

OCEAN VICTUALS ENDANGERED SPECIES

By John Townley

If anyone is to be credited for starting a number of different sea creatures on the road to becoming endangered species it is Jack Tar himself. Not only did his officers and backers find seals, whales, turtles, and other currently scarce creatures a profitable source of income, the sailor himself found them exquisite to the palate, particularly when compared with the standard rations of salt pork, hard tack, and scouse. It made life aboard the square-rigger a bit more bearable.

Practical use of these ancient recipes for most these days is unlikely, but if you find yourself stranded in a small boat in arctic



waters or afloat on a raft in the Pacific, it could be you or them—and it's all in vain if you don't know how to prepare them properly.

BAKED SEAL

Skin your seal (the hide makes superior sea boots). Select a suitable steak from the hind quarters and prepare accordingly:

Soak meat in water with soda for 1/2 hour. Remove excess fat. Place in roaster with 2 strips salt pork. Bake at 350° until tender—about 2 1/2 hours. Make gravy with dissolved hard tack. Serve with vegetables or seaweed if available.

TURTLE

Sea turtles are troublesome to prepare, but it's worth the trouble as they are a delicacy for officers and men alike. Place the turtle in a large cauldron (you'll need one, they're big) on deck and bring to a boil for 10 minutes. Drain, and allow to cool. Now scrub it down to rid it of excess algae and then plunge it into boiling water and cook it for an hour or so—a really big one will require longer. Remove it from the cauldron and place it on its back (to keep the juices in) and remove the flat ventral shell plate with a knife and crowbar. Up near the head you will find the liver and gall, the latter to be thrown away. Retain liver, eggs (if any), small intestines, and meat from carapace and skinned legs. All of these may be prepared in a thousand ways, with soup or stew the most popular, but some old salts say

the only way to really enjoy it is to completely cook it whole for a number of hours, and then eat it directly out of the shell backyard barbecue fashion.

PORPOISE BRAINS

Though modern sensibility may recoil from such a dish, in the days of sail this was the number one delicacy to be foraged at sea, so much so that the common sailor never tasted it, as it was the sole privilege of the captain and ranking officers when such a creature was caught. And in those days, the harpooneer had no idea he was destroying a creature probably more intelligent than himself.

Preparation beforehand: Soak raw brains in vinegared water (lemon juice or wine will do), after skinning to remove all blood. After draining, blanch in acidified water (as above) for about 20 minutes, but do not allow to boil.

This delicacy can be sauteed (using standard pork fat rationing) or better, baked. When sauteeing, cook in sizzling fat 2 minutes on each side, then cover and cook on low flame for 10 minutes. Baking takes about 15 minutes at 400°. Cook or garnish with lemon juice and available spices to enhance the delicate flavor.

It is hoped you will not have the opportunity to try out these recipes on their original species although other substitute meats such as pork or beef will do quite well. Nevertheless, were you a sailor looking for an alternative to hard-tack in the 1840's you would have welcomed the culinary bonanza—and back then, it wouldn't have made a dent in the animal population.

Times have changed.

OCEAN VICTUALS FORAGING

By John Townley

The main problem with cooking at sea in the days of sail was the lack of fresh vegetables after three or four weeks at sea (when even the hardiest potatoes turned bad). All that remained were hard tack, salt pork, and pease, plus whatever delicacies could be hauled out of the sea, such as seaweed, porpoise, turtle, seal and the like (the subject of an earlier column, "Endangered Species").

However, many a barren coastline was sighted between ports, whether on a whale hunt off Alaska or Greenland or while fishing off the banks of Newfoundland. The savvy seacook who knew the local wild coastline flora could collect a fresh vegetable feast in just a few hours on a deserted shore while the ship hove to for repairs. Here are some of Nature's little-known finest, still available for the shore-gatherer:

Beach peas (*Lathyrus japonicus*) — Heart-shaped, compound leaves, pink to purple flowers, 2-3 feet high, with long pea-pods. Grows on the shore at tide's edge from Labrador south. Excellent for stews or steamed by itself. Peas of dried, brown pods, cooked for an hour, yield good pea soup.

