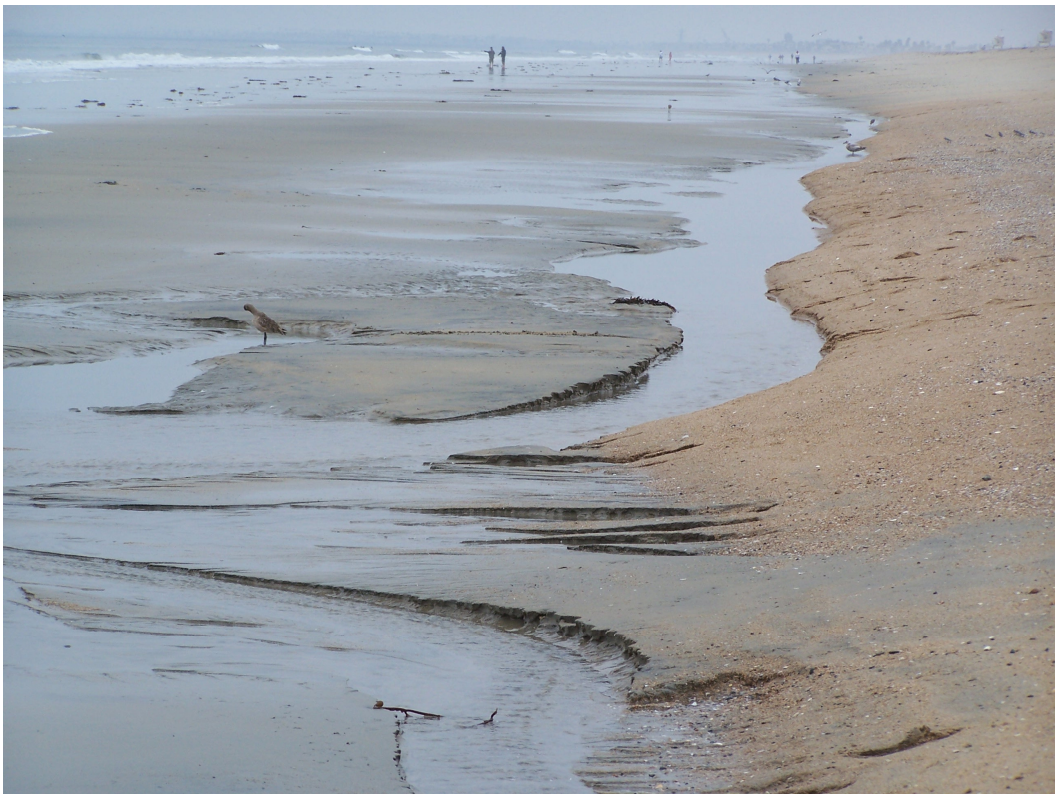
# TIDES, TROUGHS AND CURRENTS

*By, Bill Varney Jr.*

Over the last couple of weeks, tides, winds and heavy surf have reshaped Southern California's beaches. It's not uncommon throughout the year when big surf rakes the beach that the bottom changes dramatically. Fish need troughs, holes and their interaction with currents and tides to provide an ideal place to feed and hide.

Having a better understanding of how these three variables interact will help you to know where to find fish at the beach. Beaches, especially those you are visiting for the first time may seem overwhelming but with the use of a few common sense observations you'll find fish at almost every beach.



What is the inshore trough and how do I find it? The inshore and offshore troughs are created by pounding surf and form depressions that run parallel to the beach. At *low tide* waves crash offshore and create a trough several hundred feet from the beach. At *high tide* waves crash and create a trough closer to shore. It's in these troughs that surf fish forage and find some relief and protection from the surf and predators.

I like to fish the outside trough at low tide when I can wade out a bit and cover that area with a fan casting motion. Conversely, I like to fish the inner trough at high tide when it's covered with water and surf fish are feeding in the trough or coming ashore into shallow water to hunt for sand crabs.

*What's the best way to find inshore troughs?* One-way is to start by doing this: Choose a day when you can go to the beach at low tide, the lower the better. Walk the beach below the high tide mark

and look for the troughs and holes. They will be obvious as you stumble over them!

