do some "homework" *before* we launch the boat. It seems rather foolish to make the situation more difficult by not considering simple fishing facts.

There may be a question or two at this point. You may ask, "What do I do if I do not have a topo or contour map of the reservoir I plan to fish? How do I go about finding the best fishing spots? How far do I go?"

You do not change your basic presentation of lures. You head away from the dock just as we did in Figure 1. That is, trolling the different size lures (and running depths), to thoroughly check out the shallows (0-8 to 10 ft.). If Spoonplugs (tools) are being used, this would entail the first three sizes (500, 400, 250 series). In some cases you would use a larger lure (200 series) on a shorter length of line to be sure all the crooks and turns are covered. Your aim is to not only cover the shallows for fish, but to also get some answers as to bottom conditions, structure, breaks, breaklines, water color, etc. One size is used for a spell, and then another size, etc. In checking the shallows for fish, or to note any other things of importance, you do not retroll a particular area with deeper running lures — unless you catch a fish, or some obvious, well-defined structure (breaks, breaklines) shows up.

It would be wise to travel quite a distance before considering working deeper than the shallows (below 8-10 ft.). This will give a bigger picture of the conditions present. This will show if any fish movements are occurring, and will give a broader, or "birds-eye" view of the body of water. Your continued trolling run will show any side feeder stream channels, coves, "washes", gulleys, etc., that appear along the shoreline. These are the more important observations that can be made in ANY type reservoir, be it highland, lowland or flatland. These particular things will show clearly the type features the fish use in their movements and migrations. Regardless of the season, your aim is to find the larger, flatter structures (bars, humps, etc.), preferably those with well-defined breaks and breaklines on or connected to (the structure), which will lead (or guide) the fish *all the way* to the shallows. (Do not forget "all the way!")

If the season is cold, pre-spawn, etc., the best steeper, deeper shorelines (steeper banks, where the river or creek channel sweep in close to shore) should be near the more flatter well-defined bars, humps, breaks, breaklines, etc., used by the fish in the warmer seasons. In the case of most reservoirs, the channel itself can serve as a guide. Our basic interpretation of a

continued



Education Editor, Buck Perry (at center) is flanked by Spoonplugging instructors Don Dickson (at left) and Tom Ferencik. Of the more than 40 bass that were caught and released this day, each angler kept two or three fish for the family dinner table.

BUCK TALKS FISHING, continued

reservoir is to expect the more shallow, flatter portions of the bottom to occur on the "inside" of all turns, or bends, in the channel. The steeper, shorter, deeper features being on the "outside."

You will find after trolling the shallows for a distance, the different features will show up. The "fishing" waters will begin to stand out like sore thumbs. All of them can be worked thoroughly by trolling and/or casting as they show up. Then again, several could be found before taking time to check out the deeper water. Whichever way is chosen, all of them should be thoroughly checked in the deeper sections, regardless of any fish caught on

others. It is important to have a comparison as to which is better — for the day may come when we will have to concentrate our efforts on one rather than another.

A good rule of thumb to use when considering "how far" to fish, or "how much" water to cover, is to break the available fishing time in half. The first half being used moving away from the dock, the last half moving back toward the dock. Our time should be used fishing, not riding.

Fishing is not so difficult; presentation of lures is no big deal, and "fishable" spots are not so hidden they can't be found. It's too bad so many fishermen are led to believe only an "expert" or "pro" can catch a fish.



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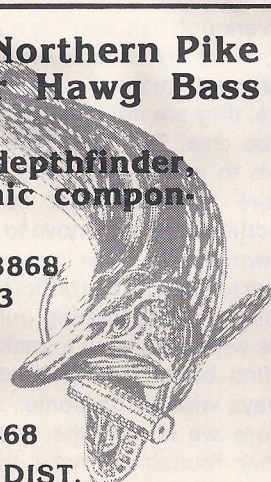
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