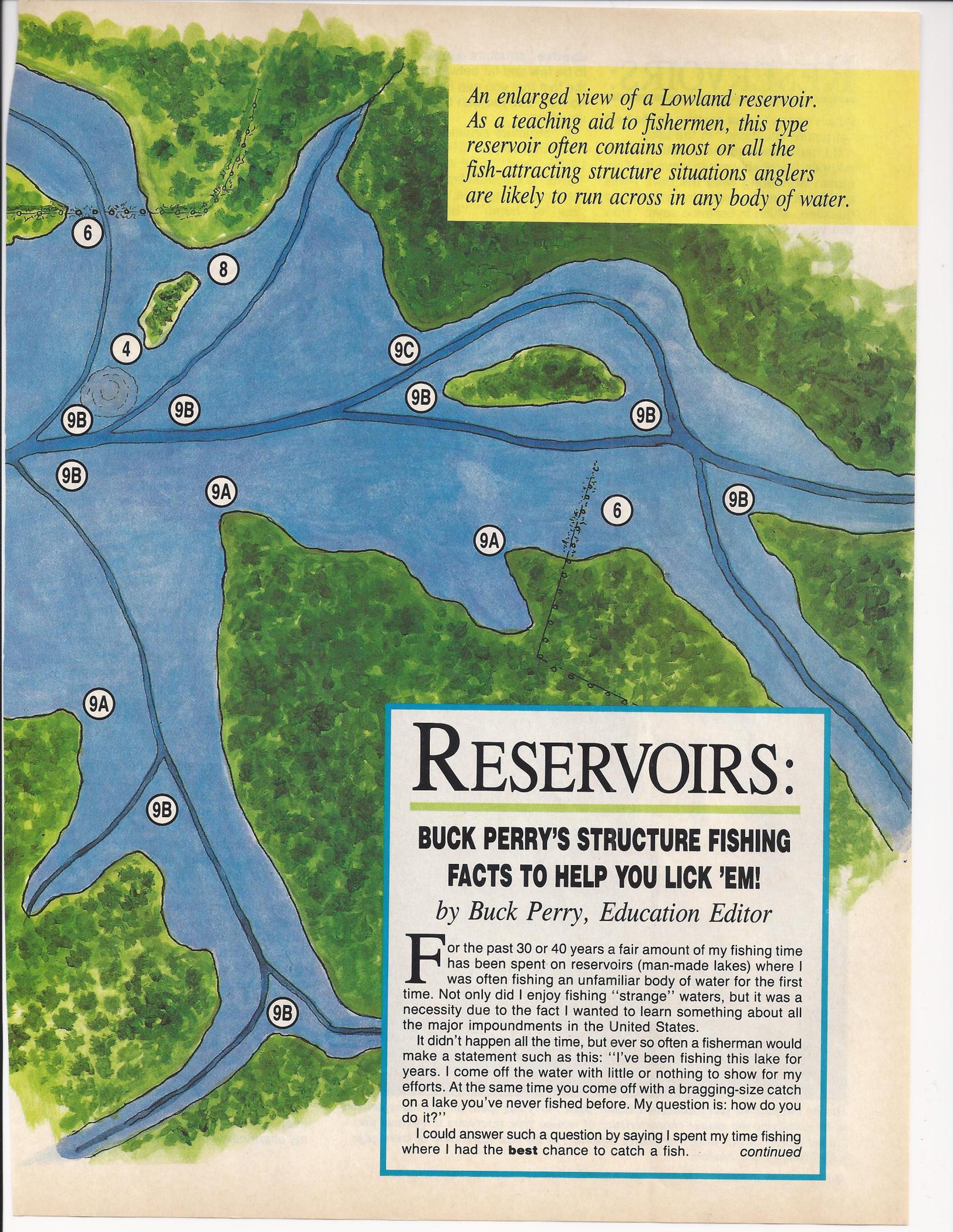


**C**all him immortal, genius, the  
Father of Structure Fishing,  
the Education Editor of Fishing  
Facts, our greatest living angler  
... and all are true. Elwood  
L. (Buck) Perry stands head  
and shoulders above all other  
anglers. You will be wise to  
study his article carefully.

*George*





An enlarged view of a Lowland reservoir. As a teaching aid to fishermen, this type reservoir often contains most or all the fish-attracting structure situations anglers are likely to run across in any body of water.

# RESERVOIRS:

## BUCK PERRY'S STRUCTURE FISHING FACTS TO HELP YOU LICK 'EM!

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

**F**or the past 30 or 40 years a fair amount of my fishing time has been spent on reservoirs (man-made lakes) where I was often fishing an unfamiliar body of water for the first time. Not only did I enjoy fishing "strange" waters, but it was a necessity due to the fact I wanted to learn something about all the major impoundments in the United States.

It didn't happen all the time, but ever so often a fisherman would make a statement such as this: "I've been fishing this lake for years. I come off the water with little or nothing to show for my efforts. At the same time you come off with a bragging-size catch on a lake you've never fished before. My question is: how do you do it?"

I could answer such a question by saying I spent my time fishing where I had the **best** chance to catch a fish. *continued*

# RESERVOIRS:

Which means I spent my time on the best "structure situations" in the lake.

If I had answered the question in this manner, it probably would leave the fisherman wondering what the devil I was talking about. In order to answer the question, which in essence says: "How can you seem to go directly to the best spots in a lake you've never fished before?," the answer calls for more detailed discussion.

First of all, a "structure situation" is an area in a body of water where the bottom features and deep water are so made up and related, that the fish use the area in their movements and migrations. In most bodies of water the **best and most pro-**

**ductive** "structure situations" are likely to be few and far between. Keep in mind the fact that you can have structure and no fish, but you can't have fish without structure.

A "structure situation" is made up of "STRUCTURE," "BREAKS," "BREAKLINES," and "DEEP WATER." "STRUCTURE" is a bottom feature different from the surrounding area, such as a ridgelike "bar" or "hump"; "BREAKS" are items on or in the bottom such as rocks, stumps, bushes, etc.; "BREAKLINES" are where a more rapid increase or decrease in depth occurs on the bottom, such as the edge of a channel, or a line on the bottom where the makeup changes from sand to muck or to shells, etc.; or, where two sections of water come together which differ in temperature, color or movement (current).

