



## How to Catch Bass from Shore

By: Ramon J. Ross

I couldn't keep from chuckling at the picture my cousin L. D. Jones made creeping up quietly on the pond. All hunched over on hands and knees, the stocky rancher crawled up the earthen dam and peeked over, looked briefly, then ducked down and with some awkward contortions brought his casting rod around and sailed the surface plug out of sight, beyond the slope. I heard it splash in the water.

Almost simultaneously there came a louder splash. It sounded as if one of the Hereford cows grazing along the pond shore had tumbled in.

L.D. jumped into action. He yanked back on the rod, leap-frogged to his feet and scattered dirt as he scrambled up the dam. I raced to the top just in time to see the broad tail of a big bass water swirl. Then the fish bored deep and I was sure L.D. would get some blisters where he pressed down on the spinning arbor with his thumb.

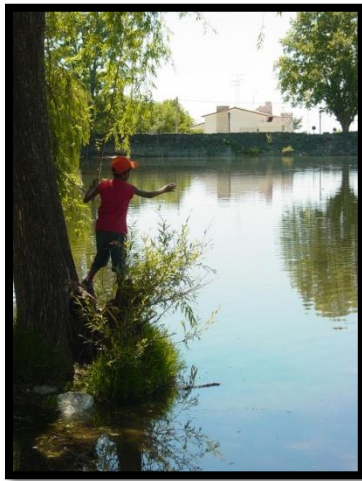
After a short, spirited fight the bass came grudgingly in. L.D. guided it into the shallows and dragged it up on the grassy bank with his free hand.

"I told you these bass were wary and you had to sneak up on them," he said. "This proof enough?"

I nodded in amazement.

This bass fishing I've quit trying to pin down into a predictable pattern. Back when I used to regularly fish the tin Rio Ruidoso River in New Mexico for trout, it was operational procedure to snail stealthily up to a fishable pool on my belly, just to keep from spooking the alert trout.

But this was a deep sprawling stock tank, as the pounds are known in my country. Down in those dark blue depths it seemed unlikely that a bass could detect the silhouette of a person standing upright on shore. Yet, only the day before I'd plugged the pond steadily for two hours and caught only a couple of small bass.



Later I questioned L.D., who runs a combination ranch-farm near Brady in the very heart of Texas, about this.

"Usually many of the bass are up in the shallows, where it's clear," he explained. "They can spot the moving form of a human fifty feet away. They scoot back in the protective depths and you couldn't beg one to take a lure. You're got to sneak up on the bass, stay hidden and don't cause any ground vibrations at all."

That's when he demonstrated his uncanny strategy.

It proved one thing to me quite conclusively: When fishing from shore, you must change your techniques accordingly, getting away from the rules you've learned when angling from a boat. **Shoreline methods differ.**

Of course it isn't often that you must resort to this belly-rubbing approach. But sometimes it pays to go to the extremes. The angler who catches fish from shore must size up the water he's fishing and plan his strategy before he ever ties a bait on the business end of his line.

In this hurry-up age of boats and motors, shore fishing is almost a lost art. Certainly it is a neglected one. Yet there are many waters which only can be fished from land, and others that will produce for the bank-walking angler if he adequately adapts his methods to the task at hand.

Stock ponds make a good example.

More of these diminutive artificial lakes are showing up on the landscape each year, particularly in those areas like Texas where water conservation is a front-page habit in the newspapers. A few of these man-made ponds can be fished from boats, but vast majorities are so limited that they only can be fished properly from shore.

There is the weekend angler who motors out to the local lake for a brief fishing stint. Perhaps he doesn't own a boat or doesn't want to bother with renting one. Or maybe he is fishing where no boats are available. He must fish from shore. (If it is private land, don't fail to get the landowner's permission.)

Small streams also demand shore fishing. Sometimes the size of a river or creek can be deceiving. Even the smallest of streams often harbor bragging-sized bass.

It is a fact that game fish, in a stream or lake, usually are found within thirty yards of shore. This is where there is the most abundant food supply. This means, then, that most of the fish population of any particular stream or lake is within casting range of the bank-walking fisherman. It also stands to reason that he has as good a chance of catching fish as does his boat-riding counter-part.



The one noticeable disadvantage the shore fisherman has is that, when battling a big fish, he cannot maneuver away from obstructions. It is simply a basic fight of fish versus angler. Should the powerful bass head pell-mell for a submerged stump or rock, the land-ridden angler has no choice except to hang on and pray that

the fish won't wrap the leader around the obstruction and break off.

