



Loon Lake Map Feature



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# STAFF TACKLE

## Central Coast Potluck Fishing Goes Full Tilt

As the boat slogged its way out of the Port San Luis Harbor, there was a sense of excitement in the air that I haven't felt in a long time. We knew we would get rockfish, but what about lingcod, halibut, or even white seabass? Only time would tell, and it wasn't long until a fleet of private boats appeared on the horizon...honed in on...something.

On Thursday the 29th of July, I took my first ever fishing trip off of the Central California Coast onboard the Phenix. I had heard good things about Captain Kyle Dyerly - that he has the knack for finding fish. Kyle runs the Phenix, which is one of several boats in the Patriot Sport-fishing fleet based out of Avila Beach and Morrow Bay.



**WHAT'S HOT**  
by  
**Jack Naves**

As I gazed off the bow, a misty marine-layer deposited beads of dew on my face. While a cold droplet of water trickled down my nose, the boat suddenly rocked forward as the engines idled down to a slower chug. Several dozen private boats were anchored in a large pod seeking white seabass as their prized catch. From my observation, there didn't seem to be any action going on. I had spoken to Captain Kyle the previous afternoon about our prospects of catching one of the elusive croakers. Kyle said that so far in the month of July, the Phenix had landed a staggering total of 96 white seabass! He said he searches for seabass on the way to and from the rockfishing grounds. When he sees something he likes on the sonar, anglers drop gear in front of the seabass and hang on for the ride.

On the way out, Kyle didn't like what he saw and quickly spun the boat southward at full speed. Another thirty minutes passed until we arrived

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Jack Naves poses on the deck of the Phenix on July 29 with a chunky California halibut. The fish slammed a 3/0 teaser hook baited with squid strips above a two-ounce scampi jig. Jack was employing a light bass-fishing setup with an Abu Garcia Revo baitcasting reel and a Shimano Clarus rod. Shallow-water potluck fishing off the Central Coast opens up the possibilities of prime flatfish like this making their way onto your dinner plate.

## WHAT'S HOT

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at the rockfishing grounds.

A jagged rocky point split lonely beaches on either side. We were about sixteen miles south of our departure point. Peaks of dry grassy hills disappeared into a blanket of foggy marine-layer above. As the boat swung into position for the first drift, we readied our gear for the drop. This trip would be quite a departure from my usual rockfishing trips at the Farallon Islands.

Instead of the usual sixteen-ounce diamond bar that I throw up north, I was able to utilize a bass-fishing setup with a three-ounce P-Line Laser Minnow. We were only fishing in 40 feet of water, making my heavy-duty rockfishing rigs unnecessary.

Perched on the starboard side of the bow, I hooked up immediately, putting a nice gopher rockfish into my bag. As I swung my next fish over the bow, I asked the captain what I had. "It's a brown rockfish", Kyle relayed, as he unhooked it and threw it into my bag. He said the fillets are one of the better quality cuts of the rockfish varieties. All around the boat, chunky brown rockfish steadily filled bags as we made southward drifts along the rolling coastline.

I continued to hook rockfish, but they were smaller than most. I changed my setup by clipping an eight-ounce swimbait below a teaser leader. Meanwhile, most of the locals were having success employing Hookup Baits.

Hookup Baits are tube jigs that mimic fleeing baitfish. I had never heard of them, but they seemed to be all the rage in Southern and Central California. Without any of these local baits in my box, I scrambled to make another change. On the next run between drifts, I clipped a white two-ounce bullet head jig to the bottom of my teaser rig. Instead of a swimbait, I threaded an orange twin-tailed scampi onto the jig head.

As we made our next drift, Captain Kyle lunged for the bamboo gaff



**Frank Cannon of Arroyo Grande employed a dead-sticking approach onboard the Phenix on July 29. He used pink plastic squid dropper loops baited with cut strips of frozen squid. He would deploy the rig near the bottom and simply hold the rod stationary until the telltale tug of a bite. While this method sounds old-school, the results were nothing short of spectacular. Not only was Frank hooking more fish than anybody, but he had the largest average sized fish of anybody on the boat.**

located on the outside of the wheel-house behind me. I could hear a commotion at the stern as Kyle ran down the side of the boat. I leaned over the rail to get a view of what was going on. I could see a large brown shape appearing from the deep, and I figured a nice lingcod would soon be hanging from the gaff.

To my surprise, instead of a lingcod, the unmistakable oval-shape of a California halibut emerged at the surface! The fish made a few runs, but the angler eventually pulled it close enough to be gaffed. Possibilities of white seabass, premium rockfish, and now California halibut? The Central California version of the potluck trip was starting to look pretty nice.



**George Abellera of Long Beach boated a hefty limit of brown rockfish onboard the Phenix on July 29. He used a combination of jigs and dropper loop setups. Deckhand Dustin Miles made quick work of the catch on the way back to port, providing premium rockfish fillets for George to take home.**

On the next drift, I pitched my teaser rig off of the starboard bow into the leading side of the drift. I felt the thump of the bottom, and slowly worked the rig back towards the boat. Above my scampi, I had a short dropper leader with a 3/0 octopus hook. I pinned a thin strip of frozen squid to this hook, which acted as the 'teaser' six inches above the main jig.

My rig was almost vertical under the boat when I felt a sharp strike. After a quick hook set and a few cranks, it was obvious that this was no rockfish. The fish started headshaking and making line-stripping runs. All of the headshaking made me suspect a lingcod, and it seemed like a good one at that. "I have something nice here!" I shouted, and Captain Kyle was immediately at my side with the gaff.

"Color!" I grunted, as I heaved the fish to the surface. In one smooth motion, Kyle gaffed the fish and swung it over the rail onto the bow. I

couldn't believe my eyes, as a meaty halibut flopped on the deck at the base of my boots. The fish had hit the baited teaser hook and not the scampi. Deckhand Dustin Miles quickly gilled and gutted the fish and placed it on ice in the hold. It was an exhilarating cap to my mid-coast adventure.

Kyle once again searched for white seabass after we got our rockfish limits, but alas, there was nothing worthy of a drift. Overall, I was impressed with the professionalism of the Captain and his crew. Besides pulling limits of quality rockfish, they went the extra mile by searching for white seabass along the way. They had a state-of-the-art fish cleaning setup, and overall the boat was clean and well organized. Anytime you are in the Central Coast area, I strongly recommend taking the time to fish with the Phenix. You can book a trip at [PatriotSportfishing.com](http://PatriotSportfishing.com) or by contacting them at 805-595-7200.