

After many, many years of teaching and talking to fishermen, it has become quite easy to predict what questions will be asked, or in what areas the subject matter requires greater detail and repetition. This experience has been a great help in getting students to talk. If I can get them talking and asking questions about a particular subject, I know we are into a good session. We may not completely clear the air, nor will we always agree; but, one thing for sure, the students are thinking and this means they are on their way to becoming better fishermen — the sole purpose for the discussion in the first place.

Subject matter that comes to mind at this time are the sub-

*There is no limit to fishing knowledge. No one knows all there is to know. However, the entire era of modern fishing was started in 1946 by one man, Elwood L. "Buck" Perry, the Father of Structure Fishing. We are privileged to have him as our Education Editor; the only publication for which he writes.*

# FINDING SUSPENDED FISH

**MADE  
EASIER**

**BY BUCK PERRY,  
EDUCATION EDITOR**

jects of Sanctuary, Suspension, and Structure. Quite often it is not necessary to stimulate a discussion on these three subjects, but at times, it is necessary. This is due to the nature of the subjects themselves.

We usually get around to questions, or a discussion, in one way or another. I try to guide the discussion so that we gain the detail required to clarify the subjects in the student's mind.

For example; you might say: "In your drawings, when talking about the deep water sanctuary, you placed the fish directly on the bottom to show their position. Are the fish always in a position as shown? Is the sanctuary of the fish always on the bottom?"

**There's really no mystery about suspended fish when you consider these factors.**

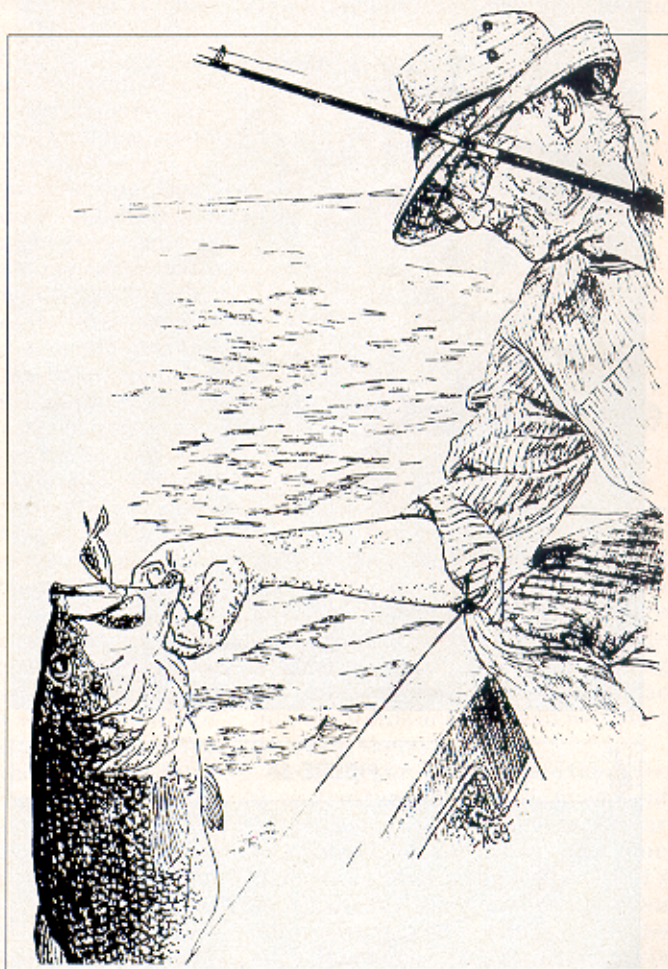
In past discussions the figure (drawing) used was to show the existence of a deep water sanctuary. It was not intended to say all deep water sanctuaries were exactly like the example shown. There are many different shapes and features in a given body of water. It is possible no two would be the same. There are numerous waters with different depths; there exists a multitude of weather and water conditions and of course, we have seasonal changes.

I'm not sure I fully understand what you have in mind, but regardless what it might be, the point that was being made at the time was the fact that fish spend the greater part of their time in deep water (sanctuary), not in the shallow water. The particular (or exact) position they might be in, will depend upon quite a few things; the bottom makeup, the conditions of weather and water, depths, seasons, etc.

Let's change your question somewhat and say, "Is the deep water sanctuary of a group of fish at the same place all the time?"

Let's look at a few figures and see if we can't straighten this subject out in your mind.

**Figure 1** is a side view of a small natural lake. There exists only one small deeper section in the whole lake. The deepest water available is only 24 feet. In a situation such as this, you



might say the deep water sanctuary is in the same place all the time. **Figure 1** could also represent a channel (or underwater slot). Here again you could say the sanctuary is always in the same place — the channel. But, they (the fish) do not necessarily have to be at the same place in the channel all the time. However, when the fish move toward the shallows we would normally expect them to come from somewhere in this (24 ft.) area.