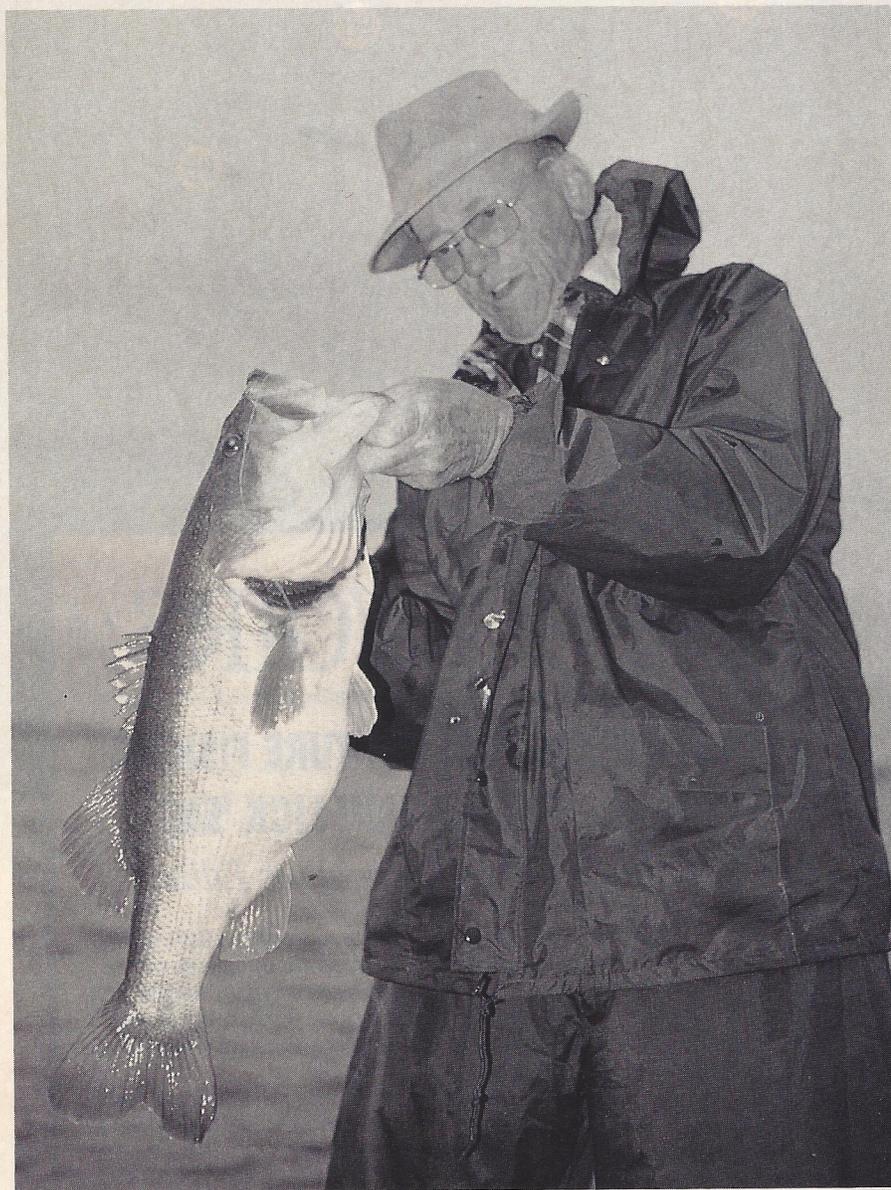
The more important "breakline" in the average body of water and for the greater number of fishermen is where the bottom shows a more rapid increase or decrease in depth.

As for "DEEP WATER": our guideline says "a depth of water greater than 8 to 10 feet is considered deep water." However, the term "deep water" means a great deal more to the skilled structure fisherman than just so many feet in depth. Wise fishermen should accept the fact that the only escape a fish has from a changing, hostile environment is deep water. He spends the *greater* part of his time there, and the older and bigger he gets, the more reluctant he becomes to venture very far from it. It's little wonder the shoreline "stick-up" fisherman catches mostly yearling fish.

One of our key fishing guidelines says most of the time fish, when in sanctuary depths, are either so deep or so dormant, or BOTH, they are practically impossible to catch. As fishermen, we are "saved" due to the fact they (the fish) do not stay so deep or so dormant all the time. Once or twice a day they become active and **may** move toward the shallows. We are lucky again because the fish do not move or migrate toward the shallows in a haphazard manner. They use the features of the bottom as "signposts" in their movements and migrations. We call these paths "STRUCTURE SITUATIONS." *Where the fish start from in deep water, how far they move toward the shallows, and how long they stay is dependent upon (controlled by) the weather and water conditions at the time of the activity.*

As a rule, the shallow-water fisherman had better plan to go to the fish, as most of the time they are not likely to come to him! He should keep in mind the "home" (sanctuary depth) of the fish is somewhere in the *deep* or *deepest* water in the area being fished; and weather and water conditions are seldom conducive to shallow movements of the fish. This means a fisherman should not use the features of the shallows to determine whether an area is potentially good. **His key is the availability of deep water, or the lack of it.** He should also be thinking the deeper the water available, the better the situation. A good guideline to follow would be to expect the sanctuary depth of the fish to be below 20 feet **if available.** When he catches a fish on a "migration route" (a structure situation) the fisherman should be thinking the average depth a fish (or group of fish) started from was 30-35 feet (if available). If he fails to make contact after presenting lures correctly to this depth, then he had better figure the weather and water conditions have the sanctuary depth deeper than he's fishing, and/or he has to exercise patience for the fish to move (become active). [Let me pause somewhat and say my observation of weather and water en-

*continued*



*During the past 40 years Education Editor Buck Perry has spent an enormous amount of time studying the unique characteristics of various type reservoirs throughout the United States. In this article he shares a portion of his vast warehouse of knowledge with Fishing Facts readers.*

# RESERVOIRS:

ables me to judge fairly well what is faced in regard to depth and the movements of the fish. This keeps me from "spinning my wheels" too long at any one place or any one time. But that's another subject for another time.]

A good "structure situation" can be made up of many features (structure, breaks, breaklines), but in order to be productive, they **MUST** be related to the

deep water in the area. In other words, they must be connected in some manner to the deep or deepest water in the area being fished. The fish must have a visible path **ALL THE WAY** in their movements and migrations from the deep water (sanctuary from a changing environment) to the shallows and vice versa. There may be many "structures," "breaks," and "breaklines" in any body of water, **but only a few may be so related to deep water that the fish will use them.**

In order to start answering fishermen's

questions about reservoirs, it has to be pointed out that most fishermen need guidelines as to "reservoirs" (man-made lakes). Dams are built in all different types of terrain. Some are built in flat country, some in hilly country and some in the mountains (or canyons). Reservoirs come in all shapes and sizes, and no two are likely to contain the same features (bottoms, depths, water color, etc.). However, I prefer to classify reservoirs into just three main categories, these being **FLATLAND**, **LOWLAND**, and **HIGHLAND**. We do this so that fishermen will know what type "structure situation" to expect, and where he or she is likely to find it in any reservoir one may be fishing.

**FIGURE 1-A** is a side view of the basic vision the fisherman has of a "FLATLAND" type reservoir. This type reservoir is located in flat country, or on major streams which have wide flood plains. The figure shows a "flat" area (flood plain) between the shoreline features and the deeper channel.

**FIGURE 1-B** is a top view showing a portion of the lake where a feeder stream has cut a channel or ditch through the flat to the main channel. With these two figures in mind (**1-A** and **1-B**) you will know what to expect but, better still, know where the best "structure situations" are likely to exist in a "Flatlander."

In this type reservoir, the dam itself may be quite long in length. The concrete portion may be short, but the dirt-filled part may be quite long. The face of the dirt-filled part has rip-rap (rocks) on it.

