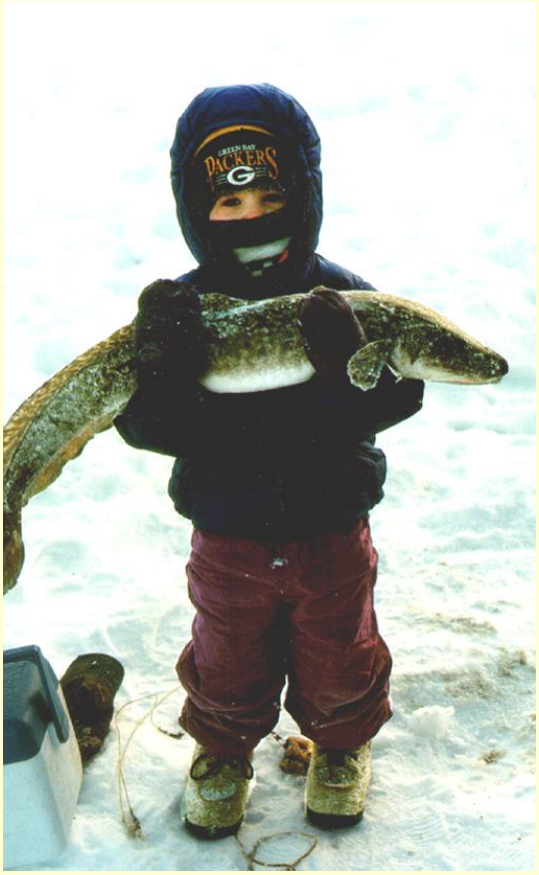
Photo credit: Matthew Senger



The following is a step by step tutorial on skinning & filleting burbot.

This is just one method.

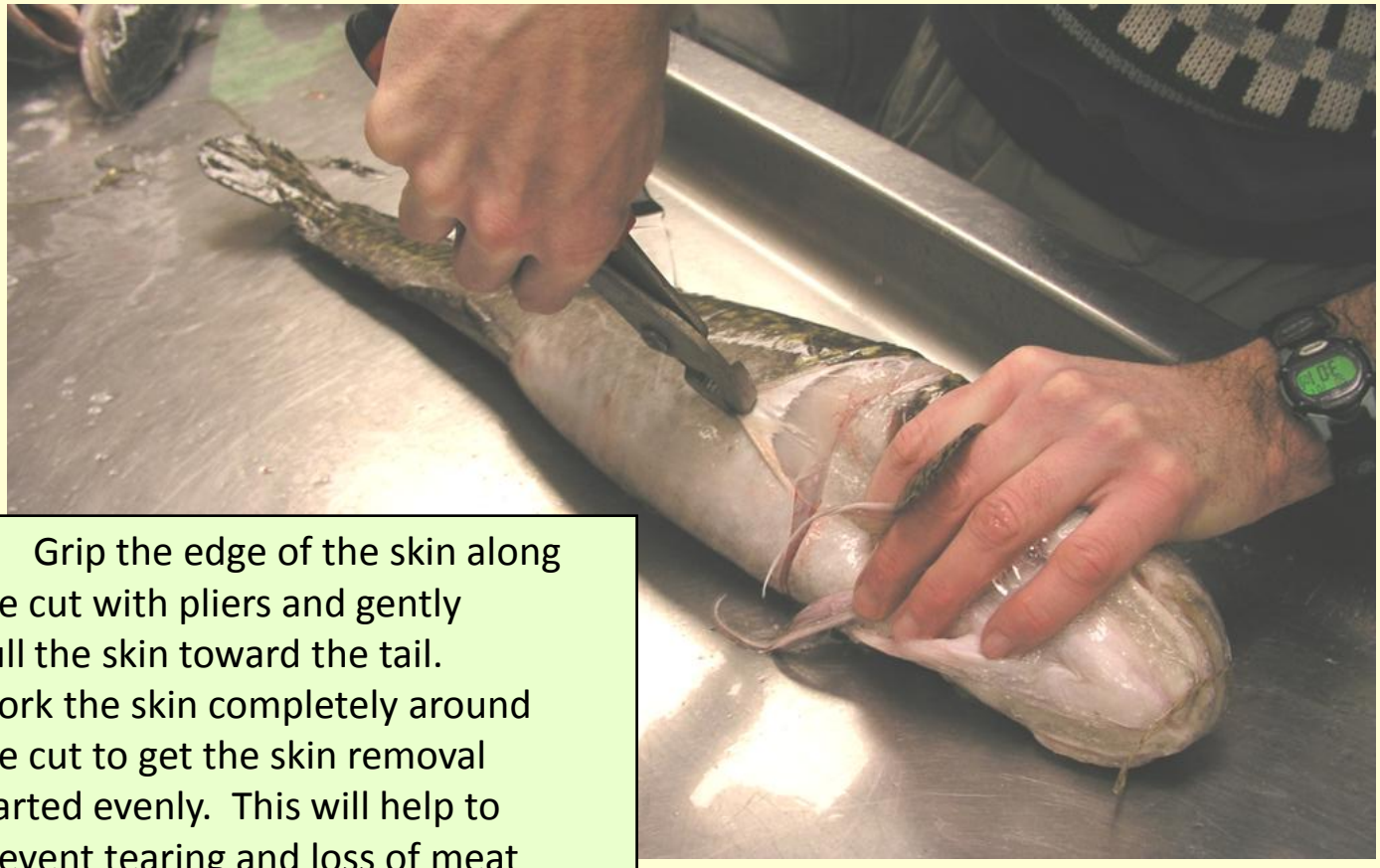
There are slight variations.