*continued*



FIGURE 1

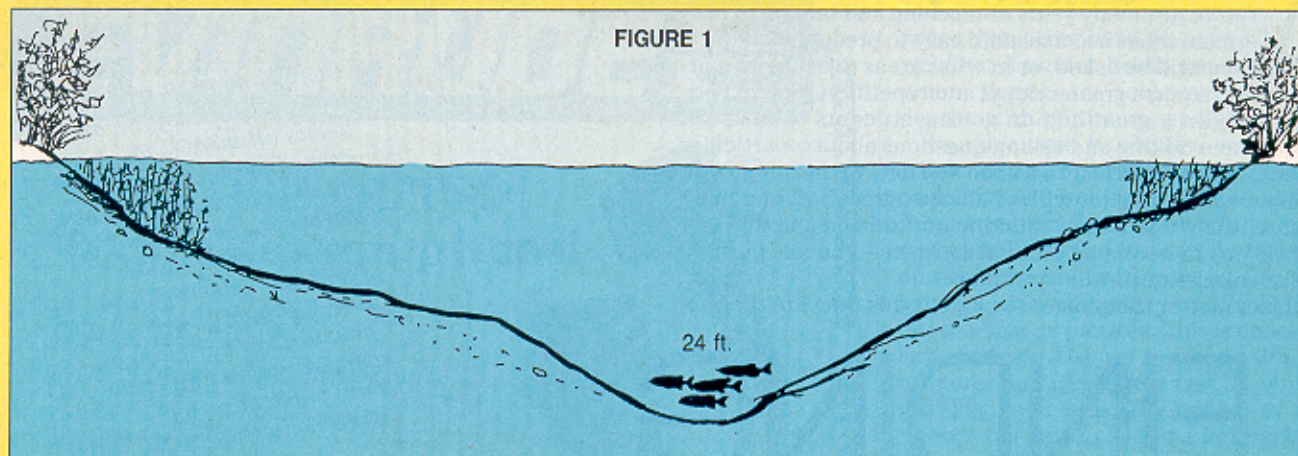


FIGURE 2A

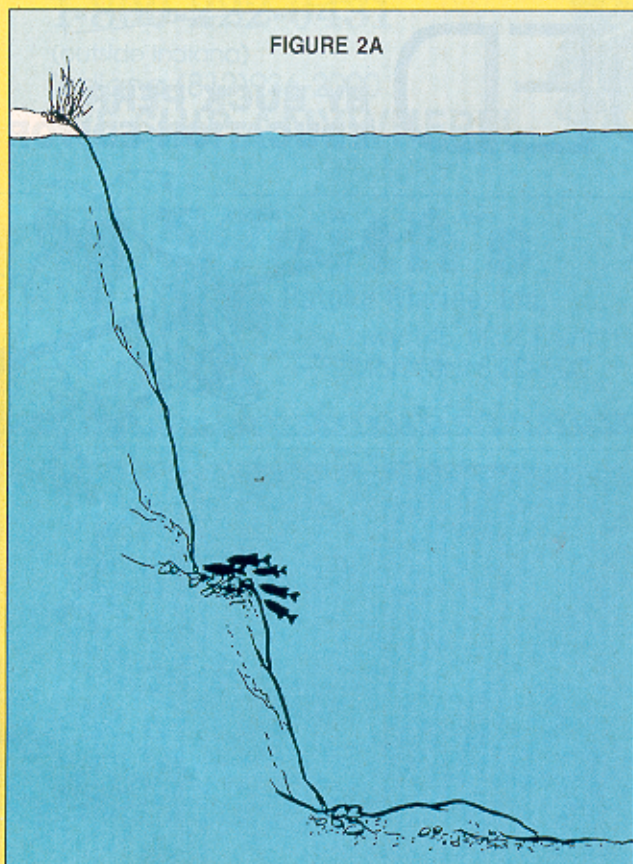


FIGURE 2B

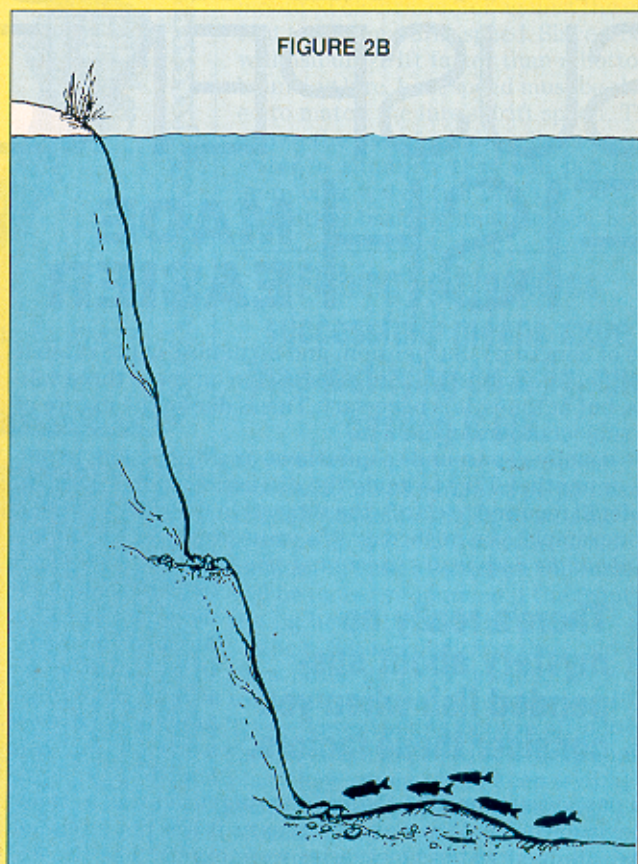


FIGURE 3A

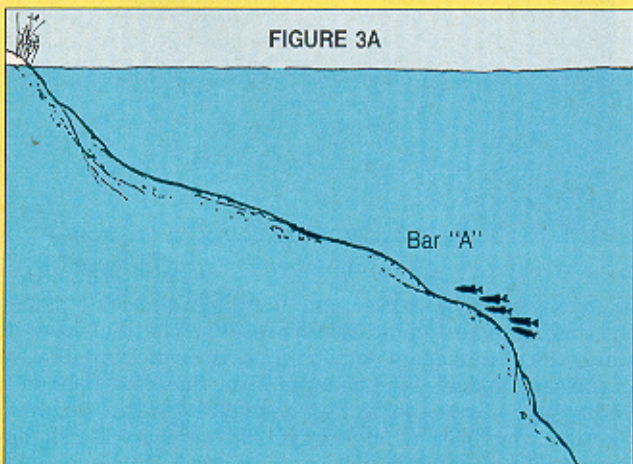
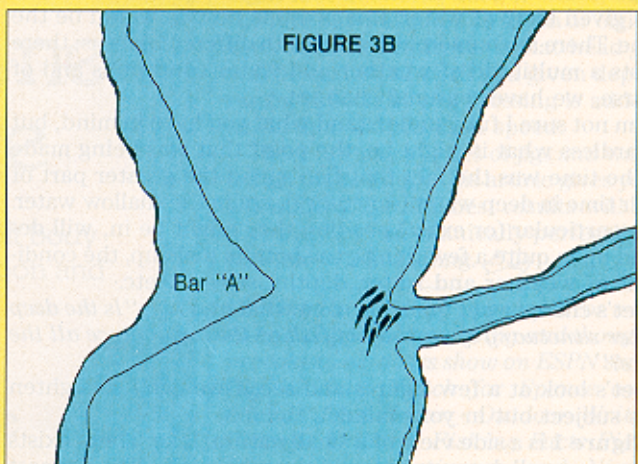


FIGURE 3B





## FINDING SUSPENDED FISH

Figures 2A and 2B are side views of the same section in a body of water. Figure 2A shows the fish in their deep water sanctuary under a good weather and water condition. Figure 2B shows the same fish in their sanctuary under a cold front (weather condition), or after the water cleared, or after a seasonal change (such as winter).

Figure 3A shows some bass in a deep water sanctuary during the warmer part of the season. They are using bar "A" as structure in their movements and migrations towards the shallows. Figure 3B is a top view of the same section of water, in the colder (winter) or pre-spawn season. Figure 3B shows the fish are using the steep shoreline, or the breaks and breaklines of the feeder stream, in their movements and migrations toward shallower water at this period. These seasonal movements and migrations could have some species of fish using structure, breaks, and breaklines in entirely different areas of the same body of water.

Now let's look at the second part of your original question, "Is the deep water sanctuary always on the bottom?" Probably what you meant was, "Are the fish always on the bottom when in the deep water sanctuary?"

