

This article is the result of arm-twisting from Bob Spurgeon, due to suggestions made to the Officers of BASS, that we ought to run some instructional type articles. The basis for the suggestion, and I have to say it is not a new one, it is that new members of BASS may also be new to bass angling and therefore for whom Surf Fishing, Rock Fishing, Lure Fishing etc. may be a brand new experience.

Surf Fishing for bass is just about as traditional in approach as you can possibly get as a technique. For those old enough among us it is easy to get nostalgic and reminisce about such classic strands (beaches.. J.) as Pendine, Rhossili (Llangennith), Dinas Dinlle, Hells Mouth; and in South West Ireland Inch and Stradbally, where we used to throw our baits behind the mystical third breaker and take several good, slab sided silver bass per session. Sadly those prolific days have gone, and with them many disillusioned anglers whose catch rates fell inexorably to a level that, for them, made the effort not worthwhile. This didn't happen overnight though, no, it was a gradual process that took perhaps nearly 25 years.

Today's modern basser has the advantage of never having known the heydays of yesteryear, our expectations are much lower... realistic even. But our enthusiasm for the surf is unquenchable. Surf fishing today may not be as prolific but you can still catch fish, good one too, although most of your fish will, in my experience, be small schoolies.

Surf fishing is much more than just about catching fish. It is a totally satisfying experience, encapsulated so well when such men as Bob Moss, Vincent McKernan, Malcolm Gilbert and Nick Cosford are seen in action. These guys just revel in the suds. Bob in particular positively frolics in the breakers. He wades so deep you start to wonder why he bothers to don waders at all. Yes, the things that all surf men have in common are the love of facing and battling curly breakers, with a fresh wind blowing in their faces and..... very wet feet! Surf fishing is rough, tough and wet but it can also be a truly breathtaking experience and one not to be missed.

So, how do you tackle the suds? There are many approaches and I can't claim to have tried every method. My own experience has been with the classic strands in S.W. Ireland: Inch, Glenbeigh, Fermoyle and Stradbally, plus the immensely aggressive strands in North Cornwall close to Padstow. I have also fished around the beaches in Mid and North Wales, with special affection afforded to those lovely strands on the Lleyn Peninsula - Hells Mouth and the Whistling Sands being just two.

What do we mean by a 'Storm Beach'? Well to me this is typically a west or south westerly facing beach, which is fairly flat and therefore shallow. The distance between high and low water can be 150yds plus. This type of beach is often characterised by a steep bank at the high tide mark. At first glance these beaches can be, and often are, featureless; but careful observation will often reveal small shallow sand bars, ocean holes, shallow gullies and small streams. All potential fish holding areas. These beaches will under good conditions have several widely spaced lines of surf, the flat water between the crests being known as tables - along which bass are theorised to run. The waves can be wind driven or the result of an offshore Low pressure system resulting in a powerful ground sea. In the latter case quite often there will be no wind at all. The most dramatic and exciting surfs I have fished have been Inch, where the water tables just seemed to stretch out to the horizon. For sheer speed of moving water though, Fermoyle (near Castle-gregory), has to be experienced at least once in a lifetime. During the early flood you can be standing on dry-ish sand; and then you will be hit, and I mean hit, by a wall of incredibly fast moving water, which will speed past you for three to four yards, effectively locking you in place. It will then retreat at breakneck speed, sucking madly at your legs, until suddenly you are now again thirty yards or so from the edge of the surf - fantastic!

## **TACKLING THE SURF..... SAFETY!**

A crucial consideration before setting your

first foot into the surf is safety. The hazards, and they are very real, are not always obvious to the uninitiated. It is very important to make a day time recce of your chosen beach at low water; even better at low water springs. You can then determine the whereabouts of boulder patches, channels or shallow gullies, deep pools and even drop off's, the last occur on at least one of my beaches.

A not so obvious hazard is a steep bank on the high tide mark. Here rapidly draining backwash can drag you, or worse - and more likely, small child anglers (we all take our kids fishing!) into a potentially fatal fierce surf. I have had experience of this at Stradbally, when it was necessary to really brace and dig in, a frail or senior angler could have been swept away.