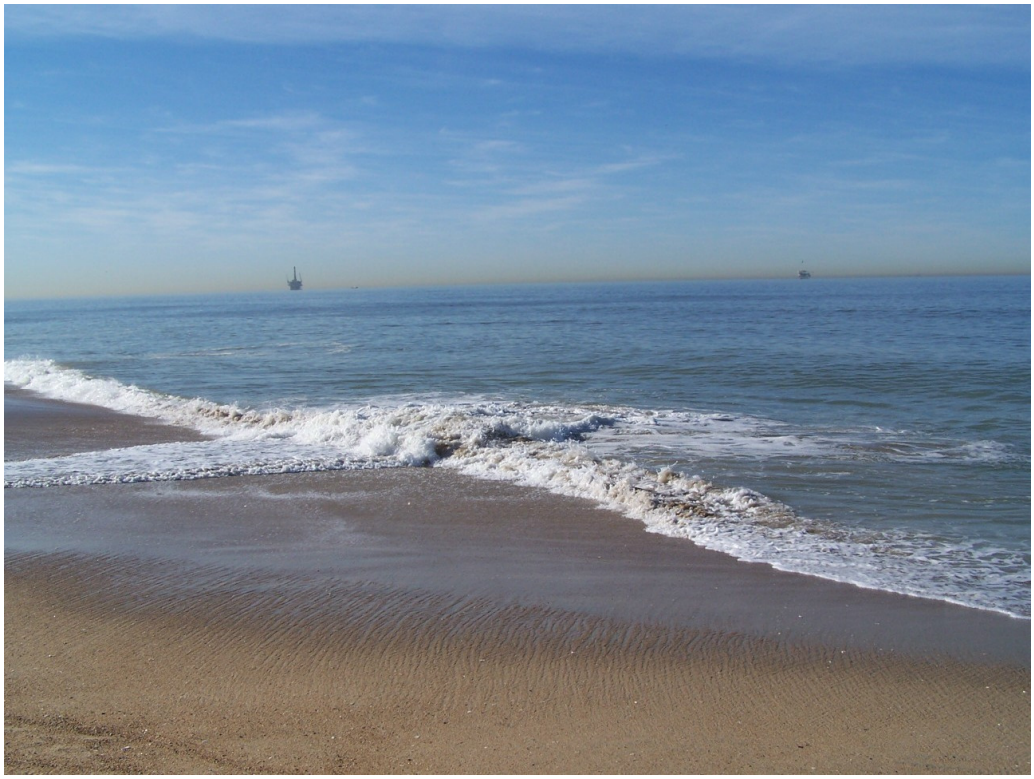
Some may be subtle, only a few feet wide or long. Others may be huge and stretch hundreds of feet down the beach. Mark these areas by looking back toward shore and line them up with permanent objects or landmarks. Your next step is to return at high tide, line yourself up with the landmark and fish there.

Once you've lined up your spots you'll usually find it's productive and be glad you took some time for field research. Thereafter, check your spots occasionally at low tide, as the surf can quickly reform the sand and fill in yesterday's trough.

Regardless of the structure most beaches with surf produce two separate troughs. One forms on the inside during high tide wave pounding and the other on the outside at low tide. Both troughs and inshore holes are generally created by seasonal waves and currents and appear and disappear at regular intervals.

*Where can I find currents that attract fish?* There are a number of beach currents but one of the most common is a rip current. Rip "tides" form when water rushes ashore and then reforms to create a current that flows offshore and away from the beach.

Rip currents may be small, only twenty or thirty feet long, or extend well beyond the surf line. As they channel water out and away from land they may also create a trough perpendicular to shore. Fish wait in the current near this offshore trough for bait churned up by the rough waters. If you locate a rip channel that cuts across the inshore trough, take additional time to fish the zone where they intersect.



The best place to fish a rip current is on its sides. Cast out and retrieve your bait back along the current's edges and toward shore. Fish will also hide and feed in the area near the top of the mushroom, on the very outer tip, or "head" of the rip.

