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A GAME & FISH MAGAZINE EDITION

**TWO TRICKS
FOR BIG BASS
ON LAKE WEISS**

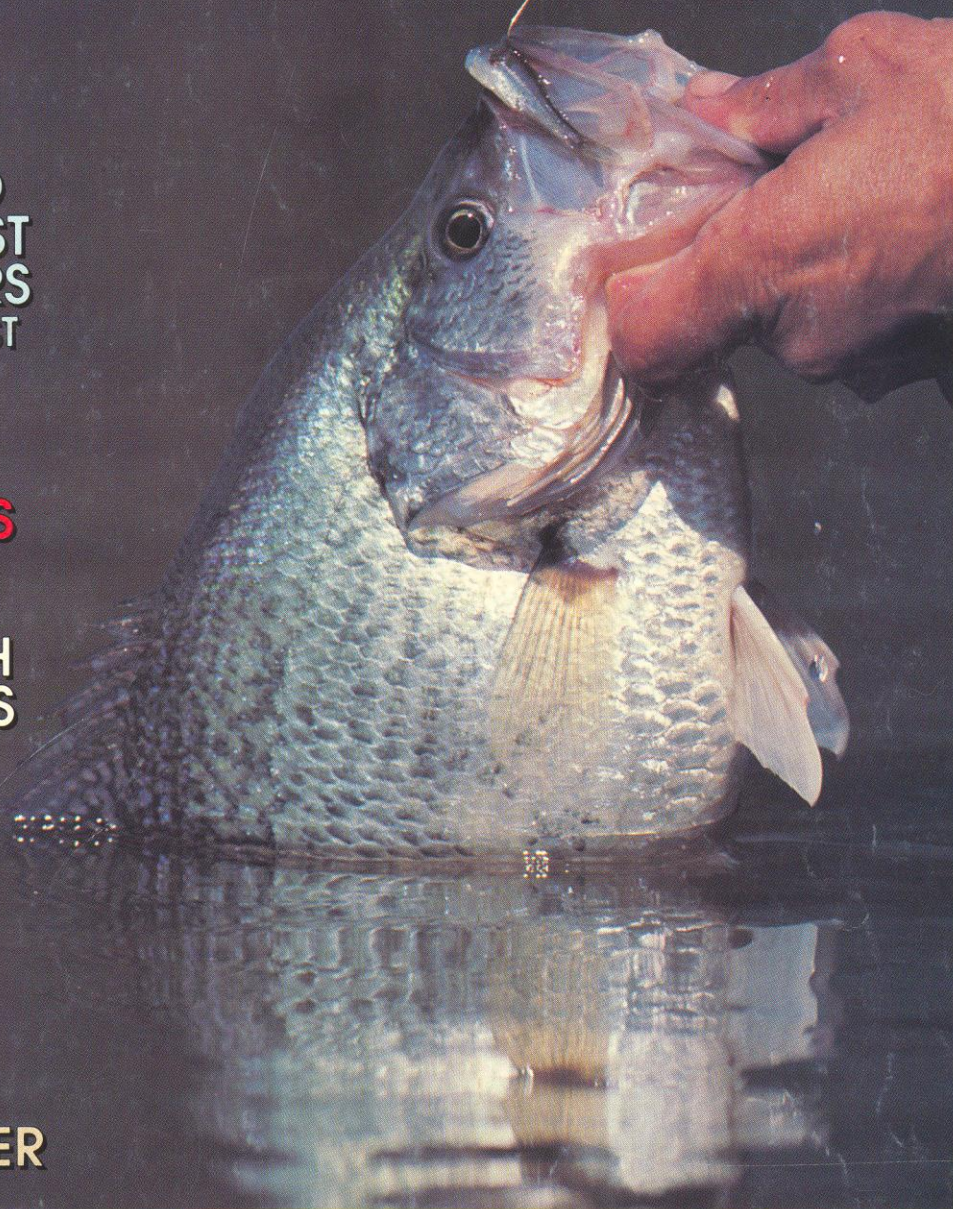
**YOUR GUIDE TO
ALABAMA'S BEST
CRAPPIE WATERS
STATEWIDE FORECAST**

**OAKMULGEE
PUBLIC-LAND
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AN INSIDER'S TIPS**

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PLUS: HOT FLY-FISHING FOR APRIL COBIA
WEIRD CATFISH BAITS THAT WORK!

