

Knowledge + Execution



During the past few years, while trying to expand our knowledge of fishing and various fishing situations, we have had numerous opportunities to fish both natural and man-made reservoirs in the northeastern part of the country. Some varied and exciting fishing opportunities are to be found in this area; namely Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. Almost every type of freshwater game fish can be found in these states. Quite a few of the lakes contain good populations of many different species. With all of these fish and the surrounding population centers, you would almost think a reservation would be needed to get on the water. Through our experience we have found the exact opposite to be true. On numerous occasions, especially during June, July and August, we have fished all day without seeing more than two or three boats on the water. Considering the success we have had on these waters, the absence of other fishermen remains particularly puzzling.

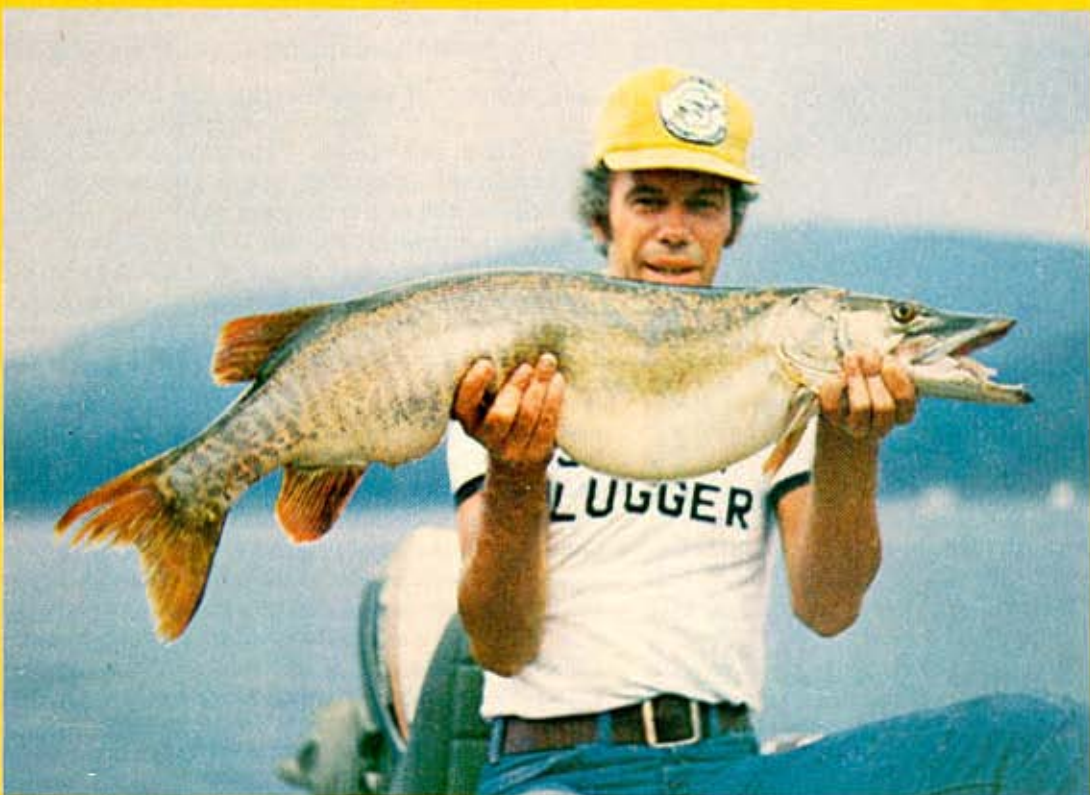
We encountered such a situation during the last week of August on a lake in northwestern Pennsylvania called Kinzua Reservoir. This man-made reservoir was built in mountainous terrain, and for regular Fishing Facts readers, it is what we refer to as a highland type reservoir. Being able to classify various type reservoirs (highland, lowland, flatland) will enable us to answer a lot of important questions before we begin our actual fishing.

