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### In Wellfleet, the pull of a freshly plucked oyster is strong

By [Christopher Borrelli](#), Tribune reporter

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WELLFLEET, Mass. — All roads lead to water.

Which means, here on the outer curl of Cape Cod, 70 miles or so into the Atlantic Ocean, where tall marsh greens in autumn turn the color of butterscotch, all roads lead to oysters.

Bumper stickers remind you of the oyster fishermen who drive alongside you down U.S. Highway 6. Oysters are painted on the sides of residential homes. Oysters dominate every menu and suck at your heels on the beach.

Heading north down the long neck of the Cape, toward Provincetown, you can make two turns at Wellfleet. Turn right, you hit bluffs, set high against the ocean; here, 100 years ago, Guglielmo Marconi built one of the first radio stations, Theodore Roosevelt sent the first trans-Atlantic radio message (to King Edward VII), and one of the first distress signals from the Titanic was intercepted.

Wellfleet's oysters, though, are the village's legacy, its name a standard chalkboard scribble in upscale restaurants across the globe. So turn left and drive toward the harbor.

There are several ways to eat oysters in Wellfleet. The first is at one of the many restaurants shucking them morning and night. The second is the Wellfleet Oyster Festival, Oct. 15-16, a bivalve overload that reminds you why the pilgrims who landed here 400 years ago referred to this place as "Billingsgate," after London's great seafood market.

Which brings us to the third way to eat oysters here: Pluck them from the mud. You have not eaten an oyster until you have eaten an oyster pulled from a tidal pool, its shell releasing a satisfyingly wet pop. But to do this, you need to get a permit (\$75 for out-of-towners, at the village shellfishing office), fish on a Sunday or a Thursday (the only days open to nonresidents) and wear shoes with thick soles. Don't do it the way my girlfriend and I recently did. We had the right shoes, but not the permit or day. You can look, but you'd better not touch. Though how could you not?

The moment the tide pulls out, a field of shells is unveiled, standing at attention and clumped together. They're like grapes at the supermarket. We clomped out into the shallow water of Indian Neck Beach, the old shells of past harvests crunching beneath our feet. We pocketed a few and headed for the B&B, then — and here is the wrong way to eat an oyster — cracked them open with a wrench we found. We looked like cavemen beating back a reptile. We had nothing better and were too ashamed of our theft, petty as it was, to ask the owners of Aunt Sukie's Bed & Breakfast for a blunt, rounded clam knife.

Incidentally, there is no Sukie.

Just a retired couple named Sue and Dan Hamar, whose idyllic, 181-year-old home is a magazine-pretty, weather-beaten example of traditional New England living (accented with a large, 18-year-old addition). It overlooks Wellfleet Harbor, and in lieu of backyard offers something better: A wooden plank that runs across marsh and stream, over the tops of crabs in the crevices, leading to beach, across from Indian Neck.

We stayed here before Labor Day, just after Hurricane Irene (downgraded to a tropical storm) sat lazily atop the Northeast like the last guest on your couch at a party. At sunrise, the tide pulled out and the beach behind Aunt Sukie magically went from several feet wide to several dozen feet; pickup trucks and fishermen promptly pushed in, leaving thick, deep tracks through the mud. The storm had tossed their clams around, tearing them out of their beds — which are often helped along by contraptions resembling bed frames. The oysters cling to these, have sex, then multiply. Fishermen set about raking together what the hurricane left.

We set about eating them at various local stops.

First, there was Bookstore & Restaurant, a used-book store attached to a 48-year-old restaurant whose owners maintain their own oyster beds (directly across the street from the dining room). Their cocktail sauce was the finest we had and a rarity, spicy without killing the clam; their oyster po' boy, however, was a losing proposition — tasty, but a reminder that oysters this fresh shouldn't be fried. At Mac's Seafood, right on the beach, across from fishing boats still unloading their afternoon catch, we ate a dozen oysters from a paper plate, the liquor on the clams (which is what you call the seawater pooling on top) running over our chins.

The trouble with eating oysters in the cradle of oysters, however, is you lose perspective. Merely spectacular clams no longer impress, so here's what I suggest: Hit The Wicked Oyster, early, and plead, as we did, for shucked oysters before noon, when the catch smells of the Atlantic. Our waitress hesitated.

Then she brought out a plate rich with brine. These clams were sweet, meaty, so unlike the gummy taste people associate with even great oysters that, tired as this sounds, I felt as though I never had an oyster before. "Please," she said, "don't tell anyone. We don't like to do this so early." We nodded, agreed, we'd never tell anyone. Though to keep it a secret would be a crime.

#### If you go

Stay: Aunt Sukie's Bed & Breakfast, [auntsukies.com](http://auntsukies.com), 800-420-9999 or 508-349-2804, [info@auntsukies.com](mailto:info@auntsukies.com)

Eat: Bookstore & Restaurant, [wellfleetoyster.com](http://wellfleetoyster.com), 508-349-3154; Mac's Seafood, [macsseafood.com](http://macsseafood.com), 508-349-6333; The Wicked Oyster, [thewickedo.com](http://thewickedo.com), 508-349-3455

Check out: Wellfleet Oyster Festival, [wellfleetoysterfest.org](http://wellfleetoysterfest.org)

General information: [wellfleetchamber.com](http://wellfleetchamber.com), 508-349-2510

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