Another hazard is the sand bar - which can leave you nicely stranded. You nearly always get a tide rip going out to sea at the ends of these bars. The area of the rip is normally indicated by quieter water with smaller waves due, I assume, to its much deeper water. Potentially a great fish holding spot. But a no go area for chest or thigh boot wading. Innocent looking sand pits - no not the ones the kids dig - can be up to 2ft deep. "That's not deep", I hear you mutter. No, its not - until you step into one in the dark, when you are already only 6 inches away from your wader top in sudsy water!

I would strongly advise staying away from estuary flats, where even the best of us always stand a chance of getting cut off by advancing tides rapidly filling deep gullies. Finally beware of fishing under cliffs, as falling rocks are always a possibility; and quick sands although uncommon do occur - ask locally.

The above could, I suppose, put some budding surf angler off -don't let it. Surf Fishing is one of the safest branches of our sport; providing you apply that sometimes rare commodity common-sense to your angling.

## **TACTICS AND METHODS.**

On my beaches the best times to be fishing are April, May and June - then September,

October and November; with December included for S. Ireland. As a general guideline these times should hold good for most beaches, although there will always be local exceptions. Do some research on your own patch. I have a strong preference for night fishing on all English beaches, but have found daytime fishing to be almost as good in S. Ireland, providing other conditions are OK, like good surf, dull/overcast with perhaps a touch of drizzle. For your first sessions, however, whilst finding your 'surf' feet stick to daytime sessions.

Tide wise it depends on the beach. I like Springs for beaches which do not have a strong lateral flow, for those that do, then a middling tide, for me, is preferable. You can tackle fast lateral flows on big springs however if you are prepared to work hard (it can be fun too!). The most productive times for me have been 1 hour before low water to 2 hours up; and 1 hour before high water to 1 hour back. If these periods coincide with dawn or dusk so much the better.

## **CONDITIONS**

Conditions wise you are looking for good layered surf with defined water tables between waves. I like fishing into the wind, and don't mind whether the surf is wind driven or as a result of a low pressure system. I prefer seasonal temperatures for the months I'm fishing in, but feel it is a mistake to dismiss out of hand cool or even cold conditions, as many of my better fish have come then.

## **TACTICS....**

for large almost featureless strands.

For me the overwhelming tactic for success in the surf assuming, a) we are fishing in good conditions, and, b) we have bass present - is mobility; with a capital M. Bass are not going to populate the whole length of a strand. You can take the siege approach and wait for a pod of fish to swim to you. Or, you can make things happen by actively searching for the fish along the length of the strand.

Many anglers prefer the siege method,

mostly, I believe, out of laziness; justifying their approach in the belief that bass will eventually turn up. But this is not a lot of good if their chosen bit of beach is barren and rarely if ever holds fish.

Mobility, for me, means fishing for up to a maximum of thirty minutes in one spot and if fish-less or bite-less then moving by one or two hundred yards along the beach. This tactic is even better if fishing with a partner, as you can leapfrog and cover much more ground. Once fish are located you can fish close together until the action stops then revert to a search pattern again. Fishing with a partner also allows you the options of varying the distances you fish, with one fishing close in - from say 20 yards to 50 yards whilst the other explores further out, say to 100 yards.

Mobility is achieved by discarding superfluous items of tackle, in particular large bulky things like rod rests and bait buckets, the wearing of good chest waders with the bait carried in a soft lightweight neck bag; tackle is carried in the pockets. Bags and boxes which have to be parked on the beach need too much attention as the tide floods, forcing you to leave the surf in order to move them and in the process losing you incredible amounts of valuable fishing time - plus preventing certain fishing methods which I will enlarge upon later.

## **BAIT.**

Good baits for traditional surf fishing in my experience are fresh sandeel (though the blast frozen Ammo are highly recommended), King Ragworm, Black Lugworm, good quality Blow Lugworm and fresh Razorfish. I consider these primary baits for the surf, with peeler crab and mackerel fillets (or heads) as good secondary baits.

The sandeels tend to sort out the better fish if present (no such thing as a wonder bait), whilst the lugworm definitely pulls the schoolies. Traditionalists in Cornwall fish sandeels at dusk and first light and lugworm through the night. It works, but I would be happy to fish sandeel both day and night - preferably eels in the 7" to 9" lengths. I do like big baits, and will put on several

blowlug to make a bait over 12" long - or even more! My one and only 10lb plus bass took a bait of lug and white rag that totally filled a 20" hook snood.