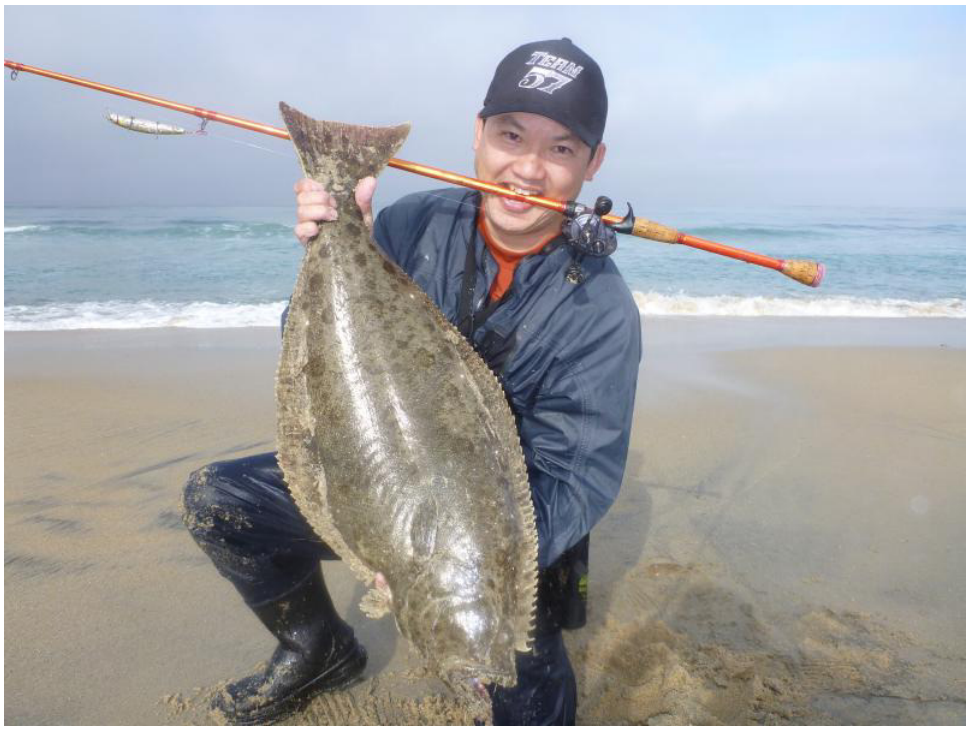
Rip currents can also be created by beach dredging equipment. As the dredge re-deposits sand, it churns up bait and attracts fish. Try fishing along the edges of an area being dredged where turbid water meets clear water. Use the same technique as with rip currents by casting and retrieving along its edges.

*So what tide is best for surf fishing?* The answer varies by beach but here's a good general rule: In Southern California, we have two types of beaches: dredged and natural basin beaches. In the late 1960's, beaches like Hermosa, Redondo, Manhattan and Huntington Beach were dredged using a long pipe system to deposit offshore sand to enlarge the beach. Other beaches

remained untouched where much of their natural structure still remains in place.

Dredged beaches lost much of their natural shape and structure. When fishing these areas my favorite time to fish in about two hours before high tide until two hours after. During high tide most of the "structure" areas are flooded and fish congregate there to eat and rest. One exception to this may be during a low tide when you can reach the outer trough where fish have gathered and wait for the tide to rise in order to forage closer to the beach.

On beaches that have not been dredged both high *and* low tide provide good fishing. One reason may be that on these beaches troughs, rocks and other structure are here naturally and their existence creates specific eddies, troughs and holes. Many of these topography variations are semi permanent and have allowed marine creatures to inhabit them for decades.



**Arthur Lai with a beautiful beach halibut**

Yet another variable that comes into play may also be the tide that is favored by the fish you are targeting. Halibut are lazy by nature. So when I'm fishing for halibut I like to target peak high tide and peak low tide when there is the least water movement. Halibut are the laggards of the sea, and unlike croaker and surfperch, (whom seek out forage) they like to just sit on the bottom and wait for a nice meal to come their way.

Unlike halibut, surfperch seek areas with great water movement and turbulence to churn up their food and create a safe place to rest. My favorite tide for surfperch is a high falling to a low tide. This allows crabs, clams, worms and other forage to be pulled from the beach down into their trough or hole.

Without doubt, the tide I've spent the most time contemplating is the one for corbina. A low tide rising to a high is my favorite time to hunt for the elusive silver shadow of the surf. On a rising tide, corbina surf each successive wave closer to the beach in hopes of landing on a newly flooded crab bed. As each wave crashes closer to shore the more confident I feel that a huge corbina will soon be pulling on the other side of my line!