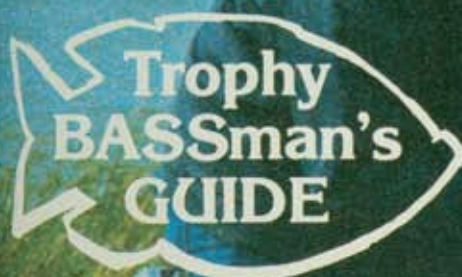


BASSmaster's TROPHY BASS TRIP **Central FLORIDA**

Bob Forrester averages catching 20 bass per year in the 10-pound class on Toho. This one, a 9½-pounder, didn't make the trophy class! Stuart Norfleet of Orlando shares the thrill.



GO TO TOHO FOR BIG BASS

Compiled By MORRIS GRESHAM

The standard hold on a rod and reel here is the two-handed, white-knuckle "Florida Grip." On any cast, a monster bass can rip the tackle from your grasp . . .

Sound like a bunch of bunk? Florida's biologists report, "There's a 10-pound bass for every five acres of lake." This super bass factory covers over 21,000 acres. Here's where, when, how-to land your trophy bass . . .

Bass fishing professionals coach plastic worm fishermen to be "line watchers." The pros might even learn something fishing behind burly Bob Forrester.

"You left a good fish in that pocket," informed Forrester as I reeled up the dark plastic worm.

"How do you know there's a bass there?" asked the puzzled me. I'd just frailed the pocket with a perfect cast.

"A couple of days ago, I hooked a good 'un in there," said the Lake Tohopekaliga guide, "but what makes me suspicious is that I saw the grass move just before you threw."

Bob Forrester's hunk of plastic splashed beside the reeds, then slipped through the grass. Brother, it never reached bottom!

My guide reared back with all the muscle in his 205-pound frame. The butt-stiff rod in his beefy hands buckled into a U-shape. Forrester continued to muscle the fish to the surface.

The shock faded, and I scrambled for the net. Then, watched helplessly as the biggest bass I've ever seen pulled loose — not six-feet from the boat.

It's a misnomer to "weigh" a bass without landing it. However, we both have calibrated eyeballs. Forrester, a veteran Florida guide used to such things, judged the bass at 12 to 13-pounds. This Bassmaster considers the figure "conservative."

The thought of such a trophy bass sends average Bassmasters into cold shakes. It was the reason for this Texas-based basser to be in the middle of a grass patch in central Florida. I was stunned by the pace of events. Forrester's bass boat was launched from Red's Fish Camp less than an hour. It was mid-afternoon in mid-May.

While pondering the size of Forrester's lost trophy, there was a TAP-TAP at my door. A coiled rattlesnake couldn't have reacted faster or more deadly. The battle lasted 10 seconds. The 25-pound mono turned chicken. It was brand new line, and freshly tied to a new hook and worm...

Visions of those two trophy bass kept me on edge the following morning, as travelin' buddies Dan Tucker and Dee Levins of Dallas, and this nerve-scattered basser plunked plastic into the matted grass. Bob Forrester, a B.A.S.S. member and helpful soul, had a guide party. He'd advised us where to fish.

The Texas trio whipped a few fish, missed a few, and then it happened again. After the previous day's initial

TACKLE, TIPS & TECHNIQUES

HOW BIG BASS GUIDES FISH WEST LAKE TOHO

■ Bassmaster Bob Forrester has earned an enviable bassin' reputation during seven years on Florida's Lake Toho. He totes an average of 20 ten-pound-plus largemouths to the scales each year; his largest bottoming out at 14-pounds 4-ounces.

At 6-foot, 205-pounds, the husky Forrester has the strength to handle any situation, including the Toho monsters. The 40-year-old West Virginia native began his Florida bassin' in 1957. His fishing experience began long before that, and he has the scars to prove it. Forrester's father hooked him behind the left ear with a plug. His age at the time? A tender two-years!

After part-time guiding, Forrester turned his bassin' into a business in 1975. Now, he averages 200-days a year searching out Toho's lunkers. The remainder is spent on other lakes tuning up for or competing in bass fishing tournaments.

An active bass clubber, Forrester served two terms as president of Orlando's Lunker Busters. This avid Bassmaster is a member of the Florida B.A.S.S. Federation, as well as several other fishing organizations. He headquarters at Red's Fish Camp on Toho.

The following trophy bassin' tips are Bob Forrester's proven techniques and suggestions for getting a trophy bass into your boat:

BASIC TACKLE

There's no compromise. Get a heavy rod with good tip action, and a good level-wind reel loaded with high-quality, 25-pound test line.

"If a fisherman comes down here with a spinning reel and a whippy rod, I tell him to put it back in the car," says Forrester. "That tackle might be suitable for some lakes, but it's not worth a darn on Toho. He'd get just as many bass in the boat with a piece of cheap twine and a willow stick."

Every Bassmaster has his own preferences in tackle. Here are Bob Forrester's: Fenwick rods, Ambassador baitcasting reels, 25-pound Maxima line, 4/0 Mustad hooks and Jake's Producer worms.

WORKING THE GRASS

For fishing Toho's grass, a 12/24-volt trolling motor is preferred and a basket weedguard is essential. Otherwise, you'll waste time clearing grass off the prop. Some of this matted grass is impossible to get through. A handy item to have aboard is an eight or nine-foot push pole. Just lift both motors out of the water and pole the boat. This cuts noise down to a minimum.

