

# Southeasterners fish for the Halibut



PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

Ivan Gambell pilots his loaded skiff to the Angoon dock where his fishing boat lies ready to take to the sea.

by Bill Hess

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"We-ell, I heard it through the grapevine! Not much longer would you be mine!" The tune, a recording of the late rock star Marvin Gaye, blasts out from the tape deck with strength enough to overpower the churning roar of the outboard engine.

It will be heard many times this day.

Up in the sky, a bald eagle breaks away from two companions and glides to a landing in the lush hemlock trees growing on the nearby bank.

Although it is only about 6:00 a.m., a number of boats have already moved through the narrow channel, with its strong tidal currents, which separates Favorite Bay from Chatham Strait.

On the shoreline stands the Russian Orthodox Church and the homes of Angoon, located on the western shores of Admiralty Island, or as the Tlingits call it, Kootznoowoo, "Fortress of the bears."

The halibut opening does not begin until 12:00 noon, but with only 72 hours to take a full year's commercial catch it is necessary for the many fishermen of the village to get to their different locations and prepare their hooks and lines for the minute when they can be dropped into the water.



An eagle flies overhead as Gambell and crew head to sea.

The sea is very calm at first, but as Ivan Gamble pilots his boat out into the waters of the strait, the wind picks up and choppy waves, some topped with small whitecaps, rock the boat back and forth.

On board with Gamble is his friend and classmate from Mount Edgecumbe High School, Don Bremner, and his brother-in-law, Dave Hogue. Bremner had been working a desk job in Yakutat until a couple of months earlier, when he decided to leave that world behind and come down to Angoon to become a "normal" person again.

He has been fishing since he was a small child, having learned the trade from his father. Hogue is a non-Native living in Seattle with his wife, Gamble's sister. He spent several years living and working in Sitka and Mount Edgecumbe, and is retired from the U.S. Air Force.

He likes Alaska, and enjoys returning now and then, but says that both he and his wife are content to live the rest of their lives outside.

When opening comes Gambell takes the boat once again. A whale spouts nearby but (Continued on Page Twenty)



Don Bremner prepares the bait.

# Halibut

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Hogue and Bremner are too busy attaching the scores of hooks to the different lines, sinking them to the bottom of the sea.

It is hard work, especially when they return to the lines in the late afternoon and labor well into the night hauling up halibut, sifted out from the starfish, sea cucumbers, cod, bullhead and other creatures which come up from the sea bottom.

With a low price, (65 cents a pound compared to last year's \$1.25) the 1200 pounds of halibut they will eventually harvest will not bring in much money.

Some of the bigger boats which have come up from other places and which are loaded with all kinds of machines, pullees and fancy gadgets will take as much as 90,000 pounds.

"They're a different type of person than I am," Bremner sighs, in the evening, after pulling up a line. Some 100 eagles feed from a herring run about a quarter of a mile north of the boat. A seal pokes its head up from the water maybe 200 yards away to study the people who have floated into its domain. During lunch, a sea otter swam by the beach where rest was taken; several porpoises were spotted.

Ducks, and geese, fly by, sometimes lighting in the water.

A loud exploding noise erupts from the south side of the boat. Spray lifts into the air as the flat back of a humpback whale glides through the water, then curls into a massive display of muscle and power, a great tail rises momentarily out of the water, then glides beneath the surface.

It is appreciated.