



TECH BULLETIN

TEXAS

SOUTH END SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.



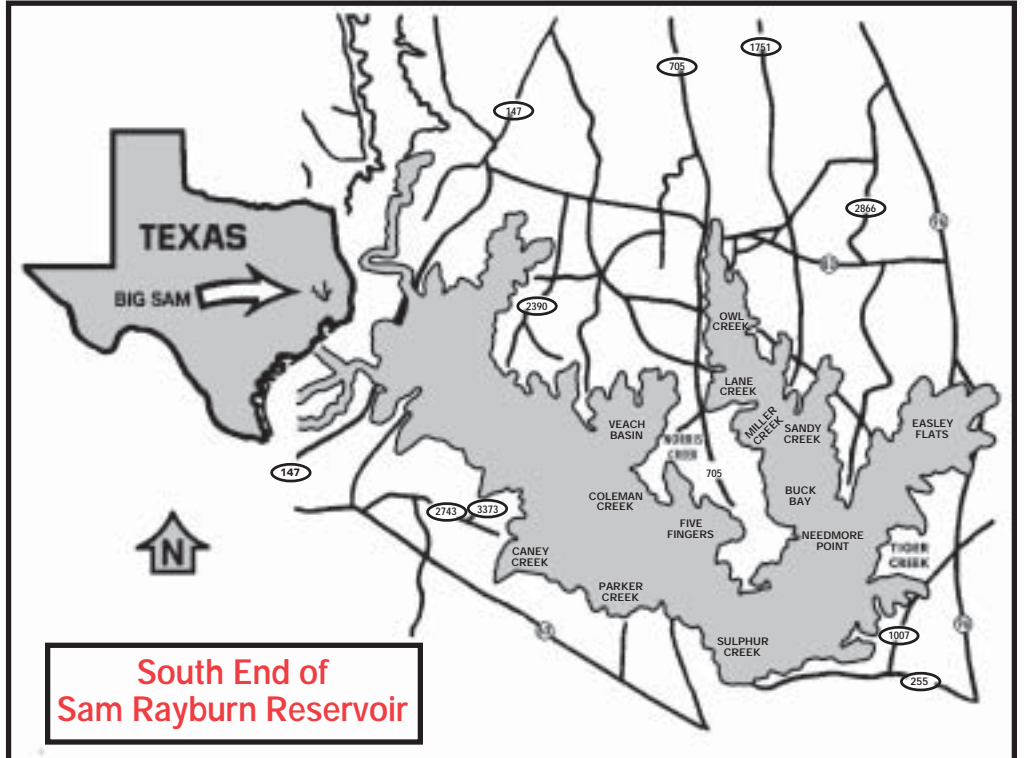
By Will Kirkpatrick

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Sam Rayburn Reservoir was the first (1963) of many impoundments coming on-line in the '60s throughout the southeastern United States. Sprawling over five counties with a shoreline in excess of 750 miles, "Big Sam" is considered one of the top largemouth bass fisheries in our nation and ranked #1 in Texas for size and numbers. While its sheer size can be intimidating (114,500 acres) there are certain seasonal patterns and lure combinations that will always catch bass.

Since my first trip to Rayburn, fishing a B.A.S.S. tournament in 1970, I've seen major changes, not only in angling methods, but in our bass' patterns and reservoir habitat. Areas where we used to fish flooded timber are today almost devoid of wood except scattered stumps and a few old logs.

Rayburn's normal shoreline cover now con-



sists almost entirely of buckbrush (button willow), longleaf willows and laydowns (fallen trees). An exception to this is when high lake levels push back onto areas on normally dry, forested land.

Our predominate offshore cover is hydrilla and while this "weed" can cause a multitude of problems on small or shallow bodies of water, it's been a big plus for us.

Sam Rayburn Reservoir's normal elevation is 164.4 feet above MSL with a maximum high elevation in 1992 of 175.1 and minimum low in 1996 of 150.76 feet. Knowing how, when and where to fish during these fluctuating water levels is a major key to your angling success.

Following are normal seasonal patterns, areas of application and recommended lures to use.

SPRING

(Pre-Spawn/Spawn - Bass Moving In)

• **PIGEON ROOST, MILLER, LANE & OWL CREEKS:** All are protected from cold northwest winds and have deep feeder creeks leading well toward the rear of cove.

• **FIVE FINGERS/RAYBURN PARK AREAS:** This is one of our most productive locations with several good concrete boat ramps for easy launching in all types of weather. Five Fingers produces many large bass each year and has good spawning flats over the entire bay area.

• **NORRIS CREEK:** Has several feeder creeks leading into good shallow water flats. Its inactive creeks hold clear water throughout major spawning periods.

• **COLEMAN CREEK & COLE BRANCH:** These are both protected from cold north and west winds. A good early season bet and only a 3 to 5 mile run from Five Fingers boat ramp.

• **LURES:** During this time of year, all bass forage (bream, shad, crawfish, etc.) are full grown so stick with large bulky lures.