Any time you use the big motor to get through grass, clean the prop. Put the outboard in reverse, give it half throttle, pull forward and reverse it again. Repeat the operation until the prop is clean. But, lift the motor to check both the prop and the water pickup for obstructions. "If you don't, that grass can burn up an engine in a couple of minutes," says Forrester.

OBSERVING MOVEMENT

A good pair of tinted glasses are necessary to see clearly into the water. Wear polarized lenses if you have them. "Observation is important because in this heavy grass, you must drop the worm right on the fish," says Forrester. "I constantly watch the grass all around the boat for any unusual movement — even in a 15 to 20-mile an hour wind. Then, after I've seen the movement, I throw directly at that particular fish."



Bassmasters Ed Chancey, left, and Bob Forrester launch lunker hunts from Red's Fish Camp on Lake Toho. There are several fish camps spotted around this 21,000-acre lake.

(Photo By M. L. OLIVER, Marion Gazette)



Keep your eyes open on Toho. Clusters of snail eggs on reeds often signal the location of largemouth bass. The fish bump the reeds to dislodge the eggs, according to local lunker lore.

"If you miss him by six or eight-inches, you've just missed him," inserts Forrester. "Pick an area no larger than two-feet around the spot of the movement, and chunk that worm all over it. Doodle sock it up-and-down in each spot."

Especially keep an eye on cane reeds. "Bass often hit a reed hard enough to make it resemble a buggy whip," advises Forrester. "If you're not paying attention, that fish will be out there doing its thing, and you'll miss him."

Many fishermen fail to see fish movement because they're line watchers. "I never watch the line while I'm fishing, but go directly by feel. That leaves my eyes free to look for the next bass," Forrester says.

CASTING THE WORM

The first problem is getting the plastic worm down through the grass. "Find small holes in the grass and slide the rig right down through them," says Forrester. "If there is no hole, you've got to make one. Slap that worm down as hard as you can throw it — just beat it through the grass."

Both the 1/2-ounce sinker and the hook should be toothpicked in place to hold the rig together when it slams into the grass. The worm should also be well lubricated with oil so that it will slide on through the grass instead of sticking.

"Never make a cast more than 10-feet away in the heavy grass," says Bob Forrester. "If you see a fish moving 12-feet from the boat, move at least a couple of feet toward it with the push pole. Then, lay the worm in there. It's 75 percent fish and 25 percent bass fisherman out here. The bass is the king, and you'll have to be on the ball to get him in."

WORM TYPES AND COLORS

The most important thing in a plastic worm for Toho is a heavy, high floating tail — a highly visible worm that won't stick to grass and reeds. A good coat of lubricating oil is essential.

"In my opinion, the worm that fills the bill on Toho is Jake's Producer. That's the only one I use on this particular lake," says Forrester. "I only use three colors; blue grape, black grape and black. Normally, I fish the eight-inch worm unless bass are taking the tails off. Then, I'll drop down to a seven or maybe even a six-inch model. I don't recommend threading the hook further down into the worm to catch short strikers. That kills part of the action."

Whichever length you choose, run the hook through 1/4-inch of the top of the worm, and then turn it back inside in the standard Texas rig.

"Once in a while bass will pile up in the deep grass, and won't hit anything," Forrester says. "At those times, a 10-inch worm will sometimes trigger them off, and you can tear 'em up."

HOOKING THE FISH

According to Bassmaster Forrester, when you set the hook, you'd better bring the bass to the top. "Set it like you were going to jerk him straight into the boat," says the veteran guide. "If you wait for that second tap or give the bass time to take up the slack, it'll wind you through the grass like an old lady weaving a sweater. And, you'll never get him out — no way. When you feel that first bump, nail him and move him fast!"

You seldom catch a small bass in the heavy grass. It's the domain of larger bass. "And, when a bass takes the worm, it's moving with it," says Forrester. "With a big bass, there's often no tap-tap — just one big YANK. And, brother, you'd better be ready or that hawg is going to take your rod and reel with him."

When you do hook a bass in the grass where there was almost no opening, you'll understand the importance of the heavy rod and stout line. "After setting the hook, rear back and fight because that bass is going through the grass," grins Bob Forrester. "You'll lose a few fish by horsing them — usually because the hook catches in a soft portion of its mouth and tears out — but the bass hooked in a bone will have to break your line to keep from coming into the boat."

LOCATING PRODUCTIVE GRASS

Only about 25 percent of Toho's grass doesn't hold bass at one time or another. And, this 25 percent is the area most fishermen want to fish — the sheltered places out-of-staters invariably seek.

"These sheltered areas usually have too shallow water, muck bottoms, maybe some hydrilla — and no fish. But, the rest of the grass is an absolute haven for big bass," swears Bob Forrester.

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tion, I'd begun to practice the standard "Florida grip," a two-handed, white-knuckle grasp on the rod with a bone-jarring hook set. I did my best as the pros say, "To cross his eyes!"

Stung by the 4/0 hook, the bass surged. Dang, if it didn't "feel like a runaway freight train." The fish's lunge ripped the rod loose from my two-handed grip. Then, the hook pulled loose . . .

Don't Let Toho's Looks Fool You

At first glance, Lake Tohopekaliga (simply called "Toho," or "West Lake" by local bassers) is unimpressive. At least, to visiting Texas Bassmasters accustomed to standing timber, flooded creek channels and rocky points of man-made reservoirs.

Toho is approximately 12-miles long and two to four miles at the widest points; a lake with the bottom structure closely resembling that of a five-foot deep dishpan.

