

DETAIL MAPPING

I will never forget the advice that Terry O'Malley gave me regarding mapping and interpretation of structure: "If you can't draw it, you don't know it". Terry was a master at mapping structure, and Mr. Perry even said that Terry was the best mapper he had ever known. After looking over a structure, Terry could hand-draw an almost perfectly detailed picture of what was beneath the water surface. Nowadays, some might say that with the advances in modern GPS fishing technology, it is no longer necessary to map a structure, a perfect picture is there on the screen, just go there and fish it! However, it may not be quite that easy.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

First, you will be fishing on the water, not in the screen. Picture information must be processed, interpreted, condensed, and then used in a lure presentation plan. That takes mental sharpness and the ability to visualize spatially to execute a plan. With much of the newer electronics, numerous screens, colors, and endless details confuse some fisherman as to what is most important. If that is the case, I would recommend the use of just the flasher portion of your electronics when mapping and presenting lures. Over time, one may become familiar with using more advanced electronic features, and adding that information can help as an aid. The flasher is recommended at first because depth is a key detail used in mapping and interpretation. Other key details needed on a map are the depth of breaklines and how many, feature forms and their relation to deep water, breaks, sharper breaks, and the bottom hardness conditions. Interpretation of structure is simpler if those details are concentrated on first. In the past I have taken several week-long on-the-water classes from Don Dickson and Tom Ferencek in Minaki, Canada and 1000 Islands, New York. Learning to map and interpret different structures by drawing them was the primary emphasis at every one. Comparing structure features in order to select the best ones was the goal. It seems to me that just the key details should be used for that, and they can be quickly determined with a flasher and sketched on a piece of paper for best interpretation. Many other screens, colors, and extraneous details from some electronics may only confuse or slow things down. Think about simplifying.

PROCEEDURES

In the Dickson on-the-water classes, 2 key questions were asked to determine if a structure (bar) would produce fish. The procedure took only a couple of minutes using the flasher without a lure in the water.

1. **Will this structure produce?** Start in the shallows and run out toward deep water. Does it lead all the way to deep water? Is there a breakline at 15-17 feet or deeper?
2. **What is the form?** Get on the first major breakline and follow it, dropping a marker on all major features. Then go off each marker to determine the longest, narrowest, sharpest, deepest break to the deepest water in the area. That is the contact point.

If the structure did not meet the criteria, it likely will not hold big fish, so move on to check the next structure. If it does meet the criteria, start the fishing and mapping process. It is likely worthy of the time and effort to fish it and draw a map. Because structure is formed by breaklines, putting them down on paper greatly helps one to visualize how to make trolling passes and where the contact point may be. It is the most important spot to locate on any structure. The more you draw, the easier it will become for you. Just remember: it is only for you and does not have to be perfect. If you choose, you may want to keep the map and add to it the next time you fish it, but by simply drawing out the structure, you have already improved your skills at mapping and visualizing.

EMPHASIZE STRUCTURE

At several Chattanooga Jamborees, Mr. Perry emphasized that Spoonpluggers need to get “back to Basics”, and we know that active fish use structure, and we need to concentrate our efforts on it. Wandering around looking for suspended fish on electronics can waste time, as they are often inactive. If I were asked: “What one thing helped you the most in your growth as a Spoonplugger?”, my answer would be detail mapping. Basically, to me, that means drawing the important details of a structure on paper to help you visualize bottom conditions for better interpretation and presentation of lures. Mr. Perry had always stressed that knowledge in the area of mapping and interpretation ranks the highest and most important. He also said: “The most important of all in the mapping and fishing process is for the Spoonplugger to RECORD what he finds”. Gathering that information and putting it down on paper is the best way to master it. Letting electronics draw a picture is akin to watching someone troll a structure for you, vs. taking the helm and doing it yourself. Your learning is much greater with the latter.

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