The answer is they could be, or they may not be. It would depend upon the particular situation, and upon the species of fish. In the case of bass, most of the time they will be so close to the bottom (structure, breaks or breaklines), for all practical purposes you might say they are on the bottom. At other times they may not be so close. There are other species that may have a tendency to suspend, but they, too, will be so close at times they could be considered as being on the bottom. But in either case, their position would be related to the bottom features.

We must never forget that weather and water conditions change and most of the time the conditions are not ideal. This means most of the time the fish (when in the deep water sanctuary) are dormant and close to the bottom features. It shouldn't be so difficult for you to understand the fish would not necessarily be directly on the bottom. They could be over a clean spot, rocks, hump, or around a bush, etc. If they are located under cover, such as weeds, brush, etc., they wouldn't necessarily have to be right on the bottom. But again, I say they are related to bottom features that serve as signposts for their movements.

You might say, "I have read, and heard some expert indicate there was no such thing as a deep water sanctuary, and that bass more often suspend off structure when not on structure."

Probably those who made such statements did not read, or study the Spoon-plugging material in depth. But, such statements are largely due to limited experience, limited observation, limited areas, limited fishing waters, limited weather conditions, limited water conditions, limited bottom conditions, limited species of fish, and especially, limited creative thought of their own!

First, let me point out that your remark (or question) is made up of two distinct subject matters: (1) Sanctuary, (2) Suspended fish. These are two completely different subjects, and should not be treated as one.

