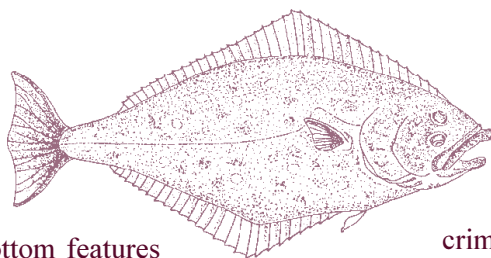


➤ HALIBUT

Like many other bottomfish, these stay near physical bottom features or “structure” such as kelp beds, drop-offs, deep trenches, underwater bars or reefs, pinnacles, and transition areas of rocky, sandy, or muddy bottoms. They hold in these areas while tides change, and as tides slacken, they move and feed. Bottom depth contour charts help the angler determine potential feeding and migration areas; a good-quality depth flasher or graph recorder helps locate specific fishing “holes.”

Use a heavy, saltwater revolving spool-type reel, equipped with a good drag system and large line capacity for Dacron, nonstretch-type line in 60- to 100-pound test. Mount reels on heavy, stiff action, 5- to 7-ft fiberglass rods. Some anglers prefer roller guides along the entire rod length to lessen line stress and abrasion. Many use at least a roller tip, to reel in heavy weights from deep water, especially in fast tidal currents. Of many different options available for terminal tackle, many anglers prefer the slip sinker/leader hook rig for bait presentation. This includes a sleeve-snap weight system which slides up and down the main line coming from the rod tip. The end of the main line is tied to a heavy-duty snap swivel, to which a 20- to 30-inch monofilament or



Bottom fishing

wire strand leader is attached (80- to 300-pound test to allow for abrasion). The leader should have a large barrel swivel crimped on at one end and the hook on the other. Standard long shank J hooks, 4/0 to 10/0 size, are popular as well as the newer circle hooks. The leader pulls freely through the attached sinker and allows an angler to detect more and lighter strikes.

Bait presentation by drifting is simpler and more popular than anchoring, but anchoring is probably the most effective technique for halibut fishing, once the fish are located. Anchoring the boat allows the fished baits to distribute a scent pattern down-current which, because of the halibut’s keen sense of smell, actually attracts them from some distance. A group of anglers using herring bait will create more scent effect than a single angler. Many baits work—herring, squid, octopus, and salmon heads or tails.

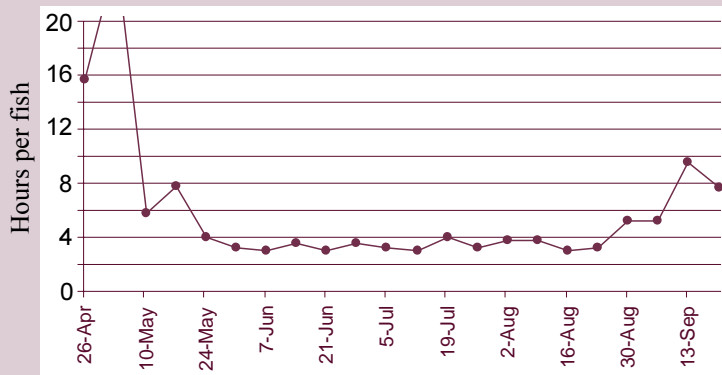
The halibut’s sense of sight is also important in finding food. For visual effect, hootchies or plastic skirts on baited hooks give a definite advantage. The plastic material in the skirts picks up the smell of the bait being fished. So, even if the halibut hits and “steals” the bait, the remaining skirt which now emits the bait scent can draw another strike. Various lead head jigs and plastic squid or octopus imitations work well. Flashy spoon-type jigs, decorated with fluorescent or iridescent green/blue adhesive, also prove very effective when fluttered erratically off the bottom. Most fish can detect greens and blues from the color spectrum better than most other colors as depth increases.

Halibut move from deep water to shallower shelves near shore in late spring, and by late May catch rates average one fish for every 3 hours of fishing (see graph on page 16). Catch rates remain high on into September, when the halibut move back out to deeper waters. This fishing period conveniently coincides with better weather and quieter water in the North Pacific. Halibut can be found later in fall and in early spring, but catch rates are low. The entire month of January is ***closed to halibut fishing***.

Landing and boating halibut can be an interesting proposition, especially when a fish over 100 pounds is on the line. A large salmon landing net can be

Robert Anchor





Average weekly halibut catch rates in Sitka, 1994 to 1998.

used on halibut up to about 50 pounds, but once it's inside the net and alongside the boat, use a small club to dispatch the fish by a sharp blow to its head. Halibut are very strong—they can do considerable damage if brought aboard a small boat alive.

➤ **ROCKFISH** These slow-growing fish are surprisingly long-lived. The most common species in the sport fishery (yelloweye, quillback, and black) can live to 114, 71, and 40 years, respectively (yelloweyes average 50 years), and they mature at about 15, 12, and 10 years. Males mature earlier, but are usually smaller than females the same age. Rockfish are often caught incidentally by anglers targeting on salmon, halibut, or lingcod. Those who want to target on rockfish need access to rocky bottom or shoreline areas. The best fishing is from May to August (rockfish tend to go much deeper in winter). Use a fairly limber rod and light salt-water tackle, so that you can feel what is happening on the other end of the line. Jigs, buzz-bombs, herring bait, or other lures may be used. Favorites are the leadhead jigs and the many types of plastic “worm-tails”—they can be kept from snagging rocks and are very effective jigged just above bottom.

