Center Hill Lake is one of the most beautiful Lakes in the United States and provides year around fishing. Other Lakes are more productive during their peak seasons; however, Center Hill will beat any Lake that comes in second. The bread and butter fish for Center Hill Lake is the small-mouth bass. A typical limit of bass would include five small-mouth, three large-mouth and two Kentucky-spotted bass. I am sure that there are large-mouths in Center Hill that exceed thirteen pounds, small mouth that exceed twelve pounds (which would be larger than the Dale Hollow World record, and Kentucky-spotted bass that exceed six pounds. Large-mouth have been reported caught that exceed twelve pounds, small-mouth that exceed nine pounds and Kentucky-spotted bass that exceed five pounds.

Very seldom are large numbers of bass caught in rapid succession. The best strings are the result of hours of patient fishing. There are few anglers that can truthfully admit to a better-than-one fish per hour overall average, which is better than most other Lakes can attest.

The most important first step to consistent Bass fishing Center Hill is to determine the depth at which the fish are located. You might ask fishermen who have recently returned the depth at which they caught fish. Most fishermen don't mind divulging this information. Sometimes, however, it is touchy to ask a fisherman where he caught fish. Another means for locating the depth for productive fishing is by using a "research" lure. This lure should be a sinking-type lure--one that you have confidence in, and one with which you have consistently caught fish. You should cast very close to the bank and carefully keep in mind the approximate depth that you either catch your first fish or receive your first bite. If the fishing is slow, this could be a timely process, therefore, you could save yourself considerable valuable fishing time by a few, well placed questions.

When questioning returning fishermen, pay little attention to the type bait on which they say they caught fish. You are much better off fishing a bait that you have confidence in and know how to fish. If a fisherman says he caught his fish on a "Dipsy Doodle" lure, and you have never heard of this lure, you certainly don't know how to handle it. Don't waste your time chasing lures. Once you have established the depth at which to fish, cast a lure you know how to handle into this depth the majority of time and make long, sliced or parallel casts, thereby keeping your bait in productive water a higher percentage of the time. This means more fish. Weather conditions have a lot to do with productivity of a fishing trip. Center Hill fishing is a lot like Duck Hunting, the rougher the weather, the better the fishing. Rainy, cloudy, windy conditions seem to be best. Never shy away from a windy bank. When water sloshes upon the bank it becomes aerlated with a higher oxygen content and washes food off the bank for the fish to eat. This brings them closer and makes them easier to find. Many fishermen believe in the barometer; however, I think that barometric conditions affect fishermen more than fish. I personally feel that high or low barometric readings have little effect on good fishing. The good effect from barometric conditions occur with a rise (associated with the passage of a cold front for example). Stable water level seems to be essential for good fishing on Center Hill Lake. A rapid drop or rise in water level will certainly send the fish deep and make them lose their tendency to bite.

During the Summer, Bass fishing is most productive at night. Walleye are caught mostly by trolling and are occasionally caught along with night bass fishing. In the early Summer, night lantern fishing produces most of the Stripes. Crappie are caught in fallen tree tops. Bream are caught mostly on small spinning lures, crickets and worms fished early and late in shady spots.

Summer night fishing for bass is accomplished in complete darkness. Most fisherman prefer to fish by moonlight; however, this is not completely essential. The stars will generally furnish enough light to see the bank. Dark, shaded banks, seem to produce best; however, this not necessarily the case.

Law now requires that boat lights be on during night fishing. This does not seem to have any adverse effect of fishing.

It would appear, while boat riding on Center Hill Lake that this lake was formed by damming a valley in the midst of numerous steep hills. On the other hand, if you were to fly over this Lake, you would note that it is more like a canyon that has been dammed, and all the surrounding countryside is level. Smithville, Silver Point, McMinnville and the surrounding highlands have an elevation above Sea level of about eleven hundred feet, while the Lake elevation is approximately five hundred feet lower. In other words, any approach that you make to the lake will generally be down steep roads into this canyon-like formation. There are four types of banks that make up the "canyon walls" that run into the water.

First the rock bluffs which are near vertical can provide excellent fishing under certain water level conditions. Always at the bottom of a bluff there will be broken chunk rock and debris that make cover for the fish. The merit of a bluff, as far as good fishing is concerned, depends on how far behind the water the bottom of the bluff lies. If the bluff is located on the outside sweep of the old river channel, fish depth has been established at a distance at fifteen to twenty-five feet, and this is the level of the base of the bluff, then this particular bluff will provide good fishing. As you have probably already surmised, a particular bluff might be good under low water conditions and poor under high water conditions, or vice-versa.

