

Use Your Eyes To Find Potential Hot-Spots



Driving completely around an unfamiliar body of water and just "looking," is never time wasted.

Part Three by Buck Perry, Education Editor

In our last two articles (July - August '83 *Fishing Facts*) we tried to point out the importance of keeping our eyes open when we face a fishing situation. Our interpretations of it should not be a long drawn-out process. We should be able to look at the present weather conditions, in light of the recent past, and come up in short order with a fair estimate as to the activity of the fish. We should look at the water color and determine if it is too clear for the season or for the prevailing weather conditions. Just these quick observations should tell us if we are fishing in the wrong lake or the wrong part of the reservoir.

I can't recall the number of times I've been accused of wasting time by driving completely around a body of water just "looking." I found out many years before that the time my partner felt wasted was about the most important period of the fishing trip. It mattered little if it took a full day in selecting a spot to launch the boat.

My observations entailed a great many things. Probably first and foremost was the water color. Another thing I could see was the terrain. This observation told me a great deal about the features of the lake bottom, such as: structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water, etc. If an area did not indicate or show structure situations the fish would use in their movements and migrations, I quickly marked the area off the list. Why should I spend my time working an area with only a hope that something "might" be present?

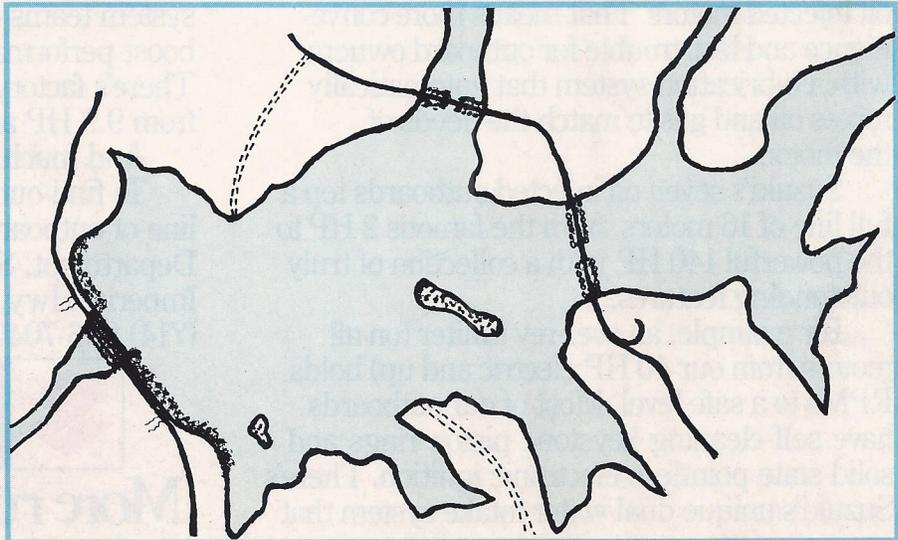
My observations showed me areas where I would have problems presenting lures. All areas of brush, weeds, wind and traffic were noted and evaluated. Regardless of the time it took for me to decide where to fish, I knew I was way ahead of the game. I had not only saved time, but also saved myself a quantity of hard work.

As said before, our **above water** observations are a major factor in determining whether we spend our time where we have the best chance to catch a fish. This does not mean all the "fishy-looking" places along the shoreline. It means our observations must lead us to the features of the lake (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water) the fish use in their movements and migrations.



Education Editor, Buck Perry, with a fine catch of largemouth bass.

FIGURE 1—Top view of a Flatland reservoir that is practically filled with brush, bushes and standing trees.



These observations must also tell us if the area can be worked effectively. If a good structure situation can't be worked effectively, then my thought is to get the heck out of there as fast as I can.

In our last two articles we were discussing how our above water observations should tell us much about what lies **below** the water. Quite a few of our readers reacted to the "type" reservoirs used in our discussions. The major portion reacted by saying, "What about those 'Flatland' reservoirs containing bushes and standing trees?"

