

The IN' FISHERMAN

UNDERWATER OBSERVATION TOWER

The IN' FISHERMAN Research Team is always working on something new. And, the Underwater Observation Tower project is one of our more ambitious ones to date. When we finally work out the bugs in the design and finish construction, it will be an advance in the study of fresh water game fish in their natural environment.

In our search for fishery knowledge, we have used and questioned many skin divers. But, there was always some problem — it was too cold, the water was too murky, the fish got spooked, the fish could not be found. Of course, we also used depth finders and graph units to further verify our findings, but this information was still not first-hand, visual material. We even built a huge aquarium, but under such conditions, fish just do not function normally.

The question was: How do you really get to watch a school of fish in their natural surroundings for a sustained period of time without spooking them?

Little by little, the idea of our IN' FISHERMAN Underwater Observation Tower began taking shape. And, now, finally, Jeff Zernov, the staff's Jack-of-all-trades, was commissioned to go ahead and build the tower.

The observation tower is shaped somewhat like a rocket with a pointed nose which will make it easier for the cylinder to be towed by boat. The nose seals water-tight to the end of the cylinder, making it buoyant. The cylinder, an in-

ternally reinforced fiberglass shell, is five feet in diameter and 30 feet in length.

Once the tower is towed to the site — an area known to attract fish because it is a feeding station or a stopping point on a feeding route — the lower section of the tower is pumped full of sand. This will act as ballast and provide the proper weight to set the tower in a vertical position. Support cables will secure it.

Since most observations will be made in water 25 feet deep or less, the tower can be left open and the observer will be able to utilize outside air with the aid of a simple circulation pipe and fan. By using bubble shaped plexiglass viewing ports, the observer will be able to watch fish in their true element.

Once the tower is in place, the outside could be camouflaged with brush to provide additional cover and even a possible point of attraction for schools of fish on a feeding movement. If visibility becomes limited, a system of lights can be turned on and directed where necessary.

Since it is a very simple structure, the tower has a minimum of noisy machinery and equipment. After a period of time, it should appear to be a part of the natural structural landscape to fish. At this point, we will be able to not only observe fish, but also watch their reactions to lures, sound, vibration, etc. In future study reports, we will keep you abreast of progress on this project.