The second type bank I wish to discuss is the steep, rocky bank. This is the most commonly fished bank on the lake. Good fishermen prefer the points and projections that are common to this extremely sloped (45 degrees + angle), chunked rock bank. Again, the location of these banks in relation to the sweeps of the old river channel is important.

The third type of banks is the shallow rocky points and pockets. These types of banks are best in the summer and winter, and should be fished deep out at a fairly good distance from the shoreline. Sub-surface vibrating lures produce well during the spring. This type of bank makes excellent walleye trolling.

The last type of bank that I shall discuss is the shallow gravel points and pockets. I do not mean gravel as commonly understood. Gravel on Center Hill is composed of small, sharp, angular chert rock, yellow-orange and brown in color. Small minnows school over these areas, thereby attracting all kinds of game fish. These areas provide excellent walleye trolling and bait fishing. They provide excellent surface "jump" fishing. The best locations for gravel banks depend upon their proximity to the old channel, either at the mouths or backs of creeks.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a great deal of "research" involved in successful fishing. You will recall that I mentioned a "research" lure in order to find the correct depth. I hereby advocate a "research" bank in order to find the second dimension for successful fishing. It is too commonly accepted that the steep, rocky banks are the only good banks on which to fish. All banks provide good fishing at certain times. I suggest that a sweep bank on the old river channel that runs from gravel, to mud and rock, to steep rocky, and on to bluff be first fished and considered your "research" bank. You should take note of the type bank that you catch fish on and continue this type bank for the remainder of your trip. You have established a fishing pattern.

One type of bank that I do not advocate is the slick, muddy bank. This condition, in combination with chunk limestone, is quite often good; however quite often feed near the bank during the night. Always fish near valleys and points that are close to where water runs into the lake.

FLY AND RIND The Fly and Rind is a combination of realistic fly and bait attached, trailed by a cut piece of pork rind or plastic. Other baits will be more productive during their particular season, but over-all, the year around, no bait will catch more fish, from Center Hill Lake, than the Fly and Rind. This bait produces more fish annually than all the other baits combined. The Fly and Bind bait is probably the most misunderstood type of bait fished as far as fishing methods are concerned. Many fishermen ruin the natural action of the park rind with excessive speed and/or "pumping action" produced by the tip of the rod. For light flies (1/16 ounce to 1/4 ounce) the desired action can be achieved by merely slowing turning the reel handle with little or no rod action whatsoever. When retrieving the Fly and Rind, maintain the light line principle, which means retrieving the fly only fast enough to keep it off the bottom. The heavier flies (3/8 ounce to 5/8 ounce) are best fished by "stepping" them off the bottom. This is not an exaggerated move; merely lift the rod tip slightly and allow the fly to settle from ledge to ledge. This is an excellent bait when fish are deep on steep, rocky banks. Usually fish will not strike the heavier flies to include the hook. They will "mouth" the pork rind and run with it. When you feel this slight tugging action, drop your rod tip and allow the fish room and time to take the hook. After a five to ten second pause allow the line to become almost tight, and set the hook with a brisk, upward motion. Set the hook immediately on strikes from Lighter Flies.

PLASTIC WORMS Plastic worms produce well during the spring, when flashed practically as a top water bait. Use a four to eight pound test line and a light number 2/0 hook. Thread the hook through the head of the worm until the eye of the hook is covered and allow the hook point to be exposed. Make long slice casts of 45 degrees angle into bush or stumped areas and retrieve the worm only fast enough to remain in sight. This will be approximately one to three feet below the surface. Twitch the tip of the rod to produce a slight snakelike motion, and do not exaggerate. Most of the time you will see the bass approach and strike, thus, making this an exciting way to fish. Weighted worms produce well during summer nights, fished near the banks, and during summer and winter days fished deep. It is best to rig the plastic worm weedless by turning the point of the hook as described above, back into the body of the worm. Use a one-half ounce slip sinker (Bullet or egg) ahead of the hook. Fish this arrangement as above described for the heavy Fly and Rind.

NOISY SURFACE LURES: Surface lures such as Jitterbug and Heddon Spook produce well all the months of the year except the winter months. These baits should be fished early and late during the Spring and Fall, and at night during the summer. The best results are produced by long parallel cast one to two feet from the edge of the water with a fairly fast, constant speed retrieve. For instance, for the Jitterbug the speed should be slightly under the speed which would cause the lure to leave the water and dance about.