West Lake Tohopekaliga, basically a north-south body of water, is just one of several central Florida "bass factories" known as the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. Others on the Kissimmee River are East Lake Tohopekaliga, Cypress Lake, Hatchineha and Lake Kissimmee. The river flows southward into Lake Okeechobee. The entire chain is operated as a flood control and navigation project.

Toho connects to East Lake Tohopekaliga and to Cypress Lake via canals and locks. West Toho contains over 21,000 acres, and is practically within casting distance of Kissimmee and Orlando. Toho has steadily gained a reputation as one of Florida's top trophy bass lakes; many believe it to be the best. The official lake record, caught in May, 1977 is 16.55-pounds, but since early 1975, Toho has produced two other verified lunkers over 15-pounds, and numerous bass over 13.

Ten-pound bass here no longer excite local Bassmasters and guides. Bob Forrester, a full-time Toho guide, caught a dozen bass over 10-pounds during the first five months of 1977. Dick Butler of Big Toho Marina said his parties had accounted for 17 bass over 10-pounds between January and May, 1977, and that perhaps as many as 300 ten-pounders had been weighed in around the lake during the same period. Many big bass are simply released right back into the water, since

they are taken during local bass club tournaments.

Drawdown Program Turned Toho Around

Lake Toho is going through a transformation similar to what happened at Lake Jackson near Tallahassee nearly a decade ago. And, every Bassmaster knows about the incredible numbers of "giant bass" pulled from that Florida lake from 1968 — 1970.

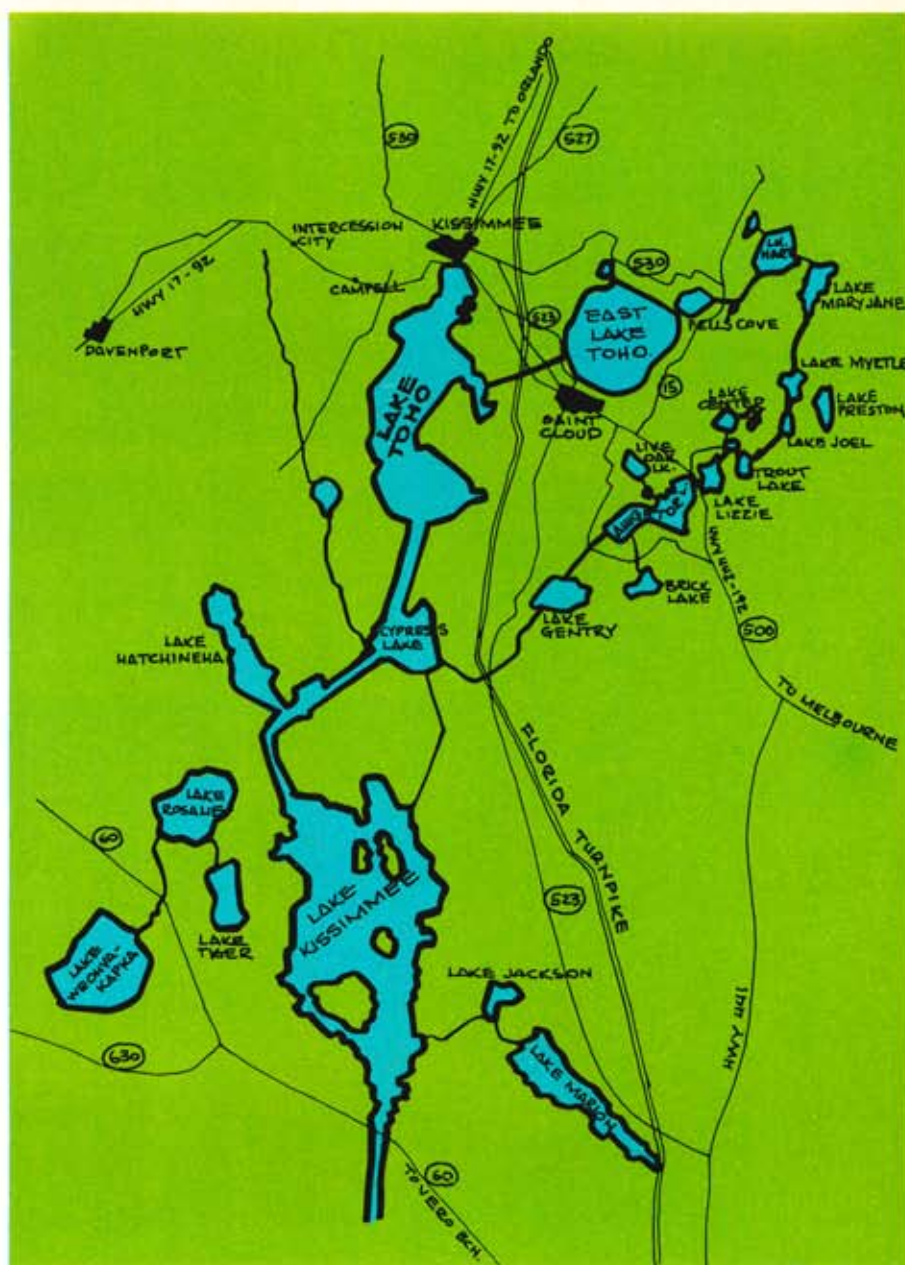
Between 1971 and 1973, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission drained Toho. The lake was used as a "dumping ground" for several Kissimmee and Orlando sewage plants. A water manipulation program was planned to improve the lake's habitat for fish. Biologists requested the lake level lowered seven feet, and be kept down for half a year. With a prolonged drought in central Florida, it took over a year before the lake filled back to full pool.