## **HOOKS**

All of these baits can be effectively fished on several patterns. I have standardised on Spearpoint hooks in (their) sizes 6/0 and 8/0, these roughly equate to a 4/0 and 5/0 in most other manufacturers ranges.

These black finished hooks are very sharp straight out of the packet, have a small neat barb and medium to long shank with a smallish eye, the last feature ensures that they do not damage worm baits too much. Some anglers don't like them, believing them to be on the brittle side. I can only say I've never had one fail. They do rust and I tend to treat them as single usage. As hooks go they are expensive at around £1.20 for 10, but they really are effective at turning bites into fish due to their sharpness.

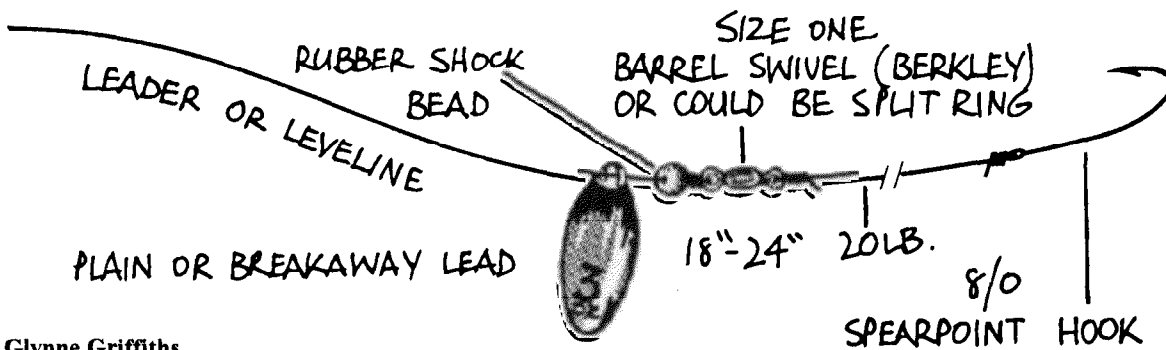
Other ranges to consider would be Mustad Nordic bends or their more traditional patterns like the 79515. I am not keen on Aberdeens, even the beefed up versions, I feel that they could open out on a good fish and am therefore not prepared to take the chance. Not everyone will agree with me here (maybe no-one!).

## **RIGS**

I like simple but effective end rigs for the surf. One of the most efficient is the fixed paternoster. My standard rig has a snood length, equalling (nearly) the lead length, of 28" to 30". You can include the dreaded bait-clip if you must, which may improve bait presentation during the cast, but as typical casts are between 40 - 60 yards, bait destruction is not normally a problem. If I incorporate a clip it is fixed down and a small bead stopped by a rubber band or stop knot may be used on the hook snood to prevent the bait being blown up the snood on the cast.

I like clear mono's like Stren or Berkley, 30lb for trace and leader (if used) and 20lb for hook snoods. Bite indication is very

## SO CALLED FREE RUNNING LEGER



Glynne Griffiths

good with this rig, many fish hook themselves against the inertia provided by the weight of the lead plus the resistance provided by the wires embedded in the sand. Typically I use breakaway 3oz, either long or short tail leads, which is about right for most reasonable surfs; 4oz is used if conditions are a little tougher and 2oz home-mades if conditions will allow. Either single or pannel hook arrangements are used depending on the type and size of bait.