In the case of Kinzua Reservoir, we knew by looking at a road map it was a "highlander". Normally in highland reservoirs the area near the dam will contain short, steep structures, clear water, and exceptionally deep water. Most Fishing Facts readers know these ingredients can mean tough fishing. With these facts in mind, we decided to drive toward the headwaters of Kinzua (upper part of reservoir) to try and locate some flatter terrain, better (dingier) water color, and a little less depth in the old (original) river channel. The forty additional miles of driving were well worth the effort. When we arrived on the water, we found the exact condi-

= Fishing Success

by DON DICKSON &
TOM FERENCEK

Tom Ferencek (photo at far left) with three bragging-size muskies caught by he and Don Dickson (shown at right, holding another pot-bellied lunker). Tom and Don are two serious fishermen who have "put it all together", so to speak. Read how they went about capturing these elusive giants of the deep.



tions we were looking for: flatter and more well-defined bottom structures, only fifty feet deep in the original river channel, and exceptionally good (dark or dingy) water color.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the lake, so we decided to set up camp and get on the water early the next morning for some serious fishing. We pulled into the campground and saw a very familiar sight. The campground was almost completely full, but THERE WERE ONLY A FEW FISHERMEN ON THE WATER! Upon questioning two park rangers and some of the campers as to the reason why there were so few fishermen, we heard a very familiar reply: NOBODY WAS CATCHING ANY FISH! We could hardly wait until morning.

We launched our boats around 7:00 the next morning. The two of us had decided to use separate boats so that each of us would be able to select different sections of the lake in order to keep our mapping and scouting time to a minimum (and hopefully, locate some fish). We started our fishing by motor trolling a free-swimming Spoonplug (nor-

mally a bottom-bumping lure) in the shallows. Regardless of the type water we are fishing, we always begin the same way. Trolling the shallows enables us to eliminate unproductive water and learn something about the bottom makeup of a lake in the shortest possible time. While fishing the shallows (less than 8 to 10 ft. depths) during the summer months, we will normally catch only the smaller fish, but that doesn't stop us. Whenever we find small fish, we also remember the adult-size fish are not likely to be very far away.

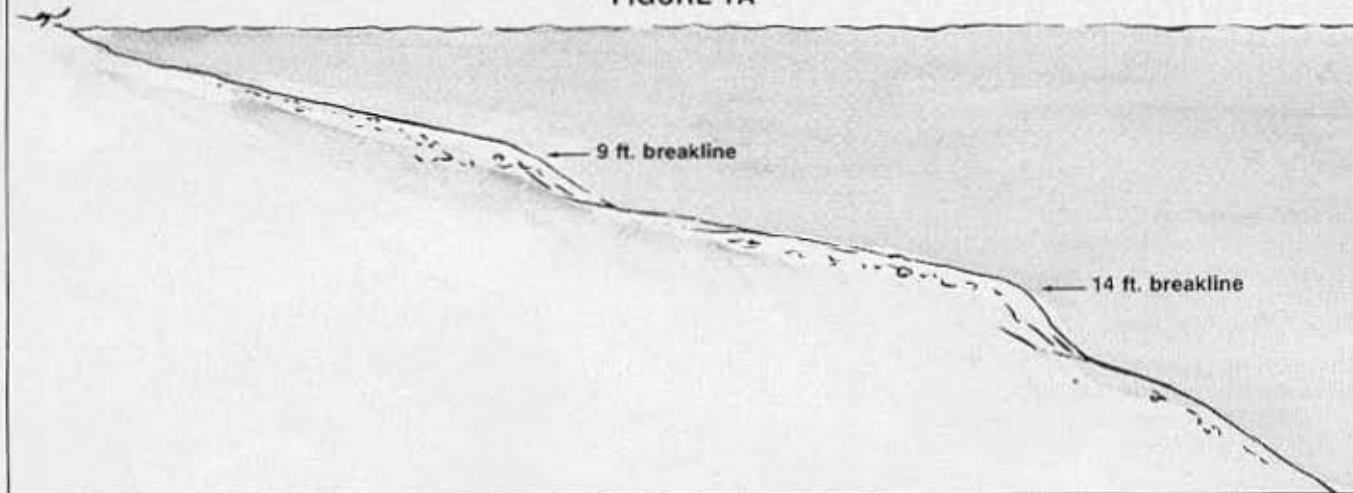
We always use two boats so we can map and fish a larger area. We parted company and Tom took the near shoreline while I went across the lake. I started my trolling in the two to four foot depth range and had not gone more than one hundred yards when I hooked and landed the first fish. It was a smallmouth bass of about twelve inches. That's not exactly what anyone would consider a "wall" fish, but let's not forget, small fish are important in finding the "haws". I caught that little stinker on a very common structure, an underwater bar.

