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FISH TRADE TRICKS.

HOW THE PROFESSIONALS LOCATE A "BITING" GROUND.

The Secret of Successful Fishing On the New Jersey Coast—Marking the Good Spots For Future Catches and Dodging Rivals.

"Got the range, Will!"
"Looks like it, Si."
"See the walnut tree on the hill!"
"Yes; stands about west-northwest."
"And the church steeple south-southwest!"
"To the dot. No mistake about that."
"How heads Ludomus' cottage?"
"About due west."
"We ought to be nearly over it now, Will. Stand by to let go when I sing out. Steady, now; steady! Let her rip. Now! Now! Bally boy! Right over the middle of it."

That is how the professional fisherman along the Jersey coast finds his favorite "biting" ground. The latter may be 20 or more fathoms deep, and a dozen or more miles offshore; but, with the aid of such landmarks as trees, steeples and beach cottages, lying in various directions along the strand, these crack surfmen seldom make a mistake in "picking up" the ground sought offshore. It's no easy job this finding of some particularly good fishing ground that has no mark on the chart and is only fixed in the mind of fishermen by study of distances from the shore.

It is a well known fact that fish must be sought. They will not, as a rule, come to the fisherman, be the latter professional or amateur. Sea fish, as well as lake fish, like rocky bottom, and it is over this kind of bottom that the best catches are made. It is no easy task to locate a rocky bed along the Jersey coast, and even with ranges or landmarks one is not always certain to find it on another day's fishing trip. The ranges are manipulated this way:

In an ordinary surfboat, such as the majority of the Jersey fishermen use, the beach line that looks so white and extensive close inshore resembles a white thread at a distance of, say, 15 miles from the land. When the fishermen discover a new ground at or about that distance offshore, they generally pick three marks on land—one north, one south and the third directly to the westward. By bringing these three marks to a convergence the happy hunting ground is located.

As a rule these fishermen are a bit selfish when new grounds are discovered. They conceal the fact as long as possible from one another, for business reasons principally, for there is a ripe competition among these beach combers, and it is only by playing possum and keeping a weather eye open that one learns what his rival sometimes knows.

One day last season a reporter was in one of these surfboats 18 miles offshore from Barnegat. The fisherman in charge of the tiny craft was heading for a rocky bottom as far offshore as he dared to go without compass and provisions. When within a mile or so of the ground, another fisherman and his helper were seen at anchor. They were hauling up whacking big bass as fast as they could throw out, and altogether they seemed to be having a glorious time. After the two boats had separated sufficiently to permit a private conversation the professional in charge of the first mentioned craft said to his shipmate:

"Did you mark it?"
"Yes," answered the other. "The pier's to the westward, the life saving station is to the northward and the cottage of that old crank is to the southward."

"That's the way I made it," replied the first speaker. All this seemed like so much Greek to one of the amateurs in the boat who began to ask questions.

"That's a new ground," said the fisherman. "We didn't know that it existed. Yes, they are catching lots of fish. Why don't I go back and try it? Well, I do not like to imitate people—at least I do not care to let them see me copy them. I'll try it some other day."

It may have been professional pride or etiquette, this sharp bit of practice, but in other walks of life it would be called a trick of the trade. It's done all along the beach. Here's another trick of the trade that a surfman at Belmar taught this landlubberly reporter. There's a schooner that takes city folk from Asbury Park offshore to fish. She was anchored ten miles offshore this particular morning over a newly found ground, and there were half a dozen or more surfboats clustered about her. The biting was first class, but presently one of the big fishing steamboats from the Battery was sighted heading down the beach. There was an interchange of conversation on the part of the professional fishermen, but they suddenly pulled up anchors as if one man and began rowing around.

The schooner weighed her bowler also and under her headmills and mainsails reached offshore. Naturally the amateurs wanted to know why a shift should be made, especially as the strikes were unusually lively. "That's the Hal Corstar coming down," said one of the fishermen in a half whisper, as if those on the steamboat could hear him, although she was fully two miles away. "We have a good ground here, and we don't want her pilots to find the ranges. She'll keep to the southward, and we'll circle around until she gets out of the way. That's how we save our bacon."

And they did save it too. The steamboat kept to the southward for some little distance and finally, being unable to get the ranges or whatever ground her pilots had in view, came about again and stood to the northward, finally anchoring off Long Branch. She had no sooner done so when the fishing schooner and surfboats, after a mental and ocular struggle with ranges, were back in their original positions, with their amateurs fishing like mischief.—New York Mail and Express.

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