I have heard some say, "I have never found the fish in a so-called sanctuary; therefore, a sanctuary must not exist." Very few people, relatively speaking, have found and caught schools of fish in the deep water sanctuary. Most have not found, or caught fish in the deep water sanctuary due to the depths, position, interpretation, weather and water conditions, improper presentation of lures, and especially due to the dormancy (inactivity) of the fish.

At times a fisherman may just happen to present his lures correctly enough at the right place to get a lone fish before they (the fish) become active and migrate to recognizable structure. Many, many fishermen have found the fish in deep water, and caught them immediately after the fish began to move (became active). Anytime you hear that the deep water is not the home or sanctuary of the fish, you should give this statement a great deal of thought. You should not only consider the source of the remark, but you should also do a little fishing and observation on your own.

You probably have also heard or read where someone said something like this: "If there is such a thing as a deep water sanctuary, why aren't bass sanctuaries found away from the vicinity of weed beds, bushes, trees, etc.?"

So much could be said about a statement such as this it would fill a book. We'll just note a couple things. Not all fishing waters have weeds, brush, etc. The movements (and activity) of the fish would put them in the vicinity of these breaks (weed beds, brush, etc.) — if the weeds, brush etc. were on structure (breaklines, etc.). This statement would indicate the expert never got very far from the stick-ups. And, possibly his choice of lures, or his method, has never put him in a school of fish in the deep water. If he had spent more time fishing a channel or a deep water slot, his conclusions regarding sanctuaries not existing away from weed beds, bushes, trees, etc. might be totally different.

Now, concerning the second part of your question (or the sayings of your assumed expert). This is in reference to suspension.

You might say, "I find, and catch,

most of my fish when they are after schools of small fish on the surface. In fact, lots of times I find them by watching the birds that have been attracted by the commotion. These fish aren't down on the bottom nosing around in muck and mud; neither are they peeping out from behind some rock, bush or weed. Another thing, these fish can be found over many depths of water. How do you relate this to structure and migration?"

First, let us understand you are talking about a particular feeding situation, not a basic movement pattern. You are talking about a feeding process after the fish have become active and moving. The word schooling has often been used to describe a feeding process as you describe. The word has been around for quite some time. It is not a good word to describe the action. Neither is the term "schoolies" a good word for yearlings (small fish) that may roam around more, and seem to be schooling more. These terms were, in all probability, used and adapted because fishermen did not

**We must never forget that weather and water conditions change, and most of the time the conditions are not ideal.**

know that all fish schooled, particularly big fish in deep water. Most fishermen probably thought the fish only gathered together (schooled) when they decided to gang up on a batch of small forage fish (minnows, shad, etc.) on the surface. But, the words are here, and we have to live with them.

Probably you did not relate this activity to structure and to basic movements of fish, because it was never necessary to relate it, or you never gave much thought to what made a fish tick. I'm sure if you had made your own personal observations, you would have related even the forage fish to structure (at times). You must have observed your depth sounder lighting up like a Christmas tree (from the forage fish) just before, or just as you came up to a bar, break or breakline. Did you observe when the schoolies were smashing the shad in the shallow stick-ups (brush, etc.) they were related to some point, channel, breakline, etc.?