Some folks like to hang the burbot by its head from a nail in order to skin it and strip the fins.

With practice, you will find the method that works best for you.

1. As with any meat processing endeavor, make sure you have a clean work area.

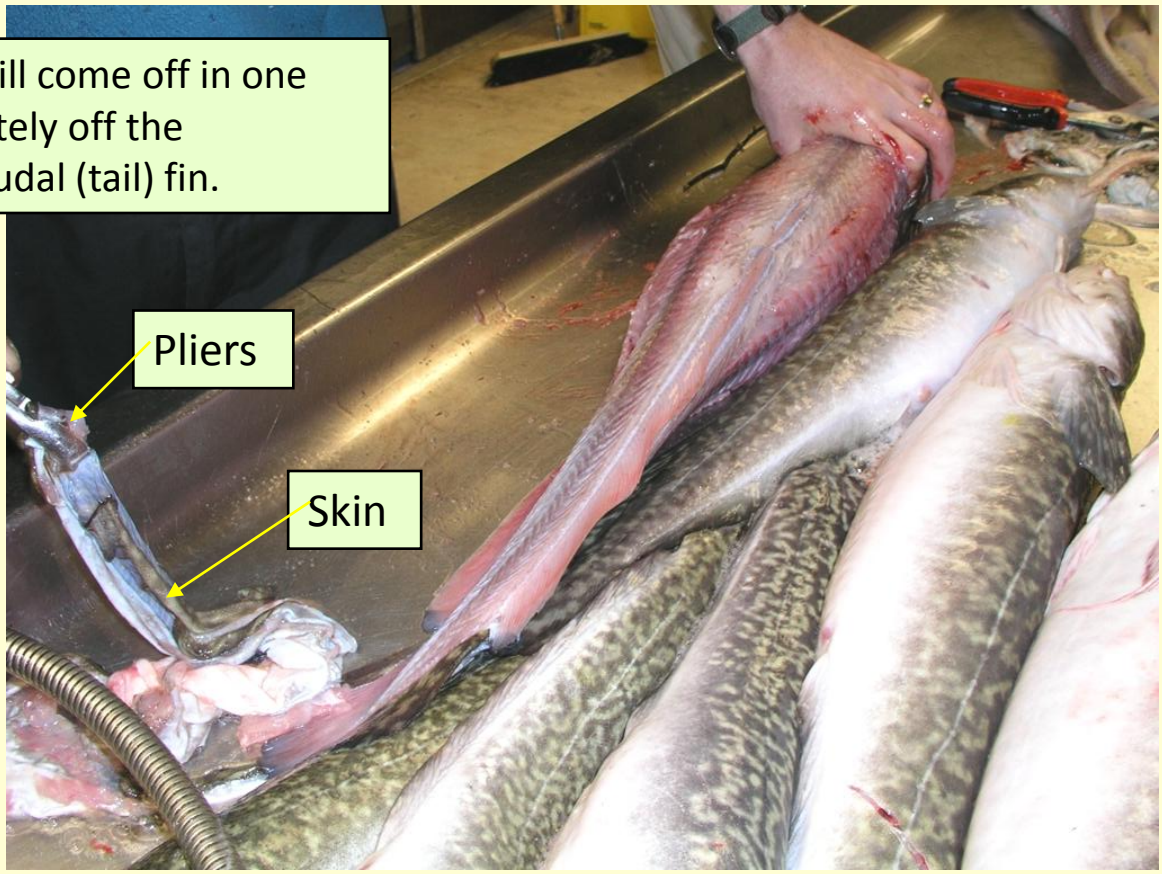
2. Cut just through the skin (not too deep) completely around the base of the head, behind the gill plate and pectoral fins.



