



“What I DIDN'T say about structure fishing”

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

This past year, due to the fact new readers are coming along all the time, I started a series of “talks” (articles) to review some of the “basics” of structure fishing. To get started I discussed the BASIC GUIDELINE of the Spoonplugger (structure fisherman). As expected, the response indicated quite a few fishermen were hearing the information for the first time. I was rather surprised to find some of the “old” readers hadn’t gotten the message. In other words, quite a few did not hear or understand what was said.

Before we talk of other things, I feel more should be said about the “Basic Guideline” of the structure fisherman. If a caption were put to this discussion, it probably would be something like this: “What I Didn’t Say” or “I Didn’t Say That!” or “What The Basic Guideline Said.”

Let me back up a bit here and say something so everyone will know what I mean when I use the word “guideline.”

While still a small chap, it was determined (the hard way) that to be consistently successful whenever and wherever I went fishing, I’d have to have facts, rules or “guidelines” to follow in ALL phases of fishing. There was no way I could get satisfaction out of fishing if I went about it in a haphazard manner, or predicated my success on something I could buy in a fancy wrapped package.

The “guidelines,” as set forth in the structure fisherman’s (Spoonplugger) study material, have proven their worth over a good number of years. The guidelines have made me a happy fisherman. They have done the same for a great many other fishermen who have understood



Elwood (“Buck”) Perry, the father of structure fishing, displays a big bass that gobbled up a deep-running, bottom-bumping lure (#700 Series Spoonplug).

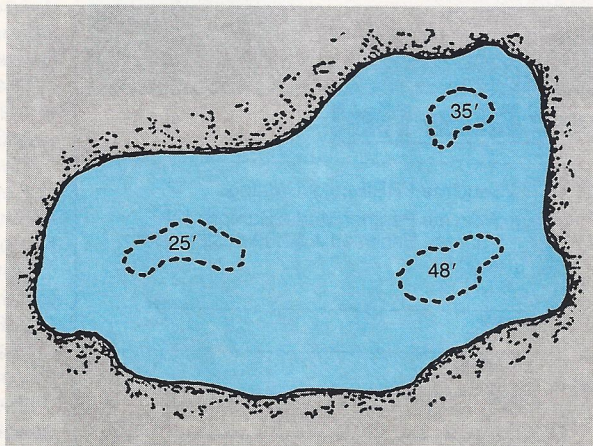


FIGURE 1 – Top view of a natural lake with three deep sections (or holes) shown.

what the guidelines said.

We should repeat the Basic Guideline, for I’m sure there will be some (again) who will be hearing it for the first time.

The “home” of the fish (where he spends the greater part of his time — a sanctuary from a changing environment) is somewhere in the deep, or deepest, water in the area being fished. When in the sanctuary depths, the fish are normally so dormant or so deep they are almost impossible to locate or catch. As fishermen, we are saved due to the fact they do not stay so dormant or so deep all the time. Once or twice on an average fishing day they will become active and MAY move toward the shallows. We are saved again because, when the fish become active and move towards the shallows, they do not go in just any direction. The route they take has bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) that show them the way. As fish move along a bottom feature (structure) they will pause or stop at “things” (breaks and breaklines) on the bottom. Where they (the fish) start from, how far they go (toward the shallows) and how long they stay (at a “break” or “breakline,” before turning back to deep water) is dependent upon (controlled by) the weather and water conditions **at that particular time.**

In order to consistently catch fish we must control the depth and speed of our lures (or bait) on, and/or around the bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) the fish are using in their movements and migrations.

If the Basic Guideline is read and studied carefully it should be seen there are quite a few things involved here. I like to

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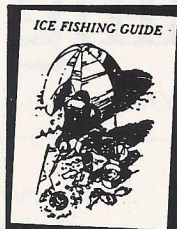
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think of them in terms of:

1. The Movement of the Fish
2. Lake Features — Structure, Breaks, Breaklines, Deep Water
3. Weather and Water
4. Lake Types
5. Mapping and Interpretations
6. Controls and Tools
7. The Presentation of Lures
8. Mental Attitude

Let us look at the Basic Guideline and see if we can clear up what the Basic Guideline DID say, or what the Basic Guideline DID NOT say.

It said: "The 'home' of the fish (where he spends the greater part of his time — a sanctuary from a changing environment) is somewhere in the deep, or deepest, water in the area being fished."

