

CLOSE TO HOME

A perfect autumn day on the Columbia River

By DAVID CAMPICHE

A perfect day. Let us imagine the soft choir of angels, or the hooting of a small owl deep in a copse of Sitka spruce or Western cedar, or sandpiper tracks, laid down indiscriminately, soundless, but with a mysterious voice. Let us imagine a message that pierces our senses and touches us with wonder.

Phil and his fishing pole. A travel writer from Edible Seattle. With her is a fine photographer. Her name is Megan Hill and his, Noah Forbes. Carol Zahorsky, a diligent public relations person for the Long Beach Peninsula, has brought along her affable personality and keen skills. The visitors are vibrant, talented and certainly impressed with this mighty tug of tide, now flooding from ocean to river.

It doesn't feel so much like a river as much as a great salty force that floods or ebbs four times a day in predictable cycles, sometimes comfortably, sometimes thrashing with 30-foot surges of fear. Huge. Unrestricted. Awesome. I tell our new friends about shipping, how the ebbing sands and ocean combers have stranded so many vessels. Here is the graveyard of the Pacific. How hard it is, on this bluebird day, to imagine the danger that lurks just below us from our perch on the North Jetty. Swells from the ocean lap onto the fishing rocks. Spume jumps at our happy faces. One must be cautious. Slip into this ocean and the currents will most likely pull you down.

Phil ties a small plastic box onto a heavy leader and heaves that box and its cargo of clam meat far into the water, this the aqueous mixture of salt and feshet on the east side of the North Jetty. Here, where Dungeness crab lie so still or stealthily creep across the ocean floor. Here, where salmon have rendezvoused for eons.



PHOTOS BY DAVID CAMPICHE

The patient fisherman plying his trade.

Phil has a choice today: He can fish for salmon or try and lure in the crusty red-bodied crab. I, for one, find this crab to be the king of all seafood meats. It can be boiled, cracked and served without garnish. It can be baked au gratin, married into fried rice, soup, or with dozens of sauces. But fresh and simple is best, and we will soon attest to that.

He feels the tiny tug on the line, tightens the slack, and closes the trap, and then, reels like a man possessed. Suddenly a crab dangles before us, a male better than six inches across the back. Dinner!

Nancy, Phil's wife, a fine, generous and intelligent woman if ever there was one, has set a picnic table in Cape Disappointment State Park and is boiling water. She has brought a baguette and salad, and a lovely ceramic vase filled with Tod Wiegardt's garden flowers. She has combined green onion, parsley, mayo and fresh crab into a stunning cake, and mixed up a Cajun mayonnaise to boot. Call this a remoulade if you wish. All that really matters is how good it tastes.

After a successful day fishing, we deliver the crab, about a dozen between us. Boil them. Back them.



A party of happy fishermen and fisherwomen catching crab off the North Jetty.

Accompany sweet meat with drawn butter. There is cold beer in the ice chest. The sky speaks of early fall, and the last heat of summer comforts our bodies. We sit at the wooden table talking approvingly about this park, so close to home, with a lake and waterfowl, and two Maya Lin installations, and lastly, the surrounding history of those great explorers, Lewis and Clark and their corps of brave soldiers, one Native American, a woman called Sacagawea, her newborn son, Pomp, and of course, York, the slave of William Clark. He deserved much better.

It's all here, in this park of many acres, with a backdrop of mighty Pacific water and tall sky. The skyscape, still a peerless blue, swoops across the water horizon, touching ocean and river, touching

us. One feels nothing but fortunate.

We eat and laugh and tell a few tall tales. An osprey hurls overhead. An eagle glides effortlessly by, catching the updraft and soaring. Soaring. Mallards dip like Olympic synchronized water dancers in the nearby lake. Grubbing. But my mind is on our good fortune. This landscape we call home. And of course, just how much we have, in our majestic corner of the world.

We devour every single crab. Evening comes on, the end of a chapter. I feel the new taste of fall, a particular denseness in the air. And smells. Wonderful natural smells. I think of my Haisla friend, Cecil Paul, and how he taught me to worship nature. And as we eat and laugh, I worship.

**NANCY ALLEN'S
CRAB CAKE RECIPE****Ingredients**

- 1 pound crab meat
- ½ cup mayo
- 3 green onions, chopped
- ¼ cup parsley, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper
- Panko or bread crumbs

Directions

Mix all ingredients except bread crumbs and form patties. Gently roll the patties in Panko or bread crumbs. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or more.

Sauté slowly over medium heat until golden, 3-4 minutes on each side. Optional additions include: lemon juice, lemon zest, cider vinegar, Tabasco, chili flakes, capers or dill.



From left, Nancy and Phil Allen after a successful day of fishing and entertaining.