I don't quite understand why trees, bushes (brush), or "Flatland" makes any difference. I thought we discussed the structure situations fish would use quite fully, and we stressed where the development of a **productive** structure situation must begin—at the deepest water in the area (not some visible object in the shoreline shallows). How much brush, standing trees, or flats exist in the body of water doesn't change a thing. Some should **review** the word "Structure."

However, in this report we will talk about the above-the-water interpretations in a Flatland reservoir with brush and standing trees.

We will also have something to say to those who wrote about their situations where the channels have silted in so badly they can see no evidence of

“deepest” water, breaks, or breaklines.

All of these subjects have been discussed in one form or other in our study material, but I still see some students fishing “trees” and brush with no thought whatsoever as to their location. I have also seen many so-called “structure fishermen” out in deep water wandering around on some big flat completely void of guideposts. I hope some things covered in this issue will drive home a point or two.

Figure 1 is a top view of a Flatland reservoir. It is practically filled with brush, bushes and standing trees. Here again, we are going to “interpret” what is here (in the way of structure situations) by the things we can see above the water. As before, it may appear we are guessing what is under the water by the things we observe above the water.

We see no reason to go into great detail on the “why” of our observations. The “why’s” were talked about rather extensively in our last two reports (July - August '83 *Fishing Facts*).

Figure 2 shows the structure situations (marked with an “X”) we figure must be checked out thoroughly if we expect to catch fish CONSISTENTLY out of this reservoir. We have also placed some arrows showing fish migration, and

feeder streams (coves, etc.) and position and direction of the main stream. The position of the exposed brush and trees was a major key as to the position of the channel. Once we determined the position and direction of a channel, it was easy to determine where it made a turn or bend, by the islands, exposed bushes, etc. If the channel was headed toward an island or exposed brush or standing trees, the channel would have turned. It was not

deepest water in the area (channels). Please be aware of the fact our interpretations STARTED at the deepest water, not at the shallows. During our presentation of lures **we will start at the shallows** and work toward the deepest water (channels), but our “interpretation” of a PRODUCTIVE structure situation must start at the channel (deepest water in the area). Study this figure very carefully.

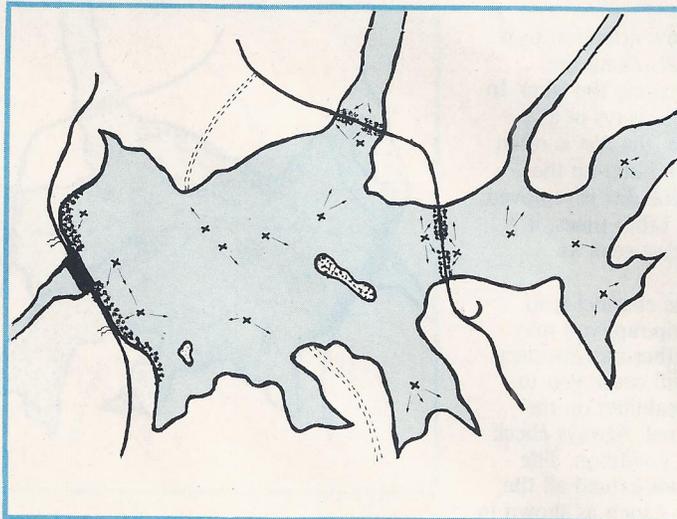


FIGURE 2— Places marked with an “X” should be fished thoroughly if a fisherman expects to catch fish consistently out of this type lake.

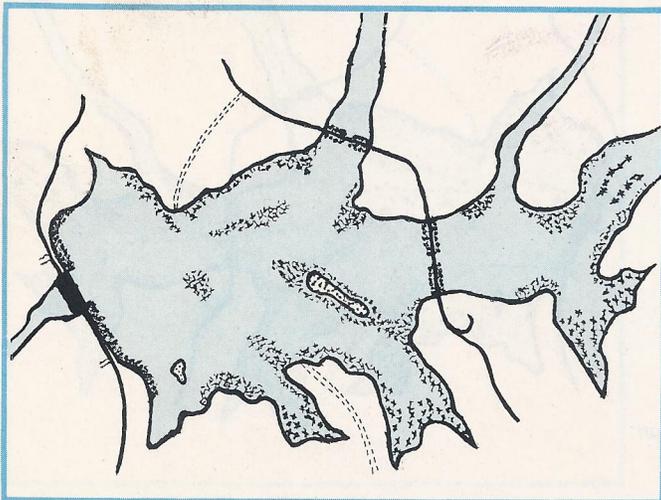


FIGURE 3— Exposed bushes, brush and standing trees will often reveal the position and direction of shallow and deeper water.

