

Three Road Trips for Summer Surf Fishing

By Bill Varney Jr.

California offers so many great places to go camping and fishing but here are three of my favorites spots for summer surf fishing road trips.



Carpinteria State Beach is just south of Santa Barbara. This is one of my favorite places to camp and fish. It's the only place I've ever camped where you don't need to take a lick of food. Within a short walk from the park you will find Linden Ave. This is the "main street" of Carpinteria where you'll find dozens of restaurants, galleries and stores all laid out on a beautifully

landscaped avenue. Sports bars, food establishments and entertainment are just a short walk from the campgrounds.

The park itself is large and has over two-hundred campsites. About one third of the sites are adjacent to the sand and provide access to several miles of great fishing beach. The park offers sand dunes, picnic tables and full camping facilities including flush toilets and coin showers. Camping here is great for both motor homes and tent campers. The park offers interpretive programs weekly where you can learn about both the history and environment of the area from park rangers. As with most of our State parks, camping fills up quickly and a reservation is required.

Carpinteria State Beach is located between the Salt Marsh Reserve to the north and the Cliff Bluff Open Space area to the south. The beach that runs between these ends offers three miles of great surf fishing for perch, bass, shovelnose guitarfish, seabass, corbina and an occasional silver salmon.

Fishing here is great for a variety of surf fish. The beach is made up of both rocks and sandy areas. Fishermen hike in both directions from the park to look for fish along miles of beach. To the north near the Salt Marsh you will find good fishing for both perch and halibut. The estuary opening to the ocean is an especially good place to target halibut at peak low and peak high tide. Use a Krocodile, Rapalla or Lucky Craft here.

To the south there are a great many places to find good fishing. Just in front of the campground you'll find excellent perch fishing. Throughout the summer, early morning and late evening can be spectacular perch fishing with a bite almost every cast. The beach here is generally loaded with sand crabs which make great bait for perch. Also due to the large number sand crabs you'll find quite a few corbina, especially in late summer.

Farther to the south and around the point (which can be identified by the massive amount of coal tar that covers it) you will find a series of rocks and an active oil pier. Both provide fantastic habitat for perch. If you are really searching for a trophy perch this is where you will find barred, calico and walleye perch.

I would use natural baits in this area (although halibut do hit the lure here) like ghost shrimp, sand crabs and various worms to target the largest perch. Find rock areas just off shore and exposed by the tide. Cast just in front of these areas with a 1/4th ounce sliding sinker on the Carolina rig and a short 12" leader. Perch use the eddy circulations around these rocks to find food. Search for the big fish here but be ready to reel fast or they will take you into the rocks.

Fish you'll find here: Barred surfperch, buttermouth perch, halibut, shovelnose guitarfish, calico bass, bull bass, corbina and sliver salmon.

Tackle you'll need here: When fishing for halibut both a spinning and bait-casting rod both work well. For halibut I prefer to use a conventional setup. A bait-casting reel loaded with 10lb monofilament on an 8' casting rod seems to work best. For bait fishing and grub fishing I like a spinning outfit with 6lb mono on an 8' - 9' light action rod.

Areas you'll want to fish: Great fishing spots are both north, south and in front of the campground. Take time during low tide to walk the beach. Look for the numerous rock piles to the south and estuary features to the north. Find rock clusters at low tide, line them up with a landmark on the cliffs or shore and return at high tide to fish there.

When you encounter kelp walk until you find where it ends. There will usually be a break between clumps of debris. Fish in between

these masses of kelp and along their edges. This is where you'll find the fish!

Park information: 805-968-1033 / 805-585-1850



Bolsa Chica State Beach offers some of the best surf fishing on the West Coast. Designed by the Army Corp of Engineers, the huge Bolsa estuary was connected to the ocean by an inlet in 2006. The estuary bays are full of spawning surf fish. Working as a supply route, a veritable “fish superhighway”, the inlet acts as the perfect stocking system for the entire Orange County coast.

Bolsa Chica State Beach is located between Warner Ave. and Golden West Street along Pacific Coast Highway in Huntington Beach. With more than five miles of beach and over 200 fire pits it's a great place to spend time with your family and have a chance at some of the best surf fishing on the coast.

The park opens at 6am and closes at 10pm. Its facilities include fresh water showers, bathrooms, fire pits, overnight camping for self contained vehicles, park benches and miles of sandy beach great for fishing, surfing and relaxing. Bolsa Chica State Beach

offers visitor's miles of sandy beach, hundreds of fire pits, RV camping, surf fishing, beach combing and surfing.

Fish you'll find here:

Walleye surfperch, buttermouth perch, zebra perch, barred surfperch, corbina, both spotfin and yellowfin croaker, halibut, leopard sharks, rays and various sharks.

Tackle you'll need here:

On the sandy beach I like to use an 8' light-action rod matched with 4-6lb mono on a spinning reel. For fishing from or adjacent to rocks I'll upsize my equipment and go with a bit stiffer rod and 6-8lb mono.

Areas you'll want to fish:

For summertime bait, sand crabs are plentiful all along this three mile State Park. When fishing the open beach you may find surfperch, corbina, croaker and various sharks. If you plan to fish in or near the inlet you'll also have a good chance of catching a halibut.

The open beach seems to fish best at high tide while the inlet seems best at peak high and peak low tides. Take some time to search around at low tide for troughs and holes. Line them up with something on shore and go back at high tide to fish them.

Park information: 714-846-3460



South Carlsbad State Beach is just one of the many great surf fishing spots in San Diego County. This state park offers year round fishing. Located in Northern San Diego, Carlsbad features swimming, surfing, skin-diving, fishing, camping and picnicking. The large bluff top campground is very popular, especially in summer. Stairs lead to the beach.

Located at 7201 Carlsbad Blvd. in Carlsbad California this State park offers bluff top campsites with beautiful views of the Pacific. The campground is well designed with clean new bathrooms (with flush toilets!), showers, dump station, store and most campsites are just steps from the beach.

Fish you'll find here:

Barred surfperch, walleye surfperch, corbina, halibut, both spotfin and yellowfin croaker and various sharks

Tackle you'll need here:

This spot is mostly sand beach with a few small rocks. A light action 8' rod matched with 4 or 6lb mono-filled spinning reel.

Areas you'll want to fish:

For bait, look on the beach between the access stairs during high tide periods. Many times the crabs will be located near areas of small rocks. For fishing, the best idea is to stroll the beach and fan cast for fish. There is very little structure here so most fish will be in holes or the inshore trough. You will many times encounter kelp here. So much in fact, you won't be able to effectively fish. But don't fret! Fish this area from low tide to high tide. I like to start about one hour after low tide (especially in the early morning) and fish as the tide rises. That way most of the kelp is still on the beach. Both the rising tide which attracts fish to the crab beds on the beach and the reduced amount of kelp and eel grass make this a fun place to fish. Try casting to both the inshore trough at medium and high tides and to the outside trough at peak low tide.

Scope out this beach at low tide to find the troughs and holes then line those spots up with something on the cliffs so you may go back at high tide and fish right in the trough. Some of the biggest surf fish on the coast will be found here.

Park information: 760-438-3143 or 619-688-3260