

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Seaside fish and chips spot knows its breading

Review and photos by
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Well wouldn't you know it — one week after declaring beer-battered fish and chips “far, far superior” to the breaded variety, along comes Grizzly Tuna with a breadcrumb crust so perfect as to rattle my foundation.

Unlike the usual soft, dry breading that leeches moisture from the fish and puffs you up with dough, Grizzly Tuna's golden mixture is thin and crisp with an incredibly satisfying crunch. It snaps and shatters like a potato chip and, unlike most of its breaded brethren, somehow keeps from getting soggy. Relatively lean and not too oily, Grizzly's crust is a revelation.

The secret has to do with a combination of two different types of breading, likely panko and another.

That's all I could wrest from the employees who squinted knowingly at me when I asked and otherwise stayed tight-lipped.

What is clear is that the recipe took some time to perfect. When Grizzly Tuna opened about a year ago, the place went with beer-batter. The breading began as a healthier, less-greasy alternative before edging out the original. The superior crust prevailed.

Grizzly's tuna comes from Ocean Beauty, a Seattle-based company with a facility in Astoria. In Grizzly's hands, the tuna filets are cut flat and wide, at largest about the size and thickness of a wallet, the grain apparent, running vertically. It's hearty, lean and clean, a bit buttery, somewhat flaky.

Around this time of year — late June and early July — is when the tuna are caught closest to shore. The distance — which can take boats hundreds of miles off-shore — can shrink to single-digits.

From a former drive-thru coffee hut in Seaside, Grizzly offers take-out only, save for two uncovered picnic benches. They'll do in a pinch, but the sight (of the Nike outlet store) and the sound (the aggressive whoosh of Highway 101 traffic) don't do much for ambiance.

But ambiance matters less when you're faced with a terrific product at a reasonable price. On one trip I noticed a couple in their car, absolutely devouring their respective orders in total silence. I walked by and said: “Pretty good, right?” They smiled and nodded in vigorous agreement, but couldn't be bothered to speak — their mouths were busy. The woman licked her fingers and dove in for more. The man never looked up.

Indeed, Grizzly's is a decidedly minimalist experience. It knows what it does well and appears

comfortable in that narrow lane. There are fish and chips, and that's it. You can get a three-piece order (\$8, a totally reasonable amount of food), a five-piece order (\$10, the way to go), a side of fries (\$3.50) and bottled drinks. (The fries, by the way, are fries — they're fine.)

Every order comes with ketchup and tartar sauce. Ask and you can get lemons and packets of malt vinegar. Some more exciting, fresh, hand-made sauces or slaws would be welcome. And while improving the surroundings would require the moving of earth, spicing up the dips offers tantalizing potential at minimal outlay.

Otherwise, Grizzly's service (cheery and quick, orders taking about five minutes), value (quite reasonable, always filling), and consistency (exacting) are impeccable. With that in mind, I feel Grizzly could give Astoria's beloved Bowpicker a run for



The grain of the fish is apparent in Grizzly's tuna fish and chips.



Grizzly Tuna serves take-out fish and chips, though two uncovered picnic tables are available nearby next to U.S. Highway 101.

its money in the annual Coast Weekend Readers' Choice Awards for Best Fish & Chips this winter. Plus, Grizzly's takes credit cards, and there isn't that ridiculous line.

Indeed, if you're a fish and chips fan and you haven't been to Grizzly Tuna you owe yourself a trip.

For me, Grizzly did two things. First it made me realize

GRIZZLY TUNA

Rating: ★★☆☆

850 N. Roosevelt Drive,
Seaside

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
daily

PRICE: \$ – Reasonable price
and portion.

SERVICE: Quick, cheerful and
consistent.

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OP-
TIONS: French fries.

DRINKS: Bottled soda, water.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region



Grizzly Tuna in Seaside serves up fish and chips from a former coffee stand.

that, when done right, breading can go toe-to-toe with beer-batter. Second, it got me excited about fish and chips, a dish so ubiquitous on the North Coast that it had become stale in my mind. With Grizzly Tuna, though, on each return trip I found myself in the throws of greater appreciation. It wasn't boring; it was growing on me — a simple pleasure delivered distinctly, with crunch!