This type reservoir will show quite well what is meant when it is said "not all 'structure' will produce fish." There can be ridgelike "bars" off the points or along the shoreline, but most of them will "peter out" and will in no way be related or connected to the deep or deepest water in the area. In other words, these shoreline features do not go all the way to the sanctuary depths. A wide flat exists between them and the channel (deep or deepest water in the area). In most cases the fish would never know the shoreline "bars" were there (see **Figure 1-B**). In most flatland reservoirs the main channel is the only place that contains the overall sanctuary depths. It should be noted here that one of the keys to ANY type reservoir is the side feeder streams or "washes." These visible shoreline features (coves, etc.) indicate where water has flowed, and fishermen should figure all of these have structure, breaks or breaklines going in some manner to the deep or deepest water in the area.

**FIGURE 2** is a top view of the basic guideline when talking about a "LOWLAND" type reservoir. In this case there are no wide flats (big flood plain) between the shoreline features and the deep holes or channels (deepest water in the area). We view the bottom features, such as a "bar" or a "point" as extending *all the way* to

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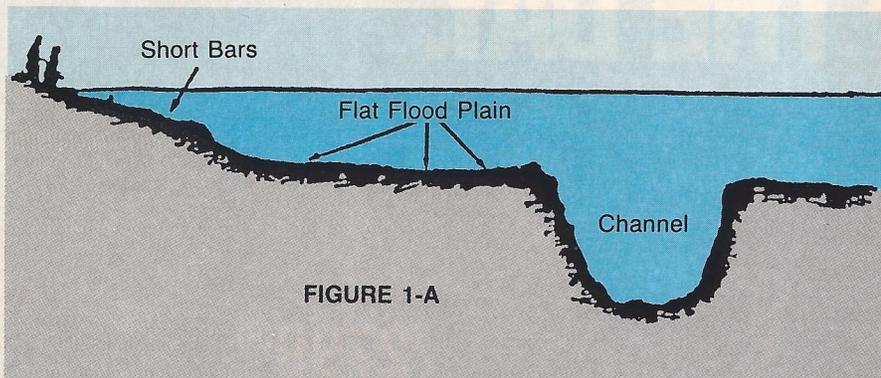


FIGURE 1-A

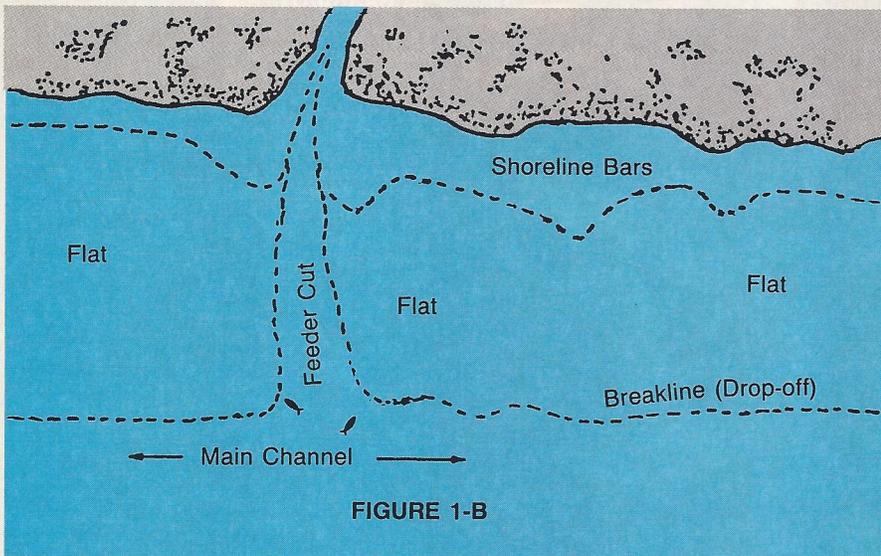
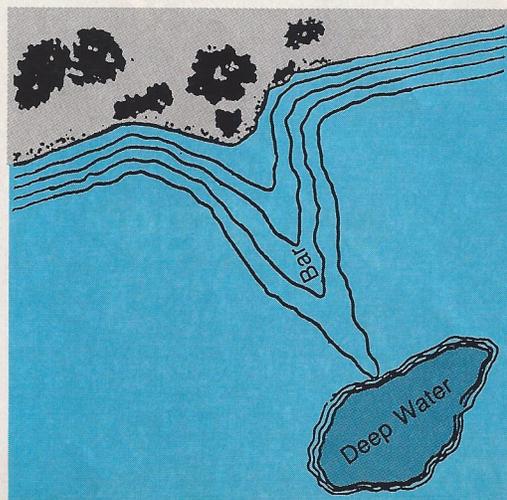


FIGURE 1-B

**FIGURE 1-A** is a side view of a Flatland-type reservoir. This type reservoir is located in flat country, or on major streams which have wide flood plains.

**FIGURE 1-B** is a top view showing a portion of the lake where a feeder stream has cut a channel or ditch through the flat to the main channel.

**FIGURE 2** - Top view of an underwater bar or point extending all the way to the deep or deepest water in the area.

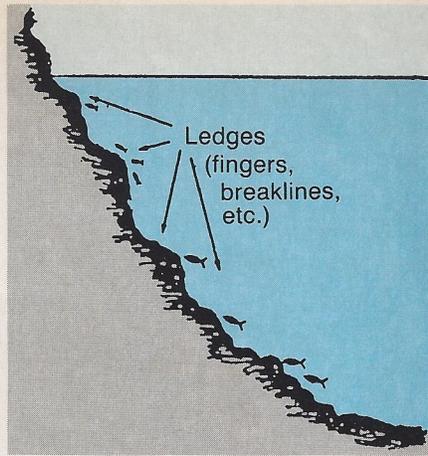


# RESERVOIRS:

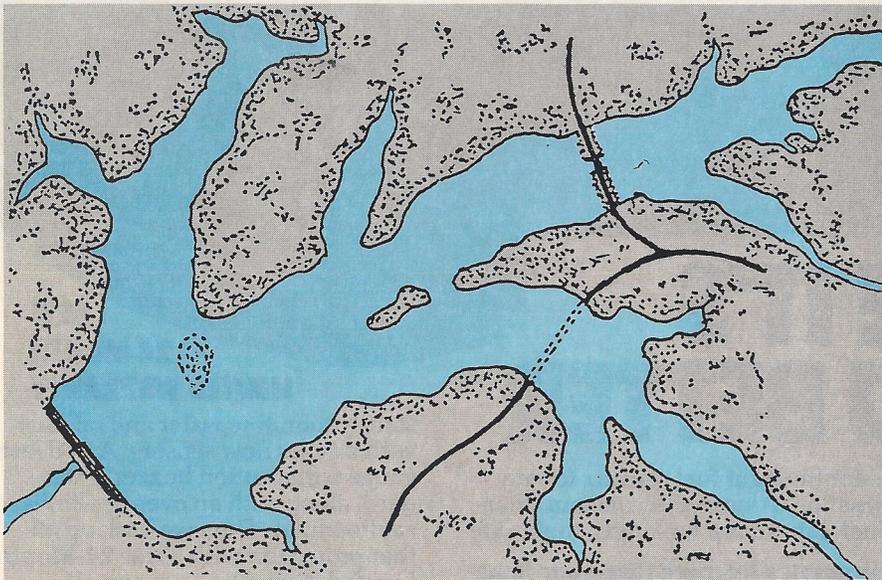
the deep or deepest water in the area. Reservoirs of this type (lowland) are usually located in rolling, hilly country.

