

MAPPING IS CRITICAL TO FISHING SUCCESS

All Spoonpluggers are familiar with our motto “Knowledge is the Key to Fishing Success”. This knowledge has been given to us by Buck Perry in his “Green Book”, “Study Guide”, “Structure Situations” booklet, and other written and video materials (don’t forget the DVDs’, back issues of “National Spoonplugger”, and even old articles from “Fishing Facts” magazines). These encompass a lifetime of fishing knowledge available to us. Yet once we become familiar with a good part of this material, some may find themselves on a “plateau” as far as fishing results. The “knowledge” that is the key to fishing success is based on Buck Perrys’ written works, but also includes the knowledge one gains on the water in both mechanical skills and in the learning of structure. Both take considerable time on the water practicing to develop skills. Mechanical skills may take a while to learn, but are straightforward. Mapping and interpretation (learning and figuring out) structure is more difficult, and this is where many fall short. This is the area of knowledge where we continue to learn and improve our fishing throughout our lifetime. Fish use structure in their movements and migrations, and we need to find them before we can catch them. In advanced on-the-water Spoonplugging classes, mapping and interpretation of structure is the main focus. In these classes, don’t expect the instructor to just “show” you how it is done. You will DO it with proper guidance, resulting in the greatest amount of learning.

Recently I gave a seminar at the “Ultimate Sports and RV Show” in Grand Rapids . It was titled “Structure: Learning a Lake ”. The terms “Spoonplugger” and “structure fisherman” were used interchangeably. No other fishing approach concentrates on structure as thoroughly as Spoonplugging when the true definition of structure is used. Structure is defined as the bottom of the lake that is different from the surrounding area. We target the largest fish of all species by finding the best structure situations from our mapping and interpretation information. The criteria for these best spots lie in the migration routes that lead all the way from the deep to the shallows, and have the quickest access to deep water. Obviously, getting details about a lakes’ structures and comparing them to find the best ones take time and effort mapping. Using the depth sounder, straining the water with different sized Spoonplugs, and drawing detail maps of the structures to compare, usually gives the most and best information. Terry O’Malley has stated: “If you can’t draw it, you don’t know it”. When you get to the skill level where you CAN draw good detail maps of every structure that you fish, you probably don’t need to draw anymore. Emphasis was placed on visualizing the lake bottom details and

getting a “fish eye view” of what is under the water. To catch fish, lures must be accurately placed on structure elements (breaks and breaklines) on the lake bottom, not in a graph or GPS unit. Markers help immensely in visualizing what is down there.

Fish behavior was gone over because knowing how fish move and behave on structure helps us to locate them more accurately. Their home is deep water (normally 30-35 feet) where they spend most of their time and are dormant or inactive. During activity periods they can move shallower on pathways like deer, and are more easily caught. Fish will not cross a flat void of breaks or breaklines. They behave differently in the shallows (8-10 feet and shallower) than in the deep water. In the shallows they will scatter and can be caught at any depth there. In the deep water they tend to school up and remain on or very close to the bottom. The older and larger a fish is, the less adaptable and more reluctant he is to come shallow, due to the instability of conditions there compared to the deep water. Fish won't go downhill to get shallower, so we know that pathways must continue to go shallower or they will not be used. Fish will pause at breaks and follow breaklines, so we know exactly where to put our lures to have the best chance to catch them. Most breaklines are described as an increase in depth on a line along the bottom, although at times breaklines can be formed from current, temperature, and water color differences, also offering pathways for fish to follow. Further information on fish behavior can be obtained in Buck Perry's book “Spoonplugging”, pages 11-26, “Basic Movements of Fish”.

Next mentioned were “Mapping Tools” which included boat, motor, rods, reels, line, lures, depth sounder, contour maps, net, anchor, markers, and pencil and paper. As with any task or sport, the best tools to do the job should be used because they are most efficient and effective. Those tools that will best help us control all depths and speeds in our lure presentation are selected. As we learn about structure it helps to join a fishing club that emphasizes structure (e.g. Lunker Hunter Spoonpluggers), attend their outings (e.g. Muskegon), and attend seminars on structure fishing (e.g. John Bales). Also, we learn the fastest when we teach others, and teaching youth to structure fish helps insure the future of fishing.

The subject of lure presentation was touched on to show how we strain the water with different sized lures (depths) to find breaks, breaklines, and structure situations. Although just the depth sounder can be used to gain some quick information about a structure, adding thorough trolling with Spoonplugs gives us

the most detailed information for our mapping. Placing a marker in 8-10 feet on the tip of the feature helps greatly for us to visualize the underwater structure as we troll it. By feeling the lure on the bottom and glancing at the depth sounder, marker, wake of the boat, and terrain, we can gain a true visual picture in our mind of what is there. Spending a lot of time hunched over a depth sounder is not my idea of fun. Using lures to help us map gives us a chance to catch a fish while we are learning structure. As Buck Perry has said: "Trolling is our teacher".

Some pictures were shown of decent sized fish to demonstrate how all species of fish use structure. Then a slide from Mr. Perrys' study material was projected where different structures, breaks, and breaklines were compared, and the best fishing spot was indicated by interpreting the detail information on the map drawing. By looking for the longest, narrowest, sharpest, deepest break to the deepest water in the area, we can determine where to best spend our time fishing for the largest fish. Recording information that we find about a structure is important to insure that we save considerable time when we fish it in the future. Odds are that when you first fish a structure, you won't catch a fish. Repeated trips give a greater chance that the fish will be active when you are there. First, a letter or number is given to the structure, and that is marked on the lakes' contour map. A simple line drawing of the structure is then made with pencil and paper. It need not be elaborate or very detailed, just a representation of what you visualize. It is only for your benefit and doesn't need to be shown to others. As you fish it in the future, you may want to add more detail, although some Spoonpluggers, after drawing the map, will tear it up. The very act of drawing it will help burn the details in your mind for the future. Accurate rifle linesights or a GPS waypoint will allow you to return to this structure in the future.

Even if no fish are caught in the mapping process, we will leave that area with knowledge that will save us considerable time when fishing it in the future. A structure fisherman does not just fish structure, he maps, learns, and records it also. This is fishing in an orderly manner to catch fish on purpose. As Mr. Perry would say, "Knowledge is the key to fishing success".

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