

sionally a grouper, tarpon or cobia. You really never know what will bite. Another good location is the old pilings from the phosphate docks on the north side of Boca Grande. These pilings hold a lot of fish. Anchor up, place a chum bag over the side and get ready to reel. Goliath grouper love this spot. Many other bottom fish will jolt your rod and often break you off before you can pull them from the structure.

The key here is the structure. It offers a place for the predator fish to stage behind and ambush their prey. This is the basic fundamental of the successful angler. Visualize the bottom and any ambush point that is derived from a bottom depth change, or position your boat to fish man-made structure. Identify these spots by reviewing a chart and using your depthfinder to locate the subtle bottom contours.

More obvious places include man-made rip-rap, rocks, seawalls, pilings and bridge abutments. Sandbars are snackbars for fish and are a sure thing for action. You can drift or anchor on sandbars that form points or pockets and have moving water around them. As a general guideline, fish a spot for 20-30 minutes before moving on to the next. Fish travel different paths on different tides and at different times of year. Be patient, but fresh bait should get some attention if your in the right spot. One of the favorite baits on the Harbor is cut ladyfish. Catching ladyfish is at least half the fun of having them for bait. Ladyfish love to hang on the outside of the east and west bars, mouth of the Myakka River, Bull and Turtle Bay. Generally in 3-6 feet of water they can be caught throwing soft plastic lures and spoons. Let the wind drift you down the edge and blind cast until you hook up. With a few ladies in the boat your ready to go fishing. On a recent fishing trip, we had a slack tide with high north-east winds that put the kabash on fish catching. Our third fish of the day after 5 hours fishing was a ladyfish. Redfish, sharks, snook and most other species love cut ladyfish. Hoping to save a slow fishing day we took the one ladyfish and went to a nearby mangrove island and cast out a healthy chunk. So far that day a livewell of pilchards could hardly raise a bite. After only 10 minutes of soak time with a ladyfish chunk a huge redfish ate the bait. One heck of a battle ensued and 10 minutes later a redfish of over 14 pounds came boatside. Two more bites produced cat-

fish which really gave a good account of themselves despite being less glamorous.

Trolling is a basic form of fishing where you cover lots of water while fishing lines out of the back of the boat. Despite the fact that you won't see many boats trolling Charlotte Harbor we do it often when guests come into town. We can talk and enjoy the weather and casually fish while the swells of the harbor impart extra action into our lures. Mackerel and ladyfish are really suckers for a small white bucktail with a twister tail attached. A silver or gold spoon also works well. Put your boat in gear and make a long cast with 2-3 rods, letting a little extra line out as the boat moves forward. From Burnt Store Marina to Boca Grande Pass there is always a school of fish to be had. Set a troll up for 20 minutes and if no fish are hooked, move your boat up another mile or so into a new area. One thing to look for is small white birds dipping on the water or pelicans diving. This indicates bait on the surface and almost always there are fish nearby. If you are not getting bites know that upsizing or downsizing your lures can make a huge difference. Another method of trolling is to use your trolling motor with live bait. The hard part is catching the scaled sardines and threadfins but slow trolling with a trolling motor can be deadly. The Peace River can be very good as well as trolling in 5-12 feet of water parallel to the bars throughout the harbor. Tarpon are commonly caught this way. If you don't want to bother with a cast net then buy a sabiki rig and catch your bait around the roving pods of threadfin herring that are seen on the surface. For the ultimate in action try slow trolling threadfins parallel to the beaches and hang on! Any beach area within 100 yards to several miles offshore has lots of fish and big fish to excite any angler. Expect sharks, barracuda, kingfish, huge redfish, snook, jacks, cobia and you-name-it... it is there.

There are as many fishing techniques as there are fisherman however the basic methods above will produce a variety of fish every day on the water. No need for a high performance boat or 50 years of fishing experience to have success. The key is fresh bait, identifying good bottom locations to fish and trolling, drifting or bottom fishing the area. Nothing is more important than perhaps confidence. If you carefully select an area and believe it will produce then it likely will.