**FIGURE 3** is a side view of a "HIGHLAND" reservoir. It shows that the major portion of the lake has steep or cliff-like conditions along the shoreline. This type terrain produces deep water close to the shore. The dam itself is usually short and quite tall. Most are built of concrete, but some are entirely dirt-filled.

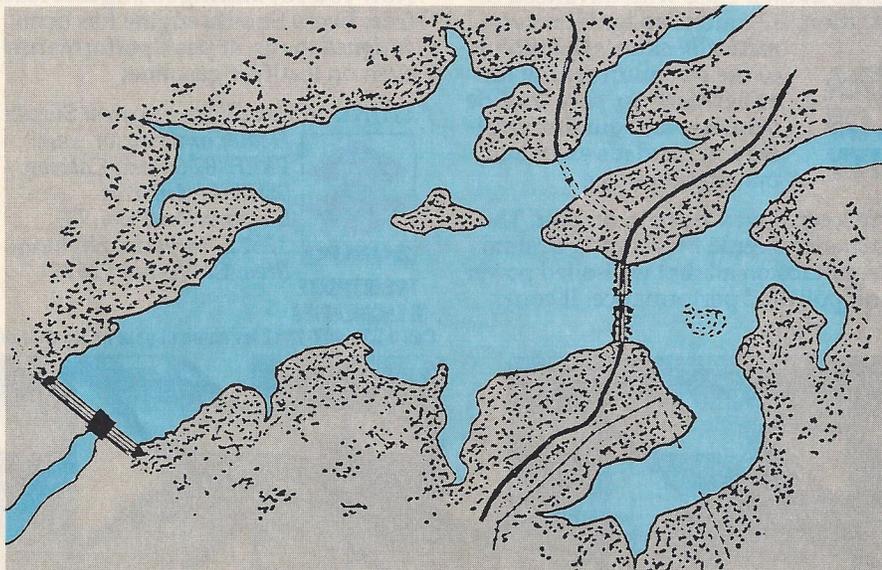
As stated before, with these categories and with a birds-eye view of how each is made up, you will know pretty well what type structure situations exist in most any type reservoir.



**FIGURE 3** - Side view of a typical section of lake in a Highland reservoir. The major portion of the lake has steep or cliff-like conditions along the shoreline.



**FIGURE 4-A** is a top view of a #1 Lowland-type reservoir. In this case there is a minimum of "flats" (flood plains) between the shoreline features and the deep channel area.



**FIGURE 4-B** is classified as a #2 Lowland-type reservoir. Note that a rather short dam was built where the original stream passed through a relatively short, narrow, cliff-like area in the rolling terrain.

In thinking back over the years, it comes to mind that most of the questions asked about catching fish out of a "new" lake have occurred on lowland-type reservoirs. This is probably due to the fact "lowlanders" come in so many places, sizes, shapes and depths, and contain so many different types of "structure situations." In one lowland, one type structure may be more productive than others. At the same time, in another lowland type, a different structure may be the best. In order to cover the range of lowland-type reservoirs, my fishing guideline is to put them into three basic shapes or types. I do this **because of the wide range of "structure situations"** (where the fish will be found) **that can occur in reservoirs built in rolling hill country.**

**FIGURE 4-A** is a top view of what I call a No. 1 lowland reservoir. In this case there is a minimum of "flats" (flood plains) between the shoreline features and the deep channel area. Most of the "bars" off the points (extrusions in the shoreline) extend to deep water (channel). The "bars" on each side of the coves (feeder streams) reach deep water. We could say most any pronounced feature (bar, etc.) goes "all the way." There are other features on or around this type reservoir that should be observed (study the figure carefully).

**FIGURE 4-B** is what I call a No. 2 lowland. In this case a rather short dam was built where the original stream passed through a relatively short, narrow, cliff-like area in the rolling terrain. This produced a lake section near the dam that had bottom features like that of a "highland" type reservoir (steep, deep, rocks, ledges, slides [see **Figure 3**]). However, just a short distance upstream (towards the headwaters) the lake spreads out (terrain opens up) with bottom features such as those found in a No. 1 lowland. Here again **Figure 4-B** indicates features which should be noted.

**FIGURE 4-C** is a top view of a lowland reservoir which is designated as a lowland No. 3. For some reason the area where the dam was built had a rather wide flood plain, although the greater portion of terrain was of rolling hills (lowland). In many cases the dam is quite long and the lake is large. When first viewed the fisherman may think it a flatland reservoir. To a certain degree this near dam section is, but a fisherman doesn't have to go towards the headwaters very far before the greater part of the lake features become "lowland." Study **Figure 4-C**. (The broken lines denote channels [or washes]. Other features should be noted.)

By this time, we should be aware of the fact "lowland" type reservoirs are very important waters to know something about. It doesn't take a lot of effort to determine just what type (or section) lowland reservoir you might be on. All you have to do is keep your eyes open as you

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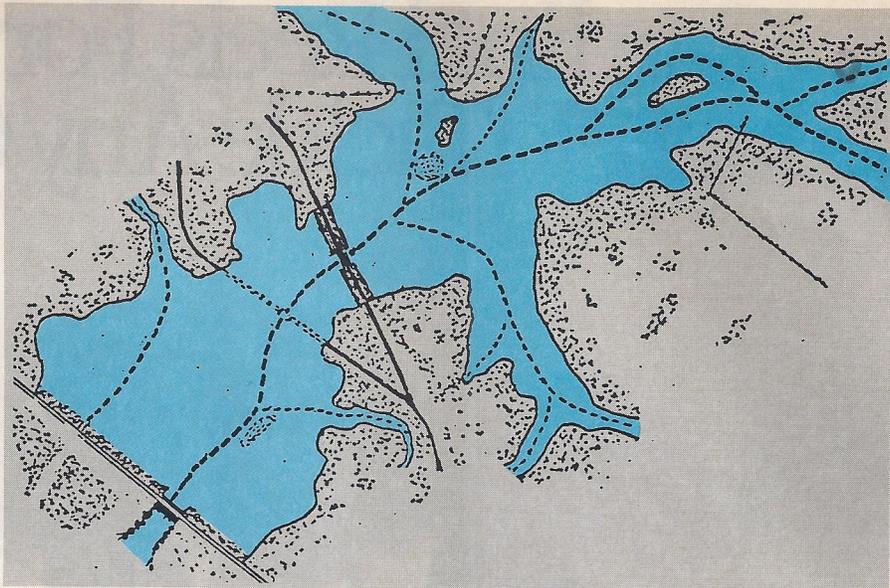
# RESERVOIRS:

travel around the lake on the land or on the water.