EARLY MORNING: work 8- to 12-ft. depths with a 1/2-oz. spinnerbait and a Colorado and Indiana blade combination or single Colorado blade model with *White/Chartreuse* or *Fire Tiger* skirt using a slow roll type of presentation. At the same depths use a 3/4-oz. *Hot Lips® Express* crankbait in *Hot Texas Red/Crystal* or *Crawfish* color. The secret to fishing this type of lure is making it dig and ricochet off bottom cover.

AFTERNOON: Work 2- through 5-ft. depths with a 1/4-oz. *Speed Trap™* varying speed of retrieve and throw in a stop/go every few feet. If water is clear, use *Clearwater Flash* or *Bleeding Shiner*. If it's off-color, use *Fire Tiger*.

LURES TO USE IN "BIG SAM"



Also check grass beds at the same depth using a **Power Minnow™** as a jerkbait in **Clearwater Flash** or **Gold/Black Top/Orange Belly** color. When bass have really moved in, this jerkbait method will account for some of the biggest stringers of the year. With numbers of 15 to 20 fish not unusual and the possibility of a double-digit sow always there.

Fishing **Brush Babies®** (1/4- or 1/2-oz.) in hydrilla and long leaf grass is one of my favorite and sometimes most productive methods for catching bass here on "Big Sam".

I start using Brush Babies in early spring as our bigger bass make their initial move into prespawn area. The 1/2-oz. size in **Hot Texas Red/Crystal** or **Chartreuse/Blue/Crystal** are both excellent colors with the larger size being used because all bass forage is full grown at this time. Prime holding cover will be scattered clumps of emerging vegetation between migration routes and spawning flats.

I use a 7-ft. moderate action, medium power rod (*G. Loomis CBR 843*) with Shimano's new *Curado* cranking reel loaded with 12-lb. test *Silver Thread* line during this period. This outfit allows you to make long casts and pick up more line when you detect a strike. Also, lures will dive deeper due to the reel's slower 3.5 x 1 gear ratio, plus the small diameter line also contributes to a deeper diving lure.

Since you will be fishing various depths of 4 feet through 10 feet, the key is getting your Brush Baby to dig and ricochet off the bottom as well as off vegetative patches. The difference between working bottom cover and vegetation is how you, the angler, respond to each. When encountering bottom, all that's required is stopping your cranking of the reel which allows the lure to realign itself and then you begin the same procedure all over again. The secret to fishing emerging grass is that your Brush Baby will be vibrating along and then suddenly you will feel it get mushy. At this point, stop reeling, push your rod tip down then forward wherein your lure will actually move backward and it will float away from the vegetation.

Most strikes at this time of year are very faint and usually all you feel is an absence of lure movement (vibration). Anytime you detect your Brush Baby doing something different "set the hook"! It's surprising how many times that difference in feel involves a bass.

SUMMER

(Post-Spawn/Vegetation Growing - Bass Very Active)

• **BUCK BAY & MILLER CREEK FLATS AREAS:** Good spawn recovery areas all near migration routes back to deeper waters.

• **NEEDMORE & POWELL PARK LOCATION:** Has lots of boat traffic but holds good fish in both size and number throughout this period.

• **FARMER FLATS:** Has one of the largest hydrilla beds on Rayburn and produced a 15-lb. largemouth in 1995.

• **CANEY FLATS & BLACK FOREST AREA:** This produces good bass throughout the year but sits out in the open and is very susceptible to windy conditions.

This is prime topwater time, especially if hydrilla beds are near the surface. Each year some of my biggest topwater bass come on **Nip-I-Diddee®** slushbaits. When fish are actively feeding, this is one they won't pass up. On less aggressive feeders, I'll use a single-bladed slushbait such as a **Dalton Special®** or **Jerk 'n Sam™**. My choice in size and color depend on forage, water color and amount of available sunlight. Darker/brighter colors and bigger lures seem to work better under low light or stained water conditions. When working clear water during full daylight, I'll go more with light or neutral colored models in smaller sizes. Another fun bait to use is the **Buzzer'd™** buzzbait which, under the

right conditions, will really sack up the bass.

As "Big Sam's" bass enter the post-spawn/early summer period, we begin getting more and bigger patches of vegetation. We change our presentation in that we start fishing more over this vegetation than around it. This is also when I start going more with the smaller 1/4-oz. Brush Baby. Using the same rod/reel setup, start fishing a little deeper water and more parallel to the outside edge of vegetation but over the top. As you crank down, you will feel your lure hitting the grass tops. When it begins digging into the grass, stop reeling, push your rod tip down then forward wherein your lure will actually move backward and float away from the vegetation. This is when "Mr. Bass" really nails a lure -- as the old saying goes, . . . "Try it, you'll like it!"

FALL

As hot summer temperatures begin to decline and waters cool, threadfin shad start their annual migration into bay systems and the main feeder creeks, rivers and bayous. This is what I personally consider the prime time to fish here on "Big Sam". Summer time boat traffic has gone, most tournaments are over and deer hunters have left for the woods.