Weiss Lake April Bassin'

*This stump-filled reservoir
on the Coosa River
provides plenty of places
for bass to hide in the
spring. Listen as a couple
of local experts explain
which stumps the
fish are under!*

by Bill Vanderford

Though it doesn't yield a lot of bass over 10 pounds, Lake Weiss is literally full of bass in the 5- to 6-pound range. Lake Weiss is an Alabama Power project that was impounded in 1961 and encompasses more than 30,000 acres when full.

Before planning a trip to this lake, however, one should be aware of a few important things. First and foremost, this is a very shallow lake with lots of stumps and other debris just below the surface. Therefore, when boating on this reservoir, one has to use extreme caution, especially if your boat is operated beyond the carefully marked channels. Additionally, any sizable rain storm can bring lots of floating logs and other debris down the rivers.

Also, because the lake backs across the state border into Georgia, one must understand the regulations of both states. No reciprocal fishing license agreements are in effect on Lake Weiss. In other words, if you fish on the Georgia arm of the lake, a current license for that state is required.

Despite this concern, if one uses common sense and stays within the regulations, a spring bass fishing trip to Lake Weiss can be very productive. Fishing the lake, however, requires knowledge, and both Mike Gunter and Reed Biggers have agreed to share their WEISS APRIL BASSIN' knowledge.

Though he is an accomplished bass angler, Mike Gunter is first and foremost a Methodist minister. Despite his love of fishing, Mike has never let that interfere with his faith or his family. Instead, he has often used the fishing aspect of his life to enhance the lives of others, especially children and elderly people.

Mike Gunter was born in Gadsden, and he and his dad watched Lake Weiss being built. In fact, some of his first bass fishing memories are entwined with this big, shallow impoundment.

Even before fishing Lake Weiss, the Gunter family had spent vacations fishing Lake Guntersville. They always stayed at a place called "Osawintha."

"It was a family fishing camp," recalled Mike Gunter. "The owners would show Walt Disney movies at night under the stars for all the children, and we would fish during the day."

Several years ago, after numerous stops at other churches, Mike Gunter ended up at a church in Cedartown, Ga., which is very near Lake Weiss. This gave Gunter the chance to renew his love of bass fishing on this productive lake, which had been part of his early angling experience. He adapted quickly and became very adept at catching the wily large-mouth bass from Lake Weiss.

During April, Mike Gunter catches most of his bass on spinnerbaits,

Reed Biggers tips a Lake Weiss bass that fell for a spinnerbait fished around some of the impoundment's abundant stumps. Photo by Bill Vanderford.

Texas-rigged plastic worms, crankbaits and topwater lures. He says it depends on the weather conditions and water temperature as to his choice of lure. Springtime fronts and cooler temperatures have an adverse effect, which often forces the bass to go deeper in Lake Weiss.

"If they go deeper," said Gunter, "I prefer the bass in Brushy Branch on the Georgia side. There's lots of timber in that creek, and you can cast most any lure along the edge of the creek channel and work it through the standing timber successfully."

The water along this channel is usually 7 to 10 feet deep, with lots of limbs to get through. So bring plenty of lures because Mike Gunter says you'll lose a few.

"I prefer tandem willow-leaf spinnerbaits in either a 3/8- or 1/2-ounce size," said Gunter. "The water is often muddy or stained in the spring, and this lure with copper blades and a white or chartreuse skirt seems to work the best."

According to Gunter, if the water is warmer, the bass become very active on stumpy points and underwater ridges near creek or river mouths, and they can be caught with

crankbaits. One of his favorite spots for this action is a point on Hog Island in the mouth of Little River where it feeds into the Coosa River. He also catches quite a few nice bass out of a stumprow on an underwater ridge near a point of land across from the "Alabama Queen," which is at the confluence of Cowan Creek and the Coosa River. This is a great area for worms, crankbaits and topwater lures.

In recent years, Lake Weiss has also become well-known for a growing population of big spotted bass.

"Any place where a creek or river comes together and makes a point is great for concentrating feeding bass," said Gunter. "If they're very active in these areas, the crankbait is best, but when the action slows, I break out the Zoom or Red's plastic worms and lizards."

Gunter uses either an RC-1 or RC-3 Poe's crankbait when fishing these points. His favorite colors are black/chartreuse, crawfish,

cray/chartreuse, brown and yellow and black.

Mike fishes the worms and lizards Texas style and uses a variety of colors. The worms are utilized near the creek mouths and the 5-inch plastic lizards back farther in the creeks.

His color preferences are Zoom's "redbug" for slightly stained water, "electric red" with a chartreuse tail for the clearer or darker-appearing water or "green pumpkinseed" for very stained water. Mike Gunter also has another way of deciding which color to use — depth.