Rockfish should be bled, filleted and chilled immediately after catching, to enhance edibility. (Watch out for the sometimes venomous spines on the fins, though—punctures from these spines can be very painful!) Rockfish have firm flesh that turns snow white when cooked. Flavor and texture varies subtly between species, but all are excellent, and the mild flavor lends itself to a variety of cooking methods and sauces. (For some good recipes, write



the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, at 311 N. Franklin Street, Suite 200, Juneau, AK 99811, for their brochure on preparing and cooking rockfish).

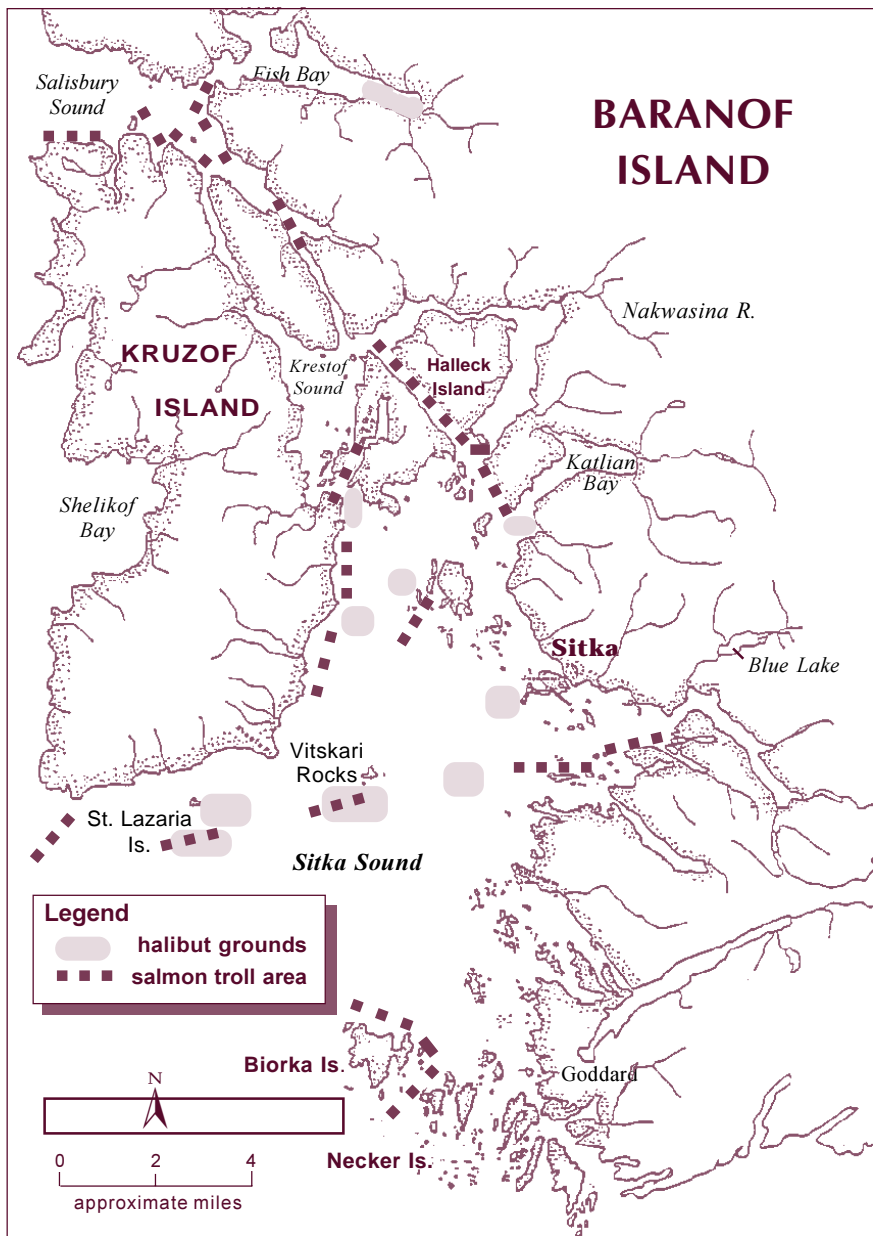
➤ **LINGCOD** A large piscivore (fish-eater), the lingcod grows to 50 pounds or more and ranges along the rocky coastal area, inhabiting rocky bottoms and reef areas.

Lingcod gear is essentially the same equipment used for trolling or mooching for salmon: limber to medium-stout 6- to 9-foot rods and level wind reels with 200- to 300-yard capacity of 20- to 50-

pound test line. You can use lighter gear, but care must be taken with the terminal tackle. Lingcod have a mouthful of the most wicked-looking teeth found in the northeastern Pacific ocean, and wire or heavy monofilament leaders are necessary to keep your line intact during the fight. Fish bait such as herring, salmon tails, and viscera work best. Lures and jigs work well, too. A unique feeding behavior of lingcod is to grab hold of hooked live fish and hang on while being hauled to the surface.

Adult lingcod live on or near reefs, drop-offs, and steep boulder gradients in areas of high current down to 30 fathoms. Not an active swimmer, the lingcod waits perched on rock outcroppings or reef tops and lets tidal currents bring baitfish within reach, then dashes out to seize its prey. They often feed better when the tide is running; if you fish at slack tide, fish deeper. One very successful technique is to fish with anything silver-colored over a rocky reef or reef edge while drifting with the tide or wind. If a lingcod is in the neighborhood, it will not be able to resist.

Lingcod have a life history that makes them particularly vulnerable to harvest and predation. They spawn in winter and early spring and the males guard the nest of egg masses until hatching. Research has indicated that egg masses are extremely vulnerable to predation when males are removed from the nest. To protect lingcod during this sensitive nest-guarding season, ***fishing for lingcod is closed from December 1 through May 15.*** ■



Map 4. Some of the more popular trolling drags and halibut holes around the Sitka area.