







## Kayak Fishing Alaska

**When most people think of Alaska, they think of wilderness. When they think of fishing in Alaska they think of salmon, lingcod, and giant halibut. The funny thing is, they rarely think of kayak fishing — funny because this is the place where kayak**

fishing was born. Of course those first wood and skin vessels built by the native Alaskans bore little resemblance to the roto-molded plastic, electronics-carrying, bait-tank-equipped kayaks of today, and when their builders ventured out to sea it was for reasons of survival, rather than sport.

Some people say Alaska calls to them; the desire to see the last area of true wilderness in the U.S. has drawn many to our northernmost state — some for gold, some for solitude, some to avoid the law, some to work the lucrative commercial fisheries. The chance to land trophy salmon or barn-door halibut in this wilderness calls pretty strongly to many also.

My call to Alaska came in the form of a phone call from kayak fishing guide Howard McKim, owner of Ketchikan Kayak Fishing, who learned kayak fishing in San Diego and decided to make a career of it in Alaska. Howard told me stories of salmon fishing and of landing a 100-pound halibut from his kayak right in front of his house. Being an avid big-game kayak fisherman, I jumped at the invitation to join him for a week of kayak fishing and the chance to mark another fish off the list of species I have always wanted to catch — the Pacific halibut.

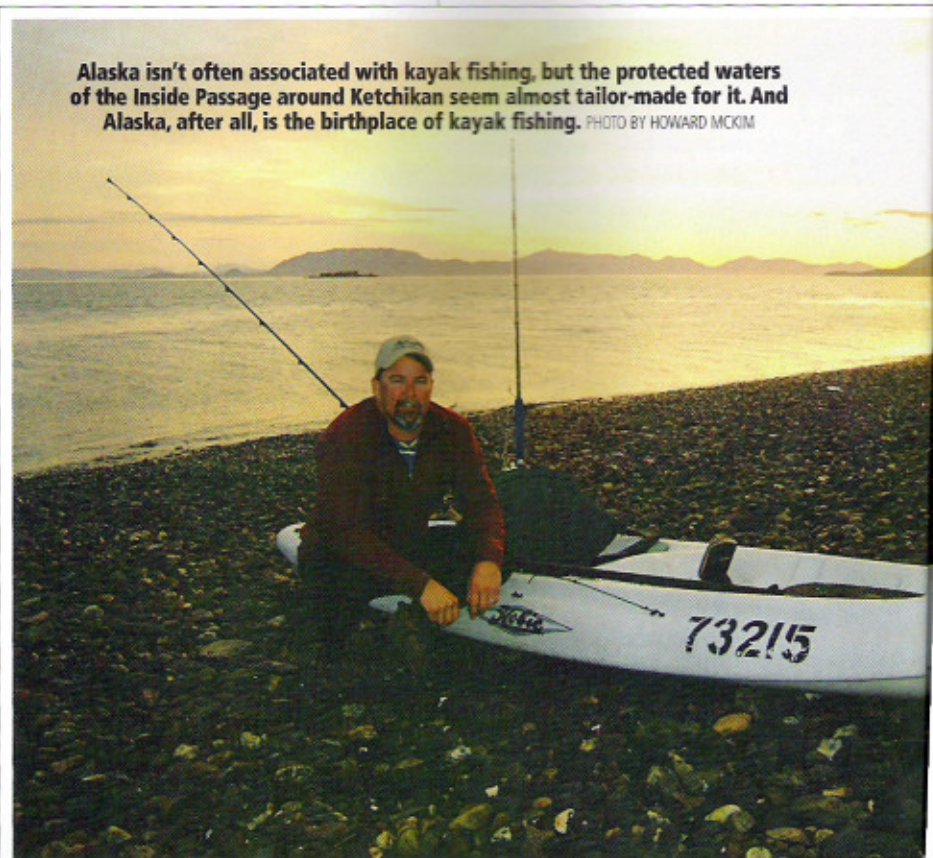
Halibut are not the only species to be pursued from the kayaks in Alaska, though. Our plan was to go after several species, including lingcod and king salmon. Later in the season coho salmon, pinks, and chums are also readily available. Just a few days before I arrived in Ketchikan, one of the local kayak anglers had landed a 32-pound king.

In preparation for the trip, I did have to make the investment in some cold-water paddling clothing, since the water

remarkable. Besides the green landscape and the cool weather, the most notable difference between the two locations was the fact that it stayed light from 3 a.m. to midnight, making for a very long day of fishing.