*continued*



FIGURE 4

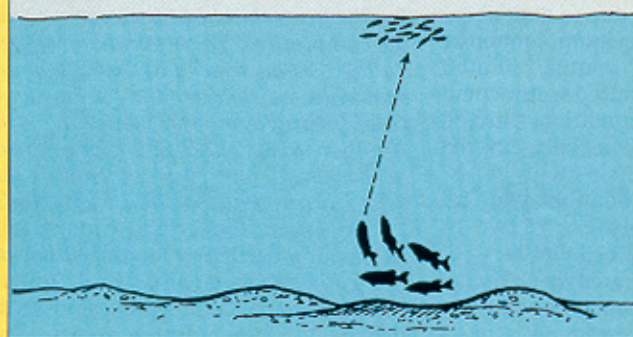


FIGURE 5

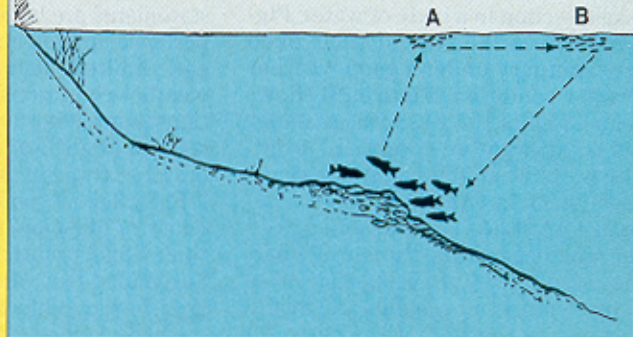


FIGURE 6

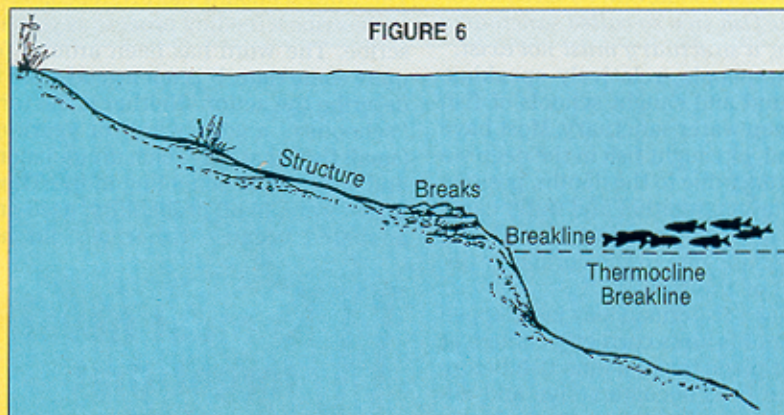


FIGURE 7

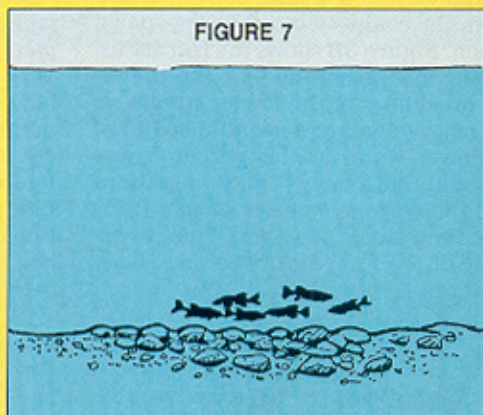


FIGURE 8A

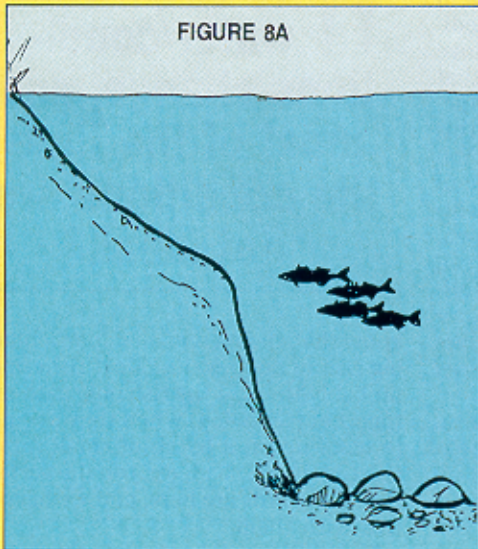


FIGURE 8B

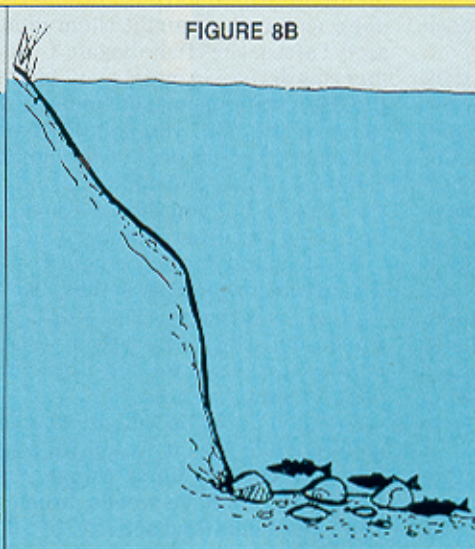


FIGURE 8C

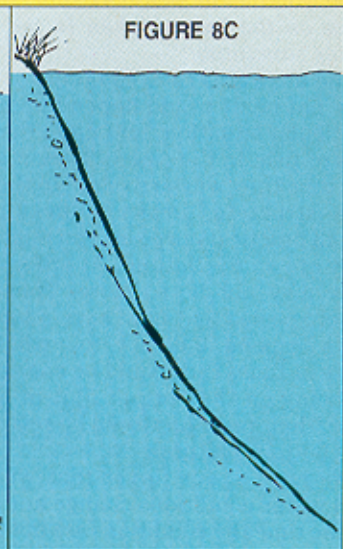


FIGURE 9A

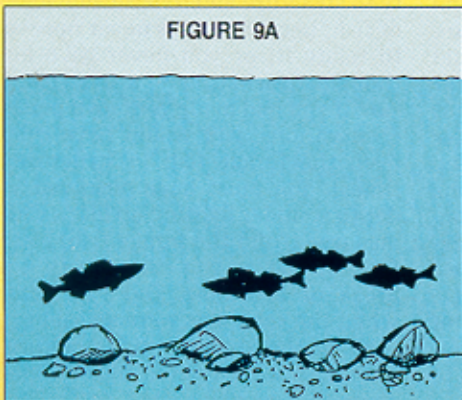


FIGURE 9B

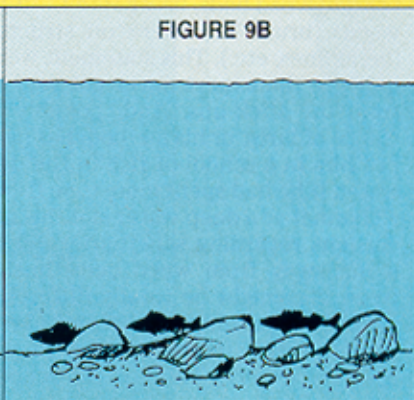
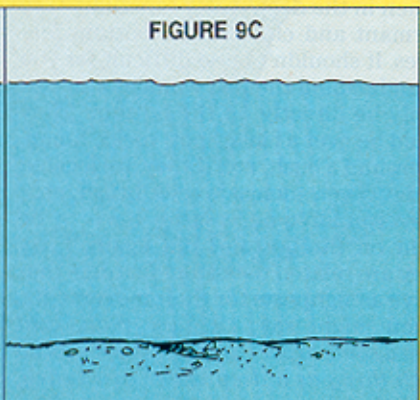


FIGURE 9C





## FINDING SUSPENDED FISH

Let's look at a couple situations where the fisherman may not relate schooling, or feeding fish, to structure (and the basic movement).

**Figure 4** is a side view of a cross section of a stream (it could represent a section in a lake). The fish are located near the bottom. Periodically a school of small shad (or minnows) will move by overhead, near the surface. The game fish will move toward the surface plowing into the baitfish. After a short action they return to the spot near the bottom. This feeding situation pulled them away from the bottom (structure, break or breakline).

**Figure 5** shows a similar situation, and may better illustrate what is meant. This figure is a side view of a bar the fish are using on migration. We'll place a school of small shad at position "A." The larger fish on the bar move up into the shad. After the action stops, they either move back to the bar, or move along with the scattered shad until they have regrouped and settled down in position "B." If you were there (position B) when the schooling began again, you may not relate this position to structure in the area. However, if you desired to find the fish after all the surface action had stopped, you would have no trouble relating their position to structure (breaks or breaklines).

**T**his following of baitfish could place the larger fish on a flat or over deep water where there were no indications of structure, breaks, or breaklines at that particular spot. However, at times you may think no structure, breaks or breaklines are present, but they still exist. You just can't see them, or they do not always show up on your recording device (breaks may be too small, or the angle of your scope not wide enough, etc.). If you were trying to locate the position of the fish by other means, such as implanted transmitters (beepers) in the fish, you are not likely to relate their position to structure, breaks or breaklines. In fact, you are not likely to even try. There is one thing that you and I should keep in mind about schooling fish. If the fish are not active or not moving on structure (breaks and breaklines) you wouldn't have any schooling to begin with.

By this time in our discussion, we are really into the subjects, and we begin to get some of those things that are bugging the student. We might get one question such as this from a student who has never spoken up before. He might say: *"You said fish may be drawn away from structure, breaks and breaklines in a feeding situation. I can now understand how this might occur, but I was wondering if the location of the fish in their deep water sanctuary might be*

