

Will you put forth the effort that leads to fishing success?

by Buck Perry, Education Editor



Fishing Facts Education Editor Buck Perry with a "good one." During a lifetime of studying the habits of largemouth bass, this legendary angler has caught not hundreds, but THOUSANDS of bass this size (and larger).

Over the years you and I will meet bass fishermen who have never caught a fish weighing as much as 5 pounds. I've known and talked to fishermen who have caught hundreds of bass this weight and above. I've met those who think they've had a bad day if they don't get one at least 5 pounds, and I know quite a few who frequently release bass in the 8 to 10-pound class. There are many bass fishermen who have never caught a limit in one day, while others may feel they must do more studying if they don't.

I've run into plenty of fishermen who never go to a strange (or large) body of water without a guide. At the same time, I've listened to highly-successful fishermen who prefer to fish water never seen before.

Experience and observations have shown there is a group of fishermen whose total aim in fishing is to beat the other guy. Yet there are those who have found they only truly learn when they begin to teach.

continued

Fishing Success

I've often wondered just how many fishermen believe their success in fishing depends upon the amount of money invested in equipment. There is little doubt they greatly outnumber the fishermen who have learned that KNOWLEDGE is the key to fishing success, not something bought which claims instant success.

What I've seen are basically two types of fishermen. One belongs to a group that goes on a body of water and consistently comes off with little to show for their ef-

forts. The other group are those who go and consistently come off with more and bigger fish. When discussing this subject, the question is often asked: "What creates the difference between these two groups?"

About the shortest answer to the question would be to say the consistently-successful group has taken the time and put forth the effort to find facts that lead to successful fishing. They have discarded hearsay, old wives' tales and statements from various so-called experts that won't stand up under close scrutiny. The successful fisherman is well aware that he

has to know how a fish lives, how it moves, and what effect a change in weather and water conditions has on the critter. He has learned he must spend his time (fishing) where he has the best chance to catch a fish. And he must be at the right place at the right time, presenting lures or baits in the right manner. His thoughts on the way to the lake are mostly: "I hope the weather is such I can get on the water and be able to present lures correctly."

The fisherman in the group that is consistently unproductive has not taken the time and effort to study, observe and note what it takes to be a highly-successful fisherman. He follows the crowd. He may believe fishing success will depend entirely upon how many casts he makes in a day, or just how fast his boat will go so he can get there first. He may be convinced his success will depend upon just how many electronic gadgets he's able to stuff in his boat. He may think the fish will take his lure if he can just find one with the right size, color or action. His thoughts on the way to the lake are mostly: "I hope the fish are biting today."

Time after time I've listened to fishermen give all kinds of excuses for having a bad day of fishing. There were too many fishermen on the lake, too much traffic, wind, cold, hot, the motor conked out, broken tackle, lost lures, never been on the lake before, etc., etc., etc. For some unexplained reason, I've never heard one of these individuals blame himself for his failures. Possibly it never entered his mind.

I've heard a smaller group make excuses also, but in this group the major excuse was: "I just don't know enough yet" or "I'm just not good enough yet."

I've seen a great number of fishermen leave a body of water after a day's fishing (whether successful or not) who were no better fishermen when they left than when they got on the water. At the same time, a couple other individuals fishing the lake were a whole lot better fishermen when they left than they were earlier that day.

I run into quite a few fishermen who consider themselves "experts." I run across others who think there is no such thing as an expert, as there is just too much to learn.

A technique (or teaching aid) often used in the past would be a good way to find out why these differences exist. We'll get a couple bass fishermen together a couple of times and let them talk about a fishing situation. If we listen carefully their conversation may tell us why one is happy and highly successful, while the other is making fishing a highly-frustrating chore. I'll leave it up to you to decide which one makes more sense.