After I met up with Howard, we made plans for an evening fishing session. Howard has a full fleet of kayaks all rigged with rod holders and fishfinders, ready to chase down your quarry. Before we got on the kayaks, we did a rundown of the safety equipment and safety procedures. Unlike

**Alaska isn't often associated with kayak fishing, but the protected waters of the Inside Passage around Ketchikan seem almost tailor-made for it. And Alaska, after all, is the birthplace of kayak fishing.** PHOTO BY HOWARD MCKIM



temperatures can range from the mid-60s all the way down to the low 40s. Taking Howard's advice, I picked up some dry pants and polypropylene thermals. A good paddling jacket is also a must, as well as a layering system of clothes. The weather conditions can change from sunny and warm to windy and rainy and back again within a morning, so you need to be prepared for anything.

Arriving at the Ketchikan airport in a slight drizzle, I couldn't get over how green everything was. Having returned from a trip to the East Cape of Baja only two days prior made the contrast between the two locations even more

when fishing from the coast of Southern California, a kayak angler fishing in Alaska needs to be very self-sufficient.

I carry a lot of safety equipment on my kayaks at home, but up here the need to be fully prepared for any situation is much more crucial. Howard explained that whenever he does a long-distance paddle or makes any major crossing he carries enough gear to camp out if necessary. The weather can come up fast, and you may need to spend the night camped in the woods.

Our first evening session on the water resulted in lots of rockfish and a couple of sole — not the gamefish I was hoping for, but in this setting, the fish-



land-most  
e two  
light  
for a  
d, we  
shing  
et of  
s and  
your  
kayaks,  
equip-  
Unlike

ing took a backseat to the scenery. The rockfish were all released, but many weren't lucky enough to make it back to their home before a bald eagle swooped down and grabbed them. The eagles would drop down, mere feet above our heads, wind roaring through their wings as they grabbed the fish just off the bows of our kayaks. It was a sight I won't soon forget.

Our second day of fishing was a more aggressive paddle, exploring some distant waters. For me, it was again all the rockfish I could catch, and again, the scenery and wildlife took center stage. The sun shone for the entire day, and we were entertained by a large pod of humpback whales cruising the area. When we needed a break from paddling, we would beach the kayaks on a nearby island and explore the rainforest — always being careful to pull the kayaks way up on the beach because of the major tidal ranges, which can be as great as 25 feet.

On our third day of fishing, after setting several crab and shrimp pots, we went to a spot that had given up some halibut in the past, and I was hoping today would be my day. Howard recommended putting some cut herring on the bottom and drifting near a small river mouth. While drifting, we also were tossing Fish Traps and dragging them on the bottom. I was

landing my usual bounty of rockfish when Howard called over that he was on the "right kind."

He had hooked the halibut on a Fish Trap, and his light Seeker rod was bent virtually in half. Fishing a Calcutta 400 loaded with just 12-pound Ande line, Howard worked the fish with finesse, letting it run when needed and gaining line when he could. It took 25 minutes to get the fish to the boat, and then the fight really got started.

For dealing with halibut, Howard carries a small harpoon with a slip-tip attached to 100 feet of rope with a buoy connected at the end. After working the fish into position, Howard stuck it with

Southern  
ing in  
icient.  
ent on  
re the  
situa-  
Howard  
oes a  
s any  
h gear  
weather  
need to  
oods.  
on the  
and a  
n I was  
e fish-



# You Get MORE with Newell!

**MORE** Models to Choose From!

**MORE** Choices in Gear Ratios!

**MORE** Stainless Steel Gears!

**MORE** Corrosion Resistance!

**Thinking Graphite?  
Think...**



**NEWELL**

*Graphite*

High Performance Graphite Reels

Available at Better Tackle Stores Everywhere.

## Big Names. Expert Service.

Visit us online at [www.rod rack.net](http://www.rod rack.net)



**Rod Blanks:** CalStar, Seeker, Graphite USA, G. Loomis, St. Croix, Purgas, Rainshadow, Tiburon and more.

**Components and Supplies:** Aftco, U-40 Forecast, Fuji, Perfection, Struble, Pacific Bay, FlexCoat, All America Roller Guides, Gudebrod, and more.

