

Fish Where The Fish Are — Know When To Fish Where

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, continue 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

Water levels can play an important part in making a particular structure productive or not. Under higher water conditions, these stickups may hold some fish if they extended to deeper waters. This same structure under low water conditions would probably hold few if any fish because it may lack sufficient depth of water.



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 fishing. This book has just gone on sale for \$9.90 in soft cover and \$19.80 in deluxe cover, limited edition. Available on an unconditional money back guarantee from us, Northwoods Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 4169, Milwaukee, Wis. 53210. (The books are the same in content.)

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 Fish-

ing 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.

When talking to a group of fishermen it is not my nature to make corny jokes. But, there is one time I know I am going to get a great big laugh. This is when I make the statement (after viewing a fishing hole) — "I know exactly where the fish are — they are either in the shallows, the deep water, or some place in between".

Sometimes it takes a spell for this to sink in, but you can bet the whole group gets a big chuckle out of it.

While this merriment is taking place, I glance around the room and see fishermen exchanging remarks. They are leaning toward one another, and I can just imagine what they are saying — "Big deal, any stupid jerk would know this."

Just a couple of days before, I had seen quite a few of these same people fishing their lake. From what I observed, 95 percent of them were fishing as if they didn't know this to be true. Most were casting to visible objects such as "stick-ups", stumps, weeds, pads, etc., little realizing they were spending their time working water that contained fish only about 5 percent of the time.

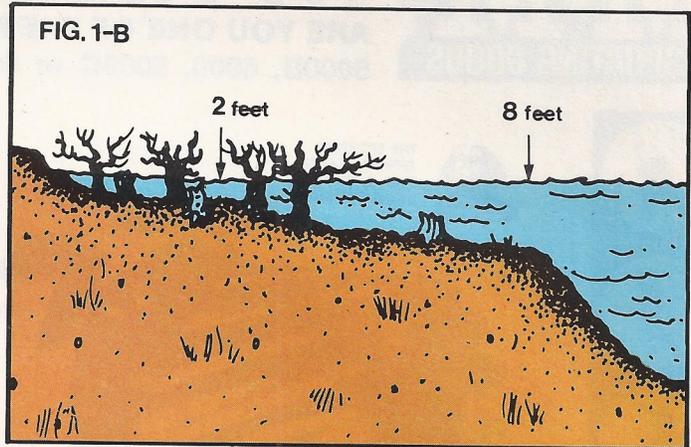
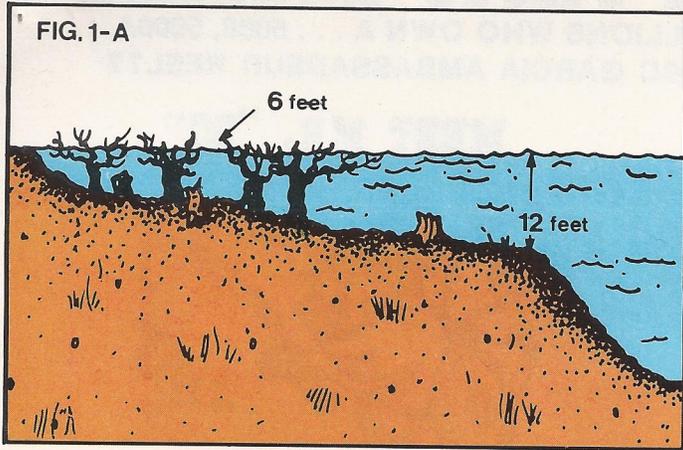
Probably today, years later, these same fishermen who got such a bang out of my statement that the fish were either in the shallows, the deep, or some place in between, are still limiting their search for fish in *only one* of these areas!

Observation over the years, have shown, that the area where many fishermen spend the greater part of their time, is the *shallows*. They do not realize that the "in between" would contain the fish a lot more time than the area they are fishing, and the "deep" would contain the fish more time than the other two areas combined.

When viewing water depths, you do not have to divide them into three sections. You only have to separate the shallow water from the deep water. This is done for two main rea-

Under low water conditions the fish might move out of shallows entirely. If this happens you should concentrate your efforts on the next breakline adjacent to the shallows that has sufficient depth of water over it (8-10 Ft.).





sons. First, the fish react differently to shallow water and deep water. Second, you must distinguish between the two for the purpose of lure presentation.