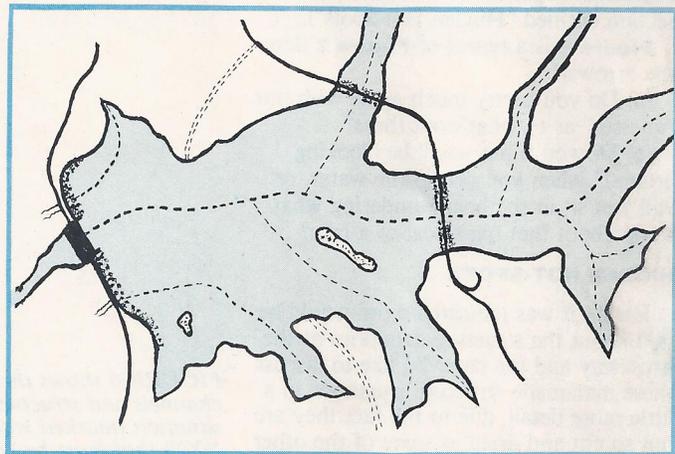


FIGURE 4 shows the channels and their directions. Once you determine the position and direction of a channel, it's fairly easy to determine where it makes a turn or bend by the island, exposed bushes, etc.

our coverage during the presentation of lures (you will probably want to refer back to these arrows when studying **Figure 6**).

The question might be, “How did you determine the ‘structure situation’ by the things you observed above the water?”

Figure 3 shows the exposed bushes, brush and the standing trees. Our observations of them can tell us pretty well the position and direction of the shallows and the deeper water. They also tell us lots about the structure situations present. Let's look further.

Figure 4 shows the river and creek channels and their directions. This was fairly easy to determine from the terrain,

difficult to determine how it turned by the things we could see (direction of the lake - bushes, etc.).

Figure 5 shows a combination of **Figures 3** and **4**. Now go back and look carefully at **Figure 3**. Where would you place the channels? Most likely we wouldn't be very far apart. If we did not place them exactly in the same place, or if we both were slightly off, it would matter little for we would take care of any discrepancy during our presentation of lures.

Figure 6 shows the channels and the structure situations (marked with an “X”) that must be checked out. You notice we have placed the “X” in relation to the

There are several spots in **Figure 6** where we should draw attention and make some remarks. The first, and most important, is the submerged roadbed. This was placed by the things we could see along the shoreline, the exposed bushes, and where the channels ran.

One of the features always looked for in a tree or brush-infested reservoir is the sunken roadbeds: (a) we have a “clean” area to fish, (b) the structure goes all the way, and (c) there is little doubt about the “contact point.” [Where the fish first contact the structure when moving up from deeper water.]

The next area to look at is at the dam.
continued,

Use Your Eyes To Find Hot-Spots

There are two things to note here. The areas where the old channels were cut off by the long dam must be considered as potential hot-spots. Note also a bypass or diversion channel may have been cut during construction. In another part of this article we will say more about a situation such as this.

The next area to draw attention to is the two dugout channels along the causeway (roadway crossing the lake). In the construction of causeways in a reservoir of this nature, the dirt is often removed alongside it to build up the roadbed. At times all the dirt is removed from just one side. At other times, it is removed from both sides, such as indicated in **Figure 6**.

Most of the time the channel is so close to the roadbed (rip-rap) you may not be aware it is a rather narrow, deep water channel. This will cause you to pass up breaks and breaklines on the other side of the channel. Always check it out to see the exact condition. The dugout channel may not extend all the way to the shoreline — such as shown in **Figure 6**. More about this later (see section entitled "Hidden Hot-Spots").