This part did not say the home of the fish was in the deepest spot in the lake. It did not say the fish had a definite spot in the deep water as a sanctuary from a changing environment.

Let's look at some figures to better show what was said or what was NOT said. **Figure 1** is a top view of a natural lake. There are three deep sections (or holes) in the lake. One section is 25 ft. deep, another 35 ft. and the third 48 ft. Our guideline would indicate there exists *three* sections in the lake the fish could consider "home." It *did not* say all the fish would be in the 48-ft. hole. Neither did it say the fish would be 48 ft. deep.

Figure 2 is a top view of a reservoir (man-made lake). Note the depth figures of the channels. It should be obvious the deep or deepest water in any area fished would be the channels. The Basic Guideline *did not* say all the fish would be in the channel where the depth is 80 feet. Neither did it say the sanctuary was at 80 feet. IT DID NOT SAY AT WHAT DEPTH THE FISH MAY BE.

Figure 3 is a side view of one of the deeper sections of the natural lake (**Figure 1**), or a section of the reservoir (**Figure 2**) with a channel.

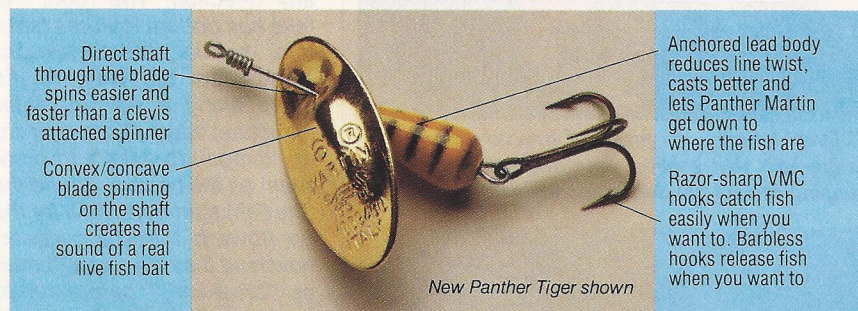
The Basic Guideline said the sanctuary of the fish (from a changing environment) was **SOMEWHERE** in the deep or deepest water in the area being fished. It did not say they were in the deepest spot. Neither did it say the fish were always on the bottom.

What actually did the guideline say regarding the sanctuary of the fish? It said **DEEP WATER** was the only escape from a changing environment.

Your question at this point may be: "Where are the fish when they're in the sanctuary depths?" I would say "Never mind, we aren't to that part of the basic guideline yet." However, I could say we

continued

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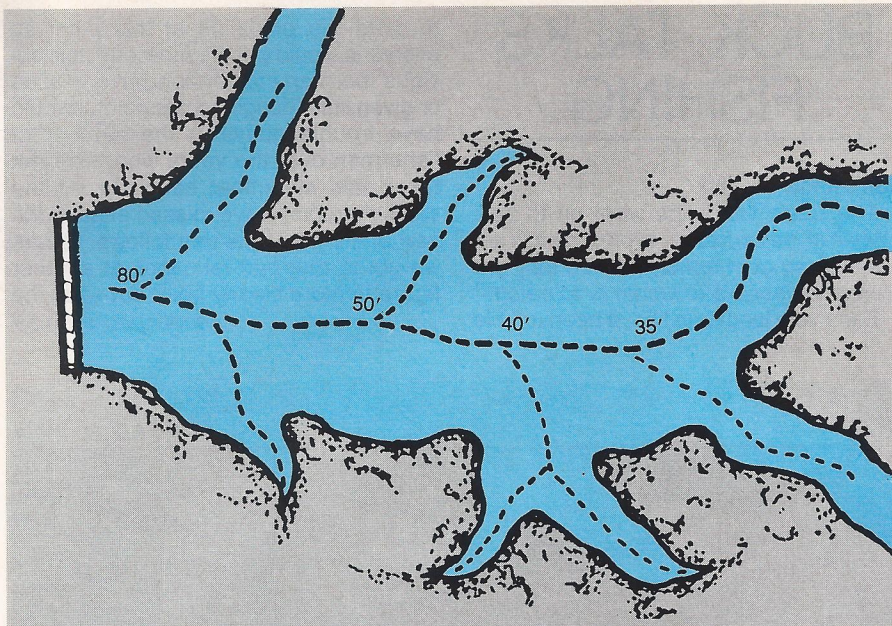


FIGURE 2 – Top view of a reservoir (man-made lake). Note the depth figures of the channels.