In my studies, I have found the dividing line between shallow water and deep water, is at the 8 - 10 foot depth. I just didn't pick this depth figure right out of thin air, I made a study of the fish — he told me.

As your studies should have told you, it is at this depth (8 - 10 ft.) that the fish upon migration toward the shallows, begins to slow down, and probably says to himself — "Whoa, back up, I'm getting too shallow".

With this thought in mind, let us resume the things we had in mind the last time we met.

We had been considering how it was possible for a fisherman to come into "your" lake, for the first time, and make a good catch, while you were drawing a blank at the same time. I stated I was not going into great detail as to "why" but would stick primarily to fishing facts.

It would be your job to figure out why one guy scores and the other fails. If you are up on your "Basics", you should have no trouble doing this.

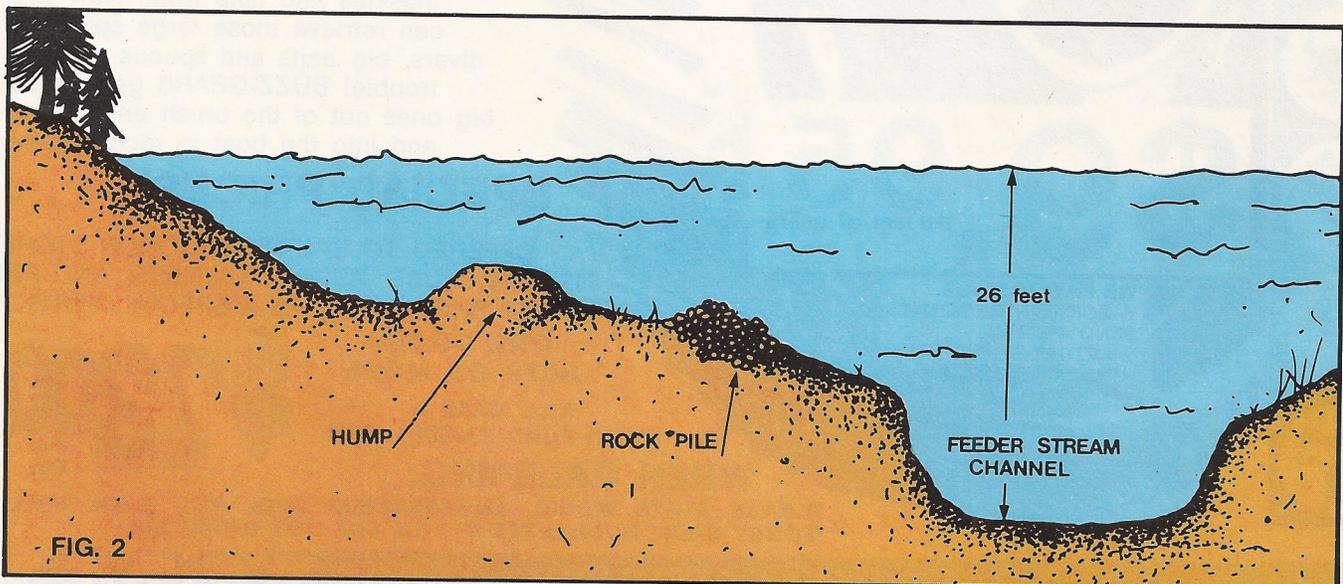
The last time (February 1974 Issue), I set up a question for consideration. It went like this — "You have fished a particular lake for some time. You have found some bars and humps that produce for you when the weather cooperates. The water level stays rather constant, but lo and behold, you return to the lake after a short absence and you find the water level three or four feet lower than you have 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?"

Figure 1-A is a side view of one of the bars you have had good luck on in the past. Previous to the time under discussion, the water level in the lake created depths such as those in

Figure 1-A. The top of the bar had "stick-ups", or bushes, running out to about 6 feet. Then the bar started dropping off, and finally "broke" into the deep water — the "breakline" occurring at 12 feet. The distance from the "stick-ups" to the "drop-off" is quite a distance. The "breakline" could not be reached with a cast from any position near the "breaks", (located in the shallows.)