Figure 7 is a repeat of **Figure 2** (less the arrows).

(a) Do you pretty much agree with our "guesses" as to what's out there?

(b) Do you think you'll be "looking around" when you get on the water, or will you sit in the boat wondering what to do about that big rascal of a lake?

HIDDEN HOT-SPOTS

Earlier it was indicated more would be said about the structure situations at the causeway and the dam. I'd like to discuss these man-made structure situations in a little more detail, due to the fact they are not so cut and dried as some of the other situations we have discussed in the past. It is wise to point out features we are likely to encounter in some Flatland reservoirs. Of special importance are those features which could be called "hidden" hot-spots.

Figure 8 is a top view of a causeway (road) crossing a reservoir. The purpose of the figure is to show a condition that occurs in Flatland and Lowland reservoirs.

It shows where the original channel was diverted during the construction of the roadbed and the bridge. In this case, we should keep in mind there are three major "contact points" to the causeway. Number 1 is at the bridge (both sides). Number 2 is where the old channel comes in contact with the roadbed on the upstream side, and Number 3 is at the old channel on the downstream side.

Quite often, the most productive water

in a situation such as this is the rocky rip-rap just adjacent to the old channel (both sides), AND, the breaks and breaklines **along the old channel and the bypass channel**. Where the two come together could be the hottest spot of all.

When working a causeway, be sure you check to see if the old channel was cut off by the roadbed. One key as to whether this occurred is to note the position of the bridge. If it was built

rather close to one of the shorelines, most likely a bypass channel was dug.

Figure 9 is a top view of a dam in a Flatland reservoir. The purpose of the dam was for flood control. Here again the original channel was cut off during construction of the dam. At times a bypass channel may be noted, while at other times the diversion occurred in such a way, and at such a depth, it cannot be clearly defined.

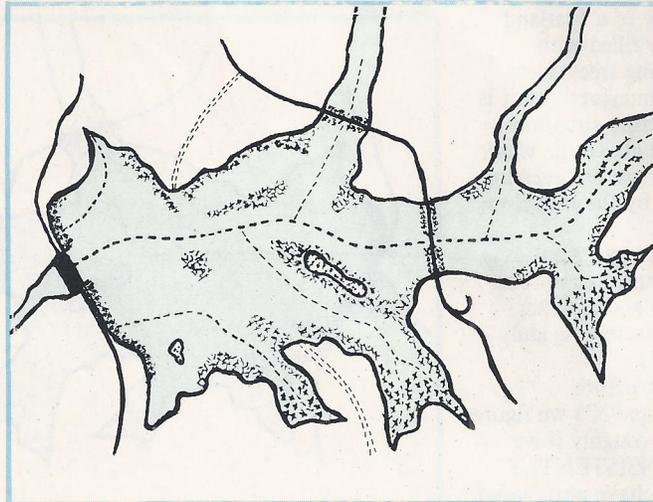


FIGURE 5—A combination of Figures 3 and 4.

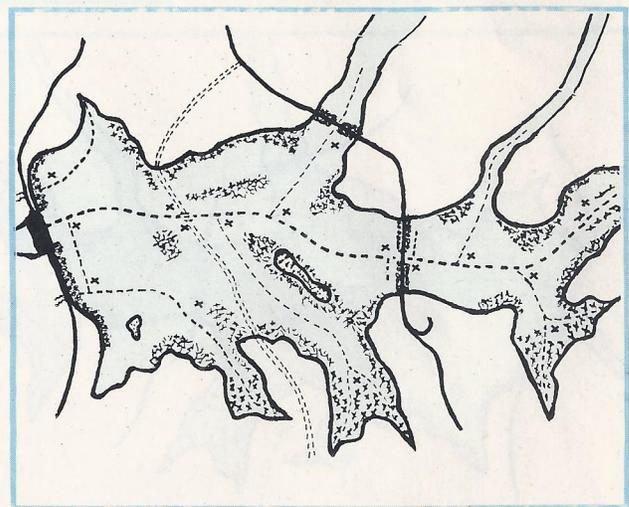


FIGURE 6 shows the channels and structure situation (marked with an "X") that must be checked out (fished).