We'll set up a reservoir (man-made lake) as a body of water for their consideration. Fishermen who do most of their fishing in natural lakes often ask why I spend more time talking and writing about

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ACTUAL
SIZE

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reservoirs (man-made lakes). I answer by saying most natural lakes do not present the problems or so many different fishing or structure situations as do the reservoirs. Maybe the best way to point this out is to say: " 'Natural' waters do not contain all the features or all the different fishing situations found in a reservoir. But 'reservoirs' DO contain all those found in the natural bodies of water." If a good teaching job has been done on reservoirs, you can bet your shirt natural bodies of water have been covered thoroughly. It's too bad some fishermen who fish natural lakes exclusively will skip over instructional material dealing with reservoirs.

Figure 1 is a top view of a reservoir. It is quite large and deep near the dam. There are many points, coves, small feeder channels and washes. There are two major streams entering the lake, plus areas where the shoreline shallows may contain bushes, stumps or weed beds, while some water in the coves and headwaters contain standing trees. However, there are areas in the reservoir where the

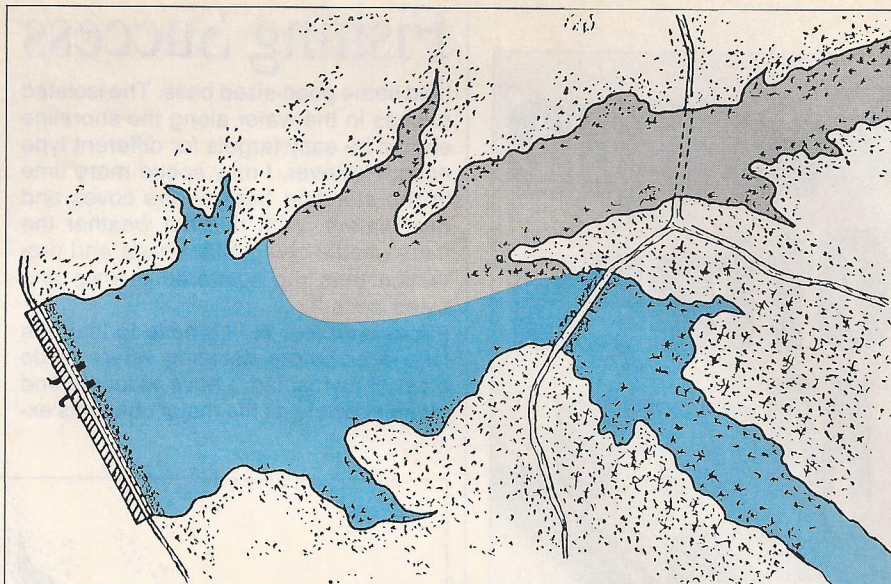


FIGURE 1 – "A typical reservoir has a greater number of different features and fishing situations than the typical natural body of water. Therefore, studying reservoirs can provide many valuable lessons for fishermen." – Buck Perry

