

Calendar

Slow Troll

No-Frills Fishing

Of ocean-fishing from a kayak, the appropriately named Paul Fisher says, "It's like learning to ride a bicycle. You develop a sense of balance. And you can work with it. When you swing the pole, you can change your own direction in the kayak as the fish pulls you along."

Sometimes, says Fisher, who has fished for 35 of his 40 years, a large fish actually tows the kayak. In the 19th Century, off the coast of New England, something similar happened to whaling vessels. The men aboard would go on what they called a

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Nantucket sleigh ride if their harpooned catch took the boat for a

dangerous spin around the Atlantic. But when the comparable thing happens to a fishing kayaker, it's welcome, according to Fisher, because it helps tire the fish out all that more quickly. It also means you can fish with lighter tackle. "For some of those bigger fish," he says, "I try to fish with as light a tackle as I can."

He uses, in fact, fresh-water tackle, "not heavy sea-water tuna-type tackle," and has caught sea bass, trout, halibut, catfish, barracuda, mackerel — "just about everything you would catch on a party boat."

For bait he favors artificial varieties, finding live bait too much trouble. "But there are people who actually put bait tanks on the kayak and carry it with them."

Nor does the other obvious difficulty — the lack of space — bother Fisher, who says, "I tend to be a minimalist and take only what I'll use." Even if his tendencies weren't to be economical, newer kayak models, designed with divers in mind, have



Paul Fisher

hatches or tank wells, he notes.

Some also have electric motors, eliminating the problem of trying to paddle and fish at the same time. But, preferring the quiet, Fisher shuns motors. As a result, he says, "I've had dolphins, seals, and fish come right up to the kayak."

So how does he manage with only two hands? His solution has been to make a rack to hold his rod and to "slow-troll."

"And it has been very successful at catching yellowtail and white sea bass.

I'll catch a mackerel and slow-troll it, and catch a sea bass with that." Of course, everything in a kayak is a slow-troll, says Fisher.

Kayak-fishing isn't all a question of overcoming obstacles, according to our guide. One advantage is that you can launch practically anywhere. "For the group of people who have fished up

and down the coast, launching rubber rafts from the beach, this is the latest evolution." Another plus: "You're not spending two hours getting the boat ready to go out. Prep time is, hey, you spend 15 minutes putting the kayak in the car and picking up a little tackle. That means it's a lot easier to fish after work," says Fisher, whose job is in engineering. "Afterwards, you take the kayak home, hose it off, and you're done."

A kayak also makes it easier to get in and out of thick kelp, to which occasionally he ties his kayak in lieu of an anchor.

And if the water is choppy? What then? "You're looking at everything from tides to surf conditions to weather," he acknowledges. "If you try to go out of San Diego Bay against the tide, that'll double the amount of time it'll take you. And if the surf's real big and rough, that's a reason you wouldn't go out, but also why a [conventional] boat wouldn't go out, either."

Off Point Loma is one place Fisher likes to fish in his kayak. "I also do Mission Bay a lot with my ten-year-old son. Mission is a little more sheltered, so that's why I take him there. And until recently he used to sit on my bow.

And it seemed like, for a long time, I did all the paddling, and he did all the fishing. He'd catch 10 or 15 fish in an hour. So he did quite well. But now he has his own kayak, and we fish together."

Fisher and others will be at the San Diego Sailing Center the night before the center's Kayak Fishing Tournament, giving demonstrations of their techniques for you to try. The center will supply the kayaks rigged for fishing; you bring your own tackle.

Losing tackle is not inevitable for learners. "You tie all the expensive stuff down," says the voice of experience. "You put leashes on the poles and nets to keep them from getting away. Where most people lose stuff is in the surf, coming in and out. If you watch people just cruising in their kayaks, they'll flip over then too. But there's an art to it, a talent, that some people have, and you know, you develop it."

— Jeanne Schinto

"Kayak-Fishing Seminar"
Friday, July 28, 4:00-7:30 p.m.
San Diego Sailing Center
1010 North Santa Clara Point
Mission Bay
Free
Info: 858-488-0651

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