

Using the Tides and Tide Tables

by Kenn Oberrecht



Anyone who enjoys coastal hiking, beachcombing, canoeing, kayaking, crabbing, clam digging, or fishing must pay special attention to the tides. A person's success and safety depend on a knowledge of the tides, their times, levels, and relationships with other natural conditions.

Those venturing onto beaches, marshes, mud flats, and coastal waterways should first check tide tables, which are published in some newspapers, magazines, and phone

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The booklets are best because they provide the most information in handiest form. Times and levels of the month's high and low tides are usually printed on opposing pages.

The tide tables provided in these booklets are derived from schedules furnished by the National Ocean Survey, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The data compiled are collected at established reference stations and are periodically updated.

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Booklets available along the Oregon coast usually provide tide times and levels for the north coast (Astoria), central coast (Yaquina Bay), or south coast (Humboldt Bay, California). They also carry correction tables for specific areas along the coast, even certain points on large bays and rivers.

For example, depending on which tide district a tide book is based upon, the correction tables will direct you to add or subtract hours and minutes to or from the projected time of a tide, and to add or subtract feet and fractions of feet to or from the projected relative depth of the tide.

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Some narrow beaches, especially those backed by cliffs, can be hazardous at high tide and might be passable only at low tide. In fact, some flats, outcrops, and spits exposed at low tide might be under several feet of water at high tide. Therefore coastal backpackers, hikers, beachcombers, anglers, and tide-pool explorers need to pay attention to tides in order to avoid being stranded, or worse.

Big water and bad weather create potentially perilous conditions at the mouths of estuaries, where the seas tend to pile up and break. Even in calm weather and good seas, a swift ebb tide can make the shallow bar dangerous. Any boater caught outside the bar then should wait out the tide and cross on the flood. The smart boater uses tide tables and plans ahead.

Exploring tide pools, gathering mussels, and digging clams are low-water activities, with minus tides best. Crabbers prefer slow or still waters, so most set their gear during the last hour or two of a tide and continue crabbing through slack tide.

Anglers who fish coastal waters also must study the tides, which influence the movement of both forage and predator species. In some places, anglers prefer a flood tide; elsewhere, the ebb is better. For fishing, slack water is seldom as productive as moving water.

No matter what kind of outdoor recreation you enjoy, if you pursue it on the coast, you should know the tides and always check the tide tables before venturing out.