Figure 1-B is the same structure at the time under discussion. The water level in the lake has dropped four feet. Note the depths now.

Although I stated the weather was fine which indicates the fish are active and moving, we now have a situation where the *areas on the structure* (bar) that would be classified as "shallow" water and "deep" water have *changed*. The "bar", as far as the fish are concerned, is now *completely different*. The "breakline" is now at a depth where the fish begin to "back off". If he moves to the breakline, further movement toward the "breaks" ("stick-ups"



Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

and bushes) would be few and far between. It is very possible, that in a situation just like this, the structure *could be abandoned entirely*, and another migration route established in the near area.

For our study, we will assume the fish are still moving toward this bar. In this case, you would concentrate your efforts at the now shallow breakline. You might find, in most cases, when the fish move up on the breakline (end of bar) there will seldom be a large group of fish, but only two or three. If this is the case, you would remain with the structure for a period.

After the first two or three fish moved up, it could be a spell before the next two or three showed. *If the fish are moving good*, you would have pretty slow pickings as far as any great number of fish at any one time, but if you stay with it you can wind up with a nice catch. The interval between a few fish moving up on the breakline could vary. This would be determined by just how good the weather and water conditions are. It could be as much as an hour.

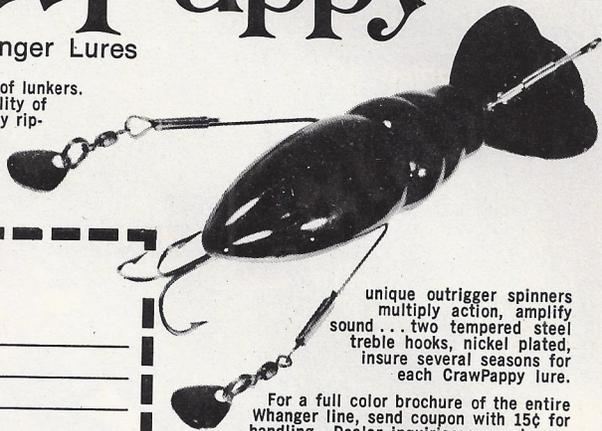
When I find myself in a situation such as this, I do not wear myself out by continuing to cast while waiting for the next fish to show, *I let it rest* — by eating a sandwich, having a soft drink, or talking fishing with a partner. Often, I catch a wink or two. During this period, I might pick up the rod and make *one* cast, to see if more fish have arrived. How often I make this cast will also vary, but normally I will check the breakline every 5 to 10 minutes. One thing to keep in mind, when a cast produces another fish, *do not mess around*, get him in and go right back with another cast! If you have a partner, direct him to make a cast to the same spot — pronto! Seldom, will just one fish show, it will be either two or three.

Normally, when I experience a structure becoming too shallow for good migration, I spend very little time with it. I am off looking for deeper structure, but during the course of the day I will check the breakline a time or two. But, I would only check it, if I found the fish active and moving on better structure. (If I were "stuck" with a lake that had only shallow structure, then I would check the best ones, as described.)

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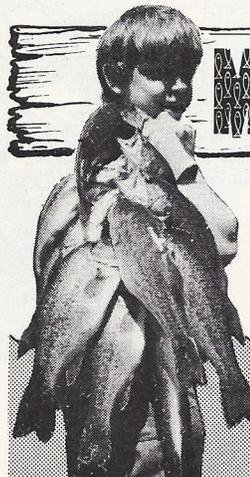
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Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

Let's pursue this same thought still further. In this case we have a hump. This hump has a ridgelike finger running out from it that finally breaks into a channel. This structure is not in the main body of the lake, but is located in a "cove" or an "arm", created by a feeder stream.

Figure 2 is a side view of this structure. Note the depths.

At a high water level, such as that shown, this structure has been producing for you. You have at times caught fish on the top of the hump. At other times you have caught them at the pile of rocks (break). At other times you have caught them on the breakline (drop-off) at the channel. This has really been a dandy.

BUT, the water drops 8 feet. The depth of the channel is no longer 26 feet, but is only 18 feet deep. You could just about mark the whole thing off. The DEEPEST water in the area, is now not deep enough for the deep water sanctuary. At certain periods of the season (colder part) some fish may migrate to the area for short periods, but as far as this area holding a group of fish permanently, it would no longer hold true.