*away from structure, breaks, or breaklines due to temperature?"*

If I understand your question, I believe you mean, will the temperature of the water influence the position of the fish in deep water? Or, it could be you have been looking for fish on your depth sounder, and when you saw some in a suspended position, you could not relate them to structure, breaks or breaklines. You could be asking this question because you have been running around looking for fish with a temperature gauge. You could also be asking this question to discount the idea that you must use structure as your guide in locating fish. Quite often, fishermen will use temperature, the depth sounder, food, and other things as a guide to where the fish might be. These, at times, could be used as aids, but they never should be used as guides. Structure is the guide.

**W**ater temperature could have a bearing, or be related to where the fish might be, if you looked at the fishing situation from a seasonal point of view (hot in summer, cold in winter). But, unless the fish have been drawn away from structure, breaks or breaklines by some feeding situation (after movement), or by some particular water condition (floods, drawdowns, etc.), their position must be viewed as being guided by bottom structure, breaks or breaklines. (The name of the game is to consistently catch more and bigger fish; the only way this can be done is to use structure as your guide.)

Since you asked the question in terms of temperature and specifically mentioned the sanctuary, let us look at a figure where you might have observed (by depth sounder or graph recorder) fish apparently in their deep water sanctuary and you could not relate it to structure, breaks or breaklines.

**Figure 6** shows a side view of a section in a lake. I have placed the fish in their deep water sanctuary; in this case, suspended as shown. I have also placed one of those invisible breaklines we have talked about in earlier study. It could be a breakline of water color, oxygen, light, current, temperature, etc. In this case the breakline is caused by thermocline. It would appear (from your depth sounder) the fish are unrelated to structure, breaks or breaklines. This is not true. They are positioned in direct relationship with the temperature breakline, as well as the breakline on the bottom. If we could look from a top view, we would likely find them positioned in direct relationship to a nice structure, such as bar, hump, etc. When the fish move (or migrate) they would move toward the bottom breakline, then on to structure to shallower water. They would have guides all the way.

Let's look at another situation where

you might find the fish on your graph or depth sounder and not relate them to structure, breaks or breaklines. We'll disregard temperature in this case.

