

# Three Top Spots to Catch Halibut in the Surf

By Bill Varney Jr.



Jonathan Medrano with a beautiful Hermosa Beach halibut

When you hear that spring grunion runs are beginning it has to make you wonder if it's time to get to the beach for some halibut fishing. Just about everyone knows those grunions are a halibut's best friend—at least for dinner that is. So now is the best time to take a close look at where we'll find halibut as they begin their spawning staging near shore.

*Open beaches* offer a challenge when looking to target halibut. When you reach the beach find a high spot near the water's edge and look up and down the beach for signs of fish. Because surf fish congregate near areas of jumbled or foaming water look for small rip currents that form just off shore. Another area to target is off shore structure including holes, kelp beds and reefs. Once you spot these areas, cast your bait or lure along the edge of a rip current, structure or where rocks meet sand--this is where fish will be waiting to ambush bait.

Halibut also congregate in the offshore troughs that are built just below the waves. These troughs are easiest to find at low tide and run parallel to the

beach. One trough will form outside where the waves break farthest out from the beach, another trough will form where the waves break (during high tide) near the shore. Cast over and drag your bait across these troughs to entice halibut to bite.



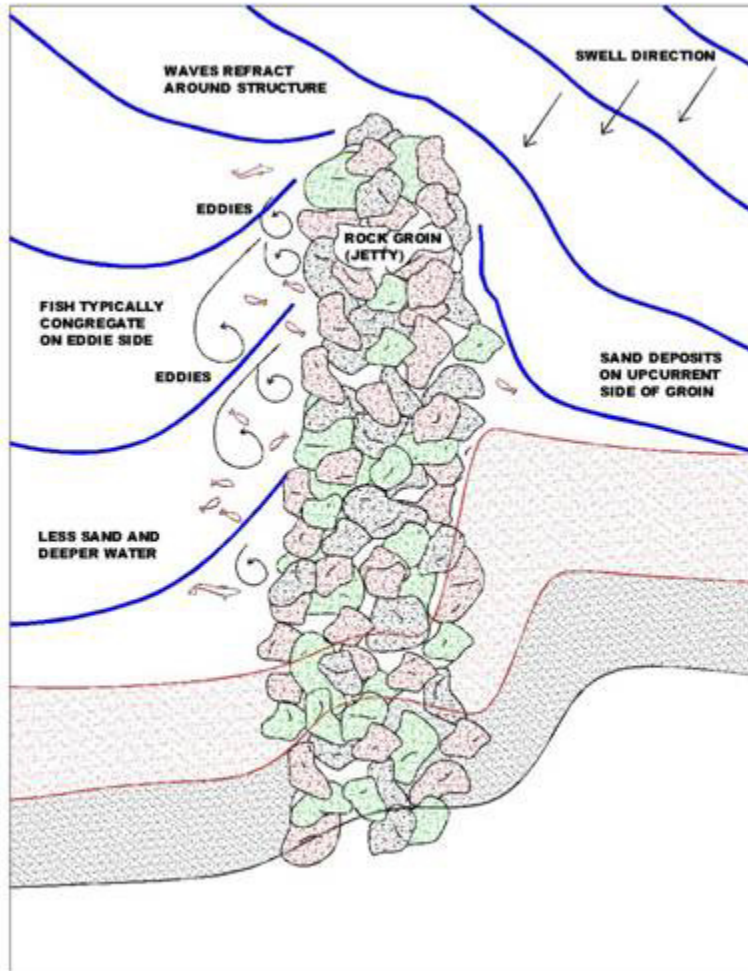
Open beaches that have a rocky point adjacent to them are also great areas to target fish. Find where the sand meets the rocks and fish along this area. Halibut commonly lie-in-wait along these edges.

Without question one of the best times to fish for halibut is shortly before and after a grunion run. The best tip I can give any angler is to find out *exactly where the fish came ashore* to spawn. This is the zone where you will find halibut. Ask the ranger or local lifeguard and they may be able to point you in the right direction.

*Jetties* also offer some great opportunities to catch halibut. The California coast is littered with man-made and natural jetties that provide structure and habitat for halibut. As with open-beach fishing, it's always smart to cast along the edge of rock where it meets sand to find the fish. But there are some subtle differences to also look for when fishing along a jetty.

When approaching the base of the jetty, where it meets the sand, look out to sea and make note of the direction of approaching waves and swells. If the waves are approaching the jetty from the right, a natural eddy will be

generated on the jetty's opposite side (left side). If waves are coming from the left, an eddy will form on the jetty's right side.



Eddys look much like a rip current and are characterized by swirling, foaming off-colored water. Fish congregate in an eddy where moving water churns up bait and allows them to stay hidden while they wait to ambush food. Once you find the eddy, fish along its edges and cast through the middle to find the fish. Don't be surprised when the tide or swell direction changes and the opposite side of the jetty becomes the best place to fish.





*Estuaries and river mouths* are almost always connected as a way for fish to run from warmer breeding grounds out into open-ocean. When approaching an estuary and river mouth area use the same rule of observation as with jetties—determine the direction of the swell and current and how it effects water movement. Unlike with jetties, tide flow will have a much bigger effect on fishing the river mouth. A high going to a low tide will pull water out of the estuary and toward the open ocean. A low going to a high tide will push water and waves up into the estuary and change the direction and movement of fish.

Again, look for the formation of eddys. On an upcoming tide, an eddy may form just *inside* the river mouth. As tides recede, an eddy may form just *outside* the river mouth in an area of open-ocean. This is where the fish will congregate to lay in wait to forage. Fish your bait along this edge and allow it to be pulled by the tide and current into the strike zone. Try to stay away from areas where the water is moving quickly as fish here will not be able to catch up with your bait.

Tides are important to halibut fishing so always familiarize yourself with the current tide predictions for the area you will be visiting. Halibut find it difficult to swim in strong currents so they prefer to feed during the peak

slack tide periods. I generally target halibut one hour before and one hour after peak high and low tide.

Check out this great graphic chart for tides: [www.fishthesurf.com/tides-moon/](http://www.fishthesurf.com/tides-moon/) where you'll find an easy to follow graph of tide changes.

Next, you need to prepare by finding the best place to start. Become familiar with good fishing areas by looking up your favorite strip of coast at: [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com) and mapping out a strategy for fishing. At this site you'll be able to zoom into any coastline on the planet and find the best spots to fish. Look for areas where jetties and river mouths meet the beach. You can also find areas where there are large inshore holes or sand bars, points, kelp and reefs. It's a crazy treasure chest of surf data!