

LANGDON COOK LOOKS TO THE LAND



Langdon Cook with the elusive geoduck.

Nourishment, deliciousness
abound — if you know what
to look for in the wild

By CARA MICO
For Seaside Signal

Foraging expert extraordinaire and globe trotter Langdon Cook stopped by the Seaside Library to share his knowledge of shellfish collecting and cooking.

The May 23 event, “Pacific NW Shellfish Foraging and Cooking,” was sponsored by the Friends of the Seaside Library and was his fourth at the library, his past presentations focused on mushrooms, plants and berries, and salmon fishing.

Cook spends most of his time in Seattle with his family, but has travelled “up and down the west coast” as well as in New England.

“Wildfoods have been a part of life since I moved to the Pacific Northwest three decades ago,” Cook said.

Cook spent a good part of his life on the water, out in the wilderness. The foraging stemmed from a need to improve boring camp menus with fresh, wild berries, fish and mushrooms when 20 miles in the wilderness. Over time Cook’s goal became the wild foods rather than bagging a peak.

But for Cook, foraging isn’t only about sprinkling in bits of wild food recreationally, it’s also about preserving wild foods for future generations.

“Sustainability is a huge part of what I talk about. Foraging makes you a better steward of the land and water. It was the matsutake mushroom hunters of southern Oregon who convinced the Forest Service to consider more selective logging. They can make more money from harvesting one variety of mushroom in mature forest than from traditional forestry,” Cook said.

He’s compiled his knowledge of the land into a series of books, which are less guidebooks and more narratives with people at the center. They focus on the intersection of food and nature with a fair few recipes woven throughout.

If you’re looking to start foraging Cook recommends taking a class, either through a local extension service or from someone you trust, and start foraging. You could also consider joining a mycological or botanical society which has the added benefit of making friends. A good class will not only help you learn to identify and harvest wild foods but also to process and cook them.

Cook’s thorough and engaging presentation covered detailed descriptions of where to find the best shellfish including razor clams, Manila clams, horse clams, cockles and the famed geoduck. He also provided several mouth-watering recipes for each species, many of which can be found in his books.

For the Seaside region he suggested foragers should keep an eye out for beaches with equal parts sand, gravel and mud where they might find the non-native Manila clam three to four inches beneath the surface. This commonplace clam is considered the clam of commerce as it travels well and is considered a delicacy by most chefs. Cook steams them with chopped fennel and thyme, wine, butter and cream. His recipes are simple, incorporating bright and bold flavors with fresh seasonal ingredients.

“All you need is a limit of clams and a few ingredients,” Cook said.

If you’re considering hunting for the elusive geoduck bear in mind that this is not an animal for beginners. The clam is only found during the lowest tides of the year, around the minus three foot tide. Look for the double barrel shotgun siphon and then start dig-

ging. Give yourself plenty of time and dig adjacent to the clam until you hit the elevation of the foot. It’s no wonder that the clam’s name is rooted in a Nisqually word for “dig-deep.”

Geoducks are the longest living shellfish species living for 150 years or more. The massive bivalve can grow up to eight inches with a three foot siphon, weighing over three pounds. Remarkably Puget Sound supposedly has more geoduck clams on the bottom than all other life combined by weight.

Cook recommends immersing the clam in boiling water for 10 seconds to remove the shell and the membrane surrounding the body. He serves the siphon, which is choice, sashimi or sushi style. The body is delicious as well but requires slightly more cooking time. Try the Sichuan morel and asparagus preparation in his book.

Other tips included in the books include which shellfish make the best chowder and which ones are good for frying, as well as cleaning methods. But Cook suggests that you won’t become an expert forager by reading his books, for that you’ll need to get out onto the land and start looking for yourself.

“There is no substitute for going outside and seeing food for yourself,” Cook said. “A photograph and text don’t tell the full story. A Douglas fir can look one way in a picture but look completely different depending on the location. Get out there with someone you trust.”

**‘FORAGING MAKES YOU
A BETTER STEWARD
OF THE LAND AND WATER.’**

Langdon Cook

‘By-the-wind sailors’ return to Seaside beaches

Seaside Aquarium

The Oregon Coast Aquarium reports the “blue tide” is upon us, as beaches all along the Oregon coast are strewn with an aquamarine layer of jelly-like organisms especially apparent at low tide.

These are the innumerable bodies of by-the-wind sailors, formally known as Velella velella, and their strandings are a regular, yet fascinating late spring phenomenon in coastal Oregon.

By-the-wind sailors are hydrozoans, a class of predatory animals, distantly related to corals, sea anemones and jellies. They range in size from a few millimeters across to seven centimeters and appear brilliant blue and purple when at sea or freshly washed ashore. After time in the sun, the velella dry out and lose their pigmentation. Beachgoers will

often mistake the dried animals for thin, clear pieces of plastic.

By-the-wind-sailors are not singular organisms but in fact colonies of animals. Each velella is a colony of all-male or all-female individuals (called polyps), which are divided into separate groups within the colony. Some polyps specialize in feeding and reproduction, while others protect the colony and provide structural support.

Visitors walking the beaches in the next few weeks should enjoy these incredible creatures safely while their aquamarine hues last — they won’t look that good for long, and they’ll soon smell much worse.

The Oregon Coast Aquarium creates unique and engaging experiences that connect visitors to the Oregon Coast and inspire ocean conservation.



Velella velella along Oregon beaches.

National parks track visitor dollars in new report

The Astorian

A new report shows 1.3 million visitors to national parks in Oregon spent \$94 million in the state last year.

Overall, that spending resulted in more than 1,000 jobs and a cumulative benefit to the state economy of \$133 million.

Nationwide, the National Park Service report found \$20.2 billion of direct spending by more than 318 million

park visitors. The cumulative benefit to the U.S. economy was \$40.1 billion.

Oregon’s North Coast contains one national park, the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park in Warrenton. The state’s other national parks are Crater Lake National Park, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and Oregon Caves National Monument.

“The national parks of Oregon attract visitors from across the country and around the world,” Stan Austin, regional

director for the National Park Service’s Pacific West Region, said in a statement. “Whether they are out for an afternoon, a school field trip, or a month-long family vacation, visitors come to have a great experience, and end up spending a little money along the way.”

Lodging expenses accounted for the biggest chunk of visitor spending, about \$6.8 billion total in 2018 at parks nationally. Food expenses came in second at around \$5 billion between

restaurants and bars and grocery and convenience stores.

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