Under the right conditions of overcast skies, light breezes and just a bit of fog, it's not unusual to catch 20 to 30 bass in a day with a couple of them in the 7-lb. range.

• **AYISH BAYOU & BEAR CREEK AREAS:** These areas have tremendous potential for big fall school bass activity lasting into December. It's a textbook fall pattern area with lots of feeder creeks, exposed shallow stump beds and several miles of hydrilla beds bordering deep water migration routes.

• **TIGER BAY:** It's only a short run from Powell Park marina and has everything required for a fall fishing period. There are four major coves contained in this bay system, each with



The Author With 10-lb. "Mrs. Bass"

deep water access, good holding cover and plenty of forage fish.

• **FIVE FINGERS, NORRIS, COLE BRANCH, COLEMAN & VEACH:** All are prime fall fishing areas that will hold major concentrations of bass.

EARLY MORNING: The ideal holding structure to start fishing is a hydrilla wall where it stops growing on the edge of a vertical creek bank. My two baits of choice would be a Brush Baby and a spinnerbait with a white skirt. As the morning progresses, move toward the rear of the cove staying alert for schools of threadfin shad working along the creek edges. If you find these moving schools, try working a 3/16-oz. Jerk 'n Sam *parallel* to the weed edges, ahead of them.

MIDDAY: Stay with the morning spinnerbait but also throw both a 3/16- and 1/2-oz. **P.J. Pop™** and work it more in a stop'n go fashion. This time of year I always plan on spending all day on the water. We get a lot of afternoon cloud cover and this sometimes really turns the bass on.

EVENING: This is usually the prime time to go for "big" topwater bass. I tie on both a 3/8-oz. Nip-I-Diddee and 3/8-oz. Dalton Special in *Silver*

Foil Shad for use during the last hour of daylight. We've put some bass over seven pounds in the boat using these lures and it's "plum awesome" when they hit one of these topwaters.

WINTERS

Shad move back out to the main lake areas. If we have cold weather, dropping water temperatures below 50 degrees, bass will move out into deep creeks, long deep points and main lake humps.

LURES: This is the time for big, deep-diving crankbaits and spoons. You need a *G. Loomis 7 ft. CBR 845* and Shimano's new *Curado 3.5 x 1* cranking reel spooled with 14-lb. test *Silver Thread*. This combination will throw a Hot Lips Express 80 feet and with a normal stop-and-go retrieve, this lure will work the 14- to 18-ft. depths. I stick with the darker colors except on bright days with clear water.

By running a Lowrance® GM 2000 or new X-15 sonar/GPS units over deep creek beds, main lake humps and points, large schools of winter bass can be found. Since there's no faster way to catch bass than "spoon feeding", try free-falling a spoon while keeping slight tension on the line; it can be very rewarding. Recommended size **Crippled Herring®** jiggling-type spoons come in weights from 3/4- to 1 1/2-oz depending on water depth and wind speeds. *Nickel, Nickel/Neon Blue Back, Genuine Gold Plate, Fluorescent* and *"Hot Tail"* colors will all produce.

The same basic principles apply when fishing for largemouth bass -- be they in Wisconsin, Kentucky, California, Florida or here in Texas. A largemouth's basic requirements are something to eat, ambush cover and a comfort zone to hold in. It has been my experience that the two most productive areas to bass fish are around submerged willows and clumps of vegetation. This information, tied into seasonal patterns such as the fact that northwest banks warm first and cool last, is a big help when working a new lake.

The U.S. Geological Survey Dept. has topographic maps available for all regions of our country. By obtaining "topo" maps of lakes you want to fish and marking in lake areas, you can vastly improve your fishing success. When marking areas, I use several different colors to indicate different water levels; one color for flood pool, another for normal pool and, depending on contour distances, other colors for deepening contours.

There is a wealth of information to be found on such maps. A few hours use and it's almost as if you are on the lake. Look for large points with smaller secondary points; points with deep creeks along side or points with abrupt drop-offs into old river beds; spawning flats with creek beds flowing off or through; and major creeks with smaller feeder creeks feeding into them, some forming secondary points by flowing in at an angle.

For those who enjoy fishing, but are tired of their present catching results, there is a solution. Since 1989 I have been running an annual series of fishing schools.

We have one 2-day class that covers Maps & Electronics. There are three week-long classes, one each in the spring and fall, plus a Big Bass Special for those who've previously attended a regular week-long session.. The regular spring and fall classes are split between actual on-the-water fishing time and formal in-classroom training. We cover every facet of bass fishing from rods to lures, electronics, structure/seasonal patterns, boat/motor maintenance, catch & release, etc.

All sessions are held at Stephen F. Austin State University's Piney Woods Conservation Center located near Powell Park Marina on Sam Rayburn. Costs include meals, lodging, classroom instruction and related materials. For info on schools or guide service, call 409-584-3177.