

NEW VIDEO RELEASE: THE LONGLINE PIONEERS

Pacific Halibut—of all the Northwest and Alaska fisheries, this one has the most tradition, the greatest mystique. Like few modern professions, it is an enterprise steeped in its own history. *The Longline Pioneers*, a half-hour documentary videotape conceived by fishing industry historian Bob Thorstenson, presents the history of this intriguing enterprise.

Using an archive of historic film and photography assembled by Thorstenson and the Seattle video production firm of John Sabella & Associates, Inc., the program tells the story of halibut fishermen through the tales of industry pioneers, some of whose fishing experiences pre-date the Great Depression.

Halibut fishing in the North Pacific began in the 1880's when three schooners—the *Oscar & Hattie*, the *Mollie Adams* and the *Edward E. Webster*—sailed 'round the Horn from New England in search of the bounty of the last frontier.

The old schooners carried dories nested on deck and lowered pairs of fishermen onto the vast ocean each day at dawn. With no more power than their arms and their backs, they propelled their boats and hauled the huge flatfish off the bottom and over the rail. Their gear consisted of long groundlines festooned every few feet with short leaders or *gangions* to which they lashed hooks baited with herring. At day's end, they struggled against wind, tide and fog to return to the mother boat and deliver their catches.

Soon, impressive new schooners built in West Coast yards joined the New England boats, and the ranks of the fishermen were swelled by immigrants, primarily from Scandinavia. Briefly, steam-powered vessels carrying large numbers of dories competed with the schooners, but the steamers proved too expensive to operate and soon left the field to the distinctive, wooden vessels that continued to be called *schooners* even after they converted to diesel power.

By the 1930s, the Halibut Commission had outlawed dory fishing because of its dangers, and fishermen had learned to set and haul their gear from the decks of the schooners themselves. Amazingly, halibut schooners built near the Turn of the Century remain viable competitors in the contemporary race for profits, and the style of fishing called longlining has changed little since its inception more than fifty years ago.

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The halibut industry has waxed and waned through good years and bad as fluctuating resources and markets have impacted the fortunes of the fleet. Today, in what ranks as a tribute to modern resource management, North Pacific halibut stocks are flourishing, while the fleet has embarked on a revolutionary experiment in resource allocation in the form of individual fishery quotas or *IFQ*'s. Indeed, this most historic of fisheries may represent a paradigm for the industry's future.

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