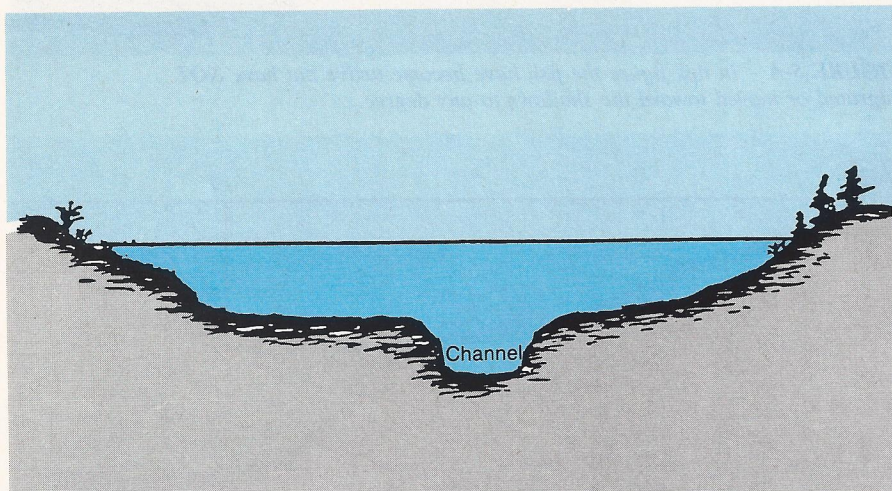


FIGURE 3 – Side view of one of the deeper sections of the natural lake shown in Figure 1, or a section of reservoir (Figure 2) with a channel.

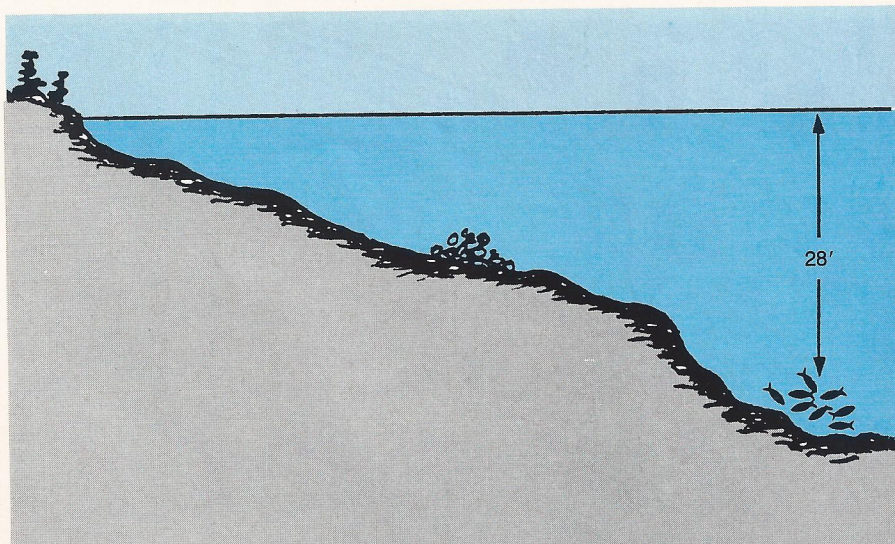


FIGURE 4 – Side view of a fishing situation with fish grouped at a sanctuary depth. Here the fish are not only at a depth where most fishermen have problems presenting lures correctly, but they are also dormant and not likely to move any great degree to take a lure.

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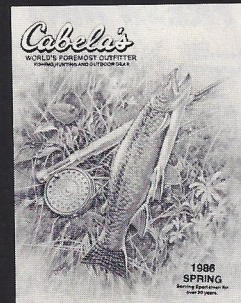
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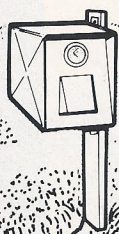
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don't know — yet!

The Basic Guideline went on to say: "When in the sanctuary depths the fish are normally so dormant or so deep they are almost impossible to locate or to catch."

