

Reading the Surf

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The most important thing a fisherman can do to assist in upping his or her catch when fishing at the beach is to learn to read the surf. I mean, you have miles and miles of sandy shore, where the heck do you stop and wet a line? Where would the fish most likely be? To answer this question, you must think like a fish. First off, as a fish, you are on everybody's menu; not good for your long-term security plans, and it does not help the natural paranoia you were born with. Second, after surviving the predators, where do you find your next meal? Finally, where do you find a suitable meal that uses as little of your energy as possible? Basically, we have three instincts working together that will guide a fish toward its next location: adequate safety from predators, appropriate food available, and conservation of energy. This usually puts our target fish in a predictable bait holding area.

Look at it another way, a predatory fish can be thought of as an easily recognized serial killer pursuing his prey. Having been identified by the authorities, he would not stand in the middle of the road, run up and down, searching for a victim where he could easily be recognized and apprehended. To continue killing, a serial killer must lie in wait, safely hidden, not using a lot of energy, relying on the knowledge where he might find vulnerable prey. Like serial killers, many species of fish are predators. If we are going to catch predators, we need to learn to think like them. That is, we will learn to recognize locations well suited to predatory fish, and come to recognize the vulnerabilities of these fish so that we can fool them into preying on a cleverly concealed hook.

Probably the best way to identify where fish are likely to gather is learning to read the beach. As you become more observant and begin to recognize the features present in the

dynamic structure of the gulf shore, understand the significance of bird behavior, and identify importance of static structures in the water, you will know where to find areas in the surf where fish are likely to congregate (i.e., fishing holes). The more signs you have per fishing hole, the better your chances of catching fish.

Static Structure

This heading covers rocks, reefs, and any man made permanent object. Of all the likely places for fish to gather, these are the easiest to find because they don't move. If you find any objects in the guts it's always worth working. There is a famous fishing spot on the Padre Island National Seashore called the wreck of the 36. It literally is no more than a large stick; about four foot in total. I think it might have been the mast on a small fishing boat or yacht. Undoubtedly, it has a dramatic story of its own that I will leave for you to speculate upon when the fish are not biting. As a static fish magnet, you would find it hard to beat for consistency on the National Seashore. Bait goes to structure because it

feels safe. Fish go to structure because they know that's where bait is.



When fishing a static structure, try and fish close to it with out hanging up. Cast your bait or lure up tide of the object and retrieve or let the current role past the object down tide. A fish will be tucked in behind the object, out of the tide. If working at long distance, remember Fish Highway. It does exist and when fishing bait at long distance, try and get the bait on the up or down side of a bar as fish will swim the edge of a bar rather than in the middle of the gut.

Dynamic Structure

The contours of the sand below the water is clearly shown by the wave patterns. When looking along a shoreline, you can clearly see the sand bars. As the water is forced over the bar, it forms a wave. The bars are defined as two separate lines of white rolling surf. When it does not break as it approaches the beach, it means the water has depth and the seabed is flat. This, in its simplest form, depicts a hole.

Bait fish, the poor suckers that our prize Trout or Red Fish are targeting, will congregate in the safety of the deeper water, but will go to the thin water that laps the beach to feed. It is difficult to catch any target fish in the skinny water in the surf as they are too skittish, the fish has lost a dimension. The water is shallow and it is now vulnerable to attack from above. Putting your fish head on again, a deep hole would be a good spot to grab a bite to

eat, providing safety in the deep water and plentiful food without exerting yourself too much.



Any situation where the sand bars that are paralleling the beach come together and close the gut off or pinch, narrowing the gut, is always worth a shot. Why would I be there as a fish? Any bait that is swimming between those bars is forced into a natural funnel. The bait, like the predator, will swim the edge of the bars. As they narrow into the natural funnel it becomes a great drive through.

A suck out is formed when the first gut is closed and the water has broken through into the other gut. Bait will funnel along the gut and then wash through the suck out. Remember, they are sitting waiting for the bait to swim to them. There is a good chance the fish will be tucked up near the side of the bar in the pinch as you approach the suck out or waiting just outside. Flip your lure or bait so it will roll along the edge of the bar and out through the suck-out.

Birds

Some days I will be driving the Padre Island National Seashore and the beach will be thick with perfect Trout holding holes, but there seem to be no fish. If the holes are not producing, then you have to look for a second sign to increase your chances of catching a fish. The perfect Trout holding hole with birds working it is definitely worth a shot.



Flocks of seagulls can often be seen dive bombing into pods of bait fish as they rise up in the surf. What you see above water is a result of predator fish feeding on bait from below. The bait, chased by our target fish, scurry to the surface only to be scooped up by birds hovering above. Shore birds have keen eyes and are constantly searching

for a meal. They will feast on these easy pickings every chance they get and lead us to our target fish.

Where do I Fish?

I am a compulsive fisherman, I fish whenever I can. I often get asked, “Where is a good place to fish?” Honestly, I have no idea. The structure of the sea floor, movement of water by tide, wind, and waves, all conspire to define likely places for predatory fish to gather. I always suggest that people work static structures like wrecks. This is a good place to start because those locations are generally known. Next, learn to recognize holes and pinches that are formed by constantly changing structure of the seabed. The presence of holes and pinches that predator fish like to inhabit are only visible to those who carefully watch the surf for signs that indicate the presence of these features. Finally, when you see the gulls working over some bait fish, toss a line into the mayhem. Practice will help you find these natural formations and help cure your surflexia.