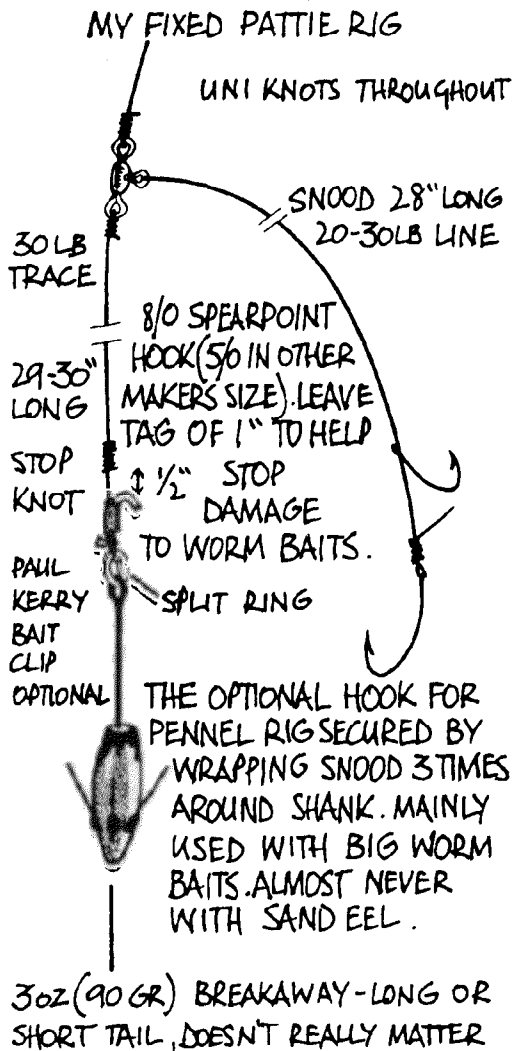
## RODS

Rods don't catch fish, anglers do that! I have built specialist surf rods professionally for over 14 years, and the only thing you can be sure of is that one man's meat is another man's poison as far as bass surf sticks are concerned. Me! I've almost lost interest these days, I don't care whose rod it is, what it's made of, or how cheap it may be. However, what I do ask of my surf wand is the following:

1) Be balanced - : (thanks to Vincent McKernan for this one) -i.e. when fitted with a 6500 sized reel the rod's balance is slightly biased to the butt when held normally. Tip heavy rods even light ones feel awful and are tiring to use.

2) To achieve (1) means typically a length of around 11' 6" to 11' 9"; 10ft would be OK if ultra -uncult. I've never yet found a 13ft that was not top heavy.

3) Light : I would not expect the blank to weigh more than 6 -8oz. 16oz maximum fully strung up.



Glynne Griffiths

4) Action : Medium or friendly fast taper able to cast 3oz (lob 4oz 50 yards).

5) Material : Carbon, glass or semi-carbon. Carbon has a nice clean feel but it's not essential.

6) Reel : Fitted in high position, i.e. around 29 to 30" from the butt.

8) Rod Guides : I am very biased to Fuji and you won't go far wrong if your rod sports old favourites like the shock absorbed BNHG or the more modern non-shock absorbed BSVLG pattern (bit lighter). Single leg guides are OK too. Both mentioned patterns have their equivalent in single leg style. As to sizes then either a 25 or 30 butt ring down to a 10 for first intermediate with a size 12 tip. This will suit fixed spool or multiplier. Suggested set: 25, 20, 16, 12, 10, 10, 10 & tip 12; this for a 11' 6" rod. Add another 10 for 12 to 13 footers.

The original Zziplex Bass went along the line of the above spec, sadly now obsolete; the replacement is more like a casting pole - still there may be one somewhere second-hand if not new. Conoflex do many nice blanks. Their 'Bones' is a good stick if a little dated and generally very cheap at around £25 for the blank. The Diawa High Performance Bass has its followers amongst BASS members, though I don't know it myself. Bob Spurgeon likes it so much he has acquired four of them.... ask him!

Reels: I do profess a total preference for either 5500 or 6500 sized multipliers. They maintain your rods balance so much better than even smallish fixed spools and are so much more pleasant to use - even at night. ABU, Diawa - who cares? They are both OK, take your pick. I suppose I have to admit I'm biased against fixed spools. If that's what you have and their of carp fishing size then I have to grudgingly admit they are reasonably OK. Some anglers actually prefer them (YUK..... 'sorry Nick').

Lines : I used to fish with either 20lb or 30lb leaders (Stren clear) and 15lb running line. I now favour going over to standard mono level line in 20lb test. This is for two reasons; one it gets rid of that awful leader knot (if you can call it a knot) which tests out at very, very few pounds and is a

potential fish loser - though a very, very efficient weed gatherer! And two, if there is no weed in the surf I like to point the rod down the line and feel for bites; 20lb line is stiffer, stretches less than 15lb and so is better at transmitting bites. Plus being a bigger O/D it does not cut into your fingers, like 15lb does, under the tension of the surf falling and pulling on the running line. Don't concern yourself about 20lb lines diameter - you can still cast it too far. It's downside tends to show in strong tides when you may even need to revert to leader and as low as a 10lb running line.