"The old adage of matching the worm and water color doesn't always work at Lake Weiss," stated Gunter. "I believe the worm color has to match not only the color of water but the amount of light penetration. In other words, the deeper you go, the darker the worm should be; however, chartreuse seems to work well in any water. Two-color worms are also very productive in most situations at Lake Weiss. Red's core worms, which mix colors like red and green, work very good in bright sunlight."

Besides the other lures that Gunter

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WEISS ... Continued

employs, he loves to cast topwater baits like the Zara Spook and Rapala over some of the same areas. These are especially good during early morning, late evening or on overcast days during the spring.

Another Lake Weiss angler, Reed Biggers, catches bass differently than Mike Gunter. Biggers, however, is a tournament fisherman and utilizes a more tournament-style approach. He started competitive fishing in 1987 in smaller, local and club tournaments on Lake Weiss. Though he had little more than farm pond or small-stream bass experience, Reed quickly developed exceptional instincts for catching bass and started winning many of the local tournaments. He also teamed with Larry Beard, and they have done very well on several of the buddy tournament trails.

Biggers has spent hundreds of hours learning everything he could about Lake Weiss. He credits many other expert fishermen from the area for sharing their knowledge, especially Buddy Touchstone for teaching him crankbait techniques on Lake Weiss.

"A spinnerbait, buzzbait and jig are usually my best baits at Lake Weiss, especially near the backs of creeks that have well-defined channels," revealed Biggers. "A good example of one of the best areas is Brushy Branch on the Georgia side. You can go under a culvert to get to the very back of this creek and fish the stumps. Bass in Weiss relate to these stumps."

Biggers prefers the "Okeechobee Special" and the "Falcon" spinnerbait with No. 7 willow-leaf gold blades. If the water is heavily stained, he uses a chartreuse and

white skirt, but during periods of normal stain, he selects a plain white skirt.

When using buzzbaits, Biggers likes the 3/8-ounce Lunker Lure with a white skirt, but he has had success with the "Buzzard" buzzbait as well. He has tried numerous colors of blades on these, but he believes that the nickel-colored blades are fine.

When the spinnerbait and buzzbait become ineffective, Biggers changes to a jig-and-pig and fishes many of the same areas and cover that he would with a spinnerbait or buzzbait. His favorite is the Stanley 3/8-ounce black jig with a Walmart "Bo-Hog" pork frog in black and blue colors. He flips this into any visible cover, and Lake Weiss has plenty.

"It's not necessary to go out and plant underwater brushpiles," Biggers said. "It has more than enough natural laydowns or blowdowns along the shores to keep any angler busy forever. The best of these, however, are the ones that extend from the bank out into the shallow creek channels. Lake Weiss is a flipper's paradise, especially near the backs of the creeks."

Stumps are a prime structure for big bass. Using good polarized sunglasses, you'll see hundreds of stumps appear as dark spots below the surface, and probably half of them will hold bass that can be caught by accurately flipping a jig.

Another pattern that has worked well for Reed Biggers requires the use of an older, no longer manufactured crankbait. The lure was made by Bagley's Bait Company and is called the B-Flat. This is a wooden, shallow-running crankbait with a squared-off plastic bill and, according to Biggers, is the most productive crankbait on Lake Weiss.

The prime targets for this crankbait are rows of stumps near or along any creek channel. One only has to cast the lure past the stumps, then with a slow retrieve, bump the tops of the stumps. The numbers of big bass caught with this method are amazing.

Biggers and other knowledgeable Lake Weiss bass anglers are constantly digging through lure selections in tackle shops around the country to find these out-of-date lures in the "Grey Ghost" color pattern. However, if they find any old B-Flats on a shelf somewhere, they will buy the baits in any color and paint them.

Reed Biggers considers Brushy Branch as the best creek on the Georgia side of Lake Weiss. All of his methods produce big stringers of bass in this tributary for several reasons.

"Lots of tournaments are held out of Brushy," said Biggers. "Since most of the fish are released here and they are often caught in other areas of the lake, Brushy Branch is constantly being restocked with nice bass. Also, the creek has everything that is needed to hold these fish. It has plenty of deeper water, lots of structure and good water quality."

Despite his affection for Brushy Branch, Biggers has found a few other creeks that produce well. One of these is Ballplay Creek on the Alabama side of Lake Weiss, which is located about 10 miles south of Brushy Branch. This creek winds back for about a mile, then opens up and divides into two separate creeks. The backs of both of these creeks are laced with stump rows, which are excellent fishing places.