3. Grip the edge of the skin along the cut with pliers and gently pull the skin toward the tail. Work the skin completely around the cut to get the skin removal started evenly. This will help to prevent tearing and loss of meat

4. Once started, you can then firmly grip the skin and gently pull it off toward the tail.

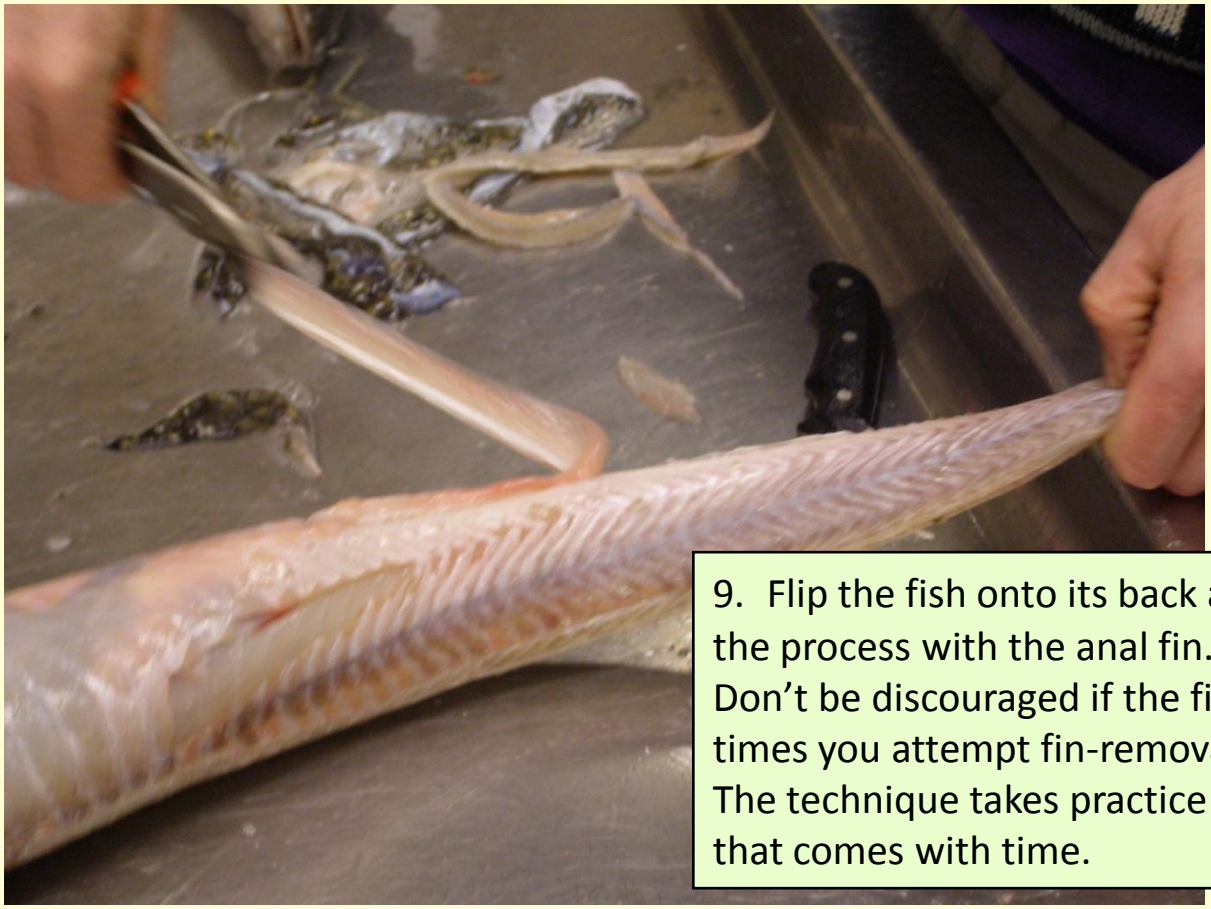
5. Continue pulling the skin toward the tail.