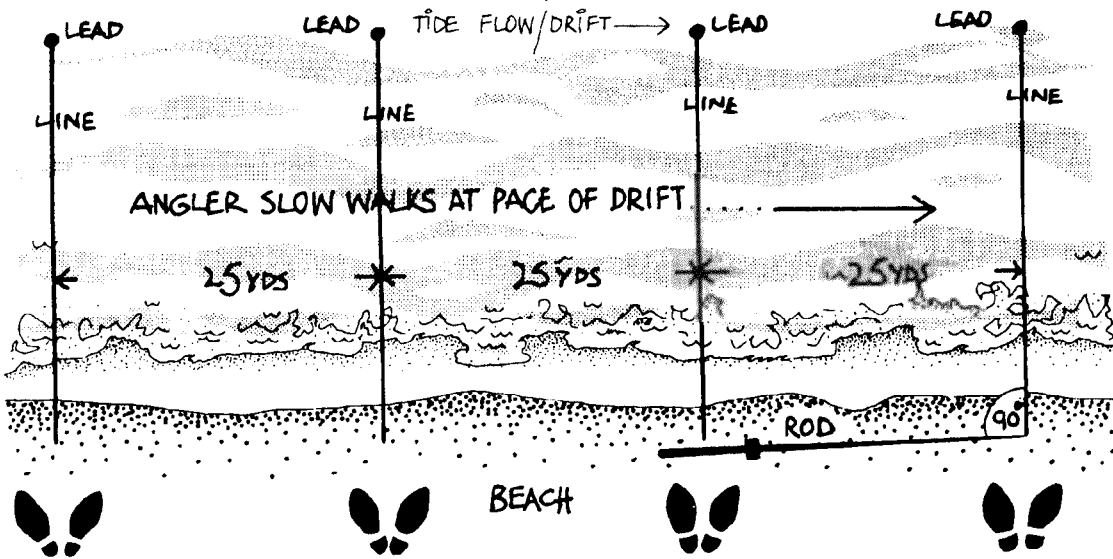
## FISHING THE SURF

The techniques for tackling the surf are, as partially already outlined, wonderfully simple. My usual approach on arrival at the beach is to size up the surf and decide where to start first. Often one end of a beach will be littered with weed. The right hand side of Inch is notorious for this. Simply get up the beach until it clears. I always start off with the belief that bass will be close, i.e. 20 to 30 yards, so with this in mind I don't wade straight away, but kick off from the sand. If bite-less I can't resist wading to at least waist deep. Bobbing around in the suds totally integrated into your quarry's environment is extremely inspiring.

The rod can either be held high, towards the vertical, which helps keep the line out of the near breakers, and/or longshore drift which could spring the lead, or towards a more horizontal position. In both cases you are getting a decent angle between the line and the rod shaft. The optimum for bite registration is 90° . The nearer you allow the rod/line angle to come together the poorer bites will register on the rod top. For me though the most exiting way is to point the rod right down the line and use my thumb and middle finger on the line to feel for bites. This is a very sensitive method. You can feel the slightest knocks and tremors, and even the lead move as a fish comes towards you, giving a much earlier indication of a drop back bite than the rod used alone.