It happened to me just the other day. Andrew, a friend of mine who runs a sporting goods store in Marble Falls, Texas, and I were walking along the shore of a stock pond, plugging out past a fringe of moss growth in the shallows. Suddenly a large bass came up and inhaled my lure just as it hit the surface.

I should have let the fish run out toward the middle of the pond to free water. But instead I snubbed it up tight, trying to break its spirit. It came around fast in a tight circle and ploughed into the shoreline moss. The lure fouled, the fish gave one frantic jerk, and that was that.

The two foremost considerations of the shore fisherman are:

1. Stay hidden.
2. Approach quietly.

It is much easier for a bass lying a few yards offshore to spot someone on the bank than it can see a person in a boat. If you doubt this, put on a glass face mask and try lying in water next to shore and turning your head just under the surface. Notice you can distinguish trees and brush on the bank, but it is impossible to see in the opposite direction.

The natural slope of the water away from shore, from shallow to deep, forms a sort of barrier which hides the boatman. But the shore-man does not enjoy this convenience. He's open to all probing eyes.



An elementary rule to remember is to keep away from water's edge when casting. Remain back ten or twenty yards. If you're fishing around obstructions out a way or the water next to shore is deep and dark, then you can move in closer. When the water is gin clear it often helps to get down on your knees and wear inconspicuous clothing. Never get any closer than you absolutely must. Distance is a great equalizer to a bass' wariness.

There serves a twofold purpose. By staying back you're also less likely to give your presence away with unnatural noise.

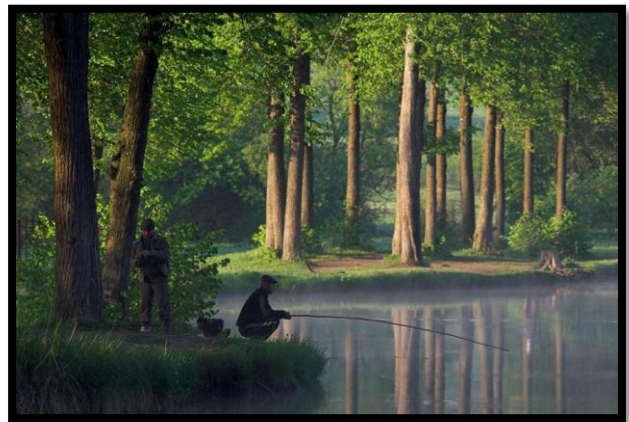
A bass' basic defense is its supersensitive "feel" of vibrations. An unsuspecting fish can be moving unalarmed in the water, but if you submerge two stones and tap them gently together, it will immediately flash into the protective depths. It is

evident then that a bass can readily detect the vibrations caused by a heavy-walking fisherman.

It is best to fish into the sun, particularly early and late in the day. When shadows are long, a fisherman gives himself away well before he reaches the water. The sudden swoop of a dark shadow across the surface will promptly drive all fish into hiding.

But there's still another advantage of this approach. Bass remain around obstructions for two valid reasons. One, a bass is less likely to be seen by its enemies; and two, by hiding in the shade made by an obstruction, a bass can zip out unexpectedly and grab any bait fish which might wander past.

By working into the sun the angler will have the shadows on his side of the obstructions and he can work the productive water more thoroughly and easily. Ever try to cast over a stump into the shady area on the opposite side? Or try to play a bass away from an obstruction when your line is over it?



On a lake that is fished hard from outside by boat anglers, the shore walker stands his best chance by looking for spots to probe which are almost inaccessible to a boatman, or a spot that would be difficult for him to, fish under normal conditions.

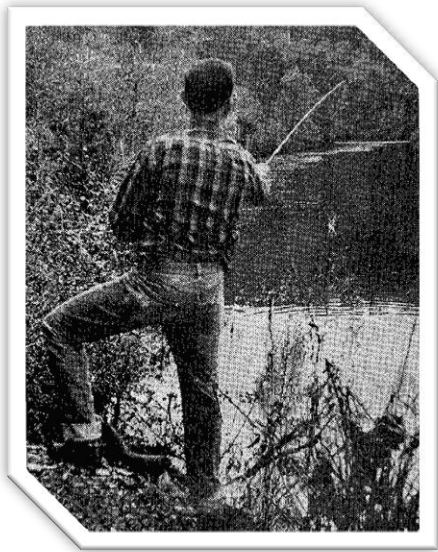
George and I discovered just such a place recently. We'd gone out to spend a weekend afloat on Granite Shoals Lake in central Texas with our families on a houseboat. After anchoring the craft in a sheltered cover where the wives could swim, we headed up the bank with our fishing tackle. We enjoyed no particular success until George, found a pocket of shielded water behind a dead tree.

