Where To Find Fish At The Beach

By Bill Varney Jr.

As the seasons change from Spring to Summer so does the contour of the beach. Northern storms are replaced with southern swells coming all the way from Antarctica. Long range ground swells like these reshape beaches by pushing sand deposited offshore in winter, back up onto the beach. Surf then pounds the redeposited sand and creates long-shore troughs that become a welcome home for summer surf fish.

Every surf angler wants to be able to enhance their chances of success. Being familiar with a wide range of possible locations for fish helps to reduce the amount of time needed to find them. Storm surf along with tidal changes, rip currents and inshore holes work together to produce some of the most productive fishing spots.

Knowing just where to fish and being able to read the beach will come with time and practice. Here are a few of the things I practice to help me find fish at the beach.

The first step when you get to the shore is to find an area where you can get a good view of the waterline. Standing on the beach's berm above the waves is a good place to start.

Survey the water's edge and look for where the water rushes up the farthest onto the beach. This is a bay. Look for areas in between these bays where a point pushes out. As you look up and down the beach you'll probably see several of these point and bay areas. Water circulates around these areas and creates fishing opportunities.

The best place to fish on a point is along its sides where the water slows down as the bottom drops off. When waves break along a point in a triangle, the best place to fish is along the edge of the triangle shape. This is where the current created by the breaking waves slows down and releases the bait and particles it carries.

When fishing between the points look just offshore and find the long-shore gutter or trough that runs parallel to the beach. If you're looking straight out to sea, it is twenty to sixty feet in front

of you, parallel to the shore. It's often six to ten feet wide, several feet deep and twenty to one-hundred feet long. Both an inside and outside trough are created by breaking waves and may be more pronounced after larger surf.

The trough is a favorite place for fish to feed and hide. Corbina use the trough to lay in wait and then rush up the beach to eat sand crabs. Perch stay suspended in the trough and feed on churned-up bait.

One of the best times to search for these troughs is at *low tide*. Walk the beach and look for where the trough has formed. Line yourself up with a permanent landmark and come back at high tide, when the trough is covered by water and you'll find fish there.

If you go to the beach at high tide and the trough is not visible take time to watch swimmers and surfers entering the ocean. If they dip down as they walk out you've found the trough and should start you day by fishing there.

Besides troughs formed by waves, strong rip currents also move tons of sand and provide structure for fish. Rid currents are formed by waves which approach the coast nearly head on, then reverse themselves and push both water and sand offshore. As these currents carry water offshore they also provide both current and food for inshore fish.

Rip currents appear with off colored swirling water, rippled areas and foam. Some rip currents may be obvious while others are more subtle.

As rip currents pull water offshore they also form a trough perpendicular to the shore where fish wait to find food. Rip currents form in the shape of a mushroom and create neutral pockets on each side. These neutral pockets, formed by an eddy circulation, along with an offshore trough provide some promising areas to fish.

Scan the water for rip currents as they will often form and subside. Some may be subtle and only a few feet from shore. Others will be more pronounced and can extend well beyond the surf line. The

best place to fish a rip current is along its sides. Cast out and retrieve you bait slowly across these areas were current meets calm water.

Similar to rip currents, rock jetties also provide eddy circulation, which attracts fish. Rock outcroppings produce water movement around its point. This is where currents create a natural feeding habitat due to water movement caused by waves and tidal changes.

As the tide moves up and down throughout the day water currents vary in strength and intensity. At slack tides, very little water will be moving around rock points. At larger tidal changes, more water and thus stronger eddy circulation will occur.

Eddy circulation is important because it provides a current where fish can suspend themselves while water flushes through their gills providing oxygen. The eddy also provides a current for bait and nutrients to pass within the fishes' strike zone.

When angling near jetty areas, slack tide conditions and small surf create very little circulation and force fish to search for food. Large surf and strong tidal conditions create too much current and

make it difficult for fish to stay in place and feed. Fishing is always best when there is a slow to moderate current condition.

To find where the current has created a fishing eddy look out toward the jetty's point and find the leeward or downward side of the current. Look for approaching swells and watch them as they approach the rocks. The opposite side from which they approach is the leeward area where an eddy will form. The eddy has similar characteristics to the rip current: swirling water, rippled areas and foam.

When fishing rock jetties cast along the outside and inside edges of the eddy. The outside edge may be toward open water and the inside up against the rocks. Fish will lurk in these areas waiting to ambush their next meal.

Another great place to find fish is near rock structure. Beaches from San Diego to Seattle have hundreds of prime fishing areas. Rock groupings and reefs provide great opportunity for fishing and great chances of catching bigger fish.

When walking the beach look for groups of rocks within casting distance. These partially submerged rocks create a wall against the surf. On their outside a strong surge rakes the rocks but on the inside an eddy circulation is created and deposits both sand and food on the rock's front side.

Find these formations and you'll find fish. Down size your sinker and shorten your leader so as not to get snagged and cast directly at the rock. Let your bait settle to the bottom, just in front of the rock and hold on. Some of the largest and best fighting surf fish I have ever caught have been hunkered down in the crevices of structure.

Rock jetties, rip currents, points, bays and the inshore troughs are all good areas to find surf fish. Getting to know the subtle differences at your local beach will help you find more fish and may be the difference between catching fish or just watching bathers.