For a very long time I have been unable

to word the guideline at this point so everyone would get the message. It is obvious too many fishermen have missed or given little thought to this point. I would have trouble guessing the number of fishermen over the years who have not taken this statement seriously. At the same time they have missed entirely the part of the guideline that follows. Before we get to that part let's look at another figure to more clearly point out what the

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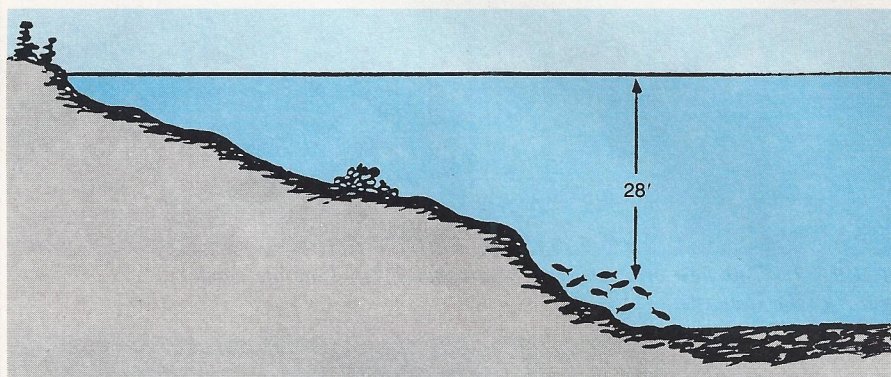


FIGURE 5-A — In this figure the fish have become active but have NOT migrated or moved toward the shallows to any degree.

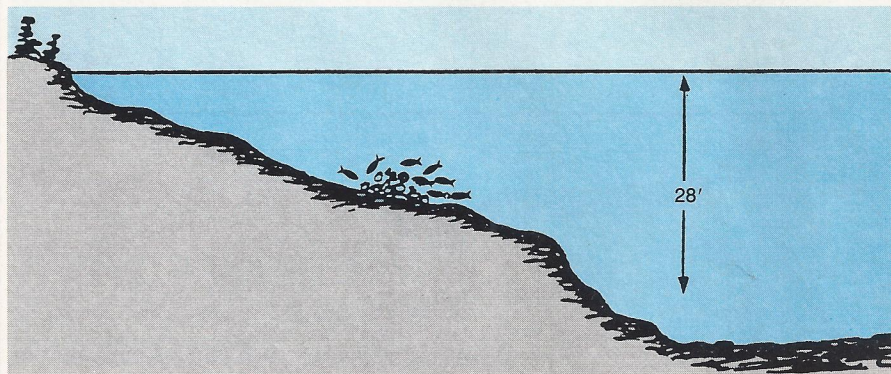


FIGURE 5-B — Here the fish have now moved or migrated toward the shallows. In this case they have moved to a depth of 15 feet.

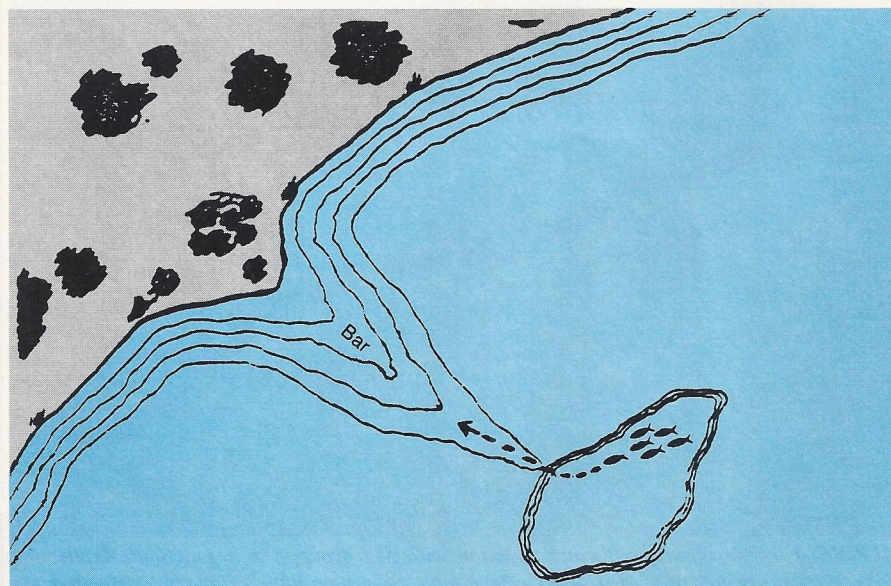


FIGURE 6-A — Top view of one of the most common structure situations found in numerous bodies of water.