The kicker to all this talk about the different type *lowland* reservoirs could be: What good does it do to classify any reservoir if we do not know what type "structure situation" we are looking for in a body of water (or in *each section*)? If we do not know **what type feature will produce fish** in each section of a lowland-type reservoir, or where it is likely to exist, we may spend all our time where there are no fish.

**FIGURE 5** is an enlarged view of the No. 3 lowland. (This figure is the same lake shown in the full-color drawing at the beginning of this article.) Note that the lake narrows in the headwaters with the water now covering only the original river channel and small (if any) flood plain. This would indicate bottom features as found in a highland-type reservoir (steep shorelines with rocks, ledges, slides, etc.).

Quite a few areas have been labeled with detail numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . etc., to indicate different type "structure situations" (potentially good areas for the fish) in the lake. With depth sounders, wire line and motor trolling, and by casting (jigging), most any depth feature can be reached. There are features along the shoreline that may appear "fishy-looking," but most may be just features ("structure," "breaks," or "breaklines")



**FIGURE 4-C** - Top view of a reservoir designated as a Lowland #3.

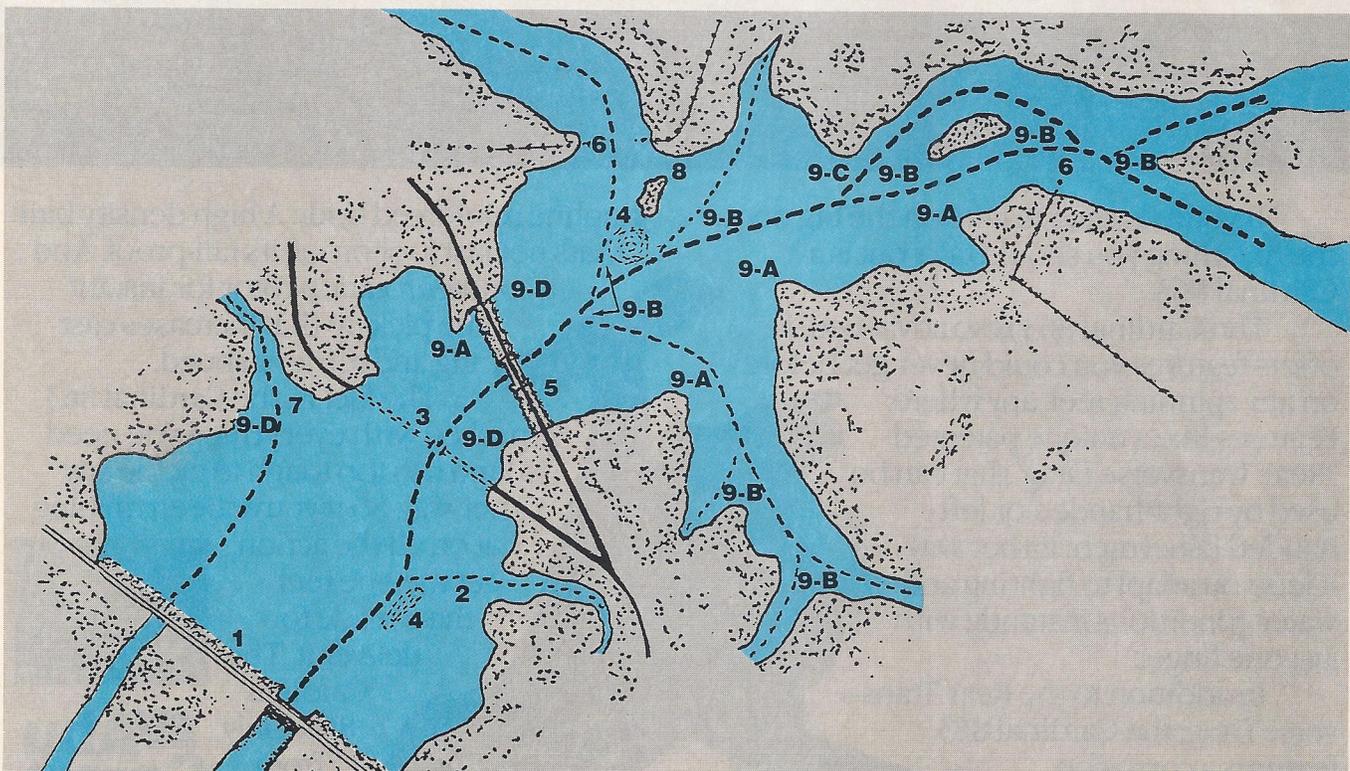
with no visible connection to deep water. Study this enlarged figure very carefully. Be sure to look at the terrain (hills, coves, roads, etc.) around the reservoir and note how these features relate to the features **IN THE LAKE**.

Let's look and comment briefly about each type "structure situation" that may exist in this reservoir. It is probable it contains most all the structure situations you'll ever run across in any body of water.

**AREA 1 - DAM.** Most any part of the dam

(and rip-rap) can be productive (you and I can't see small details the fish may see). **Figure 5** shows three areas near the dam that must be checked out. Two of them are the "points" where the dirt-fill parts of the dam meet the concrete part. Another spot is where a channel of some sort was cut off when the dam was built. **Detail 1-A** is a similar situation, but in this case it's a flatland reservoir built for flood control. There are four ways to locate this particular "hot-spot" (cut-off channel): (a)

*continued*



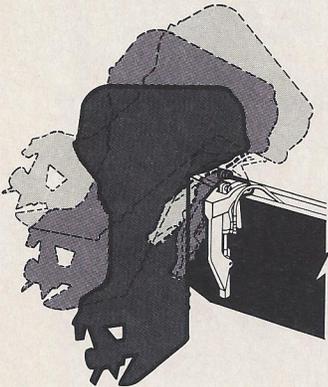
**FIGURE 5** - Lowland #3-type reservoir, with detailed areas labeled (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) to indicate various type structure situations (potentially good areas for the fish). Study this figure carefully, then proceed to the remaining detailed drawings and descriptions of each of these numbered features.