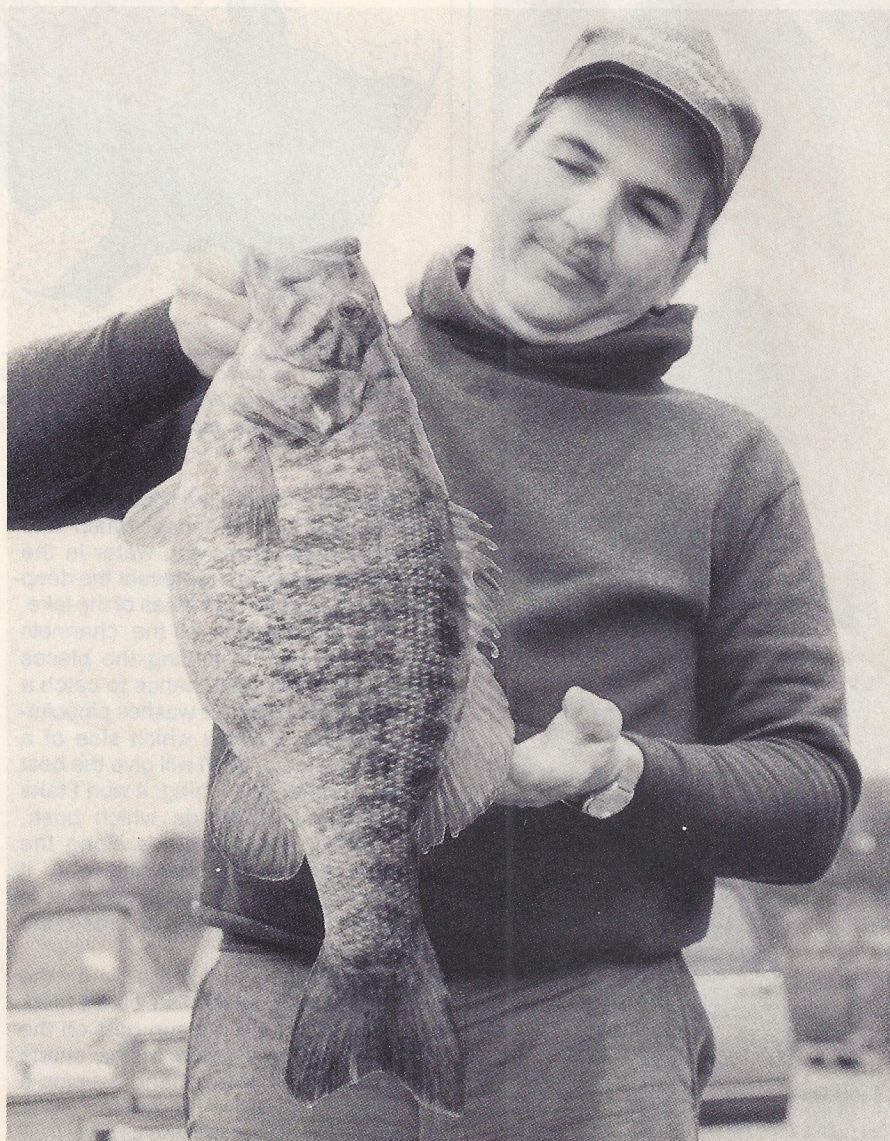
"I've seen basically two types of fishermen. One belongs to a group that consistently catches more and bigger fish."

bottoms are "clean" all the way from the shoreline to the channels.

One major stream feeding the lake comes from a forested area and the water is **clear** most of the time. The other major stream flows from flatter farming terrain and the water is **discolored** to some degree all the time.

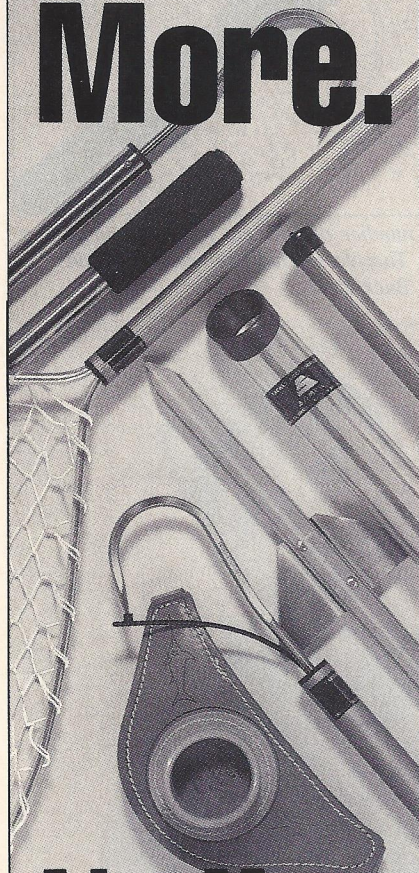
In the two major stream "arms" of the reservoir there exists very little flat flood plain beside the channels. The bottom shape may vary, but all the bottoms in these areas just gradually drop deeper to the channel. In the area of the lake below (toward the dam) where the two major streams come together, there exists a rather wide, flat, flood plain on each side of the river channel. Most of this lower section is "clean" so to speak. Some of it was originally farming land, the rest was "clear cut" (trees removed) before the lake filled. There are a couple roadbeds crossing a section of the lake. One, still in use, is raised and has rocky rip-rap on the sides. The other road was abandoned and was submerged when the lake filled. The rather long, dirt-filled type dam has lots of rip-rap (rocks) on the lake side.