6. The skin will come off in one piece completely off the end of the caudal (tail) fin.

7. With the burbot lying on its belly, firmly grasp the base of the tail. Using the pliers, grip the dorsal (back) fin as close to the base as possible and begin pulling up and forward (toward the head of the fish).

8. With an even, steady motion, continue to pull up and forward on the dorsal fin and the entire fin will pull out of the burbot body.



9. Flip the fish onto its back and repeat the process with the anal fin.
Don't be discouraged if the first few times you attempt fin-removal it fails. The technique takes practice and that comes with time.

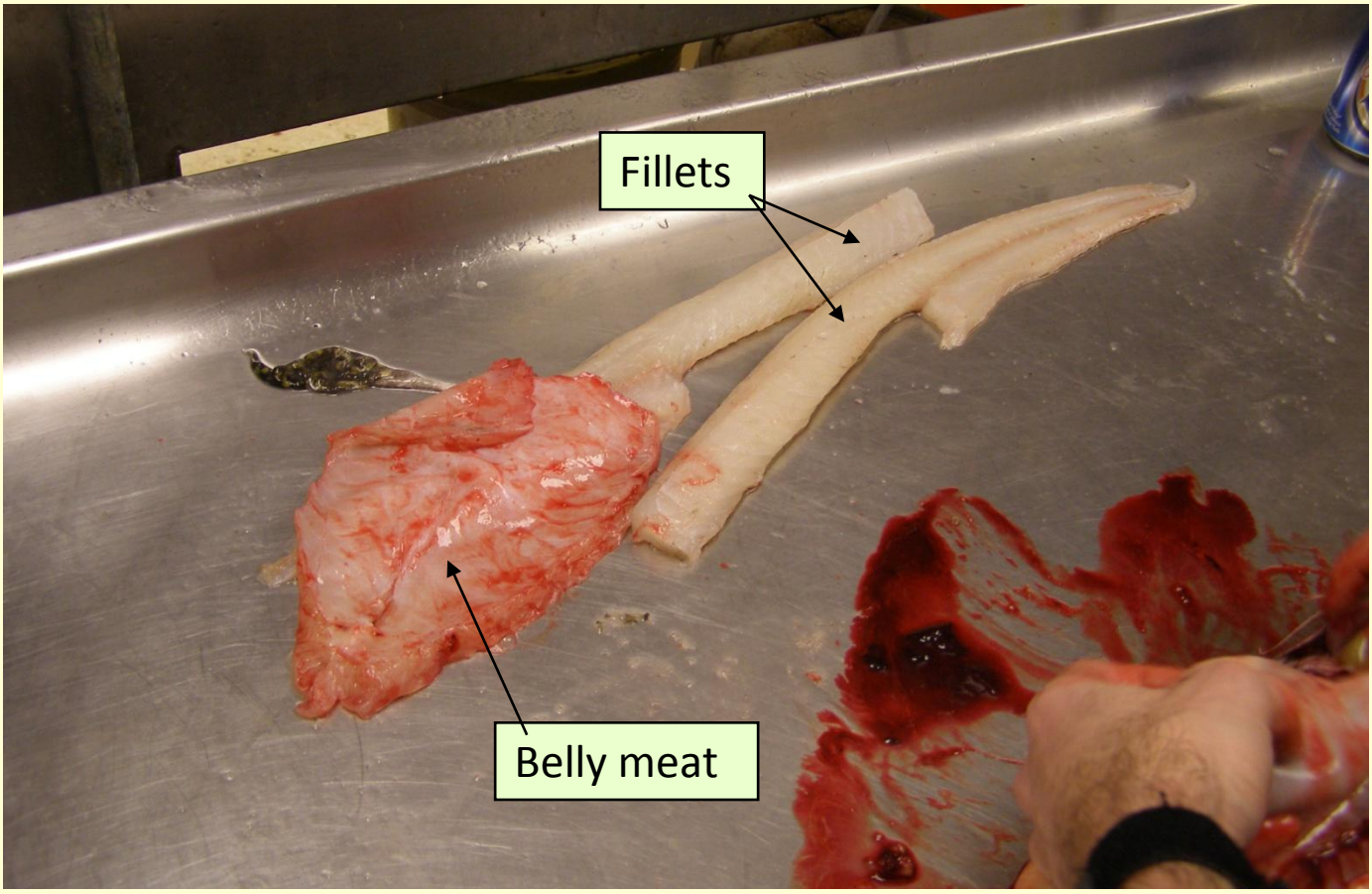
10. With the fish on its belly and beginning at the head end, insert the knife blade into the crevice made by the removed dorsal fin.
Slice down and alongside the backbone until you feel the blade hit the rib bones.