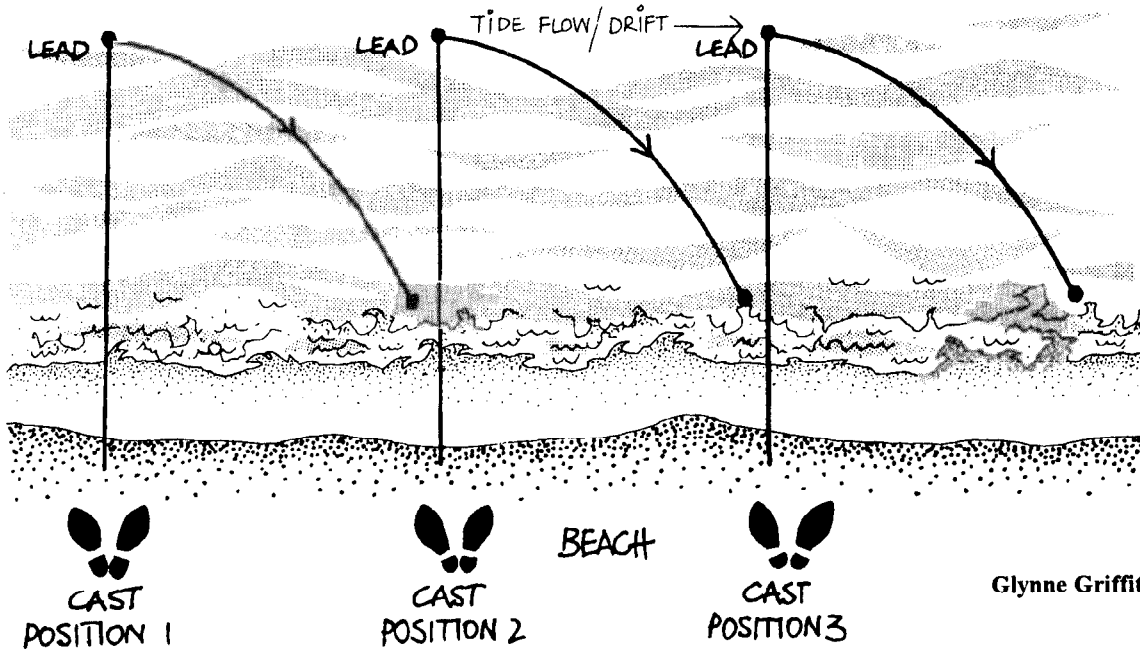
Bites to lug and sandeel can be very positive, with the tip typically registering a couple

## WALKING LEAD METHOD.



Glyne Griffiths

## SWINGING ARC LEAD METHOD.



Glyne Griffiths

knocks before pulling quite hard over. Mostly fish will hook themselves. But most bass men I know like to take up any slack line by winding down and pulling into the fish, often walking backwards to assist in the hook setting process.

In the event of a massive slack liner, caused

when a fish swims a good distance in towards an angler, you may observe the strange sight of a demented backward sprint out of the surf accompanied by several often futile attempts at striking. Thank god most bassing is carried out when Joe Public is not around! The most interesting bite is the slow, slow slack-liner; when a fish manages to



Chris Barnard

break out the lead but your first inkling of a fish is when you lose the tight line to the lead. The technique I use to deal with this type of bite is to gently wind to re-establish contact with the lead, and then wait and try to feel for a knock or losing line contact again. Either signal is my cue to tighten up and strike.

So far we have been fishing with fixed leads. If I want to cover more water, or fish with a moving bait I will either put on a plain arsley bomb or trip the grip wires on my breakaway lead. You can use the same fixed paternoster or even a simple running ledger. With a moving bait we can chose to fish at the same distance out from the beach by walking down-tide to maintain that, or we can fish in an arc - enabling us to cover far out and close in. Using one, or even better both of these techniques will enable you to really search out your fish.

Once having located a pod then it may be best to go back to the anchored lead. You can cover many, many yards of beach with this technique very efficiently; it should by now be self evident why you don't want bags, buckets and rod rests. As you may have gathered, what I really like, is that without all that unnecessary gear you needn't leave the surf at all.

On big powerful beaches, like Watergate Bay in N. Cornwall, on big Springs, fixed leads are impossible from around Low water to plus 3hrs, even with 6oz of lead and cod

poles. Many anglers give up or won't even try. But by using the wandering lead technique you can still fish effectively with light gear and in a positive, interesting manner.

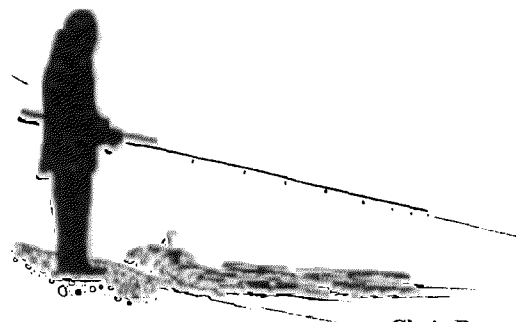
## PLAYING FISH IN SURF.

The reality is that most fish caught in the surf will be schoolies, and if the truth be told, after the bite, it can be difficult to know if there is a fish on even as you retrieve line. This is caused, in the main, by the resistance of the lead - in particular wired ones, plus any accumulated weed on the line and trace. The old hands at this game will have been witness to the following time honoured scenario. "Is 'e on then?",

"Don't know, I think so". "No he's gone...., oh, no, wait I can feel him."