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guideline said — or didn't say.

Figure 4 is a side view of a fishing situation; I have placed a group of fish at a sanctuary depth. These fish could be either bass, walleye, striped bass or northern pike, etc. In this case I have placed them at a depth of 28 feet.

The fish are not only at a depth at which most fishermen have problems presenting lures correctly, but they are also dormant and not likely to move any great degree to take a lure. It's possible they may suck in a lure (or bait) if it were placed in front of their nose *at zero speed*. However, it is doubtful many fishermen could pinpoint where they are, or be able to place the lure so accurately. It is never likely a troller or a caster working deep water would make contact with these fish.

When **SOME** fishermen read or hear that the fish spend the greater part of their time in deep water, one may decide to give it a try. On his next trip (after he fails in the shallows) he moves to the deep water. He has no idea where the fish might be in deep water, nor does he know how to effectively present lures there. After spending a period of time wandering around like some lost duck, he debunks the idea that fish are in deep water and goes back to fishing the stick-ups and visible objects in the shallows. [At least he caught a fish there several trips back.]

This type of reaction to the deep water message is not difficult to understand. He missed the part of the Basic Guideline which stated the fish may be so deep or so dormant they are almost impossible to catch. However, he is not the only one who missed the point. Much too often **EXPERIENCED** structure fishermen (Spoonpluggers) will forget this important part of the Basic Guideline. Many, after drawing a blank in deep water (or shallow), **WILL START TO THINK THEY ARE DOING SOMETHING WRONG**. This type thinking results in loss of confidence, sloppy lure presentation, and lack of patience. It leads to doubts and gimmickry. It makes the angler vulnerable to ideas on fishing shortcuts and old wives' tales that are forever present.

Let us proceed to the next portion of the Basic Guideline of the structure fisherman (Spoonplugger).

"We are saved due to the fact they (fish) do not stay dormant or so deep all the time. Once or twice on an average fishing day they will become active and MAY move toward the shallows."

This portion of the guideline follows immediately after that part which points out the fish may be so dormant or so deep they are not likely to be caught. This portion *does not* say fish are active all the

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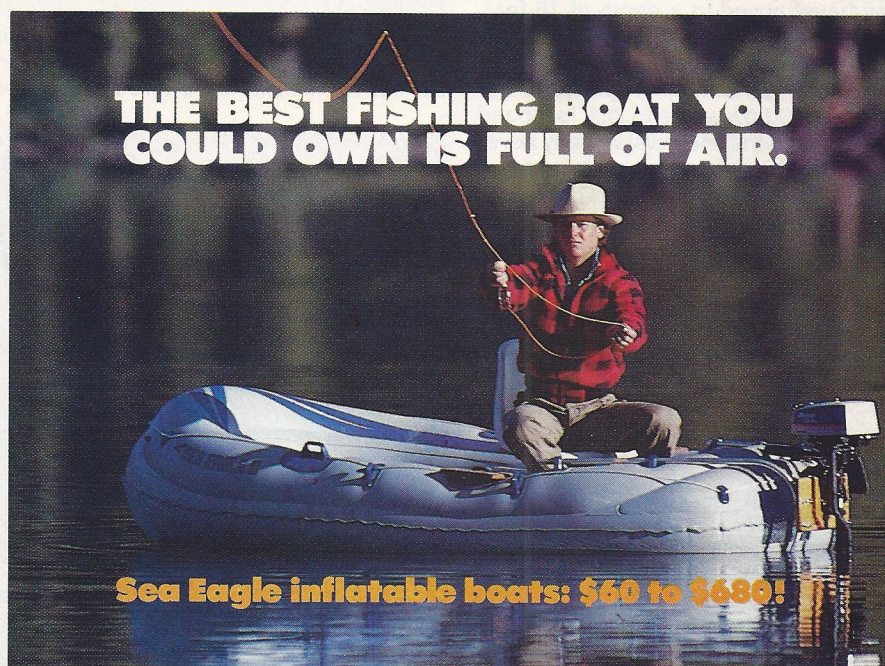
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time. It *does not* say they are in the shallows all the time.

This portion *does not* say the fish become active and move to the shallows once or twice a day. It *does not* say the fish move to the shallows once or twice a day to feed. At no time does this guideline (or any of the others) say anything about "feeding." What the guideline said was: "The fish become 'active' once or twice a day and MAY move toward the shallows."