When this happens to one of my good structures, I move toward the main lake until I have water in the feeder channel that is 25-35 feet in depth. Then I start looking for the structure the fish are now using.

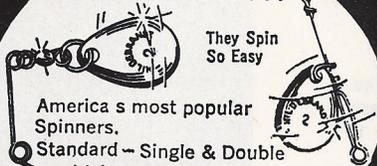
I could continue this discussion until I have covered every type of structure found in a lake. But, these two illustrations of how a depth change could limit migrations, and how it could also change the deep water sanctuary, should show you fairly well why one guy makes a catch, and another guy gets skunked. You figure out the "why's".

It is entirely possible that the answer to the question involved, was obvious to you as soon as you read it in the February Issue. BUT, just how far did you go? Did you digest the whole question? Completely?

Let's look at it again. The question stated the water level had changed. It also stated the weather was nice, which indicated the fish were moving. If you look closely it also stated another thing — "after a short absence". Although not stated, it should have been obvious the water color had changed. Since the weather was "nice", it is not likely the wa-

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Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

ter level dropping was due to a winter pull-down, but was due to a lack of rain. This would definitely indicate to me the water had **CLEARED**. (I would have already noted this the *instant* I reached the lake).

First let us examine that "short absence". I did not state just what time element was involved, but it could have been a week or so. From the drop in water level "*more than you had ever seen it*", would indicate it wasn't just a day or so.

Let's assume it was "early" season. Your good catches had been occurring on a steeper shoreline, or in bays or coves (maybe full of trees). After your absence you returned to these steeper shorelines and structures in the bays and coves, and you experienced the bad fishing. Your structures had not necessarily changed that much due to the drop in water level. But, you still drew a blank. Did it ever occur to you, that due to the **SEASONAL** migration of the fish they were no longer in these areas, but were now using longer and flatter structures for their movements?

In looking at the "seasonal" thing, we could put the time in the latter part of the season, and you would be working long flatter structure, when you *should* be working the steeper shorter structure more.

Maybe you had been having great success in the upper end of your lake on Walleyes early in the season shortly after spawning. You went back to the same area after your absence, and couldn't understand why the walleyes weren't hitting, even tho the water level hadn't affected the area that much. You probably never gave any thought to the seasonal migration of this fish, and had no thought to go toward the deeper sections of the lake.

From a seasonal point of view, you must be fully aware of Depth and Speed control at all times. It doesn't take much time for it to change. The metabolism of the fish can change quickly. Your selection of lure types and presentations will change accordingly. Probably you had been using a particular type lure, and presenting it in a particular way as to "produce" before your absence. But, while you were gone, things had changed, but you continued to make your presentation with the same ole

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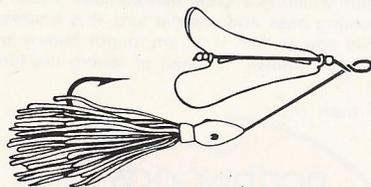
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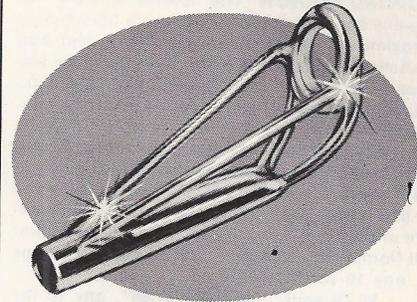
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Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

thing, in the same ole way. It won't work. Our aim is to catch fish consistently, not just once in a while.

Let's now examine the likelihood that your waters had "cleared". One of the most important observations that you can make is your water color. This particular thing alone can change the fishing potential of an area more than anything I know. Just the clearing of the water can eliminate more good structure than you can shake a stick at.

Let's re-examine Figure 1-A. This figure showed the water level BEFORE the lake dropped, and during the period of your catches. Now let us assume this figure represents the depths AFTER the water has dropped. This would indicate we have enough depth for the good movements of the fish.

But, now we have a clear water situation that developed during your absence. The clear water produces about the same reaction from the fish, as we got in Figure 1-B. Their movements are limited to the breakline, etc.

