

CONTACT US  
Lucy Kleiner  
lkleiner@dailyastorian.com

# WEEKEND BREAK



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# GONE CLAMMING



Photos by Luke Whittaker

A trio of diggers work the sand in search of clams as the sun sets over the Pacific Ocean.

## Writer offers digging, cooking advice

By DAVID CAMPICHE

A razor clam is a wily critter not as fast as Wile E. Coyote, but still pretty crafty. Like my cat, a clam avoids human contact, other than on its own infrequent terms. A razor clam is an artist at avoiding the sauté pan. When the weather is fair, the stars in place and the tides correct low and minus, well, then it ain't so hard.

A cold hard wind gusts out of the southwest, swelling the wave tops. The tide is a moderate low, say a one-inch holdover. You leave your toasty car, put on your cold clamming gear and head to the edge of the ocean. Wind and spray are in your face. Your fingers are already numb. You expect the digging will be like the last set of wondrous tides — that is you'll be able to easily spot the clams, with their large, round, indented holes.

Of course, nothing is showing. Folks are stomping literally across the beach near the surging surf. Occasionally the tide rushes in, and the cold water spills into their rubber boots. Sometimes the waves are high enough that they steal a clam digger's sack.

Old timers dig the surf. They wear waders, and are skilled at spotting the smallest and most imperceptible holes. They will throw the blunt end of their clam shovel into the ebbing saltwater and wait for the clam to make a hasty retreat.

When the bivalve does run away straight down and listing to the west the unisex clam leaves a trace of a hole, kind of an inverted dimple. That's when the digger strikes. That human being



A digger collects a clam during a foggy evening in Seaview.

gets plenty wet and appears sort of like a Civil War veteran or incarnation of a battered soul. If he or she goes into the grocery store to pick up smokes or a package of Doritos after the dig, people avoid them, fastidiously.

Good clam diggers position their shovels four inches (give or take an inch) on the west side

of the hole, dig the first shovel deep (extracting sand) and follow with a delicate second, as not to break the shells.

They slip their fingers into the hole and hopefully pull the clam up by its neck. It is generally advisable to pick the larger holes: larger clams mark their territory with a larger showing,

### TIDE TABLE — DAILY LOW

Dec. 7: 3:26 p.m., 1.6  
Dec. 8: 4:12 p.m., 0.9  
Dec. 9: 4:54 p.m., 0.4  
Dec. 10: 5:35 p.m., -0.1  
Dec. 11: 6:15 p.m., -0.4  
Dec. 12: 6:55 p.m., -0.7  
Dec. 13: 7:34 p.m., -0.8  
Dec. 14: 8:15 p.m., -0.7

Data collected from Columbia River N. Jetty, courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

While it's open season for razor clamming in Oregon, clamming dates in Washington vary, so check the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's shellfish regulations for more information.

most of the time. Clamming is like fishing: Ultimately there are no universal guidelines.

There does happen to be one rule that is enforced: You may only dig 15 clams. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officers love to enforce that rule. And they should; 15 clams go a long way. The fines are also hefty.

Once at home, pull up your sleeves and clean the clams. Be assured: It's easy. Watch that you are not squirted with a brown oozy mess that resembles spitting tobacco. Don't press the digger too hard. A quick bath in boiling water releases the

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