

Tom's Fish & Chips

Cannon Beach eatery is calibrated for tourists, but serves locals fast too

Whilst frolicking in Cannon Beach one could be forgiven for entertaining the idea that the corporations have lost. Within city limits there are no Subways, no Starbucks and nary a Motel 6. By and large, it is a resplendent refuge, though frustrating at times, when reasonably priced gas or an amply stocked grocery store can only be found the next town over.

Which brings us to the odd case of Tom's Fish & Chips, Cannon Beach's burgeoning bastion of fast food. Save for a slice of pizza or a pre-made, Saran-wrapped deli sandwich, Tom's is about as quick as it comes. Flavor — and for that matter, value — suffers accordingly.

Tom's opened in the fall of 2014. The interior is sleek, airy and brightly branded — even though I'm entering for the first time, it feels vaguely familiar. It is bold, yet largely blank. Despite a seafaring decor, it is one of the least-quirky eateries in the city. And though the slogan reads "classic," Tom's looks forward, not back — at least as far as Cannon Beach is concerned.

Another outlier, Tom's has no table service. The menu above the counter is as simple as the sign outside announces: "Fish & Chips / Classic Burgers." You order, pay, get a number, then take a seat or a to go bag. And after a few short minutes, voila!

The flagship of Tom's fried fish is Alaskan cod (\$9.95). The catch — including salmon and halibut — comes from our neighbors from the far north, and it wasn't caught this morning. Those seeking local bounty should look elsewhere.

The cod was delivered atop a basket of fries, in three neat rectangles. While prepared upon order, it landed just hot enough as to be eaten immediately. I prefer fish and chips to come out sizzling, the oil just crusted, where you have to crack them open and blow the steam away before even nibbling at the corners. Had this particular day been colder, fried fish served at anything less than scalding would've been a bigger disappointment.

Rather than beer battered, the cod was breaded, and the crust was thin. It lacked a crispy crunch, offering scant contrast to the light, tender fish inside. While the cod meat was adequate in freshness and not at all fishy, the combination was rather bland, as the breaded exterior was not seasoned in

any meaningful way. The addition of a few more distinct house-made sauces — like a spicy Cajun or a mango salsa — would go a long way.

Cole-slaw cost extra (\$1.95), but it shouldn't have. It was tasteless and lacking pep that extra salt and pepper couldn't provide. It was little more than cabbage shreds soaking in a milky-white, slightly-sweetened soup that puddled up at the bottom of the cup.

The double cheeseburger (\$5.95), on the other hand, was highly evocative, though mightily inauspicious. Upon biting into the pint-sized portion, I blurted across the booth to my companion: "It tastes just like McDonald's!"

I'm not exaggerating. My companion concurred: The inspiration was unmistakable. Tom's burger — even the double-cheese — is roughly the same size as McDonald's standard issue, which is to say: small. Tom's version boasted a slightly finer caliber of ingredients, including real cheddar cheese, but the beef was frozen, pre-shaped, and insubstantial — even with two patties. Like McDonald's, Tom's cheeseburger sports a soft, airy bun, diced onions, diced pickles, ketchup, mustard



Though Tom's Fish and Chips serves food quickly, flavor and value suffer. The Mouth found the fish adequate but rather bland, the coleslaw tasteless, and the burger small and similar to McDonald's.

Tom's Fish and Chips is an outlier in Cannon Beach by providing no table service: You order at the counter, pay, get a number and food is delivered — fast and easy for take out.

and that's it — no tomato, no lettuce, no surprises. The resemblance to McDonald's is truly uncanny, as if the secret ingredient had been unearthed.

What's less on-the-nose, however, is the price. After adding fries (\$1.95) Tom's essentially goes toe-to-toe with the numerous, family-friendly pubs within walking distance that offer much more substantial, third-pound beef patties complete with real roughage. To put it another way: After a day spent corralling kids on the beach, a hungry dad may well find himself wanting after Tom's double-cheese burger and fries.

That family of tourists is precisely who Tom's is calibrated for: folks who don't



have the time or desire to be waited on, who want simple flavors the kids are familiar with, and will eat without protest — French fries, burgers and fish sticks drenched in ketchup.

While saving on things like tip, dinner and drinks for a family of four could easily top \$50. It's fast food, but it's not cheap. (Tom's Wednesday special, however, a burger, endless fries and a domestic beer for \$6 is tough to beat.)

And yet, for all that calculation, Tom's offers an almost singular service to residents: a drive-thru type service, only minus the drive-thru. One weekday evening I noticed several locals come in, order, and take their bags to-go. It's a rarity in Cannon Beach, where some restaurants are known to fuss about making take-out. Some charge extra for the privilege, and none do it as quickly as Tom's. So perhaps there's a place for this outlier after all.

As my dinner companion put to me after trying the double-cheese burger: "Well, at least now when I'm craving McDonald's I won't have to drive to Seaside."

mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com

Tom's Fish & Chip

Rating ★★

240 N. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach

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tomscannonbeach.com

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Sunday.

Price: \$ — Fish and chips around \$10.

Service: Order at the counter, dine-in or take-out.

Vegetarian/Vegan options: Slim — french fries, cole slaw and Caesar salad.

Drinks: Soda, wine and microbrews.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region