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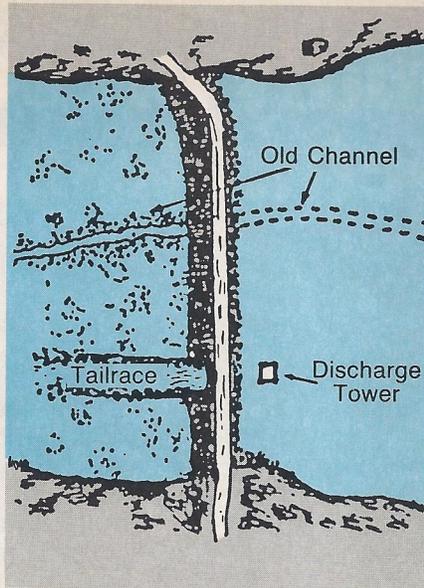
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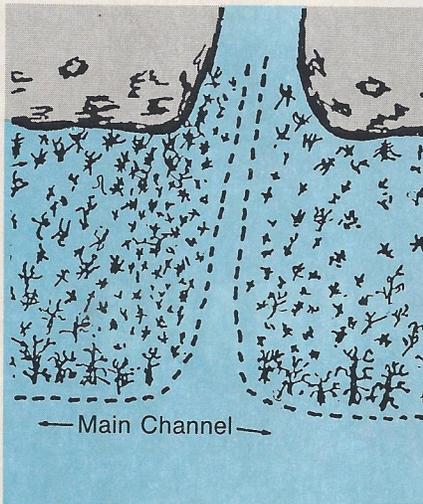
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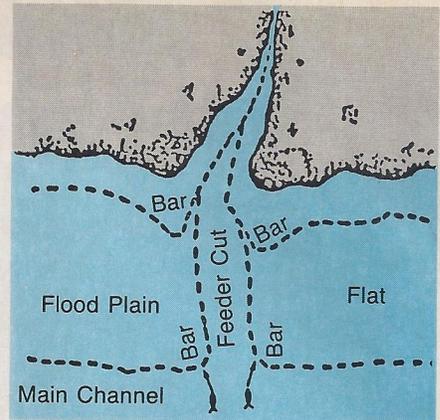
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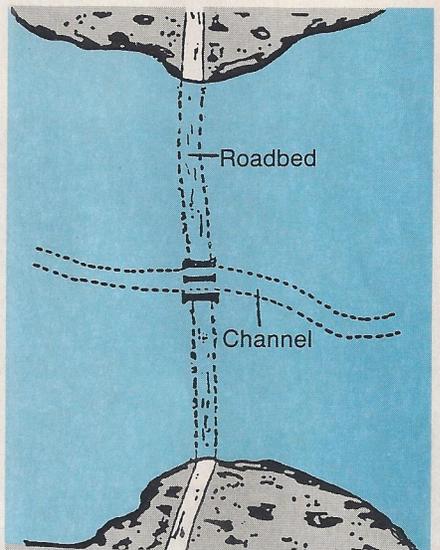
**DETAIL 1-A - Dam:** Most any part of the dam (and rocky rip-rap) can be productive. As a rule, fishermen are not able to see the small details that the fish may see.



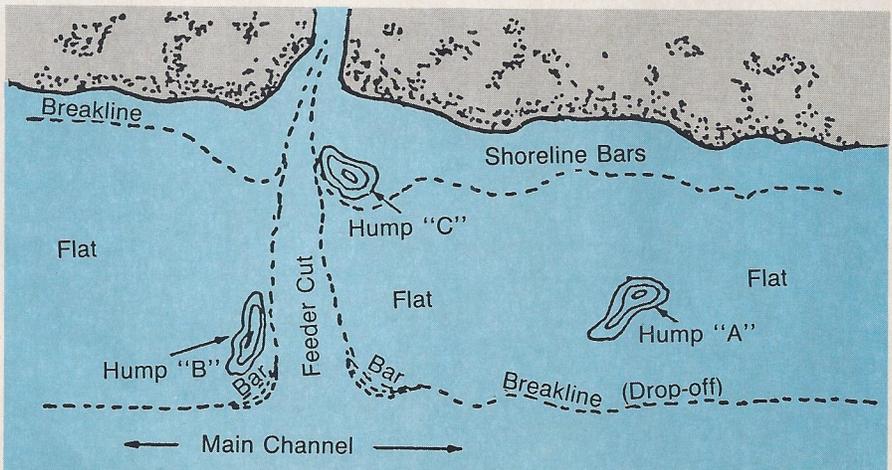
**DETAIL 2-B** shows WHAT 'brush', 'trees', 'treelines' or 'shoreline' should be fished when most of a flatland reservoir is covered with brush, standing trees, etc.



**DETAIL 2-A** shows a side feeder stream (or wash) that has cut through a flat all the way to the main channel. This is the major "structure situation" in a Flatland-type reservoir, or the flatland-type section in any reservoir.



**DETAIL 3-A - Submerged roadbed.** Fish migration could find the fish most anyplace along the roadbed. The "contact point" at the channel (where the fish first make contact with the structure) may be the limit of any migrations or movements along the roadbed towards the shallows.



**DETAIL 4-A - A hump in any body of water should be fished, as it could be the best spot in the lake.**

# RESERVOIRS:

Have a lake map showing where it exists; (b) Check the area out from the dam with a depth sounder; (c) Go to the top of the dam and look at the backside. Put some type floating marker on the front side showing where the cut-off channel exists; and (d) Keep trolling the rip-rap until the fish become active (this will find ALL the "hot-spots").

In some cases another potential hot-spot can be noted along the dam. A ramp (roadbed) used during construction of the dirt-filled portion was left under the water up to the base of the rip-rap.

**AREA 2 - SIDE FEEDER STREAM CUT THROUGH THE FLAT.** This is the major key to flatland-type reservoirs and something that shouldn't be ignored in ANY reservoir. **Detail 2-A** shows where a side feeder stream (or wash) has cut through the flat all the way to the main channel. **Detail 2-A** also shows the two "bars" at the main channel, the "breaklines" (edges of the feeder stream) leading toward the shoreline, and the two "bars" at the entrance to the cove. **This is the major "structure situation" in a flatland-type reservoir, or the flatland-type section in any reservoir.**

It must be noted that in a great many flatland situations the majority of the fish migrations will be limited to the "bars" at the main channel. In some reservoirs these bars may be so deep they can't be reached effectively, but in situations such as these (too deep to reach effectively) the sanctuary depths of the fish may be somewhere along the route to the shallows. When the fish become active (if the weather and water conditions are right) they could then move on the breaklines to fairly shallow water. It could be they move onto the shoreline "bars" or into the cove at certain seasons. However, regardless how deep the area at the channel may be, **our interpretation of the situation must always start there.** (The fish may be there during certain weather and water conditions.)

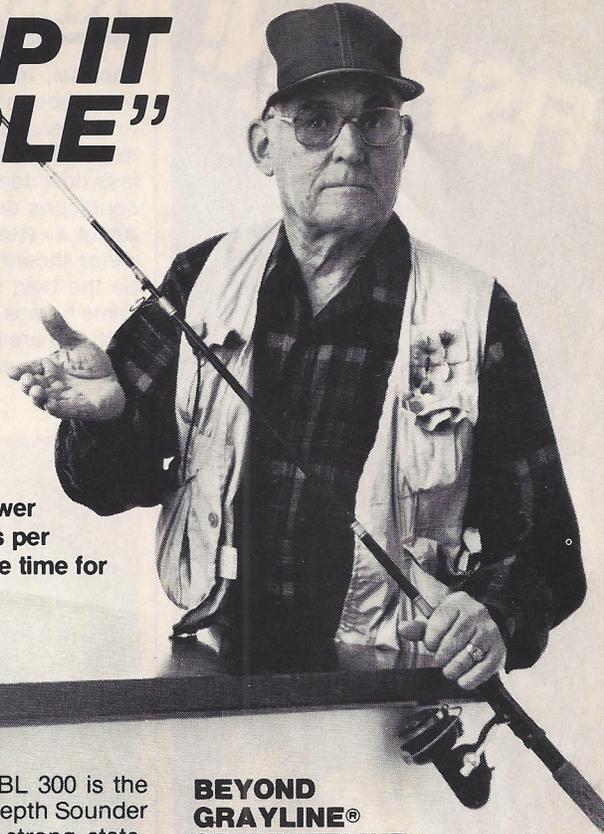
**Detail 2-B** shows what "brush," "trees," "treelines" or "shoreline" should be fished when most of a flatland reservoir is covered with brush, standing trees, etc.