Another great creek is Pooles Ferry, which is just east of Ballplay

Creek. Though this creek is on the same side of the Coosa River, it is laid out differently. Because of its nearness to the main-river channel, it appears as a wide-open body of water or large cove, but it eventually narrows down to a stumpy, narrow creek channel that often produces lots of healthy bass.

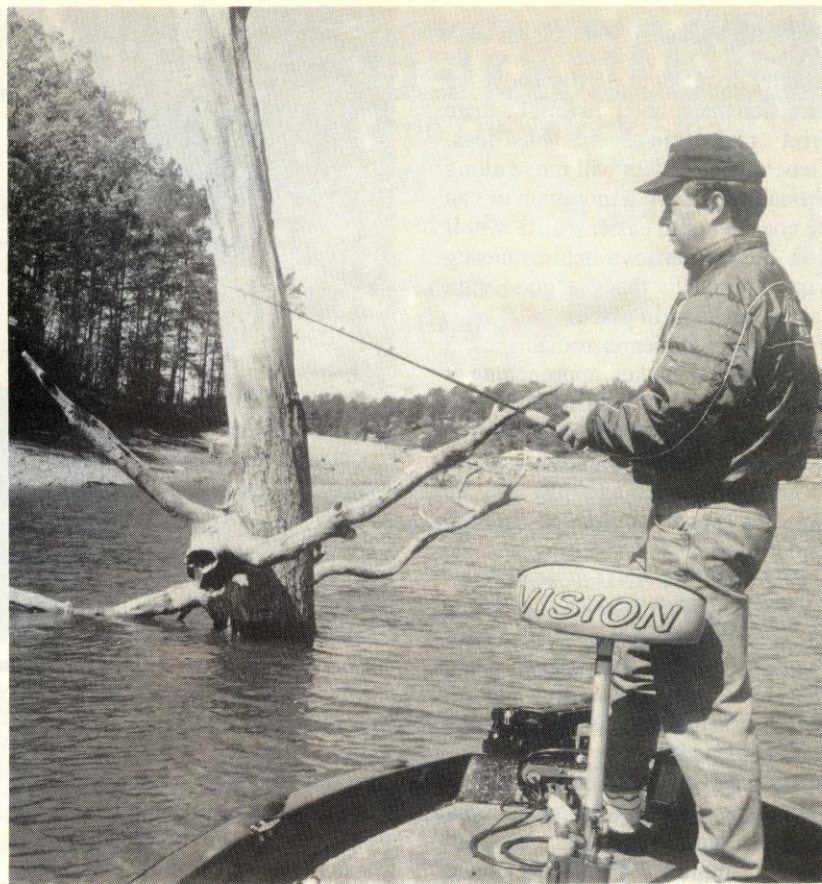
Mud Creek is also a favorite haunt of big bass. It is located on the south side of the Coosa River, but fairly close to the mouths of both Ballplay Creek and Pooles Ferry. Instead of the heavy stumps like in the other creeks, Mud Creek has a defined creek channel that winds through a number of islands near its juncture with the lake. According to Biggers, lots of big bass are taken each year from this arm of Lake Weiss.

Besides these areas, the Chattooga River, which winds its way down through Gaylesville, can be dynamite during the spring. In fact, numerous tournaments are won each year in the upper portion near the town.

"I can remember winning one particular tournament with a 7-bass limit, which weighed 38 pounds, from the Chattooga River," said Biggers. "All these fish were caught over the top of stumps with a white buzzbait."

The key structure in the Chattooga River arm of the lake is the same as in other parts of Lake Weiss — stumps! Plenty of these are visible just below the surface and quite close to the river channel anywhere north of state Highway 68, which connects Gaylesville with Cedar Bluff.

In recent years, Lake Weiss has also become well-known for a growing population of big spotted bass. Though these feisty members of the black bass family are found all over the lake, they seem to



Methodist minister and fishing guide Mike Gunter checks out some of Weiss' woody cover for a largemouth. Photo by Bill Vanderford.

congregate near the Riverside Campground area, east of Pooles Ferry. More specifically, a huge log-jam exists along the river out in front of the campground area, and it seems to hold plenty of spotted bass. These fish can be caught with spinnerbaits, topwater lures or jig-and-pigs fished in or around these logs.

Besides this particular area, spotted bass are easily caught from the Riverside Campground down-river to Yancey's Bend, which is a huge crook in the river. The best part of this section is where logs have

become jammed in the old stumps on the edge of the river channel from the campground down to below Pruett's Island on the north side of the river.

Whether it's largemouth or spotted bass you seek, an April fishing trip to Lake Weiss can be the answer to a spring daydream. All one has to do is heed these experts' advice and the fertile waters of Lake Weiss will do the rest! □