Let's look at another figure to more clearly point out what this portion of the Basic Guideline said — or *did not* say.

Figure 5-A is a repeat of **Figure 4**, but a change has occurred. In this figure the fish have become active. However, **they have not migrated toward the shallows to any degree.** If you and I were able to pinpoint where the fish were, we shouldn't run into much difficulty making contact. The fish are no longer so dormant or nonchasing; and our presentation of lures (or bait) would not have to be so exact, but the lures would have to be "on-the-money" (where the fish are) and getting them there could be difficult.

In **Figure 5-B** the fish have moved or migrated toward the shallows. In this case they have moved to a depth of 15 feet. Here again, if you or I know where to look for these fish, it should be an easy matter to put a few of them in the boat. But if we do not know where to look (or spend all our time in the shallows) we may never know the fish were active enough to move this shallow. To further reduce our chances for success, this depth (15 feet) **is likely to be the shallowest movement of the fish.** To top this, **the fish may stay here (or any other place) for only 10 or 15 minutes before dropping back to a sanctuary depth and becoming inactive again.**

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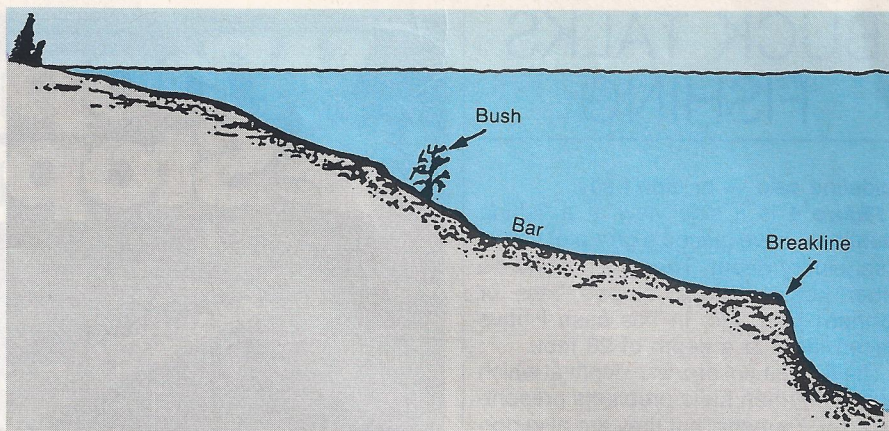


FIGURE 6-B – Side view showing a ridgelike bar with a "breakline" (a rapid increase or decrease in depth) and a "break" (bush) on the bar-like structure.

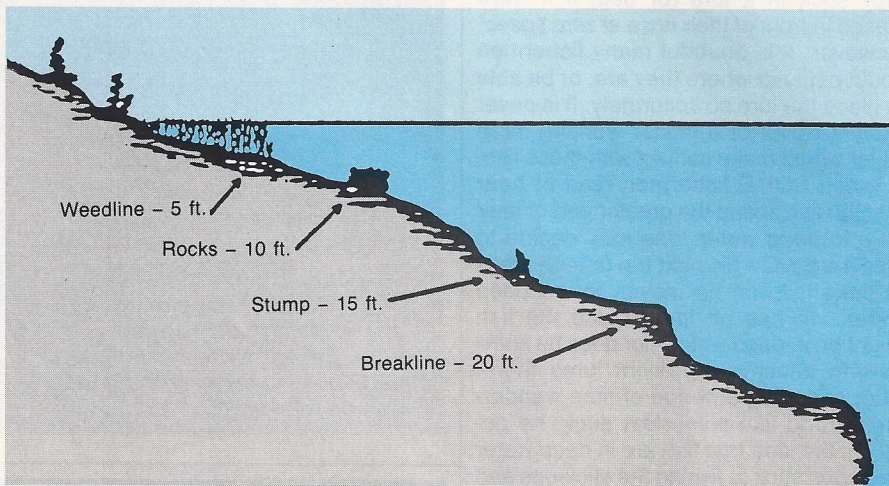


FIGURE 7 – Side view of a "structure situation." Buck's article says the fish may be found at 5 places (can you spot them?) depending upon the weather and water conditions at the time the fish become active.