Run the blade over top of the rib bones toward the tail of the burbot.

11. Once past the last rib bone, insert the knife entirely through the tail meat from the back to the belly and cut toward the tail keeping the blade next to the backbone.

12. With the tail section of the fillet free of the backbone, you can begin to separate the rest of the fillet from the rib bones by running your knife alongside and around the ribs. Continue until the fillet is free.

13. Repeat the procedure on the other side of the burbot.

14. The belly meat is some of the most tender on the fish. After removing the fillets, be sure to harvest it also.



For information on how to set-line for burbot, & Burbot Recipes visit:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.InteriorPublications

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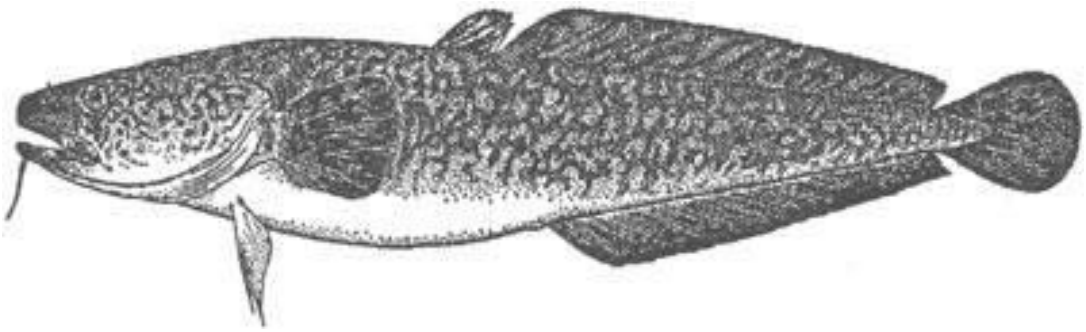
Burbot