Fisherman No. 1: "This lake looks to me like it's going to be easy pickings. The shoreline shallows contain lots of good 'cover' for bass to hide under. The weed beds back in the shallow bays should
continued



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Fishing Success

hold some good-sized bass. The isolated bushes in the water along the shoreline should be easy targets for different type lures. However, I may spend more time in the standing trees in the coves and headwaters. With this hot weather the trees should give better shade and protection than the scattered bushes and weed beds."

Fisherman No. 2: "I'll have to look the lake over before deciding where to do most of my fishing. I have to locate and pinpoint where all the major channels ex-

lake fairly early for several reasons. I'm an early riser for one thing. Since I don't know much about the lake, an early start would give me more time to find the best fishing spots. It's possible the fish may be active early, but it's no big deal if I miss an early period of activity. If I was there early and the fish became active, it wouldn't necessarily mean I'd be at the right place at the right time, presenting lures in the right manner. However, if I find out where the fish will be when they become active, I'm confident I'm going to put some nice fish in the livewell. One thing you can bet on, I'm not going to try to put words in a fish's mouth and tell him

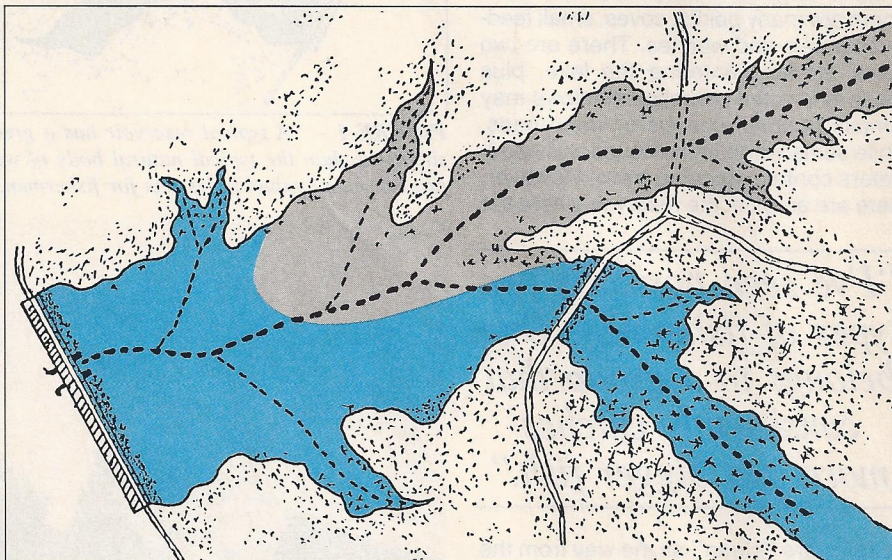


FIGURE 2 - The same body of water as shown in **Figure 1**, but here the major channels have been added to the drawing (the broken lines represent the channels and washes formed by moving water in the past).

ist. [**Figure 2** - the broken lines represent the channels and 'washes' (main and feeder) formed by moving water in the past.] These channels represent the deepest water available in all areas of the lake. Knowing the location of the channels goes a long way in finding the places where I have the best chance to catch a fish. Having channels or washes pinpointed allows me to know which side of a channel (or side of lake) will give the best results. Another good thing, it won't take much thought to decide which bush, weed bed or standing trees along the shoreline are worth checking out. It shouldn't take too long to know what is involved in the presentation of lures in the best manner."

Fisherman No. 1: "I'll try to be on the lake at daybreak, as the fish will be feeding early. When the hot sun gets on the water the fish will settle in the shade under the weeds or trees and develop a bad case of lockjaw. They won't bite again until almost sunset and when things have cooled off. So I'll go stay at the camp during the hot part of the day."

Fisherman No. 2: "I'll probably get on the

what time of day he's to take my lure. The fish aren't likely to pay any attention to what I think or say anyway."

Fisherman No. 1: "If the fish are not biting when I first get on the water, it gives me a chance to move around faster and find the best looking weed bed or stickups. Then I can concentrate my fishing at the best spots until the fish begin to bite. If I want to fish in deeper water I can go back in the coves and cast the trees standing in the water."

