



Photo by Bill Slayden

Dan Beckley, left, of North Pole, shows thumbs up while shaking hands with charter captain Garrit Hintz of Paradise Lodge after they teamed up to catch this 338-pound halibut fishing out of Port Lions on Kodiak Island. Looking on is Craig Skinn of Kalispell, Mont.

## No cash but plenty of fish for North Pole man

By TIM MOWRY  
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Had he been fishing out of Valdez or Homer when he caught a 338-pound halibut Aug. 31, Dan Beckley of North Pole likely would have won thousands of dollars as the winner of the local halibut derby.

Instead, all Beckley has to show for it is a freezer full of halibut, which is just fine by him, especially since he didn't bag a moose this hunting season.

Beckley caught his huge flatfish fishing out of the village of Port Lions on Kodiak Island. The trip was a perk from his boss, Bill Slayden, owner of Slayden Plumbing & Heating Inc.

The company had done some work at Paradise Lodge in Port Lions a few years back and Slayden took a few of his employees back down for a complimentary fishing trip last month. They fished

for both halibut and silver salmon.

The halibut fishing had been slow for the most part before Beckley hooked his monster while jigging in approximately 300 feet of water near Whale Pass.

"We had fished all day and hadn't caught any (halibut)," he said. "We just kept reeling up these 10 and 15 pound cod that kept getting in the way."

As the day was winding down, the captain happened onto a hole where they started catching halibut. He locked it on his GPS and repeatedly drifted through the area.

When Beckley hooked the fish, he could tell right away it was a sizable halibut.

"It took me a while to get it off the bottom," said Beckley, a 26-year-old plumber who acts as a job superintendent for Slayden. "For the first 30 minutes I probably didn't get it 10 feet off the

bottom. It was taking out as much line as I was reeling in. I couldn't move it."

Slowly but surely, Beckley began making progress. It took him about an hour to get the fish to the surface where it could be gaffed. The size of the fish startled not only Beckley, whose biggest halibut catch prior to that was 100 pounds, but charter captain Garrit Hintz, as well.

"They said they don't see that many fish that size, the captain was as excited as I was"

Beckley's fish would have won the \$15,000 top prize in the Valdez Halibut Derby, which ended Sept. 5 with a 277.2-pound fish at the top of the leader board after a record 363.9-pound fish was disqualified the day before the derby ended because the person who caught it admitted he had help reeling it in, which is against derby rules.

The biggest fish caught so far in the Homer Jackpot Halibut Derby, the state's richest derby with a winner-take-all first-place prize of roughly \$40,000, currently is a 277.6-pounder. The Homer derby ends next Thursday and it's extremely doubtful anybody will top that considering the largest fish caught so far in September is 174.2 pounds.

But Beckley, who always buys a derby ticket when he goes halibut fishing in Homer or Valdez, isn't dwelling on what might have been.

"I'm happy with the fish," Beckley said. "I'll be all right."

Besides, the trip was more about meat than money and Beckley's fish went a long way in that department.

"We didn't have a lot of halibut up to that point," Beckley said. "That definitely put some fish in the box for us."

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