

Road Trip: Carpinteria State Beach

By, Bill Varney, Jr.



Carpinteria State Beach is the only place I've ever camped where there's no need to bring food or cooking gear. Just a few minutes walk from the campground you'll be strolling along tree shaded Linden Avenue lined with fabulous restaurants serving everything from burgers to sushi. But Carpinteria has more to offer than just a unique buffet within walking distance of the beach it also has some of the best summer surf fishing along the coast.

Twelve miles south of Santa Barbara, Carpinteria State Beach offers several miles of beach for swimming, surf fishing, tidepool exploring and camping. Although dogs are not allowed on the beach the park offers a great picnic area where dogs are allowed to enjoy the outdoors as well. Open beach stretches out in both directions for miles from the campground and offers fantastic fishing for perch, corbina, calico bass, sharks and croaker.

Spanish settlers named the area “Carpinteria” (the carpentry shop) because the Chumash tribe living in the area built sea-going canoe’s which used naturally occurring petroleum tar to seal their canoes. Today, You can still walk along the beach and find a large deposit of tar coating the shoreline rock structure.



Fish you'll find here: This beach has both sand and rocks structure areas. Just a few of the fish you'll find here are barred surfperch, buttermouth surfperch, calico bass, rock bass, cabezon, halibut, corbina, walleye perch, white seabass, silver salmon and smelt.

Tackle you'll need here: I like to bring two setups here. Both light and heavy tackle work here. When fishing the beach I suggest 6lb mono on a light action 8' rod (look for the longest trout rod in your collection). A flexible/parabolic style rod matched with a 2000 – 3000 series spinning reel works great.

If you decide to fish for sharks at night, upsize your equipment to 12lb - 40lb monofilament and a larger reel matched with a medium to heavy action rod.

Areas you'll want to fish: Carpinteria offers miles of open beach stretching in both directions. Just offshore is a huge area of kelp forest that acts as a barrier to the beach and a breeding ground for near shore species. The State beach offers three types of structure, all of which make for great fishing.



In front of the campground entrance is a great place to get started. Most of the year you will find big numbers of sand crabs here. At low tide look for them to form in beds, out on the middle sand bar between the beach and the waves. At high tide you will find them well up the beach and just below the high tide mark.

This area is also great for perch fishing. I like to use the Carolina rig with a sand crab, ghost shrimp or worm. I rig up using a ½ to

1-ounce egg sinker depending on surf and current. (In larger surf use a heavier sinker and shorter leader). Grubs and other small lures work well here too. Look for holes and a small trough just off shore to cast into. This is where the perch will congregate to feed on sand crabs.



In addition to surfperch, corbina will also cruise along this area especially in the early morning and evening. Sand crabs and lug worms seem to do best for corbina here.

To the south of the campground you will find several small points and corresponding bays. These areas are fantastic for perch and corbina. Set up just below the point where the water is creating an eddy circulation. To find these spots look out toward the end of the point. Find the direction of the swell and current and look for the side of the point that has swirling, off-colored, foaming water. This would be the leeward side.

Currents and waves wrap around the point and deposit food and fish where it creates an eddy current. The water is normally “murky” or turbid here. If you are looking out at a point and the surf is coming from the north, then the eddy will be on the south side. Currents generally follow the direction of the waves and create an area for fish to feed. Cast out toward the point and allow your bait to follow the current down the coast and into shore. This is where fish will wait for food.

Below this area and closer to the oil pier to the south you will find rocks clusters holding fish. These groups of large rocks are just offshore and can best be fished at a medium to high tide. Most rock groupings have a rough side covered with barnacles and mussel facing out to sea and a smooth side facing the shore. Because the way water moves around the rock it tends to deposit sand on the shore-side and provide an ideal spot for perch to rest and feed.



Find these rock clusters and cast as close to their shore-side as possible. Down size your tackle to 1/4th ounce sliding sinkers on the Carolina Rig and shorten your leader to 12” or less. These adjustments will make it much less likely to become snagged.

After you cast be sure to reel up slack line and be tight to your sinker. If you feel you are getting into the rocks or kelp reel up and cast again. If you feel a bite, reel down quickly and lift your rod to pull the fish from the rocks and to shore.

You can travel the beach (about five miles) at medium to low tide all the way to Rincon Point and find great fishing the entire way. Carpinteria is great for camping from June until November with the fall months being the least crowded and most fishy!

Getting There: Carpinteria State Beach is located at 205 Palm Ave. Carpinteria, CA 93013 (805) 968-1033. The park is just off U.S. 101, twelve miles south of Santa Barbara. Exit at Casitas Pass Road, travel West on Casitas Pass Road to Carpinteria Avenue, make a right at the signal; then turn left on Palm. The beach is located at the end of Palm Avenue.

Park Hours: 7am – Sunset. You may arrive earlier and pay for parking using the “iron rangers” located in the main parking lot past the entrance kiosk.

Facilities: Fire pits, hot freshwater pay showers, bathrooms, picnic tables, BBQ facilities, firewood, self-contained RV and tent camping. Some campsites are located on the beach.

Web cam: Take a look at the beach though their webcam:
<https://video-monitoring.com/beachcams/carpinteria/>

How to Reserve Your Spot: Online reservations are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Reservations can be made 7 months in advance on the first day of the month beginning at 8:00 a.m. PST via the website, by mail, or by calling the toll free telephone number at 1-800-444-7275.

Reservations are accepted for both single and group areas. Some first come – first served sites are available. (prices below subject to change)

Overnight Camping Fees: From \$45.00/ night

Daily Parking (2024) \$15.00