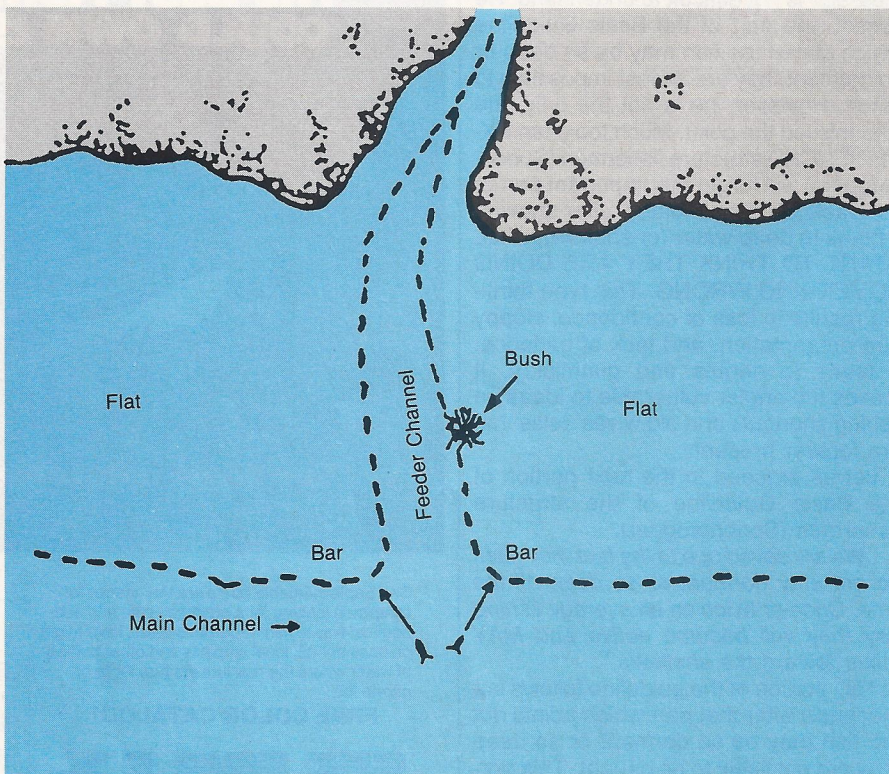


FIGURE 8 – Top view of a "structure situation" in a man-made lake. The diagram shows where a side feeder stream has cut a channel through a "flat."



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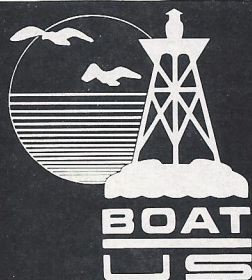
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Jeri Perry (author's wife) with a true "hawg"-size bass.

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Is it any wonder why fishermen will miss the fish most of the time if they do not fully understand what our guidelines say or don't say? Is it any wonder some fishermen may think they are not doing things right? Do you think it would be wise to exercise patience at times for the fish to become active and move shallower?

The next part of the Basic Guideline says: *"We are saved again because, when the fish become active and move toward the shallows, they do not go in just any direction. The route they take has bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) that show them the way. As fish move along a bottom feature (structure) they will pause or stop at things (breaks, breaklines) on the bottom."*

This part of the Basic Guideline is the KEY to where the fish will be found. The features of the bottom the fish use in their movements are known as "Structure Situations." The guideline points out that "structure" is a feature OF the bottom. It did not say things such as rocks, stumps, logs, weeds, bushes, etc., are "structure." A fisherman who spends all his time working visible objects in the shallows (or spends his time in deep water looking for fish on a depth sounder) cannot call himself a "structure fisherman."

Figure 6-A is a top view of one of the most common "structure situations" found in bodies of water. It is a ridgelike

"bar" extending ALL THE WAY from the shallows to the deep water. There exists quite a few different type "Structure Situations" the fish use in their movements and migrations, but this "bar" (that goes all the way) will suffice to show what the guideline said. The figure shows that when the fish move from the deep water toward the shallows they go toward (or on) the "structure" (a feature OF the bottom).

Figure 6-B is a side view of the ridgelike "bar." It shows a "breakline" (a more rapid increase or decrease in depth) and a "break" (bush) on the "structure" (bar). The guideline states fairly well where to look for the fish and how to pinpoint where they (fish) will be.

The next part of the Basic Guideline probably has more to do with the failures (or successes) of fishermen than any other thing. The reason for the failures is due to the fisherman not understanding fully what the first part of the guideline said or didn't say.