What happened during the low-water period resulted in a bass boom: shoreline vegetation, biologists call this the littoral zone, increased from around 9,000 acres to over 11,000, which at full pool level is half the lake. The increase in shoreline vegetation affected the entire food chain of the lake. The increased plant life drew increased invertebrate organisms, which in turn attracted baitfish. Bluegill and other baitfish came into the grass to feed, and the bass followed. Sport fish populations nearly doubled.

Sample studies by Florida fisheries biologists on Toho have led to some remarkable discoveries. Netting and shocking surveys have revealed a staggering 455-pounds of fish per acre, about half of it gamefish. **Largemouth bass make up 10 percent of the total gamefish population, and the biologists say there is one bass over 10-pounds for every five acres of lake.**

The grass, of course, is the first thing a visiting Bassmaster notices about Toho, and it forces its own fishing strategy. This is tough *Panicum* grass that may grow as much as two feet above the water line, and when the water is deep enough, the fish are fortified in the middle of it. In spring, when the lake level is usually dropped a foot or two as a flood control measure, the bass are huddled up along the very edge of the grass.

During the warmer months, wading the grass flats is a very popular fishing tactic. There are a few alligators here, and some cottonmouths, but



no die-hard trophy bass hunter has ever let things like that hassle him! Some boat (pig) trails exist through sections of the vegetation, and these offer partial casting access to the big bass hangouts.

Toho Anglers High On Grass

Casting into the grass also causes its own special brand of problems. "It's like casting into barbed wire because it's so tough," says Bob Forrester.

A newcomer quickly discovers why local Bassmasters prefer 25 and 30-pound test mono on extra-stiff rods; once a hawg is hooked, the idea is to get it up on top as quickly as possible before it has a chance to burrow into the weeds.

"It's not unusual during spawning to hang fish that are impossible to

handle," Forrester claims. "They break lines and rods or burn gears out of reels. There's no telling just how big some of those bass must be."

All serious trophy bass angling here centers in or around heavy concentrations of grass. Toho's hawks are rarely hooked in clear, open water. Neither are they pulled easily from a spindly brush top or from behind a single tree stump. These "hawks" dwell amid a veritable maze of obstructions. The kid gloves come off at Toho if you want any chance at a trophy.

Lake regulars recommend either direct drive reels or standard star drag models tightened with pliers all the way down. No drag slip is THE rule. A bass hooked in the grass must be brought immediately to the surface. Directly to the boat . . . or be lost.

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GO TO TOHO FOR BIG BASS . . .

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Horsing in oversized bass results in straightened hooks, broken lines or hooks torn out. However, there's no alternative.

In Lure Poll, Worm Is No. 1

Toho's best lunker producer is the plastic worm. Since a worm is often jigged among grass stems, three to six-feet down, a basser should fish with his rod tip low, pointed toward the lure. This insures a quick hook set. **HOOK and MOVE** a bass quickly is the rule, right!

If the bass hangs in the grass, don't just pull, **JERK HARD!** Several times, if necessary. You have precious few seconds before the lunker twists free. Sure you'll break some off but it's



Bass in the grass calls for these baits: Weed Wing, top left, Johnson Silver Minnow, plastic worm, spinnerbait and buzzer baits. The spoonlike, planing head of the Little Jewel spinner works best here.

Ed Chancey's Toho Record Is 16.55-Pounds

"I Don't Doubt I've Hung THE World Record . . ."



The lake record on Toho is 16.55-pounds. Ed Chancey is proud of his trophy, but claims there are bigger bass in the lake.

(Photo By M. L. OLIVER, Marion Gazette)

Does Florida's Tohopekaliga really hold a bass of world record proportions? Most area Bassmasters answer in the affirmative, including Ed Chancey, a basser intimately familiar with Toho's trophy class lunkers.

Chancey, a 49-year-old Florida native, boasts 30-years of bassin' experience — eight logged on Toho. As a professional guide, Chancey searches for trophy bass some 225 days a year out of Red's Fish Camp, near St. Cloud, Florida.

The search has been unusually productive. Chancey boated 30 bass over 10-pounds during 1976. In 1977, he caught 20 bass which topped the 10-pound mark by July 4th, a track

(Continued on page 60)

the only chance, right. Your first hurdle is choosing the proper worm. My favorite curly-tail types were almost useless in Toho's grass and reeds. The soft, twister-tails wrap and stick to stems, often breaking off.

The ideal worm has a straight body with a broad, relatively thick tail. A local favorite is Jake's Producer, designed for Toho and made in nearby St. Cloud. This worm boasts a broad, high-floating tail and small projections reportedly have increased light refraction, thus increasing its visibility.

Although bass are caught on all sizes and types of worms, the eight-inch length is the top choice. Most locals shun shorter worms except when bass are biting off the tails.

Toho regulars rarely use 10-inch worms or longer . . . those "snakes" that out-of-staters usually picture as the perfect "Florida" worm. Don't rule out the magnum models entirely, however. Bob Forrester says, "At times, a 10-inch worm will sometimes trigger big bass, and you can tear 'em up."

Worm colors for Toho are black, grape, purple and blue. On hooks, opinions vary greatly. The 4/0 Mustad worm hook is mentioned most. Many Bassmasters feel larger hooks kill the action of all but the largest worms. Easily sprung wire hooks should be avoided. Any hook that you can bend with finger pressure can't withstand the strain of a Toho heavyweight.

Proper sinker weight for worming depends upon location and "mood" of

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GO TO TOHO FOR BIG BASS . . .