**AREA 3 - SUBMERGED ROADBEDS.** A migration could find the fish most any place along the roadbed (**Detail 3-A of Figure 5**). The "contact point" (where the fish first contact the structure) *at the channel* may be the limit of any migration along the roadbed towards the shallows. If the spots at the channel are too deep and difficult to reach (with wire line trolling or by casting and jigging) it is important that lures (or natural bait) be presented as deep as possible, as the average sanctuary depth may not be as deep as the

*continued*

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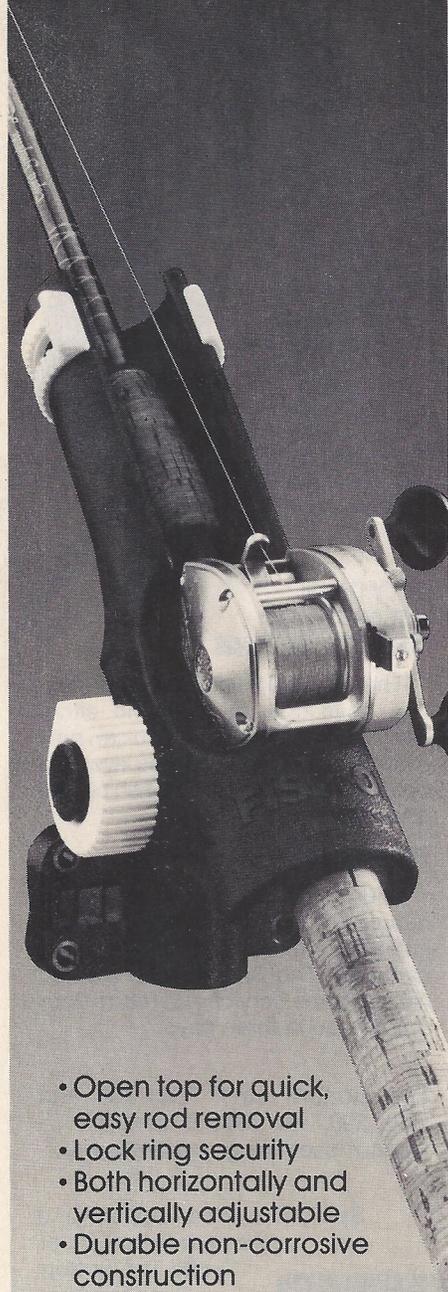
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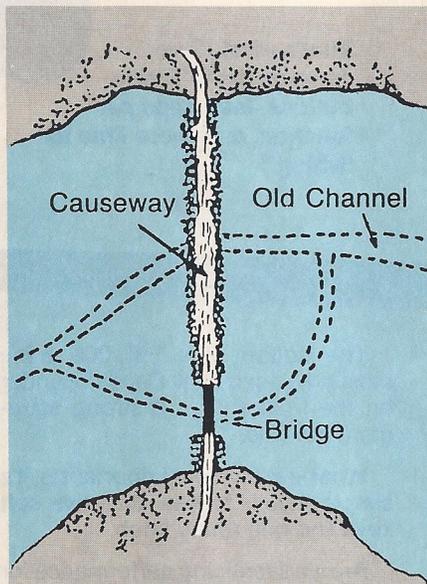
## RESERVOIRS:

channel, and the fish may be located even though the movement or active period is short. Here again, we may have to go all the way to the channel, regardless how deep, if the weather and water conditions don't cooperate.

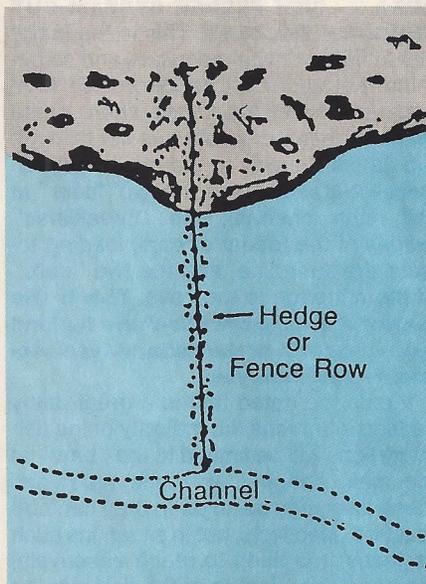
**AREA 4 - HUMP.** A hump in any body of water should be checked out, as it could be the best spot in the lake. However, some humps may not produce due to the fact they are located out on some big flat (not tied in any way to deep water) and

the fish would never know the hump exists. Another reason a hump may not be productive is due to the fact the top of it does not reach the shallows (8-10 feet or less). It is a "dead end" (does not "go all the way" to deep water). If the top of a hump goes to a shallow depth (8-10 feet or less) and is **related to deep water**, it could hold a concentration of fish. Another of our fishing guidelines says the fish will not go down the backside of a hump in order to move shallower.

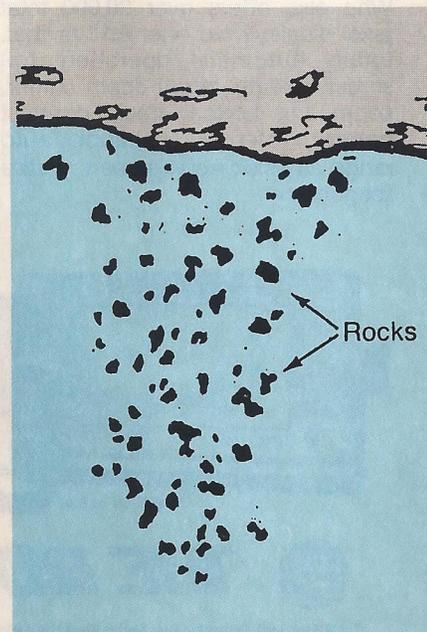
**Detail 4-A** shows three humps (A, B, C) in a section of a flatland reservoir. Hump A is located on a flat and it has always been a lost cause (no fish caught



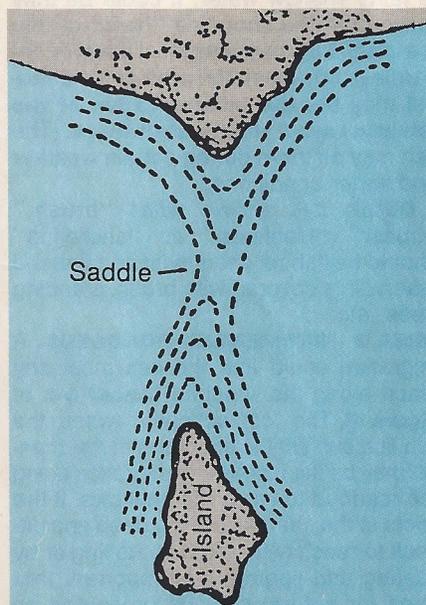
**DETAIL 5-A** - Causeways may be among the best structure situations present in some reservoirs. This "above-water" roadbed acts as a "highway" from deep water (note channel) to shallow water.