Fisherman No. 2: "It would seem rather foolish for me to say the fish would be at any particular spot at any given time. And this would be especially true if the spot was some visible feature in shallow water. When I was a small chap, I'd sneak up and look down into the shallow water along the shorelines, etc. At times I would see some bass, but most of the time I did not. If I saw bass around a weed bed or bush I'd keep going back periodically, and it could be a week or more before I'd see bass around the bush again. I noticed only certain weed beds or bushes ever had a fish around them. When the fish could be seen, it became obvious it was

the same weed bed or the same bushes that had attracted the fish before. When I saw fish around one of the spots I'd rush to see if they were present around another spot where they had been before. It took awhile, but when fish were around one good spot, I found they were around another good spot. This indicated to me that when fish moved in one area they moved in another; also when they weren't at one spot they were not at the other.

"In the height of the fishing season it might be days or weeks between visits of a fish to a weed bed or bush in the shallow water. The question that hit me was 'where had they been all this time?' Did they not feed during all this time? My conclusions were the fish did not stay shallow all the time, but spent a lot of their time in deeper water; and they seemed to follow trails just like the animals do on dry land. If I just cast my lures at the stuff visible along the shoreline, I might have to spend days and days of doing it before I'd ever have a chance to see which bush, weed bed or standing trees were even periodically productive.

"Time after time I've listened to fishermen give all kinds of excuses for having a bad day of fishing."

"All this told me I must fish deeper, but I better find out **where** to fish in deep water. It seemed to me my best bet was to start at a weed bed or bush where the fish end up and backtrack to deep water. Since I don't know where they started from or how deep, I better start looking for a 'path' all the way to the deep or deepest water in the area. This would probably mean the nearest channel. It seemed if I checked thoroughly the water and the bottom from the weed bed or bush all the way to the channel and cover a fairly wide path, I should be able to find the fish more often than I would if I just fished the weed beds or the bushes along the shoreline. After awhile, it may be possible for me to recognize the same things the fish use as 'signposts' in their movement from the deep water to the weed bed or bush in shallow water."

Fisherman No. 1: "I'll spend my time in the clear water near the dam or in the clear river arm of the lake. These areas have the best and most beautiful fishing water. I'll be able to see the weeds and bushes in the water better, and thus be more accurate with my casts. If I'm slightly off with a cast the fish will be able to see my lure better in the clear water."

Fisherman No. 2: "My daddy had to work long hours in the daytime. The only time

continued

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Fishing Success

he and I got to go fishing for any length of time was in the summer months. The lake we fished had clear water. It soon became obvious to us that the nighttime was the best time for much of the summer. The fishermen fishing in the daytime would draw a blank while Dad and I, fishing at night, made a good catch.

"A couple of lessons were learned during these nighttime fishing trips. One was the fish could and would become active and moving during darker conditions. The other thing was the fish had no trouble locating our lures when the light wasn't so good.

"Dad and I would fish another lake on his vacations. We'd stay at a friend's cabin. When I first visited the lake I didn't like the color of the water. It had a 'dirty' look about it. It didn't take long to prove to us the dirty-looking water was the most productive water we had ever fished. We didn't have to fish at night. The fish we caught were larger and fatter than any we had caught in our good-looking, clear water back home. When thinking about the two lakes and the difference in water color versus the activity and size of the fish, we began to wonder if the fish did not like clear water and lots of bright light. Did the dirty water create more activity? Shallower fish? More food supply? Did clear water mean more deeper, more inactive fish than dirty or discolored water?

"When I get on this lake (**Figure 1**) I'll head toward the section where the two rivers come together. From this area and up the river that has the discolored water, I should be able to find the best places in the reservoir to fish. I've fished in a lot of places since those days when I first gave thought to the color of the water. My purpose in going fishing is to catch the most and biggest fish around."