**Reels and Conversions:** Accurate, Avet, Penn, ProGear, Shimano, Tiburon, Baker and Willfish.

**Tackle:** Burns, Outfitters Choice, Izorline, Jinkai, Jerry Brown, BHP Tackle, FatBait, Smitty, SKB, Albackore, Angler Sports, Sumo, Tady, Mustad, Owner, Sea Striker, Leadmaster, Catchy Tackle, Sevenstrand, Team Intern'l, Triggerr Clamp, Xtra-Tuff, Smooth Drag, Precision Drag, Gary Sato, Grundens, more.

1025 "B" Street, Hayward, CA 94541

510-881-1775 • Fax: 510-881-1811



# BALLYHOOD

## "Soft Iron" Lure



The new "Soft Iron" lure by Ballyhood combines the lifelike feel of a plastic bait and the castability of an iron jig in a lure that mimics a live squid with remarkable accuracy. Weighing 3-1/2 ounces and measuring 5-1/2 inches long with a 6/0 "stiff-rigged" hook, the Soft Iron even feels like a squid when it's wet. Applications including casting to keep paddies for yellowtail and boiler rocks for calicos, drifting for halibut, and "dead-sticking" the lure near the bottom to imitate the spawned-out squid white seabass find so irresistible. With a 2/0 barrel swivel at the front to fight line twist, the Soft Iron can even be slowtrolled behind a four to six-ounce torpedo sinker. Each lure comes with a small "glow-stick" that can be inserted into the translucent body for low-light seabass fishing.



714-545-0196  
or visit  
Ballyhood.com



*Fish-Ng Accessories, Inc.*

Quality Manufacturers of

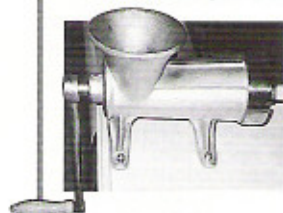
### PRECISION AUTO REELS



*Quiet  
Powerful  
Superfast  
Molded to Fit  
Like A Glove  
Fits Penn  
4/0 - 9/0 Reels*

*"The most versatile, strongest electric gear drive attachment on the market today. I guarantee it."*

*- Capt. Anthony Ng*



### Mister Chummer

Fresh chum catches more fish! Saves time and money.

To Order or For More Information...

**Call 1-800-720-FISH**

[www.Fish-Ng.com](http://www.Fish-Ng.com)



Dropping pots in the morning can yield a haul of dungeness crabs and giant prawns on the way back in the afternoon. Combine with fresh halibut for a truly memorable seafood feast. PHOTO BY JIM SAMMONS

a well-placed thrust. Not taking too kindly to being impaled, the fish took off in an explosion, dragging the buoy down as if it were not even there. The scene brought back memories of the scenes in "Jaws" where the shark drags the barrels down beneath the surface.

Ten minutes later, Howard had dragged the fish back to the surface, where its thrashing soaked him to the skin. By the time the fish was finally loaded onto the kayak, it had been 40 minutes since Howard had initially brought it to the side of his boat. We took the fish to a certified scale, and it weighed in at 73 pounds. Later that day, we went back out and pulled the crab and shrimp pots and were rewarded with full traps. We had a feast fit for kings that night — halibut, dungeness crabs, and giant prawns.

We spent one full day trying to stay out of the wind while mooching for

salmon; we would just drift with the wind and current for a while and then paddle back to our original spot. But the salmon run had not kicked in yet, and upon checking with the other boats in the area, we discovered it had been slow for everyone. I, of course, spent most of my day catching and feeding rockfish to the ever-present bald eagles.

It seems I was a couple of weeks early for the full king salmon run and just not lucky enough to get my big halibut. Although I didn't get the fish I was looking for on this trip, I did get many fish and would certainly never starve in this bountiful location. Of course, not getting my target fish is a perfect excuse for going back. ■

*Howard McKim can be reached at 888-31-KAYAK, or visit his website at [YakFishAlaska.com](http://YakFishAlaska.com). He is also the moderator of the Northwest kayak forum on the [Kayak4Fish.com](http://Kayak4Fish.com) site.*



A 73-pound Pacific halibut on 12-pound test is very impressive. So is a 73-pound halibut from a kayak. Combine the two factors, and you've got a really spectacular achievement. It took Howard McKim only 25 minutes to bring the big flattie boatside and harpoon it, but subduing it after that took another 40 minutes. PHOTO BY JIM SAMMONS