When this occurs, I concentrate my efforts at the breakline, or limit my working of the structure to periods of dark weather. I spend most of my time on deeper structure, and if I found the fish moving good, I'd go check the *breakline* for "straggler" movements, but I would waste no time on the shallow breaks (stick-ups, etc.)

In the case of Figure 2, I'd just keep moving toward deeper water in the feeder channel, until I find the deep structure the fish are now using. In many instances I would go to "wire" line and motor trolling to work the edges (breaklines) of the channel to locate such areas. (The wire line enables me to troll deeper than with the regular No-Bo mono trolling line I normally use.)

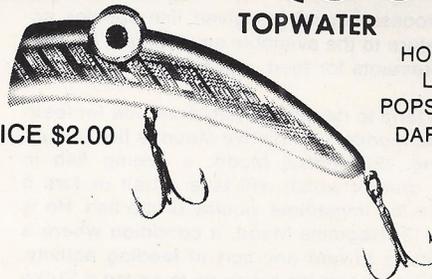
When you are experiencing failure in areas that have produced for you in the past, you must realize that *something has changed!* I have mentioned some of these changes, and in most instances ALL of them had a part to play in your failure. You cannot cite any particular thing as being the cause. You have to investigate all. If you are presenting your lures and bait CORRECTLY and producing no fish, you are fishing where they ain't. AND, you better know the "WHY."

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Buck Talks Fishing *cont.*

By the time we meet here again at Fishing Facts, let's assume that you and I are going to fish four (4) bodies of water. We will fish two (2) *Natural* lakes, and two (2) man-made lakes (Reservoirs). These four lakes are widely scattered, being in four different States. We have never fished them before. In each case, as our luck would have it, we get there shortly after a bad cold front, and the movements and migrations of the fish are practically zero. We find that, in order to make a catch, we have to go "straggler" fishing.

When we started out on this trip, we both had a Depth Sounder. While loading the boat the first day, I slipped on a wet plank, and my depth meter wound up in the bottom of the lake. Fifteen minutes after we get on the lake, your dang thing goes on the blink.

First we will fish a big shallow "saucer" type *Natural* lake. The water near shore is covered solid with weeds, grass and pads. This extends to 3-4 feet in depth. Farther out to about 6-7 feet in depth, are scattered patches of grass, weeds, and pads — all exposed. The balance of the lake has a gentle sloping bottom free of weeds, and pads, but is covered with a layer of muck. As far as we know, there are no deep holes, slots, or channels. And, there exists no structure such as bars, humps, breaks or breaklines. The deepest water is around 20 feet out in the middle. As the weeds suggest, the water color is a darker yellow-green.

The second *Natural* lake we are going to fish is a great big deep clear rascal. Tall weeds extend down to a depth of 17 ft. with most of the outer weeds coming almost to the top of the water. We cannot find a contour map of the lake, and our efforts to find out something about the lake from the local people don't pay off. To cap it all, we find we are not allowed to troll with a motor in this lake.

The first man-made lake we are going to fish is an old "Lowland" type reservoir. It has been built so long ago there is not a trace of a bush, stump or root. The bottoms are completely clean, mostly hard clay, sand or rocks. The structure types are rather constant all over the reservoir, the only great difference being depth. Structure is primarily "bars" that run out from the shore-

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line. Most all "points" have underwater bars. At the entrance to all "coves", structure exists to some degree. There is a minimum of "flats", and most all structure extends to deep water. The water color is a White-Sandy.

The second reservoir we will fish, is a large "Flatlander". The only appreciable deep water is in the old river channel. In our case, the deep water runs rather close to one side of the reservoir. This side, and especially in the lower sections, has fairly good structure in the form of

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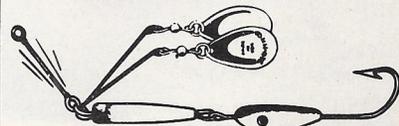
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bars, humps, breaklines, etc. But, the other side of the lake consists of miles of flats and shallow water. In certain areas on this shallow side, there are coves and sloughs, some of which could be termed as "swampy". Most of these "back areas" have weeds of some description, and all of them are long distances from any deep water. We launch our boat on the deeper side. The water color is red muddy.

QUESTION: How would we "straggler" fish these four bodies of water?