(Continued from page 36)

the bass, water depth and density of the grass. Locals use weights from 1/4-ounce to none when fishing sparse growth or extremely shallow water. Weightless worms are called for in fishing spawning beds in 18-inches to two-feet of water. Lightly-weighted worms are effective for bass suspended in grass near the surface.

During periods of extreme temperatures, bass often hug the bottom inside the heavy growths. This "pattern" calls for a 3/8-ounce or even 1/2-ounce sinker if 10-inch or larger worms are used. Heavy sinkers are essential to drive the worm into the fish holding zone.

Short, hard casts are necessary in this heavy cover. "The thing most new fishermen do wrong is make long casts in the grass," says Bob Forrester.

Casting with magnum force to drive a worm through this grass necessitates "pegging" both the slip sinker and hook with a toothpick (see illustration). Jam the slip sinker tight against the head of the worm. Without this peg, the worm and sinker often end up on opposite sides of a fallen

stem; above the fish holding zone. Peg the hook to conserve fishing time. Without it, a hard cast often pushes the worm down the hook shank. The toothpick holds the worm in position and straight over more casts.

Two other popular lure types are spinnerbaits and weedless spoons, such as Johnson Silver Minnow and Weed Wing. With these baits, the hooks ride upright and normally nail a bass solidly through the roof of its mouth. On the strike, the fish is already on or near the surface, thus reducing the problem in getting a bass on top.

Both type lures are notorious for drawing short strikes. Slight modifications can eliminate some misses. Open the heavy hook slightly on the weedless spoon to increase its "bite." Trailer hooks should be added to both spinners and spoons. A trailer hook with a wire weedguard is often desirable. Split the end of the wire guard. The weedless effect is retained, but this improves the hooking ability.

Most Toho regulars add a rubber skirt on a spoon. Often, they'll add a trailing worm or pork rind. White and yellow skirts are proper dress during cooler months; black takes over as the weather warms.


One spinnerbait type, the "Little Jewel," has proven very productive. On this spinner, the lead body is replaced with a small planing blade between the hook and tie point. The spoonlike effect, lets the lure sink slowly on a slack line. Then, a steady depth is maintained with a very slow retrieve. Fishing a spinner slowly

How Would B.A.S.S. Pros Tackle TOHO?

On the morning of Oct. 26, 1977, a skilled fleet of 26 bass fishermen set out to catch Toho's "giants." The occasion was the BASS Masters Classic®, a gathering of giants on the pro Tournament Trail.

Folks like Bill Dance, Roland Martin, Ricky Clunn and Big Jim Rogers assembled on this central Florida lake for a practice round, Oct. 25th. Only the week before, had they learned that this grassy fortress would be the site of the annual bassin' "Super Bowl."

How do top anglers ready their bassin' arsenal for a three-day fling at the finny foes? The test-of-the-best will be covered in a **Special Report: "The B.A.S.S. Pros At TOHO,"** in the up-coming February '78 issue of BASSMASTER Magazine.

Who won the world finals of pro B.A.S.S. fishing is certainly important — there's \$25,000 big ones at stake to the winner — but of more interest to fellow members of B.A.S.S. is "how" and "why" the winning results were posted. The BASS Masters Classic® has become the biggest event in freshwater fishing. The Classic "mystery" format is different. Look for the newest happening in your next issue of BASSMASTER Magazine. 

through heavy cover is a decided advantage on Toho; especially during colder weather when lunkers tend to be sluggish.

Hard baits, such as the Devil's Horse or Rapala-type topwater lures, receive occasional mention in early-spring. They're fished in the trails and alleys inside the grass lines when bass are bedding. Crank baits are infrequent producers along the outer edges. The problem crops up after you hook a Toho bass on the gang-hooked baits. If a bass makes it into the grass, there's often one hook dangling that fouls.

And, the lunkers in Toho will definitely be in or near grass, no matter what time of year you choose. Naturally, the pattern can vary from day-to-day, but established patterns normally hold true. (see, "Trip Check Facts").

How To Find Bass On Toho

Exactly which sections of grass are productive depends largely on the food supply. Location of shad movement helps pinpoint bass activity. During peak feeding periods, bass are located visually when they swirl after shad. Watch the grass for movement of bass, two or three-feet beneath the surface, as they push grass aside in their chase.

Likely areas to investigate are reeds with heavy concentrations of white eggs. Snails crawl up the reeds to deposit eggs, usually a patch of 25 to 30, tiny 1/8-inch egg clusters. These

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GO TO TOHO FOR BIG BASS...

(Continued from page 56)

white patches are highly visible and easy to locate.

Bob Forrester believes, "The eggs are the reason you see bass bang into the reeds, to knock those eggs off so they can feed on them."

Because Toho is shallow, high winds can make the lake impossible to fish. The open water is churned into waves, and the coves offer little protection. Shingle Creek, a cypress-lined stream flowing in from the lake's northwest corner, offers some shelter, but few trophy-size bass are taken in the blackish water.

There is one other possibility on Toho when the winds are kicking whitecaps. That's behind South Port Lock in the canal leading to Lake Cypress. At times, the bass fishing here can be absolutely unbelievable.

In February, 1977, Iowa Bassmasters Dick and Elaine Hengl discovered just how super it can be. Anchoring in the tailrace below the lock, they weighed-in the first 20 bass they boated during a day's casting of Rebel Deep-R lures. On the 148.23-pound stringer, one bass weighed 11½-pounds, four more topped 10-pounds and six others weighed over 8-pounds. (See, "The Day They Hit The Bass Bonanza," May/June, 1977 BASSMASTER Magazine.)