SPRING LIZARDS: The most common method of fishing Spring Lizards is accomplished in combination with a 1/4th ounce fly and light spinning tackle. Lizards are an exceptionally good night bait and are fished in the same manner as the weighted worm or heavy fly-perhaps a little slower.

CRAWFISH: Crawfish are best fished in combination with a small split-shot sinker attached approximately eight inches up the line. The bait should be hooked through the tail and cast near the edge and very slowly worked out into deeper water. Large numbers of bass are taken each year at the tails of creeks where clear water runs into dingy or muddy water. The fishermen fish from the bank and cast the crawfish into the edge of the clear water and wait for the run.

LARGE MINNOWS: Large minnows are very effective for taking Bass and Walleye in the summer and winter when cast from the bank into deep water off of gravel and/or rocky points. The "creek" minnow is hooked through the lip, and it is best to use a small split-shot in combination with a one half ounce egg sinker attached approximately eight inches up the line from the minnow-the egg sinker nearest the rod. This sinker arrangement allows the fish to "mouth" the minnow and make a "run". The fish will feed through the egg sinker and thereby keep the fish from feeling the weighted resistance.

The minnow is cast into deep water with the line free to be released on condition at the reel. Usually a fisherman casts out three lines. He then waits for a jerking motion and feeding out of line associated with a "run". By the time the run ceases the fisherman should have the rod and reel in hand and be prepared to take up the slack and set the hook.

Walleye can be taken during the winter at the Pates Ford Area and to the lake headwaters by the above method. Primarily small mouth, and an occasional walleye, are taken by this method at the lower end of the lake.

SMALL MINNOWS: Small minnows are used primarily for crappie and bream fishing (refer to crappie fishing).

LIVE WORMS: Refer to jigging under pole fishing, trolling, trout and walleye fishing.

Small red worms are one of the best baits to use for bream.

CRICKETS: Crickets are best used for bream, trout and occasionally bass. They may be used by pole fishing, light spinning tackle, or fly rod in combination with or without sinkers.

SMALL LEAD SPINNERS and "DO-NOTHING TYPES LURES: Center Hill Lake is ideal fishing water for Charlie Brewer's crazy head "do-nothing" lures. His slider should be fished the same as the light Fly and rind, however a perpendicular cast to the bank will pay off better than a parallel cast or long slice. The "whirly" Bee", "Queen Bee", Spirite, little George "Gum Drop" Small lead spinners pay off when fished extra slow and allowed to settle down slopes and points.

SPINNER BAITS. Possibly the best bet for catching bass at nite is the single spin type of spinner baits. These baits pay off best when cast at a 45 angle to the bank and worked down the slope at a very slow retrieve. You should feel the bottom rocks and stumps and feel the lure only fast enough to feel the blade, "thumping".

NIGHT LANTERN FISHING is accomplished by fishermen anchoring their boat in twenty to fifty-feet water and by using high intensity lights to attract minnows. These lights are usually laterns such as the Coleman lantern, with a reflective shield, mounted over the edge of the boat so as to reflect a high amount of light over the water surface. As insects and minnows are attracted, game fish such as striped white bass, crappie and walleye follow these bait fish to the lights.

The locations of these fishing spots are easy during the spring, early summer and fall in that the novice fisherman can see where all the general vicinity, drop anchor and get rigged out. If you were to fly over Center Hill Lake at night during the spring, you would think that there is a large city below, because of the amount of light produced by the fishermen.

Medium size minnows are the best bait-fished on more than one rod and reel. In the beginning most fisher men start with one rod set to fish near the surface and one rod set to fish near the bottom. The fisherman varies the depth of the two rigs until fishing action is established, and the most productive depth is determined. Quite often the fisherman will cast with slow retrieve, a third rod, rigged, without a float, fifty or sixty feet out from the boat and allow the minnow to sink and swing in an arc until the bait is directly below the boat.

Try fishing a weighted treble hook with a 1/16 oz. White Fly tied two feet above the Treble Hook on an 8 inch leader off the main line. Lower this rig down below the shad minnows and lift sharply until you snag a minnow on the treble hook. Then let the rig slowly fall and you most likely will have a stripe, walleye or crappie hit the snagged shad. When you get the first fish hooked, allow it to run around awhile, and it will be only a matter of seconds until another fish will hit the white fly. This way you watch two at a time!