This part says: *Where they (fish) start from, how far they go (towards the shallows) and how long they stay (at a "break" or "breakline" before turning back to deep water) is dependent upon (controlled by) the weather and water conditions at that particular time."*

Figure 7 is a side view of a "Structure Situation." Please note there are quite a few things (breaks) on the structure. The guideline says the fish may be found at five places depending upon the weather and water conditions at the time the fish become active. It could be the fish do not move or migrate from the sanctuary depth

due to the weather and water conditions. It could be they move to the "breakline." This could be as far as they move before turning back. It could be the weather and water conditions are such that the fish, after pausing at the breakline, move on up to the "stump."

Let's say conditions (weather and water) are fairly stable, etc., so you and I decide to go fishing. We know this structure situation pretty well so we check it out. It didn't take too long to find that the fish had moved up to the stump before turning back.

Let us be optimistic and say on one of our trips during the season the weather and water conditions are near perfect. We *don't* make contact for quite a period, but about 2:30 p.m. we catch a small fish along the weedline. We check out the deeper water down to the rocks (10 feet) and, low and behold, we catch a good mess of fish before the action stops. How would you explain our success on this particular trip?

Do you understand what this part of the guideline says? Does it say fish make a round trip to the shallows once or twice a day? Does it say fish move all the way to the shallows to feed? Does it indicate weather and water conditions will be good all the time? Would your past fishing experiences indicate weather and water conditions are good most of the time?

(Don't ask me, for I might tell you to learn more about deep water interpretation and the presentation of lures if you expect to catch fish consistently whenever or wherever you go fishing.)

The last part of the Basic Guideline says: *"In order to consistently catch fish we must control the depth and speed of our lures (or baits) on, and/or around the bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) the fish are using in their movements and migrations."*

This part of our guideline *did not* say anything about the size, color or action of the lure. Neither did it say anything about noise, odor or lucky charms. It did not say anything about boats or how fast they ran. It did not say you had to have all the available electronics.


Figure 8 is a top view of a "structure situation" in a Flatland reservoir (man-made lake), where a side feeder stream has cut a channel through a "flat."

Since it is a "structure situation," and from what we know of depths in such a reservoir, we can assume the fish would have a deep water sanctuary somewhere in the main channel. We could also assume that the fish would make contact with the "Structure Situation" at the main channel "bars" (structure), and proceed along the "breakline" (on or attached to the bar) toward the shallows.

Let's assume the weather and water

conditions are not too good. How many sizes, colors and actions of lures are likely to produce if you limit all your lure presentations in the cove or along the shoreline? Do you think any sweet (or foul) smelling stuff you might smear on the lures would do much good if the fish were in the channel or bunched up on the bars at the main channel? If you had a big expensive boat, just how much success would you expect to have in the "cover" or "stick-ups" along the shoreline if the farthest the fish moved toward the shoreline was to the bush on the breakline.

As you and I have been talking, I'm quite sure many questions have popped into your mind. Probably in each portion of the guideline discussed you have wondered about many things.

In the beginning of our talk I pointed out the things I think are involved in the Basic Guideline. At this point, go back and look at the things I said were involved. In past talks (and in the future) I have (and will) discuss in detail the "guidelines" for each of the things involved. A lot of effort has been put forth in articles, books, home study courses, etc. to discuss in detail the things involved in structure fishing (Spoonplugging). This was done so that when you and I get on the water there'll be no question as to where, when, why or how to put some good-sized fish on the stringer (or in the livewell). 

We built in an old Ozark fishing secret that gets the heavyweights hanging around underwater structures.

New Arbogast Arby Hanger.

Its neutral buoyancy keeps it fishing down deep even when you stop the retrieve.

The big bass boys from the Ozarks have known about it for years. Very simply, there are times when lunkers like to suspend around underwater vertical structure and it takes a crankbait that goes deep and stays deep—even when the retrieve is momentarily stopped—to get them. The slight pause is the secret; it often triggers the strike.

The Arby® Hanger was designed for this kind of structure fishing. A big front lip pulls it down fast and, combined with its slim profile, gives it the frantic swimming action and appearance of an injured bait-fish. Neutral buoyancy keeps it fishing at the depth you want even during that pause in the retrieve. This year, tie on the Arby Hanger and hang around down deep with the big ones.

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