When the winds aren't howling,

LAKE TOHO TRIP CHECK REPORT

WEST LAKE TOHOPEKALIGA, FLA. — At over 21,000 acres, Lake Toho is basically a shallow-water lake. The bottom is hard sand, without the usual "structure" of timber, trees or creek channels. The lake's main cover is grass. Average depth is five feet at 53.3 feet elevation. (Lake stage is maintained between elevations 51.5 and 55-foot mean sea level.) Lake is approximately 12-miles long by four-miles wide with over 50 miles of shoreline.

HOW TO GET THERE — Toho's northern shore is practically within casting distance of Kissimmee, Fla., city limits, and some 17 miles south of Orlando, Fla. The Florida Turnpike toll road and U.S. Highways 441 and 192 all pass within a few miles of Lake Toho, located within central Florida.

WHEN TO GO — Trophy-size bass can be caught all year. The best chance for a super "hawg" is during the spawning action of January, February and early-March. This is also the season of heaviest fishing activity. Make advance reservations with guides and motels. Schedule a minimum of an eight-day trip to insure a few good days between cold fronts, which typically shut off the bass action. (Note: A severe Florida winter, like last year, might delay bass spawning a few weeks.) Weather will usually stabilize for the March-June period, which is the second "best" time. Lunkers are taken in July-Sept., but summer heat is uncomfortable. Bass action peaks again in the cooler weather of Oct.-Nov. Locals regard the month of December as the "worst" lunker time.

WHERE TO STAY — Normally there is no shortage of rooms in the Kissimmee, Fla., area. The Rodeway Inn, Dept. BASS, 2050 East Spacecoast Pk., Kissimmee, Fla. 32741 (toll-free reservation Ph. 1-800-228-2000); Days Inn, Dept. BASS, 2095 East Spacecoast Pk., Ph. 1-800-241-7111; Holiday Inn, Dept. BASS, 2145 East Vine, Box 1707, Ph. 1-800-453-5555; Howard Johnson's, Dept. BASS, 2323 Hwy. 192 East, Ph. 1-800-654-2000 are some of the available motels. Limited cabin and trailer accommodations on the lake (see Marinas).

MARINAS — Red's Fish Camp, Dept. BASS, Rt. 2, Box 2238, St. Cloud, Fla. 32769, Ph. (305)-892-5962, camping with hookups, showers, live bait, boat launching, guides. Scotty's Fish Camp, Dept. BASS, Rt. 1, Box 55, Kissimmee, Fla. 32741, Ph. (305)-847-3840, cabins, trailer court, boat launching. Jannis' Fish Camp, Rt. 1, Dept. BASS, Kissimmee, Fla. 32741, Ph. (305)-846-6540, full-service cottages, boat launching. Jannis' Fish Camp, Rt. 1, Dept. BASS, Kissimmee, Fla. 32741, Ph. (305)-846-6540, full-service cottages, boat launching, covered boat slips. Big Toho Marina, 101 Lake Shore Blvd., Dept. BASS, Kissimmee, Fla. 32741, Ph. (305)-846-2124, live bait, tackle repair, gas & oil, guide service. South Port Park contains park center and store, 41 campsites, picnic shelter, etc. For information on South Port, contact: Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, Dept. BASS, P.O. Box V, West Palm Beach, Fla. 33402 or Ph. (305)-348-5822.

MAPS — A basic fishing map of Toho is available from Florida Fishing Maps, Dept. BASS, 25 South Magnolia Ave., Orlando, Fla. 32801 at cost \$2.00, plus postage. Red's Fish Camp (see Marinas) offers a \$1.00 lake map/brochure.

GUIDES — Standard guide rates for two fishermen (at this writing), \$50.00 half day and \$75.00 per day. Advance bookings are recommended for prime lunker seasons. Ed Chancey, Dept. BASS, Rt. 2, Box 2238, St. Cloud, Fla. 32769, Ph. (305)-892-5962, Red's Fish Camp; Bob Forrester, Rt. 2, Dept. BASS, Box 2238, St. Cloud, Fla. 32769, Ph. (305)-295-1257 or Red's Fish Camp; Bill Thompson, Dept. BASS, 512 Betsy Ross Tr., Orlando, Fla. 32809, Ph. (305)-857-1898; also guiding out of Red's Fish Camp are Jack Adams, Ph. (305)-656-3380, and Johnny Adams, Ph. (305)-656-2462. Dick Butler, Big Toho Marina, 101 Lake Shore Blvd., Kissimmee, Fla. 32741, Ph. (305)-846-2124.

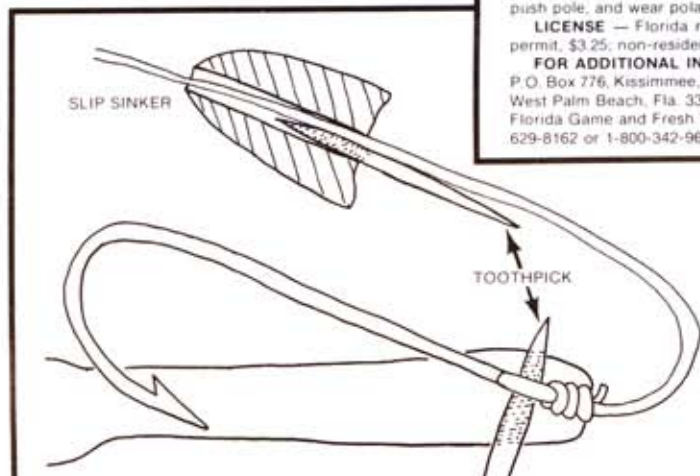
SUGGESTED LURES — Many locals fish the plastic worm in six to eight-inch sizes and black, grape, purple or blue the year around. Generally, spinnerbaits are used during Jan.-Mar. in yellow or white skirts. A trailer hook adds to your score. Bass often take a short worm trailer on both spinners and spoons, like the Johnson's Silver Minnow or Weed-Wing. The black Silver Minnow with black skirt is another year-around local favorite. (Note: Light-colored skirts are recommended for spoons during cooler months; change to black as weather warms. Most popular spoon selection is black.) Plastic worms used here in the grass should be the straightbodied types with relatively thick, high-floating tails. Local guides swear by Jake's Producer Tournament-Grade Worm made in St. Cloud, Fla.