This particular bar was rather narrow and it led directly to deep water. It was a rather uncomplicated structure with two distinct breaklines. One break (a quick change in depth) occurring at nine feet and the final break occurring at fourteen feet (see Figures 1A and 1B). This final break led directly to deep water.

I quickly positioned the boat up on the bar as close to the shoreline as possible. (By anchoring shallow, I would be able to control my lure depth more effectively.) I broke out my casting rod and began to fancast the area, reaching out as far as the nine foot breakline. Four smallmouth bass were landed quickly on four casts, but the fish were small. I suspected a movement of fish was occurring and the adult-size fish had probably stopped at a deeper place (a break) on the bar. I moved the boat further out and began casting over the fourteen foot breakline, letting my bottom-bumping lure sink to the bottom and then walking it FAST (as called for by hot weather) up over the breakline (see Figure 1B).

Within ten minutes I had four smallmouth weighing between 3 and

FIGURE 1A



3-1/2 pounds. Then the action stopped. I had taken all my fish on a bottom-walking lure. However, once the action stops on a walking or bumping lure, we always change to slower "jump" type lures and sometimes we can get one or two additional fish. So I tied on a plain leadhead jig and on the second cast I took a northern pike of about eight pounds.

The rest of the day was spent trolling, mapping, and trying to learn as much about the lake as I possibly could. Within two miles of the boat ramp, I found four productive structures and caught twenty-five additional smallmouth (all but a limit was returned to the water). All in all, I felt

it was a very successful day on a new lake, but returning to camp to check with Tom, I found out HIS day was even MORE exciting.

Tom had started catching bass about the same time I did. He located the fish on an underwater "bar" also; but in his case the bar was different than the bar I had fished. It was very wide and had a ten foot breakline and a fifteen foot breakline (see Figure 2A). Both breaklines stretched all the way around the structure (see Figure 2B). This bar had one thing in common with my structure. The final break led directly to deep water.

Once Tom had taken his first fish

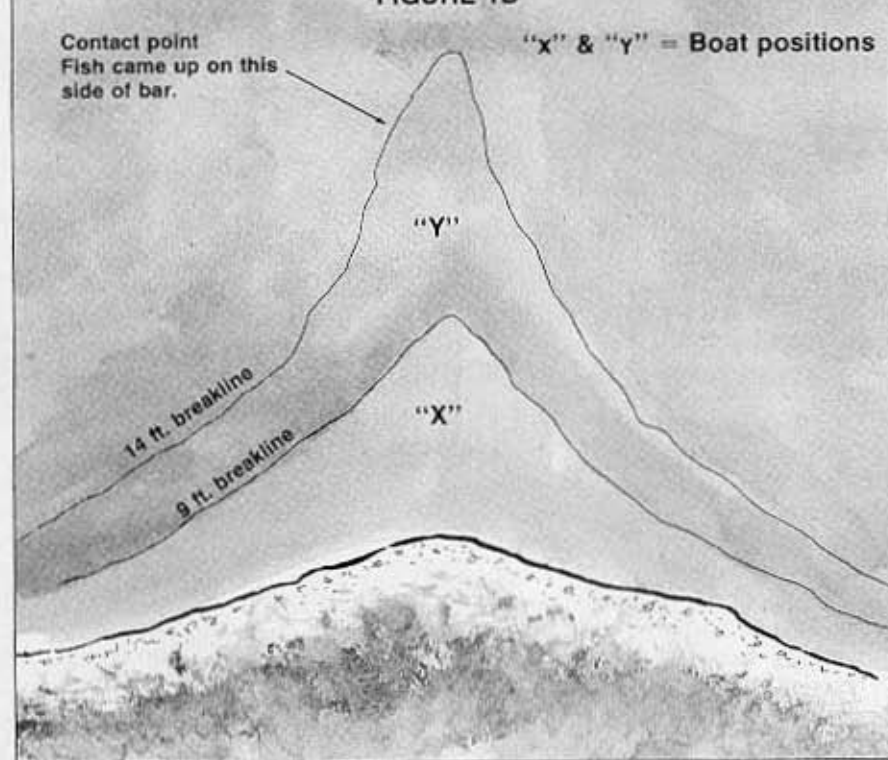
(trolling), he positioned his boat in the shallows and began casting his bottom bumping lure out over the ten foot breakline. After catching numerous small bass, he moved his boat further out on the bar so he could reach the deeper fifteen foot breakline. On his first cast he took a three pound smallmouth and that was it.