Canada lily (*Lilium canadense*) — Looks like your standard lily, but yellow-orange flower, long, slender leaves, inhabits wet fields and open wetlands. Its bulbs can be used for potatoes — crushed, chopped, fried, ground into flour for pan-fried bread. From Nova Scotia south.

Dulse (*Rhodymenia palmata*) — A long (up to 3 feet) alga, a red to purple leaf that fastens to a rock or other solid substance. Sun-dry it several days, then grind into flour for soups, etc. Has a pleasant, violet odor. From Baffin Bay south.

American brooklime (*Veronica Americana*) — Long, slender, highly-branched ground plant with narrow leaves. Excellent greens for salad, soups. Lots of vitamin C. From Alaska south.

Roseroot (*Sedum roseum*) — Thick, oval leaves with flowers at top of stem. Fleshy, red taproot is nice carrot substitute, cooked to 15 minutes. Greens are good, too. Newfoundland to Maine.

It would seem a shame to waste such nice, tender fresh vegetables on a stew based on rancid salt pork from the ship's stores. There's no need — just shoulder your piece when you go ashore and bring back a moose or caribou (depending upon which coast you're on), and you've got a stew that sure beats scouse:

Caribou Stew

- Cubed caribou front shoulder meat
- Canada lily bulbs, chopped
- Roseroot taproots, chopped, and greens
- Wild spring onions
- Salt, pepper, hard tack flour

Proportion ingredients according to available quantity and taste. Dredge meat in hard tack flour and brown it in caribou fat in skillet. Then stew it up with vegetables, simmering until meat is tender, 30 to 45 minutes. Use hard tack flour (pulverized biscuits) to create desired thickness.

For the crew whose captain was willing to heave to for a day's foraging on a nearby northern coastline, mess call could be a welcome sound — if the ship's cook had some knowledge of what was available at hand for the picking.



"The Yankee Clipper Cookbook"
Bounty from the Sea

By John Townley

Even when the salty sea cook was far from land and provisions were low, leaving barely enough rotten salt pork and hard tack to go around, there was still an ocean full of food all around the ship just waiting to be caught and eaten, if he knew what he had to pick from.

Picking was just the problem, however, because not everything that could be pulled out on a line or harpoon was edible, and some of it could kill you. For example, nice black sea urchins could be broken open and their meat was, and still is, considered a delicacy. Except in northern Pacific waters, that is, where the long-spined sea urchins are deadly poison. Some quite edible fare could be deceptively lethal as well. Barracuda, for instance, make delicious eating — except occasionally, for no apparent reason, they, too, become poisonous without rhyme, reason, or warning. Not that often, but often enough.

Fish in tropical waters are particularly tricky, and the general rule is the more beautiful the fish, the more you should avoid it. Queen triggerfish are ravishingly gorgeous in an aquarium, but don't dare put one in your skillet. The uglies and the nasties tend to be scrumptious, on the other hand, with shark and moray eel high on the list of easily-acquired edibles.

Preparation? Well, you can always pan-fry or broil your fish, but why be so mundane? Stuff your fish with a nice, large kelp leaf or two, pack the whole thing in some viscous, wet bottom clay, and toss it all in the fire or oven. When the clay is dry, just crack it open and there's your dish, with the skin neatly filleted away by the clay — a trick picked up from South Sea Island chefs. For modern-day yachtsmen faced with polluted mud or a sandy bottom, here's a more up-to-date version passed on by Lake Erie sailors Dick and Bob Larcey and Paul Kaase:

Drugstore Wrap

Filet fish and pat filets dry. Place filet on piece of foil large enough to wrap it up in, salt and pepper it. Add: 1 tablespoon onions, 1 tablespoon butter, 2 tablespoons chopped celery, 2 tablespoons chopped tomatoes, a nice dollop of ketchup. Wrap it all up and toss it in the fire or a 375° oven for about a half an hour. Serve with lemon and bread for mopping up the delicious, sweet juices.