SUGGESTED FISHING PATTERNS — Jan.-Mar.: Bass are normally found inside the grass rows, during the peak spawning activity. This is from inside the edges of the row themselves to water as shallow as 18-inches. Bass can be located on nests in scattered grass in five to six-foot depths. Generally, keep to the shallower water in alleys or pig trails inside the grass rows. Mar.-May: Bass activity starts to move to outside of grass rows. Also, check out scattered patches in open areas. On especially warm days, fish deeper into the heavy cover. June-Sept.: Stick to outside edges of grass rows in deeper water. Watch for shad activity. Also, observe reeds for deposits of snail eggs. If no bass action noted outside, fish the mid-sections of rows where grass is matted. Oct.-Nov.: As weather cools, bass again move into inside edges of the grass. Dec.-early-Jan.: Cold weather and fronts chill bass action. Usually regarded as the poorest time to be fishing Toho. Buzzer baits do get a few licks during early and late in the day.

SUGGESTED FISHING GEAR — Heavy bass rods with thick butt sections, action only in tip. Rugged bait-casting reels spooled with 25 to 30-pound monofilament. (Note: 20-pound mono is the absolute minimum if you're a serious lunker hunter here.) Also, rig a weedguard on 12/24-volt trolling motor, carry an eight to nine-foot push pole, and wear polarized sunglasses.

LICENSE — Florida resident annual, \$3.00; non-resident annual, \$8.00; non-resident 14-day continuous permit, \$3.25; non-resident five-day continuous permit, \$2.25.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION — Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce, Dept. BASS, P.O. Box 776, Kissimmee, Fla. 32741. Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Dist., Dept. BASS, P.O. Box V, West Palm Beach, Fla. 33402. U.S. Corps of Engineers, Dept. BASS, P.O. Box 4970, Jacksonville, Fla. 32201. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Dept. BASS, 1239 S.W. 10th St., Ocala, Fla. 32670, Ph. (904) 629-8162 or 1-800-342-9620.



HOW TO PEG BOTH SLIP SINKER & HOOK

Insert toothpick into the hole in sinker from side nearest the worm. If line size and sinker hole size are insufficient for insertion, the toothpick can be whittled down or chewed slightly. Trim off excess toothpick, taking care not to nick the monofilament. Then, slide the sinker down against the head of the worm. To peg hook in place, insert a toothpick through both the worm and eye of the hook, as illustrated. Trim off excess toothpick on each side of the worm.

there are a number of other spots that consistently produce more trophy bass than others. The west shore of Paradise Island opposite Scotty's Fish Camp is a top spot. Lanier Point and Brown's Point along the lake's west shore are lunker lairs. Friar's Cove and the grass near the South Port Canal have turned in their share of trophies to the taxidermist.

The purpose behind the original Lake Toho drawdown, and subsequent water manipulation program, was to help stimulate peak fisheries production. On Toho, this program — from BASSMASTER'S point of view — is certainly considered a success. At least one other lake in the chain — Lake

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GO TO TOHO FOR BIG BASS . . .

(Continued from page 58)

Kissimmee — is being drawn down for the same reason. It looks like bass fishing may be improving in central Florida for a long time to come.

"Before the drawdown," says Ed Chancey, "the grass was dirty with algae, silt and other things. With the water down, the sun dried out the bottom and a fresh, clean growth came back. The healthy grass, now under water, increased both the oxygen and food supply as well as providing excellent spawning cover."

Since the drawdown, Chancey claims, "We have been steadily catching more big bass." It's difficult to debate the fact with Ed Chancey. He caught the lake record of 16.55-pounds.

For whatever reason, Toho's grass does indeed harbor bass of monstrous proportions. It's difficult to be bored even during slow periods. The next cast might well produce your trophy wall mount or possibly the new world record?



HOW BIG BASS GUIDES FISH TOHO . . .

(Continued from page 33)

You locate bass on Toho by following the shad movement. Bass may be in one place one day, and then move a ¼-mile the next day.

"If the shad are running, you can normally pick up bass by working the edges of the weed-line or back inside 10 or 15 feet," says Forrester. "But if there is no visible shad movement, you might have to get right into the middle of the grass rows that run 35 to 40-yards wide. The larger bass have all the food they need back inside the heavy grass."

Several years ago, spraying reduced certain types of grass on Lake Toho. Forrester says, "The spraying left small patches of heavy grass in areas that used to be solid. Bass migrating from one area to another stop in these small patches to rest and feed on shiners, bream or shad."

"You might find a 10-pound bass behind a single ½-inch diameter cane reed. The hawg will lie out there beside that one little reed thinking it's hidden. Then, he'll take that worm when you drop it on him."