The burbot (*Lota lota*) is often maligned as being too ugly to be worth an angler's time, However, hidden by its mottled green camouflage is a valuable food and recreational fish. The burbot is the only representative of the cod (Gadidae) family in fresh water in North America, and like its saltwater relatives, has mild-tasting white flesh.
Burbot are distributed in fresh waters throughout North America and Eurasia southward to about 40 degrees north, and occupy most large clear and glacial rivers and many lakes throughout Alaska. Burbot are known by a number of different names including lawyer, loache, ell pout, methy, lush, lingcod, and mud shark.

General description: The burbot has a thin, elongated body that tapers to a point near the tail. Its major distinguishing characteristics are a "chin whisker" or barbel, and dorsal and anal fins that run from the middle of the body almost to the tail. The tail is rounded rather than fork shaped. The mouth is quite large and contains numerous rows of small teeth that slant back toward the throat. Burbot have mottled olive-black or brown skin interspersed with yellow patches. Burbot appear to be scaleless but actually have small, almost microscopic scales.
Life history: Burbot are a relatively long-lived and slow-growing species. In Alaska, burbot older than 20 years are not uncommon. It takes burbot about six or seven years to reach a preferable size of about 18 inches. This is also the size at which most Alaska burbot spawn for the first time. Burbot spawn under the ice in late winter (February to March) and have been observed to mill together forming a large writhing ball while spawning. Eggs are very small, and an individual burbot can produce over a million eggs.

Young burbot feed mainly on insects and other invertebrates, but by the age of 5, burbot feed almost exclusively on fish. Adult burbot can appear sluggish, but they are voracious predators, feeding mostly at night. Once a burbot has captured a fish, it is reluctant to give it up. Its large mouth, strong jaw, and large number of inward slanting teeth account for the burbotÕs efficiency as a predator. Whitefish, sculpins, lampreys, and other burbot are common food items. Burbot also sometimes eat mice or shrews.

Fishing: Burbot can be caught in the summer as well as through the ice in the winter. In some areas set-lines or "trot-lines" are used. Individual set-line hooks must have a gap of greater than three-quarters of an inch and be set on the bottom. Set-lines must be inspected every 24 hours and identified with the angler's name and address. Seasons for the set-line use and maximum allowable number of hooks vary between areas, so check your regulations.

Burbot can also be caught using standard bait fishing techniques with hand-held rod. A 2/0 or 4/0 single hook baited with a chunk of fresh or frozen fish (smelt or whitefish) and a sinker located 18 to 24 inches above the hook is a good setup. Cast the bait out and allow the weight to rest on the bottom. In a river the bait will move around near the bottom in the current. When a consistent tug is felt, reel in your catch.

Most fishers like to keep only burbot larger than 18 inches. The best way to release any fish that has swallowed the hook is to just cut the line. The most popular fishing areas in Interior Alaska are large, glacial rivers such as the Yukon and Tanana rivers. Some of the best fishing occurs near rocky bluffs, in back eddies, and near the mouths of clear tributary streams. Burbot are also found in many lakes of Interior and Southcentral Alaska. However, the department has recently restricted burbot harvest in lakes due to declines in population abundance.

The easiest way to clean a burbot is to hang it by its head from a nail, cut around the skin near the neck, and pull the skin down to the tail using a pair of pliers. The fins can now be removed with pliers. The fish can be left whole with fins and head removed or it can be fileted. Your burbot is now ready to be fried, baked, or poached. No matter how it is cooked, the meat is flaky and a gourmet's delight.

Text: Rocky Holmes
Illustration: Source unknown
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