**DETAIL 6-A** - Fence or hedgerow. Most of the time the section below water is more productive than that portion seen above water.



**DETAIL 7-A** - Rocky reefs.



**DETAIL 8-A** - Saddle. A feature that should be fished, particularly when an island is related to a "point."

there). Hump **B** is in a good location but the 15-foot depth on top had produced no good fish, although it's been fished on each trip. But Hump **C** is one of the most productive spots in the lake.

**AREA 5 - CAUSEWAY.** This "above-water" roadbed (**Detail 5-A**) may be one of the best "structure situations" present in some reservoirs. There's no question about it being a "highway" from the deep water (note channel) to the shallow water. However, the fish may be located most anyplace along the causeway (rip-rap) if sufficient depth occurs. My guideline had always been (when working toward the shoreline shallower water) to "turn around" (if no fish are caught) when the depth of water off the causeway becomes only 8 to 10 feet deep. Trolling the rip-rap at different depths will find the best casting spots — if the weather and water conditions permit the movement of the fish.

**Detail 5-A** shows where the old channel was cut off and a new one cut to the location of the bridge. It should be obvious where the potential "hot-spots" along the causeway exist; AND where the deeper open water should be fished.

**AREA 6 - FENCE-HEDGEROW.** **Detail 6-A** indicates it doesn't take much imagination to see or understand that this feature can be seen and followed by the fish migrating (or moving) toward the shallows. Most of the time the "below-water" section is more productive than that portion that can be seen above the water. One way to tell if the feature "goes all the way" is to look on the opposite side of that portion of the lake and see if the fence continues (see **Figure 5**). However, most of the old fences and hedgerows went to the "ditch" or "creek" anyway.

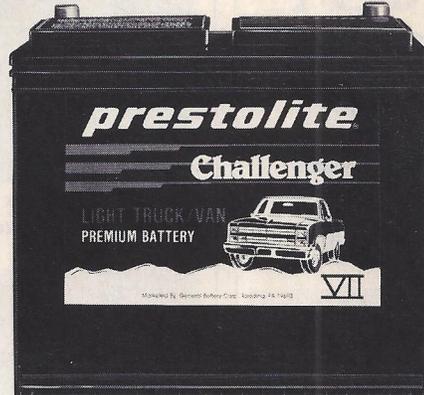
**AREA 7 - ROCKY REEFS.** Just about the time the "flatland type portion of the reservoir "peters out," **Detail 7-A** shows a section where exposed rock or boulders (breaks) on the bottom create a visible route from the deep water to the shallows. This type situation (**Detail 7-A**) can occur quite often in reservoirs where the water level fluctuates greatly over the seasons. The dirt and clay have been washed away, leaving a well-marked path.

**AREA 8 - SADDLE.** This feature (**Detail 8** of **Figure 5**) must be fished or looked at when an island is related to a "point." Lots of times weeds, grass or brush in the shallow water on the island and the point of land will indicate "bars" that run toward each other and a "saddle" is likely to exist. Not all saddles produce, but those deep enough to work should be checked out.

**AREA 9 - BARS.** In **Figure 5** various "bars" have been marked **9-A**, **9-B**, **9-C**, and **9-D**. These are different type "bars" (structure situations) that go "all the way" in some manner. Let us examine them briefly. Let us label the detail figures **9-A**, **9-B**, **9-C**, **9-D**. The bars marked **9-A** (**Figure 5**) are the most conspicuous and

*continued*

# TANK TOUGH!

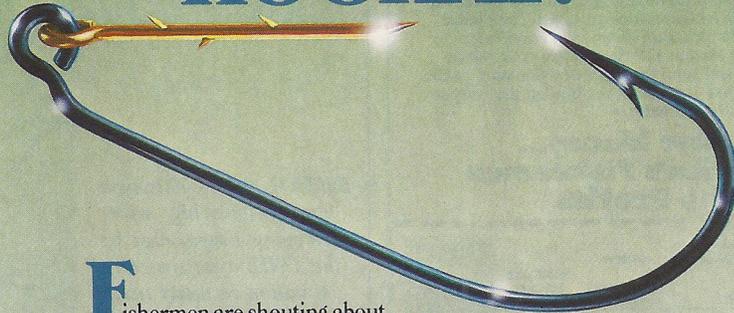


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are located off the "points." Note that in **Detail 9-A** these long "bars" go all the way to deep water. Study the "long bars" and the terrain (land features).

Where two streams, channels or washes come together may produce the best "structure situation" in a reservoir (see **Detail 9-B**). The "bar" between two channels (washes) has deep water off the end and on both sides. Special attention should be given to those related to the main channels (note **Figure 5**). Those in the "coves" may not produce in the warmer or hotter part of the year, but they should not be passed up during late fall, winter, early spring or during the spawning season.

Be sure to note the area in the upper section of **Figure 5** where the channel sweeps in close to the shoreline, a "bar" is marked **9-C**. This bar (at the point) has a breakline (drop-off) going down one whole side. **Detail 9-C** shows this as a near-perfect "structure situation" wherever it may exist in a lake. The fish have immediate access to deep water regardless how shallow they have migrated. The section just above this bar (where the channel sweeps in close to shoreline) should have "highland" type features.

Also shown are three areas where a big, wide, sweeping bar exists. This type "bar" situation (**Detail 9-D**) may be the ONLY type "structure situation" in a lot of natural lakes. The fisherman may have difficulty locating or determining if one exists in a body of water. A depth sounder may show the shape, etc. if a well-defined "breakline" exists in deep water. It may not show the "contact point" as indicated in **Detail 9-D**. The best way to handle a situation such as this is to troll the whole area with lures that cover the various depths. Not only will a bottom-walking lure show the shape, breaklines, etc., but will pinpoint any fish that have moved up on the bar. This will definitely show where the "casting" should be done.

The last and final accompanying drawing of a **COVE** in the shoreline is to emphasize that we should always be aware there may exist in reservoirs some type "bar" or productive feature at the entrance to all coves, feeder streams, gully washes, etc.

This particular lowland reservoir (**Figure 5**) shows most of the different type structure situation you will encounter if you fish a variety of reservoirs. I'd suggest that you not just look at the figures or just "read" what has been said. To get a clearer picture of what's "out there," a little study wouldn't be out of order. It is my hope this will thoroughly point out HOW an experienced structure fisherman is able to make a decent catch out of a body of water he's fishing for the very first time. 

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