Etc, etc.

There is usually a little flurry at the end and there on the sand is your schoolie. Larger fish have a strong tendency to swim at great number of knots towards you on being hooked. This necessitates the aforementioned backing up the beach... fast; damn fast even! and crank like mad. The adrenaline will really flow, and the spray will fly. The fish may then turn and slug it out in the near surf. If a decent fish... 4lbs plus, it may be strong enough to take line from your pre set drag, if it is just let it go. When the fish finally tires, steadily wind and pump her, using the breaking incoming waves to surf her in. Be ready to give line at any time. The danger point is the backwash, don't try and crank a fish in against out-flowing water. Walk towards your fish to maintain steady contact and wait for the next wave to beach your



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prize on. Most bass are lost at this time, with the hook holds failing against the pressure of the receding waves/backwash. My best fish (10lbs plus) played a Mexican stand off fight, on being hooked at about 60yds it would not budge an inch. If it had not been for the terrific, rod slamming, bite I could have been excused for thinking that the lead had sanded in. The fish did eventually move and, typical of larger fish, chose to run along the lines of surf before trying the shore-ward charge. I eventually beached her on the sand -the hook tumbled out simultaneously. She was returned to the sea after a quick measure against my rod butt, and to this day remains my best fish.

## FISHING....

feature beaches.

I will always be grateful to Derek Goodwin for sharing with me information on one of his N. Cornish beaches. He did this by taking me to a cliff top vantage point where it was possible to look along the length of the beach in question. It was Summer time, around midday, and the light was brilliant. What I saw that day opened up new horizons for me, as from our high vantage point Derek could point out bars, ocean holes and pools on what appeared at beach level to be a fairly featureless strand. The holes were formed at the end of short sand bars and would show from the beach as areas of quieter water; from high up you could actually see them as deeper blue areas. Rips run through these holes as water drains off the bars and returns seawards. This is an area to try, particularly with sandeel. It's best not to wade here, as these areas are one of the reasons these beaches need Life-guards. My approach on this beach would be to try two or three of the holes. If sandeels are present they form ideal ambush points as the rips push the eels towards the waiting bass. Quite often pools will form on a beach well in front of the surf-lines, and at night they can be real hotspots. Look to fish the pool as soon as the connecting gully has enough water to allow a fish into it, 6 to 12" will be enough. In the past I used to fish these pools with sandeels with light 1oz leads. Next year, following on from our success with the fly rod, I will be

casting a sandeel imitation at them, which, if it works, will be mind blowing for Nick Cosford and I.

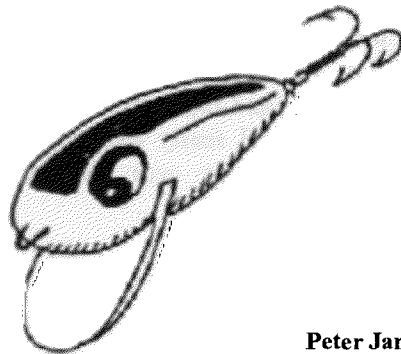
Streams which flow across the beach are traditionally rated as hotspots and always worth investigating - with eel or lug.

The steep banks at the high tide mark, often associated with storm beaches, offer excellent opportunities at high water. On one beach I fish there is a gutter running the whole bank, just four feet out, where the depth is around three to five feet. Here you can fish bait as previously discussed, or try plugs and spoons cast almost parallel to the shore. Again, this year the fly rod will be tried, plus large whole sandeels or small whole mackerel as high tide can see the odd big fish making an appearance. If I could get live mackerel then these would be used in preference, fished just four to six foot out from the sand on calmer surfs after dark. Question is, have you the bottle to throw just six foot from the edge? This is short distance casting in the extreme. I love it!

## SUMMARY

What I have tried to outline is my approach to surf fishing. In the space of an article it cannot obviously be complete. There have to be large gaps like, bait collection, storage, How To: bait - sandeel, lug etc. Some of the fine points have to be left out and I'm sure that many bass anglers out there will have opposite views to my own. That's good, not bad, and gives us a wondrous and healthy diversity which in turn is what makes bass angling so very special.

Enjoy the magical suds: Tight lines..... Mike Oliver.



Peter James