Walleye are one of the most sought after game fish on Center Hill Lake, Fishermen from all over the United States travel to here, and are usually quite successful in producing limit catches of this tasty fish. Chances for catching an unusually large walleye are possible, in that the world record was taken from Old Hickory Lake, not too distant from here. Years ago it was common to catch Walleye exceeding fifteen pounds during their spawning to the headwaters of the lake. These large walleye were the old original Caney Fork River walleye. However, most of the walleye caught today are the smaller, stocked variety.

Most walleye and bass caught during the summer daylight hours are taken as a result of trolling. The most productive walleye trolling rig is the spinner-night crawler worm combination.

It is quite often productive to cast small lead spinning lures such as the Spin Rite and Little George into locations where walleye have been caught trolling. This is because walleye school, and if one fish has been caught you will probably find others nearby. As a matter of instruction, the small spinning lures should be fished as indicated pertaining to the "tight line" method for Fly and Rind.

Crappie are usually caught in the fallen tree tops, submerged bushes, debris, etc. The important thing to establish when crappie fishing is the depth at which the fish will bite. This can be best accomplished by fishing two lines, fishing with one line baited near the bottom of one line baited approximately twelve inches below the surface. Vary the bait depths of the two lines upward and downward until fishing action is established.

The best baits for crappie are either small leadheaded jigs or small minnows fished on a #4 to #8 hook.

Jump fishing is a term that applies to fishing for game fish that surface-feed on shad minnows. This feeding is quite frequent in the late spring and fall months and is apparent when fish are observed churning the smooth surface of the water. This condition could take place in almost any portion of the lake, and in particular, the locations providing gravel banks near the mouth of creeks or near the old river channels. It is a good idea to have one rod and reel prepared for jump fishing at all times during the "jump" seasons. This is generally true when traveling from one location to another. You could come upon "jumps" and have an immediate need for a prepared fishing outfit.

When arriving in a "jump" area, don't chase from one jump to another, or you will find that you are always late and that the "jump" has subsided. The best tactic is to locate as near as possible to the center of the "jump" activity and concentrate your action on nearby schools of shad minnows. Sooner or later the game fish will feed on the school of shad that you are watching. If the shad schools are large, use sinking type lures (spinrite, fly and rind, sliders, etc.) If the schools are small, use noisy top water lures, tiny torpedo, jitterbug or vibrating subsurface lures. The Zerra Spook is an excellent top water lure and jump lure.

When the "jump" commences, determine the direction in which it is moving, cast slightly ahead and beyond the movement thereby breaking your lure directly across the nose of the feeding fish.

Finally, above all when fishing this lake, consider other fishermen. Never move ahead of another fisherman who is "plugging" the bank. When approaching fishermen in a creek or narrow body of water always slow down to idle speed and pass, making as few waves as possible. Never, never go by at half throttle, as this speed produces the maximum amount of waves. It is better to go by at full throttle than at half throttle.