Fisherman No. 1 (on Tuesday): "The weather forecast calls for a cloud cover to move in tomorrow. By Friday we should be getting some rainy conditions. The weather man says it'll clear up and we'll have beautiful, clear, cool days over the weekend. I'll be ready and raring to catch a bunch of lunkers Saturday and Sunday by casting the weed beds and bushes along the shoreline and the standing trees back in the coves."

Fisherman No. 2 (on Tuesday): "The weather looks very good with the cloud cover moving in. By tomorrow the fish should be active once or twice during the day and moving well enough for me to score. By Thursday I should have no trouble making a limit catch. Friday I should be able to cull out fish that don't measure up. Most likely I'll have the sections of the lake I fish all to myself. I'll skip the weekend wind, skiers and pleasure boats. I probably couldn't find a fish anyway with the cool, washed-out sky following the cold front. When hunting I can't even find



Spoonpluggers Herb and Warren Kramme (right and center) took friend Dick Bradford out for his first Spoonplugging lesson. These veteran fishermen really know their stuff . . . as this photo of three trophy bass would indicate.



PHOTO BY JOHNSON MOTORS

Although many anglers spend thousands of dollars on the most advanced fishing equipment, hours of enjoyment can be had for much less. A small boat and an economical motor can work as well as anything.

a rabbit during weather conditions we're going to have this coming weekend."

Fisherman No. 1: "I'm going to get on the lake early in the morning and again in the evening. Since I can see all the likely spots the fish will be, I'll be able to get enough casts in to make a nice catch. One of the 'experts' told me that the more casts I make, the more fish I will catch."

Fisherman No. 2: "With the weather coming up it shouldn't take long to see when, where and how the fish are moving. The terrain around the lake should tell quite a lot about where the best spots are likely to be. I'll pass up coves with standing trees. It's not likely any good fish will be back in the coves this time of the year."

"Some rather fast trolling passes around and near the visible weed beds and bushes in the water should quickly show if any active fish are in the shallows. Some trolling passes with appropriate lures in deeper water on the features (paths) the fish use in their movements and migrations should find some fish, or show me the best 'routes' the fish will use when they do move."

"With the weather outlook and the water color available, I'm going to have me a ball in the next two or three days. By the second or third day I should be able to dispense entirely with trolling and have the best anchoring and casting positions in the lake for lunker bass and lunker catches."

Fisherman No. 1 (the following Monday): "The wind and big boat traffic was so bad I couldn't fish the best-looking weed beds and bushes. Boats were already around the best-looking trees in the coves by the time I got there."

"The wind made it difficult to place my lures, and I lost some of the best ones to the bushes. I'm going to check the battery charger, as my battery started going out early in the day."


"Fast trolling passes around and near visible weed beds and bushes should show if any active fish are in the shallows."

"With all the wind, traffic, lost lures and battery trouble I couldn't get in enough casts to catch any big fish. As you know, I release all the fish I catch that do not weigh 3 pounds or better. That's the reason I didn't bring any fish back to the dock."

Fisherman No. 2 (Monday): "I'm still enjoying those fishing days last week. The fish moved just about as expected. They moved so good on Thursday and Friday I not only caught a lot of fish but was able

to find and map a great many 'structure situations' the fish use in their movements and migrations. It was quick and easy in the 'dingy-water' sections and the sunken roadbed was super. In fact, the fish activity and movement indicated that now was a good time to check out the clearer and deeper sections of the lake. I'm well aware of the fact that it's probably going to be a long time before I encounter such good weather, water and fish activity again."

"There was a fairly shallow movement of fish in the clear water on the rip-rap at the roadway (causeway) and the dam. Some potentially productive areas were found that ordinarily would take a season or more to tie down. Most of these were on the feeder stream channels or 'washes' that cut through the deep, flat flood plain in the lower clear-water section of the lake toward the dam."

"We may think, and be fairly sure, a place in the lake is potentially productive. However, we can't really be sure until we catch a fish on or around it. Fish are not active and moving all the time. My experience would have me believe fishing is bad most of the time and then gets worse. I consider it luck to have been on the lake when the fish moved so well. One thing is certain; a lot of time and effort can be eliminated on future trips to this lake, regardless what weather and water conditions exist." 

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