**Figure 7** is a side view of a section in a lake. A group of fish are in their deep water sanctuary. In this case suspended slightly above the bottom. But, the fish are located in relationship to breaks on the bottom; in this case a hard bottom covered with rocks. In most instances, and especially with bass, you may not be able to see the fish in a position such as this. The fish will be so close to the rocks, your depth sounder may not record their existence. This will hold true with most species when conditions are bad, and the fish become very dormant. You'd think they were rocks themselves, as far as showing up on your depth sounder — and for that matter, you'd also think they were rocks as far as taking a pass at your lure (if you were doing sloppy fishing in any form).

While we are on the subject of suspension, let's look at a few more figures.

**A** better way to view suspension ... is to expect a horizontal suspension in the shallower sections, and a vertical suspension in the deep.

**Figure 8A** is a side view of a situation with suspended walleyes. Their position is related to the breakline. Upon further movement they could go horizontally in and over the breakline, but they could move parallel with the breakline, still in a suspended manner. But in either case, horizontally or parallel, movement would be related to the breakline, and during good weather and water conditions. **Figure 8B** is the same view of the same fish when weather and water conditions aren't favorable. You can hardly tell which is rock or which is fish. **Figure 8C** is the same spot in the lake. In this case, we have removed all structure, breaks and breaklines. I can't show any fish in this figure, for in all likelihood there wouldn't be any.

**Figure 9A** is a side view of suspended walleyes moving in deep water horizontally along large boulders during a good weather and water condition. This could be big dips (or depressions) in the bottom instead of boulders. **Figure 9B** shows the same fish under marginal

*continued*

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## FINDING SUSPENDED FISH

weather conditions. Figure 9C is the same area, but in this case, I have removed the bottom features (rocks, etc.). Please note what is also missing . . . fish.

Figure 10A is a cross section (side view) of the mouth of a narrow cove in an artificial reservoir. The fish have already moved, along structure, breaks and breaklines, from the deeper water in the main body of the lake to this narrower section of the feeder stream channel. If you were to see these suspended fish on your depth sounder, you may not be able to relate them to the deep water sanctuary, structure, breaks and breaklines, although the total movement pattern of the fish was controlled by these features.

**F**igure 10B is the same cove (or bay), but I have removed the structure, breaks and breaklines. Look at the figure; can you see anything that would indicate this is a good place to fish?

Let's look at another figure to show you what I mean about suspended fish (or movement) being related to structure, breaks and breaklines.

Figure 11 is a side view of a group of suspended fish before (or could be after) movement. You will note that they are suspended, in this case, in relationship to a breakline. In fact, they are related to a breakline both horizontally and vertically. Quite often this might occur. Different species of fish may suspend more often on the horizontal, while other species will suspend more on the vertical. For instance, some saltwater fish, trout, salmon, panfish, etc., may have a tendency to suspend more on the vertical, while a species like the bass, walleye, northern pike, etc., may have a tendency to the horizontal. But, at all times you should figure their position (and movement) is related to structure, breaks or breaklines. A better way to view suspension, if any occurs, is to expect a horizontal suspension in the shallower sections, and a vertical suspension in the deep. Here again (Figure 11), if you were to remove the structure, breaks or breaklines, see how many fish you would have suspended in the area.

After reviewing the above figures and remarks, a student might say: "When we were talking about the basic presentation of lures, you said that we should fish the bottom after getting into water greater than 8 to 10 feet deep. How will this take care of any suspended fish that might be around?"

When you and I get into depths greater than 8 to 10 feet, the bottom (structure) is our guide, and in most all cases when fishing for freshwater fish (we are primarily interested in bass, walleye, northern pike, muskies, etc.) We must try to get our lures on, or just

as close as possible to, the bottom. You and I don't (and can't) keep our lures directly on the bottom at all times — casting or trolling. But, if we do not make every effort to fish the bottom in depths beyond 8 to 10 feet, our lures will be out of position most of the time. Presentation of lures in this manner will take care of any suspended fish that may be on or around the structure, breaks or breaklines.

If you disregard structure as your primary guide and use suspended fish as your guide (running all over the lake looking for fish), then you can present lures to them any way you desire, but don't plan on making a good catch very often. The name of the game is to catch fish consistently! Proper presentation of lures is a must if we desire this to happen. Proper presentation of lures in deeper water demands that we use the bottom structure (breaks and breaklines) as our guide, and every effort is made to put the lures on, or as close as possible to, these features.

Before some of you deep saltwater

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a guide to successful fishing**

fishermen, or those of you who fish large, deep, freshwater bodies of water (where saltwater or exotic species have been introduced) start a racket, let me add these comments. When the species of fish, or the weather and water conditions, or the season, have these fish in extra deep water and long distances from shoreline features, I know it becomes necessary to work our lures above the bottom (bottom can't always be reached); and, we may expect a vertical movement when the fish become active, or they move up after our lures. But, let me add also, you better conduct this type of presentation over bottom structure, breaks or breaklines (Figure 11) if you expect the free-swimming, above-bottom lures to be effective. You should also remember that when conditions are bad, you had better try to get your lures on, or as close to the bottom as possible, if you expect to catch many fish.