After fifteen minutes with no further results, Tom decided to look over the entire structure with the aid of his depth meter. When he reached the far side of the structure he noticed a small finger (projection) that broke (sudden, fast increase in depth) at seventeen feet right to the channel (see Figure 2B). It was actually the sharpest break to the deepest water in the area. Tom then repositioned his boat up on the bar so he could work the finger thoroughly by casting; he believed the movement period (of active fish) was over but he knew this deeper break HAD to be checked. The result was even surprising to him. On three consecutive casts he took two MUSKIES (thirteen and twenty-five pounds respectively). That's right; on three casts, while fishing for bass, Tom caught two keeper muskies (the elusive "fish of 10,000 casts").

He spent the rest of the day mapping and looking over the lake. Our combined results for the day showed we had located seven productive structures within three miles of the boat ramp and had a good stringer of smallmouth bass, two muskies, and a northern pike (plus quite a few bass which were returned to the water).

It is important to note here that we did not have to employ any fancy

FIGURE 1B



Fishing does become a lot easier when we go about it in an organized fashion. To attain success in any endeavor we must be organized. Why

We try to acquire as many answers as possible before we even put our boat in the water; such as type of lake, water color, available depth, the type of structures. Secondly, we

try to eliminate unproductive water as quickly as possible. We accomplish this by motor trolling. As stated earlier, we start in the shallows and work our way deep, maintaining depth and speed control at all times. We check these controls (depth and speed) constantly. By checking and rechecking, we will normally meet up with the fish. But even more importantly, we are constantly LEARNING. Tom and I are not "experts", (far from it), but by going about our fishing in a precise and orderly manner, we are always learning, trying to become better fishermen. When we

FIGURE 2B

Deep water

15 ft. breakline

10 ft. breakline

Contact point 17 ft. finger

"x" "y" "z"

"x" "y" "z" = boat positions

direct all our efforts to mapping and interpreting our lake and presenting our lures at the proper depth and speed, catching fish usually takes care of itself.

The two controls that were mentioned in the previous paragraph are the ones with which we must be concerned. Of all the controls in fishing, we have found depth control (where the fish are), is the most important. However, speed control is also very critical in achieving success.

Speed control is probably the least

talked about and the least understood of the two. When we talk about speed, we are referring to how quickly our lure moves from one place to another; not just how it might wiggle. We know a fish is a cold blooded creature. As his environment warms up (weather and water), his metabolism increases. He moves and reacts faster, eats and grows more, etc. The opposite is true when his environment cools. His body functions slow and he becomes more dormant.

Fish like these avoid most anglers and, eventually, many of them die of old age. A systematic approach to sport angling can often unravel the mystery of capturing such trophies. Muskies are GREAT, but just take a second look at the size of that smallmouth. Wow!



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In early season fishing, when conditions are generally cold, our speed control will be slow. But as we progress into the summer, weather and water conditions warm up and we must increase our speed. Sometimes this speed will be so great we often wonder if the fish can catch the lure.