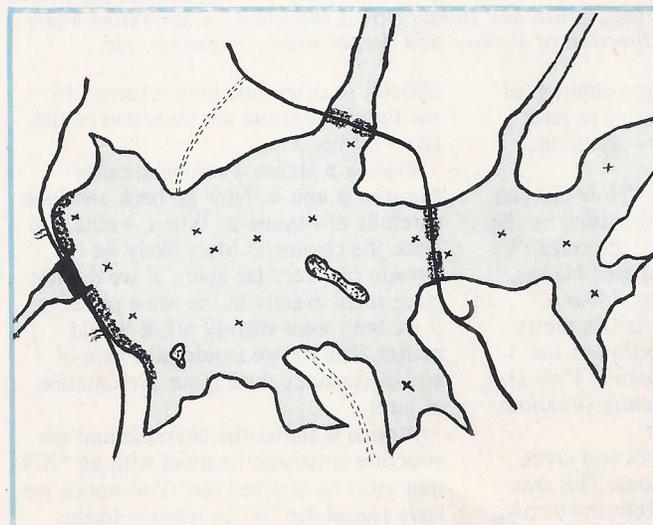


FIGURE 7—A repeat of Figure 2 (less the arrows). Do you agree with our "guesses" as to "what's out there?"

As structure fishermen, a dam such as this must be checked out thoroughly. Trolling the rip-rap can be highly productive. The lake may be so full of debris, (trees, bushes, etc.), and the wind and water color so bad, the clearer area at the dam may be the only workable area in the lake.

When fishing, or planning to fish a Flatland flood control reservoir, we should look it over, as discussed in this

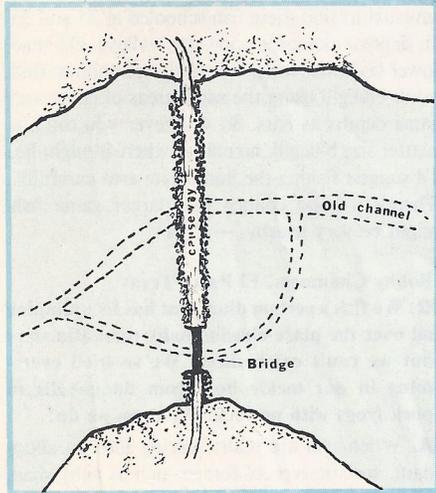


FIGURE 8—Top view of a causeway (road) crossing a lake. Diagram shows where original channel was diverted during construction of the roadbed and the bridge.

This could be the most important observation of all. This shows the location of the channel on the “lake side.” This will show the location of a hot-spot on the rip-rap (and the breaks and breaklines of the old channel). This is where concentration of effort must be had, both trolling and casting.

The question may arise as to how we can be sure we are at the old channel when we get on the lake? (The condition

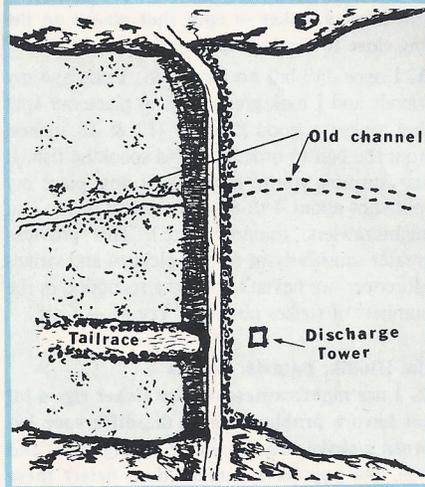


FIGURE 9—Top view of a dam in a Flatland reservoir. Here again the original channel was cut off during construction of the dam.

