

Beach Store Cafe

By C. Nicki Krom



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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Find island treasures; Locally grown goods on tap at Beach Store Cafe

*By C. Nicki Krom June 24, 2004 Publication: Bellingham Herald, The (WA) Page: 15S
Word Count: 891*

By C. Nicki Krom

Just getting to the Beach Store Cafe on Lummi Island feels like a mini-vacation.

My friends Sarah and Andy joined me for dinner at the quiet island cafe on a recent sunny, summer evening.

Sitting in their SUV parked on the ferry deck, we floated across Hale Passage. A mere five-minute crossing from Gooseberry Point (\$2 per person round trip), Lummi Island feels a world away from the rush and responsibility of mainland living.

Painted the color of lemon sorbet, the cafe is a 10-minute walk from the ferry dock and surrounded by a white picket fence. Sidewalks are lined with thronging roses, daisies and poppies. It felt more like strolling toward a family summer barbecue than making our way to a restaurant.

Weathered, painted hard-wood floors and low lighting lend warmth to the space, and it's magnified by the friendly conversations coming from the restaurant's tables. Free from pretension (and stocked with plenty of family-friendly high chairs), the cafe caters to island locals and tourists alike.

Breathtaking views of Hale Passage and Mount Baker beyond are visible from nearly every

seat in the house.

A well-worn red-colored wood bar runs the length of the restaurant. Tarnished brass-foot railings and notch marks suggests a long history of revelry.

A lone waitress rushed the length of the room refilling water glasses and delivering entrees. She arrived at our table with menus a few minutes after we sat down.

I ordered a glass of the house red wine and received a fantastic glass of Chateau de Segries Cotes du Rhone. Out of house wine, the waitress provided an upgrade for the same price.

The evening's specials included a grilled albacore tuna nicoise featuring bibb lettuce, kalamata olives, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, red potatoes and green beans with a roasted shallot vinaigrette and a drizzle of wasabi cream sauce. Local spot prawns with Asian noodles, broccoli, carrots, sugar snap peas and peppers in a sesame ginger broth with soup and salad also were tempting.

First, we picked appetizers. Leo's live, peel-and-eat coonstripe shrimp sounded appealing, as did the foccacia with tapenade, fried oysters and french fries with aioli. In the end, we could not resist the allure of steamed Chuckanut mussels.

The Cafe features products from local businesses, including Three Pheasants Farm, Nettles Farm and Skagit Valley Organic, says Lauren Gibboney, who doubles as the restaurant's manager and a server.

Riley Starks, a reefnet fisher who also co-owns the cafe, as well as Nettles Farm and Willows Inn, supplies the kitchen with his own fresh-caught salmon.

These local connections make for a varied menu. Pizza, burritos, nachos, hamburgers, steaks, fresh seafood and salads vie for patrons' orders. Island locals pop in and out of the cafe throughout the evening and pick up pizzas to go.

I'm incapable of bypassing Nettles Farm pasta. I settled for the linguine with clams. Sarah opted for the grilled ling cod tacos, and Andy, swayed by an earlier viewing of the dish, decided on the ling cod fish and chips.

As we discussed our favorite bands, the mussels arrived.

Served in simple white stoneware, more than two-dozen mussels filled the bowl. Tender and flavorful, the shellfish swam in a broth of white wine, garlic, fresh tomatoes, fresh basil and herb seasoning. We each dove in wielding forks and spoons - forks for the mussels and spoons to slurp the tasty broth.

Timed to perfection, our entrees arrived a few moments after we decimated the starter.

Sarah's fish tacos were served with double corn tortillas to minimize messes. They also boasted red cabbage, slivered carrots (for added crunch), black beans, Tabitha's salsa, guacamole and sour cream with house-made tortilla chips on the side.

Flaky and moist, the grilled ling cod tasted wonderful when combined with the textures of creamy guacamole, crunchy carrots and black beans.

Andy's dish looked equally appealing. Three generous pieces of battered, fried ling cod arrived atop a pile of piping-hot, hand-cut french fries. A side of shredded coleslaw rounded out the meal.

I sampled one of Andy's fries and immediately experienced dinner envy. The salty, skin-on potato was crisp and piping hot. He reported that the cod had just the right balance of crunchy batter and delicate fish. Dipped in a house-crafted tartar sauce, the fish was consumed in minutes.

I could barely spy the linguine in my bowl for all the manila clams on top. Once again, the kitchen proved generous with shellfish. Though slightly chewy, the clams tasted of white wine, garlic, tomatoes, basil and herbs. Served al dente, the Nettles Farm pasta relied on the simple clam broth for flavor.

Nearly full, we chose to share dessert. A hot, monstrously huge brownie topped with Columbia Valley vanilla ice cream, chocolate sauce and slivered almonds finished us off.

A beautiful setting, welcoming environment and quality food make the Beach Store Cafe well worth the drive to Gooseberry Point and occasional waits for ferry crossings.

I dine on my own dime, and the opinions herein are mine alone, not The Bellingham Herald's.
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Beach Store Cafe

Location: 2200 N. Nugent Road, Lummi Island

Phone: 758-CAFE (2233)

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

\$-\$\$

Menu items sampled:

Glass house red wine, \$4

Fresh steamed mussels, \$8.95

Ling cod fish tacos, \$9.95

Ling cod fish and chips, \$9.95

Nettles Farm linguine with clams, \$15.95

Brownie sundae, \$4.95

SARAH WALLACE HERALD PHOTO

Set your clock to island time, and mosey on over to Lummi Island's Beach Store Cafe.

Bellingham Herald, The (WA)

Date: June 24, 2004

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