Every fish Tom and I caught while trolling at Kinzua was taken while going half-throttle with a ten horsepower motor on a fourteen foot aluminum boat. That is really moving! When we caught fish on the cast, the speed factor was not overlooked. We cranked our reel handles as fast as possible. WE ARRIVED AT THE PROPER SPEED FOR THAT DAY BY CHECKING IT OUT. We learned early, in our efforts to become better fishermen, having proper speed and proper depth control, for the conditions that exist, are THE important ingredients for successful fishing.

Let's get back to Kinzua and take a look at our second day of fishing. We started our fishing in the same manner as the day before (by motor trolling the shallows), but this time we concentrated our efforts on the structures that were located the previous day. I started my fishing on the same bar where most of my fish were taken the day before. However, when I checked the bar, there was no fish activity. At this point I had a choice — stay on the structure and wait for the fish to move; or start trolling and checking new areas. I chose the latter, mainly because we wanted to find out all we could about this lake. However, six hours later after trolling all depths, I had not taken one single fish.

All regular Fishing Facts readers know how important WEATHER can be in controlling the degree of frequency and the distance fish will move. Last summer, at least in the Northeast, weather conditions were horrible (for fishing, at least). It seemed as if every third day a cold front would come through. So the movements of fish that did occur, for the most part, were extremely short. Being aware of this fact, coupled with another fishing fact, that a lure out of water will not catch a fish, I forgot about lunch and went back to my bar (Figures 1A and 1B) and started all over.

This time it was a little bit different. On my second trolling pass (fishing at a depth of six feet) the little bottom-bumping lure stopped. Minutes later, I boated a thirty inch muskie.

In Pennsylvania that is a legal fish; however, this fish was released. I made a few casts to this area but had no results. I then moved the boat further out on the bar, just as I had done the previous day, and made my casts out over the fourteen foot breakline. I was still using that bottom walking lure and cranking the handle on my baitcasting reel as fast as I could.

Don Dickson holds several lunker smallmouths and a bonus northern pike. All fish shown in the accompanying article were caught during a brief two-day outing when most local fishermen had deserted the water due to the "lousy" fishing reports. Of the 60 smallmouths caught, more than 50 were released (unharmed) to fight another day.



In fifteen minutes I had landed two more muskies, but these two were keepers; they weighed nineteen and twenty pounds. Landing three muskies in twenty minutes is a lot of fun, in ANY part of the country! The rest of the day produced only a few straggler bass, but I was well satisfied.

Returning to meet Tom, I had two muskies and had released a third. I was already planning to "give him the business", but I then found this kind of thinking was a bit premature.

Tom had started his day of fishing on the wide bar (Figure 2) where he had been so successful the day before. He caught two bass early in the morning, but fished the next five hours with no results. This structure was quite large and he stuck with it all morning hoping for a movement of fish. He kept trolling the breaklines on this bar and about one o'clock in the afternoon he made contact.

While bumping his lure across the finger (projection) at seventeen feet, there he was, another muskie, this one weighed TWENTY-THREE POUNDS. Further checking of this finger produced nothing, so Tom took his bottom-walking lure down to the twenty-five foot breakline. In thirty minutes he had THREE MORE muskies, all but one in the twenty pound class.

Later that day he took a four pound walleye and a three pound smallmouth bass off the same structure.

It seemed as though Tom had given me the business two days in a row. But more important than a little friendly competition was our two day total of sixty smallmouth, nine muskies, a walleye, and a northern pike. Keep in mind these results were NOT from a wilderness lake in Canada during the spawning season, but from a lake in Pennsylvania in August. This type of fishing is not limited to Kinzua Reservoir. There are a multitude of lakes in the Northeast that offer the same great fishing.

How do we become successful on these waters? The same way fishermen become successful in Texas, Wisconsin, Illinois or Florida. To steal a phrase from Education Editor, Buck Perry, "Anyone can become a successful fisherman; all it takes is a strong desire to catch fish, coupled with knowledge and the expending of some effort."



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