Watch closely in the early-mornings, and you'll find snails climbing up cane reeds to lay eggs. Sometimes three to four feet up the reed they'll lay 25 to 30 eggs.

Bob Forrester says, "These eggs are the reason bass bang into the reeds; to knock the eggs off into the water to feed on."

Anyway, Forrester's experience reveals that reeds with snail eggs hold a lot of big bass in the area. "Just concentrate your fishing where you see those eggs, and you'll find some big bass," asserts the veteran Toho trophy guide.

I DON'T DOUBT I'VE HUNG THE WORLD RECORD . . .

(Continued from page 36)

record that lends credence to his following observations on Toho's lunkers.

"I definitely think there's a world record bass right here in Toho," Chancey says. "So many fishermen have been broken off straight away — not around grass or reeds, but just a straight pull on 25 to 30-pound line. There are bass in Toho that you just can't handle!"

"I don't doubt that I've hung the world record myself a couple of times," Chancey asserts. "I have hung SEVERAL fish that I couldn't stop."

Those bass must have been monstrous in comparison to the particular lunker Chancey DID STOP on May 1, 1977. The possibility of a record fish didn't enter Chancey's mind as he left the dock in a boat that hazy morning with Jake Adkins, a local worm manufacturer. Their primary objective was to "field test" on of Jake's new worms.

The pair chose the southeast section of Toho, an area of thick grass and scattered reeds, about 1/4 mile from the South Port lock — the same lock which produced a record 20-bass catch of 148.23-pounds for Dick and Elaine Hengl in February, 1977. (See "The Day They Hit the Bass Bonanza," May/June, 1977 BASSMASTER Magazine.)

At 8:15 a.m., Chancey and Adkins still had no hint of extraordinary bass activity. Then, they approached a thick concentration of reeds noted for harboring big bass. The 40-foot diameter reed patch is surrounded by thick, intermeshed grass — perfect hawg cover, but a definite headache for anglers.

Adkins' first cast was rewarded with an immediate strike. Unfortunately, Adkins' hook set missed the bass cleanly, resulting in a hook stripped clean of its worm.

Since re-rigging would consume precious time, Adkins' sportingly told Chancey to try for the missed fish. Seconds later, a black grape, eight-inch worm splashed down in the same spot.

"That bass took the worm the second it hit the water!" Chancey recalls. "When I set the hook, the bass set back a little harder than I did. I couldn't budge the fish at all!"

At that point, Chancey knew he'd hooked an exceptional lunker. Although, only 5-foot 8-inches and 165-pounds, Chancey has been toughened by years in the navy and later construction work. At one time, he also wrestled garfish and alligators during some years spent in the Everglades with the Seminole Indians. Chancey knew that a bass he couldn't move HAD TO BE A GIANT.

The Toho "hawg" sped away in the opposite direction, stripping off 25 to 30-yards of line before slowing down.

"When that bass finally slowed down," Chancey grinned, "it made a little loop through the grass, tangling more line as it went."

So much line, in fact, that Chancey was unable to untangle the web of monofilament woven in the grass by the huge fish.

Any hope to land the monster bass called for swift, drastic action! Chancey kicked the trolling motor on the 24-volts, and buzzed a beeline toward the wallowing bass. He peeled line from the grass as they went.

"When we got closer, we could see the bass clearly in the water where it was tangled. There was about three-feet of line between her and the grass. Had she tightened up close we'd never have gotten her," said Chancey.

Jake Adkins expertly netted the lunker, abruptly ending Ed Chancey's anxiety. The 25-pound test Stren line and 5/0 Mustad hook had held under the strain.

Neither Chancey or Adkins realized the full significance of the moment until a short boat ride later to the South Port Marina scales. The needle settled at 16½-pounds; an event that prompted hand shaking and a photo session.


Even amid the fanfare, both Chancey and Adkins said they still failed to appreciate the full impact of the trophy catch. Only after a leisurely cross-lake run to Red's Fish Camp did the realization finally hit them — when the scales at Red's wavered just shy of the 17-pound mark!

Then, came the long overdue decision to obtain a certified weight on the lunker large-mouth. After a short drive to Market World in nearby St. Cloud, the bass was finally certified at 16.55-pounds, and a new Lake Toho largemouth record.

At that point, the trophy went to a taxidermist. Florida marine biologists on hand indicated that Chancey's record bass was a relatively young fish. And, the 30-inch long sow, with a girth of 24½-inches, had recently spawned!

"The biologists told me the bass had the longest roe sack they'd ever seen," Chancey said. "And, that the fish probably weighed 2 to 2½-pounds more before it spawned."

Chancey's Toho lake record is an awesome trophy. It is not the fish, however, but Ed Chancey's prophetic statement which continually directs a Bassmaster's thoughts toward Florida: "There are some LARGER bass in Toho — if you can get 'em out," vows Chancey.

— MORRIS GRESHAM 

CHECKING YOUR LINE

Toho has three or four types of grass, and they're all tough as "iron." This grass definitely wears and frays even the 25-pound test monofilament.

"It's best to retie after catching every fish," believes Bob Forrester. If you set the hook on a bass and miss in the heavy grass, you should

even retie. Cut off eight or 10-feet of the line each time.

"Line is cheap when you think about the possibility of losing a 12 to 15-pound trophy because of it," explains Forrester. Yes sir, line is cheap, but its the most important link between you and that trophy bass. And, with Toho's monster bass you'd probably like a well-rope spooled on your baitcasting reel.

— MORRIS GRESHAM 