I never have quite understood why fishermen will get hung up on the subject of suspended fish. Probably it is due to those not wanting to accept structure



FIGURE 10A

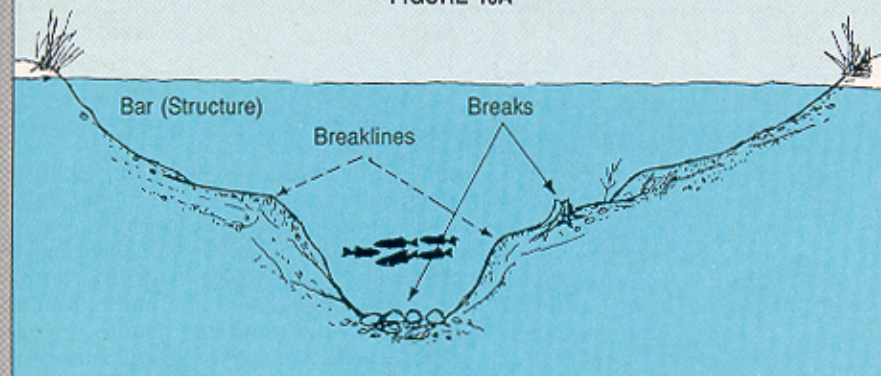


FIGURE 10B

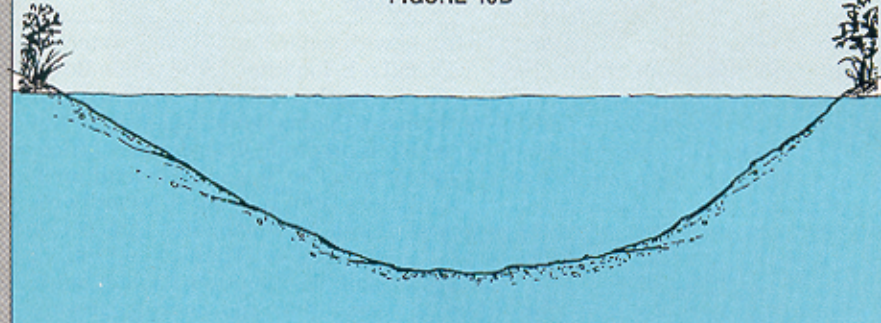
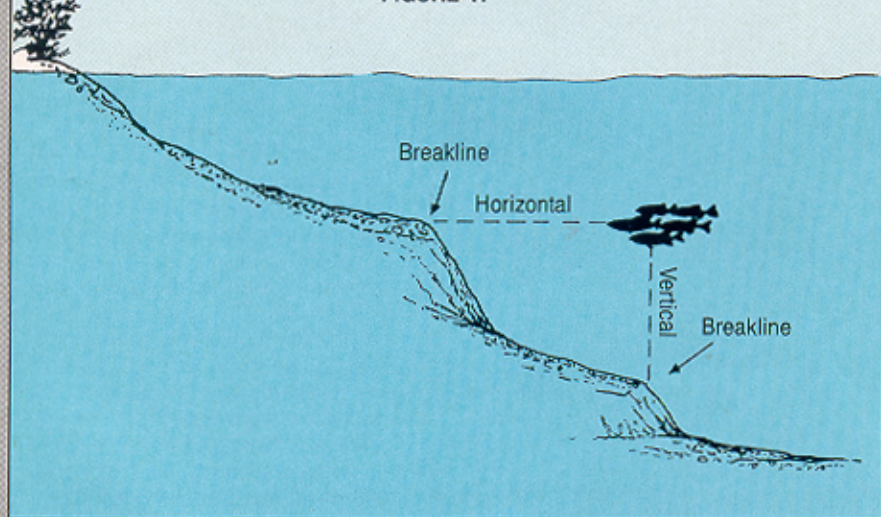



FIGURE 11



fishing, or those seeking a shortcut to fishing success. Whatever the reason might be, they are making mistakes in using suspended fish as their guide. If you see suspended fish, you can check to see if they are the fish you want — but don't bet on it. If your presentation of lures is done correctly (depth and speed control) on the different structures (breaks and breaklines), you won't have to worry about where the fish are or in what position.

Seeing the fish, at times, may become an aid, but it should never be used as a guide to successful fishing. Sure, if you were a commercial fisherman and you were fishing for certain species, seeing the fish might lead to a catch. If I were a commercial fisherman, I'd still use

structure (breaks and breaklines) as my guide, and then try to see if any fish were around. In the process, I'd save myself a lot of time and expense. I say again (and I'll keep on saying it), the fish itself is not your guide. Structure is the guide; and then trying to get our lures on, or as close as possible to, structure (breaks and breaklines) at all times. Then, we call on all the aids at our disposal to locate fish and make them strike (take).

For me and my house, we will use the deep water as the sanctuary, and we'll use structure (breaks and breaklines) as our guide to locating and catching fish. If we did otherwise, we would not expect to be very successful much of the time. 

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