

## HARVESTING THE OYSTERS OF WILLAPA BAY

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

Gorging on Willapa Bay oysters is one of the finest mouth-watering and indulgent culinary delights you can enjoy.

Willapa Bay has been a petri dish of oyster reproduction for eons.

Most mammals can't open the impenetrable shells, as it practically takes a pick-axe to fracture the resistant white-gray shells.

Two friends, Dennis Battles and James Tweedie, and I labored through ankle-deep mud to pluck a limit out of the unctuous muck. We arrived in Nahcotta at the state-sponsored picking grounds, the only public spot on the bay (Nahcotta Tidelands, around 270th Street and Sandridge Road). Following signs and a well-trodden trail, we gathered and shucked the bivalves from the low water tide flats in the early morning.

Participants in this mud-laden folly are allowed a limit of 18. Oysters must be shucked in place and shells left to encourage reproduction. Spat swims through the bay in the late summer, impregnating the rough empty shells with invisible larvae.

Willapa Bay was once called Shoalwater Bay by early pioneers. The Chinook Nation parked here many years ago. As the weather warmed, they portaged over a narrow passage in the Willapa Hills to the Columbia River.

A major goal of the Chinook Nation was the netting, collecting and spearing of salmon. They accomplished this in unimaginable numbers. On Willapa Bay, their wintering headquarters, they built cedar lodges and dipped into the plenty. Oysters and clams were a consistent part of their diets and the bounty seemed ever-present.

Today, Willapa Bay produces nearly a quarter of the country's oysters. The cairns of oyster shells that rise 30 and 40 feet into the pearl-gray skies of this shallow 30-mile bay are eye-opening, to say the least. Long Island hunkers down in the south end of the estuary. The island and its famous grove of western cedar are as lovely and less populated by visitors than in nearly any remote spot in southwest Washington.



David Campiche

See Page 12 **A cairn of oyster shells in Nahcotta.**

### Coastal Living

**LOWER COLUMBIA BOWL**

**NOW OPEN**  
Tuesday thru Saturday  
Noon to 9 PM  
**503-325-3321**

**LOWER COLUMBIA BOWL**

**SAFE, SANITIZED, READY TO ROLL**

Bowling is Back!

**\$1 OFF WEDNESDAYS**

Take \$1 off:

- Shoe rental
- Every Game
- Fountain Sodas
- Adult Beverages

**ADVERTISE YOUR BUSINESS HERE!**

Call us at **503-325-3211** to learn more

### EMERALD HEIGHTS APARTMENTS

Astoria, OR

Small and Large Unfurnished 2 Bedroom Units

**Now Available!**

\*prequalification required

**SOME NEWLY REMODELED  
NEW APPLIANCES, NEW LIGHTS  
NEW CARPET/VINYL FLOOR  
NEW BATHROOM VANITIES & MIRRORS  
2-BEDROOM APARTMENTS**

★ All Rents Include: Electricity · Garbage · Water ★

For more information call:

**503-325-8221**

Monday - Friday 9-5

NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

**AN AFFORDABLE PLACE TO CALL HOME**



Email: [emeraldheights@charter.net](mailto:emeraldheights@charter.net)  
or visit our website: [emeraldheightsapartments.com](http://emeraldheightsapartments.com)