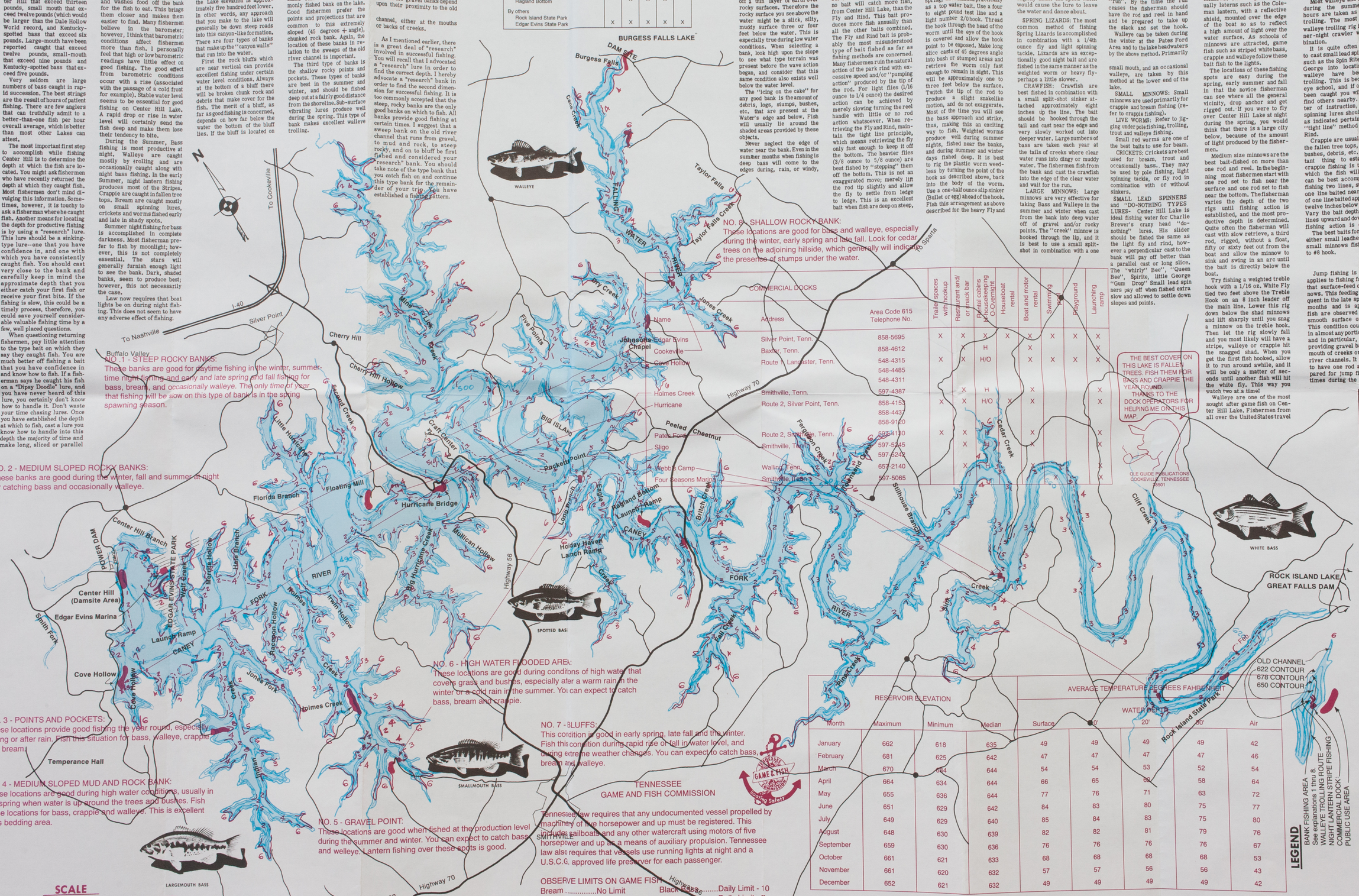
Always be humane. If you do not intend on eating the fish that you catch, release them in good condition. In general, always be considerate of the fish and your fellow fisherman.

Happy fishing and safe boating.

Bill Maffett

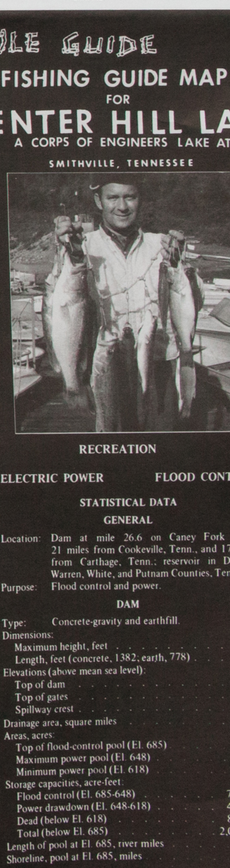
All developed camping areas open 15th April and close for winter on 1st November.

RECREATION AREAS / CORPS OF ENGINEERS	Launching ramp	Camping	Picnic area	Comfort station	Drinking water
Buffalo Valley	X	X	X	X	X
Center Hill (Damsite Area)	X	X	X	X	X
Cove Hollow	X	X	X	X	X
Floating Mill	X	X	X	X	X
Holmes Creek	X	X	X	X	X
Hurricane Bridge	X	X	X	X	X
Johnsons Chapel	X	X	X	X	X
Puckets Point	X		X		
Ragland Bottom		X	X	X	
By others					
Rock Island State Park					
Edgar Evins State Park	X	X	X	X	X



RESERVOIR ELEVATION

Month	Maximum	Minimum	Median
January	662	618	635
February	681	625	642
March	670	634	644
April	664	634	644
May	655	636	644
June	651	629	642
July	649	629	640
August	648	630	639
September	659	630	636
October	661	621	633
November	661	620	632
December	652	621	632

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE DEGREES FAHRENHEIT

Month	WATER DEPTH Surface	10'	20'	30'	Air
January	49	49	49	49	42
February	47	47	47	47	46
March	54	54	53	52	54
April	66	65	62	58	64
May	77	76	71	63	72
June	84	83	80	75	77
July	85	84	83	75	80
August	82	82	81	79	76
September	76	76	76	76	67
October	68	68	68	68	53
November	57	57	56	56	43
December	49	49	49	49	42