

HOOK N' COOK

Burbot

A Whole "Lota" Fish



When winter comes to Manitoba, the avid angler moves out onto the ice to pursue their favourite sport of fishing. Because the same baits as will catch a Lake Trout will entice a Burbot or as the biologist call him *Lota lota*, the ice angler quite often finds him/herself landing a strange eel-like creature that has the nasty habit of winding themselves around their arm. More eel-like than fish-like with its fat cylindrical body and almost continuous fins, the Burbot rates low on the angler's "most likely to be taken home" list.

This is an unfortunate oversight because the Burbot, to pun his Latin name, is a whole "Lota" fish. They take the stage as the only freshwater member of the Cod fish family and count among their relatives these illustrious food fishes: the Marine Cod, the Hake, the Pollock and the Haddock. These all play prime roles in the Maritime commercial fishing industry. The same people who would pay high prices for these fish at the local supermarket will invariably turn up their noses at the Burbot which is readily available to the Manitoba angler throughout the year.

The Burbot can be taken in the summer though they tend to hide out in the depths of lakes during this season as they are a cold water fish, preferring temperatures in the 15°C range. They have been taken from depths of 205 metres during the summer however, they can be taken in depths of 1 to 3 metres.

This pamphlet stresses Burbot as a winter fish because it is in the winter that their lean flaky white flesh is at its flavour peak and because they move into shallower waters to spawn. Burbot literally have a ball when they spawn for they move across the lake bottom in an intertwining circular mass of ten to twelve individuals (the female the centre of attention). The water temperatures are a chilly one degree celsius but this does not seem to deter them. The actual spawning period ranges from January to March, a period which nearly coincides with the peak flavour time.

Fish'n for Burbot

Burbot like things simple: fancy tackle does not impress them. A simple hand line or tip-up in an auger hole about 90 metres offshore (4 to 8 metres deep) is good for the Burbot. They have a big mouth so use a long-shanked number one or two hook. A large hook is always preferable for ice fishing because it is easier to remove than a small one when your fingers are stiff from the cold. A 1 to 1 1/4 ounce weight will carry the bait down to his bottom where they live.

The Burbot is a voracious, carnivorous predator who satisfies their natural appetites with a variety of foods; insects, small fishes, Crayfish, snails and even their own kind. Since they are a predator, minnows are a good bait to





use but remember to make sure the bait is large enough. Burbot are not all that concerned with quality: the quantity of bait is a better enticement. The larger your bait the more Burbot will go after it. Large baits have another plus for the ice fisherman: they are less likely to fall off the hook. The fishing method is easy to remember: fish baits on the bottom with simple tackle - even a stick and string if will work. The record for a Manitoba-caught Burbot is 99.06 cm (39 inches).

Preparing and Cooking Burbots

Burbot can be used in a variety of ways. It has all the gastronomic potential of the Marine Cod and can be prepared in the same way as you would use frozen Marine Cod fillets. It can be boiled, baked, deep-fried, pan-fried, even pickled or smoked if you want to put more time into your preparation.

Burbot should always be skinned before cooking to prevent an overly rich flavour which some people may find too strong for their tastes. Skinning is an easy process: simply cut through the skin all around the head, then holding the Burbot by the head, pull off the skin with a pair of pliers. After skinning, the heads and the entrails should be removed.

Remember, the flesh of the Burbot is not bland, rather it has a rich and satisfying flavour. Admittedly, certain parts of the Burbot are better than others. This is not due to flavour differences, but some chefs have found that the flesh of the belly is too thin to cook properly without it breaking up. They use only the thick slab of tenderloin meat which occurs along both sides of the backbone. Should this seem wasteful, make a chowder. The thin belly portions and the bones can be used to make the fish stock; the thicker tenderloin can be the actual meat of the chowder.

The Burbot can be fried as you would any fish fillet: dip the fish in a mixture of seasoned milk

and egg, then coat with bread crumbs or cornmeal. Pan-fry in butter. The flesh is excellent for boiling, then flaking to be used in fish casseroles, jellied salads and sandwich spreads. Why not substitute it for Marine Cod in English-style fish and chips?

Speaking of substitutions, the Burbot can masquerade as that most elite of shellfish, the rock lobster. The tenderloins when cut into chunks and boiled for five minutes in salted water and served with lemon butter will foil even the most discriminating taste buds with its similarity to lobster.

You might even cast Burbot in a prime role in your next gala entertaining event if you serve this version of "Lobster Newburg". This classic lobster dish is easily made, definitely impressive, and with the cheaper Burbot in place of the exorbitantly priced lobster a whole lot cheaper to make.

Burbot Newburg

Ingredients:

2 cups raw Burbot, cut into chunks	dash of cayenne 1/4 teaspoon of salt
4 tablespoons butter	2 eggs, beaten
1/4 cup dry sherry or Madiera	1 cup cream

Melt the butter in the top of a double boiler. Add the sherry. Add the tenderloin chunks and heat slowly in the sherry-butter mixture until the wine evaporates. This will take about five to ten minutes. Add the salt. Leave over the hot water.

Blend the beaten eggs into the cream and stir into the fish mixture. Add a dash of cayenne. Cook and stir over moderate heat until the sauce is thickened. At no time let this dish boil.

Give Burbot a chance. Do not be put off by appearances - discover the eating potential of the freshwater Cod.