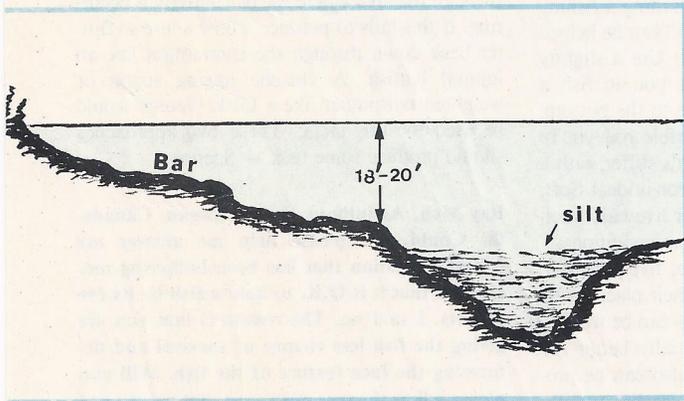


FIGURE 10—Side view of a ridgelike bar extending out to a depth of 18-20 feet where a well-defined breakline occurs. Where would you fish if you encountered a situation such as this?

article. If a causeway is shown on the road map, we should head directly to it to see the terrain and lake condition (debris, etc.). Of great importance is to note the water color on both sides.

The next spot to examine is the dam. While driving slowly over the dam you should observe both sides. The major condition to look at on the “lake” side is the water color and the degree and direction of the wind. On the back side of the dam, there are three important observations to be made. (1) The color of the discharge water; (2) How active is the fishing in the “tailrace.” (It could be a “run” is in progress, or the conditions of weather and water may be such, the tailrace is the only fishable spot.)

The third thing to note on the back side is the position of the old channel.

and depth of the old channel may not be well-defined even with a depth sounder.) When crossing the dam, you should note the location of the old channel (on the back side). Then you look toward the lake side, and see if a big rock or some type marker isn't on one of the posts of the guard rail. [Editor's Note: This means Buck has fished the lake recently.]

A COMMON QUESTION

One reader asks: “In your reports you say we must develop a productive structure situation from the standpoint it must extend from the deepest water in the area all the way to the shallows. I understand the structure, such as a bar, must ‘go all the way.’ If the ridge-like bar does not go all the way, it must have breaks or breaklines on or connected to

it that DO go all the way. I'm very much aware of the fact that the channels in a reservoir are the deepest water in the area. I run into problems when the channels have silted in and I can't see any signs of breaks and breaklines in the area. In my lake the channels are silted in so bad I can't see any bars, breaks or breaklines below 18-20 feet. What do I do in a situation such as this?”

Let's look at **Figure 10**. Such is the condition he talks about. It is a side view where a nice ridge-like bar extends out to a depth of 18-20 feet where a well-defined breakline occurs. Beyond this breakline the bottom is rather flat with no recognizable breaks or breaklines. Due, of course, to the silt that has filled the channel and covered the breaks or breaklines in the immediate area. Note that the recognizable structure (the bar) extends toward the deepest water in the area. It does not extend to what we'd call (on an average day) the sanctuary depths (below 20 feet — if available).

His question was: “What do I do?”

This question comes as rather a surprise. Your guidelines as a structure fisherman (Spoonplugger) are to use structure (breaks and breaklines) as your guide to where the fish will be found — and caught. You have been taught not to spend time where these features are not present. This is the reason we say do not go out into a channel and wander around like some lost duck — “hoping” to run across a fish. If you have no guidelines as to where the fish may be found, then get out of there and concentrate your efforts where they WILL be found.

You and I are saved due to the fact the fish become active periodically and may move toward the shallows. We are saved again, because you and I can recognize the features of the bottom the fish will use in their migration.

Fish do not move constantly nor consistently, and this means we have to exercise patience at times, and wait for the fish to come to us. **The secret to success is to wait at the right place.** Since how far the fish move toward the shallows is dependent upon the weather and water conditions at that time, and due to the fact the weather and water conditions are usually bad, we should concentrate our efforts as deep as possible, **BUT NO DEEPER THAN RECOGNIZABLE FEATURES THE FISH USE IN THEIR MOVEMENTS.**

You asked what do you do? You should work the feature (bar in this case) down to and including the 18-20 foot breakline. You do not go out beyond the “base” of the breakline. You check all **structure situations** to the last recognizable feature. Check and recheck all the best ones. If you have interpreted the weather and water conditions accurately, you should expect contact with the fish once or possibly twice during the day. 