Off to the right a ridge of submerged rocks kept any boats from approaching close. Because of the tree itself, only a highly skilled caster could sneak a bait into the secluded pocket.

On George's first cast, with a yellow-bucktail spinner bait up near the tree, he tied in to an acrobatic two pound bass. On two successive casts he caught a pair of almost identical size. In all, we took four fish out of that postage-stamp area.

When shore fishing a body of water where there is no boat competition, look for areas that other anglers would likely pass up. Perhaps there is a barrier of brush growing along the shore or overhanging trees which handicap the caster. These are the places that are most apt to payoff to the ambitious fisherman.

I remember a time on Onion Creek, a narrow spring-fed stream which passes south of Austin, when George and I tight-roped along a slender shelf of shore, between the water and a tangle of overhanging limbs and brush, and caught twelve nice bass by dropping our silver spoon baits not ten feet out, holding on precariously with one hand and flipping the bait underhand with the other. The fish weren't large, running about a pound apiece, but considering the circumstances and conditions, I was quite proud of the catch.



At the two extremes of the day, early and late, bass frequently migrate into the shallows along shore to forage. Sometimes you can actually see them, but under such circumstances the bass usually do the spying first, unless you are extra careful with your approach.

In this case, cast up or down the shore, parallel to bank. This way your lure is always traveling in the most productive water. And, as most bass fishermen know, a bass in the shallows often nabs a lure the moment it meets the water. It is more likely to take the lure this way than it is one which is pulled up from the depths, when the angler is casting out from the bank.

If the water beyond the banks is exceptionally clear or the fish are extra spooky, night fishing sometimes produces when daytime methods fail. Frequently this basic change of strategy, from day to night, makes the difference between a full and empty stringer, especially on waters which are heavily fished from shore.

Once last fall, Andrew and I spent an entire afternoon plugging along Nickolson Lake near the community of Llano in central Texas, catching only two throw-back bass. Just at fading light, as we were loading our gear in the auto and preparing to head homeward, Andrew chanced to notice the surface swirls of a feeding fish. He grabbed his casting outfit, walked down to water's edge, cast a spinning-type lure with a black bucktail, and promptly caught a five-pound bass.

By nine o'clock we had five fish on the stringer, not a one that scaled less than two pounds apiece.

The fundamentals of bass fishing are the same, whether you're fishing from a boat or from shore. You need the same kind of tackle, same kind of lures and you must fish the same kind of waters. But you must remember that you are looking at the water from an entirely different viewpoint when standing on land. Your fishing technique must reflect this change.

Mostly, successful bank fishing depends on what you do before you ever get your bait in the water. You can't simply stroll up to a stream or lake and start casting and anticipate startling results. You must have a plan of attack, one which gives you the greatest chance of escaping detection, either visually or by sound.

Back when I lived in New Mexico I knew a fisherman, Howard of Albuquerque, who seemingly fiddle-footed aimlessly up the shore, carrying two fully-equipped fishing outfits and casting haphazardly as he went. He always seemed to come back with fish. To the casual observer this man had no plan at all. But to the stickler of details, the angler had an obvious strategy.

He moved quietly and slowly, never hurrying. One rod was equipped with either a top water or shallow-running lure; the other was armed with a bottom bumping bait like a lead-head bucktail jig or a plastic worm. When he stopped at a place that looked inviting, he threw the top water or shallow-running lure up shore, in the shallows. He fanned successive casts out until the last one was perpendicular to where he was standing.

Then he switched outfits and went through the same assiduous routine with the bottom-bumping lure. This way he covered all the productive water, from top to

bottom, and if there was a bass in a striking mood within his range, he likely caught it.

Back last spring, one sunny weekend, that man-made reservoir called Granite Shoals nearby hometown of Austin was literally alive with fishermen. Many of them, I knew, were extraordinary bass pluggers. Yet at nightfall on Sunday, when everyone boated in and the results were tallied, fish-catching champ for the weekend was Mrs. Daisy, fisher-lady from San Antonio who never left land.

She walked down to the dock in front of her lakeside cabin, cast a spinner-type lure next to the pilings of an adjacent dock and hung in to a buster of a big bass that weighed eight pounds, six ounces. Who said shore fishing doesn't payoff.

