

NET GAINS

Kelly Smith has visitors to the Dungeness Snack Shack falling hook, line and sinker for her fine fare – delicious street food using fish caught from the sea just a stone's throw away

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On first visiting the Kent headland of Dungeness – a barren landscape dotted with single-storey cottages, empty oil cans washed up from faraway lands, rusted hulks of abandoned fishing boats and flourishes of sea kale – it's easy to miss the unassuming roadside trailer perched on the shingle.

For those in the know, this is the Dungeness Snack Shack, where Kelly Smith serves up fish hauled out of the sea moments before in a variety of delectable guises. She launched the outdoor café after growing frustrated by a lack of local fish available to diners. During one of her foodie jaunts to London, Kelly – who lives in nearby Hythe with husband Lee and children, Louis, eight, and Sophia, five – realised that so much produce was being mis-sold. 'I remember going to a food



CLOCKWISE, FROM THE TOP LEFT Signs of what to expect at Dungeness Snack Shack when the *Doreen 7* comes in; Kelly proudly presents some of her mouthwatering fresh fare; Kelly and her assistant are busy inside the shack as the diners start to appear; Kelly gets her pick of the just-landed catch from her family's fishing business to put on the menu

market in London and apparently it was all fresh fish from our waters, but I knew it was nonsense. I got quite irked,' she says, chatting from the trailer that serves as the kitchen for her café.

STREET FOOD START-UP

So, in 2013, she used her savings to buy a trailer from Brighton and decided to start selling her own version of street food, capitalising on the source of fresh produce being caught by her father, Ken, brother, Joe, and uncle, David,

for the family fishing business in Dungeness. Their business has been passed down from generation to generation. 'But the industry is unrecognisable now compared to 30 years ago,' Kelly's father, Ken, explains. 'For small-scale boats to make a living is extremely hard because of all the legislation. I've seen other families on the beach gradually give up on the industry, and the death of fishing along our coast. But I have never considered another career. It's in my blood ➡➡➡



coastFOOD



Kelly's Mexican-style flatbreads

(MAKES ENOUGH DOUGH FOR 25. USE WHAT YOU NEED AND FREEZE THE REST)

- 800g white chapatti flour
- 1tbsp salt, 2 heaped tsp baking powder
- 4tbsp sesame seeds
- 50g soft butter
- ½ pint boiling water

METHOD

1. Mix the flour with all the other dry ingredients to make the dough. Rub the butter through the flour mixture until it resembles breadcrumb crumbs.
2. Make a well in the centre and add half the boiling water and start to incorporate the mixture. Mix in the rest of the water slowly (you can add more if it seems too dry), knead the dough on a lightly floured surface for 5 minutes.
3. Shape into a ball, rub a light covering of olive oil over the surface and wrap in cling-film. Leave to rest for at least 15 minutes.
4. To cook, take a ball of dough the size of a golf ball and flatten it with the palm of your hand, dust with flour and roll out into a disc. Pop into a hot dry frying pan and cook on each side for a few minutes.





Fish fingers (SERVES 4)

- 400g filleted and skinned white fish (cod is excellent, as is whiting), cut into large chunks
- 50g plain flour
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 100g panko breadcrumbs
- To garnish:
- Chilli sauce
- Sour cream
- Limes, cut into wedges

METHOD

1. Coat each piece of fish with flour, dip into the egg and then coat with the breadcrumbs. Deep fry the fish until light golden in colour and cooked through (around 4 minutes).
2. Stuff a flatbread with a handful of the slaw and a few fish fingers and drizzle with chilli sauce and sour cream. Serve with lime wedges.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Kelly has adapted well to running her own business; coastal accessories in nautical blues from Mini Moderns add a dash of style and comfort to the simple seating area; one of today's fishing boats rests on the shingle; a typical menu; hauling the *Doreen T* from the sea to the shore; boats from a bygone era; fresh fish ready for Kelly; an old boat on the shore at Dungeness; Kelly chats to customers at her busy popular shack

and I love the lifestyle – living and working right here on the beach.'

Kelly wanted to redress the balance of how much fish we export and show people what they've been missing. 'Most of the fish we catch goes to the French fish markets,' she says. 'There isn't a big demand here for the fish we catch in the Channel.' Each day, a huge refrigerated lorry arrives and loads up before heading to the ferry. Kelly acknowledges fishing has become a tricky industry to navigate, mainly as a result of EU regulations. 'Skate was banned last year due to worry over numbers. Now the water is full of them and fishermen spend a lot of time trying to avoid them or having to chuck them back in. And the knock-on effect here is that there's no shrimp left because the skate numbers are now so high and they are eating all the shrimp,' she says.

This begs the question, what will Brexit do to this industry? 'Huge swathes of the fishing community voted

for Brexit because of how damaging the Common Fisheries Policy and quotas have been. The whole beach used to be full of boats and now there are only a handful,' says Kelly. But it remains uncertain how Brexit will change things, and whether access to UK waters will be used as a bargaining chip. 'The industry is not worth much to the UK economically but is worth huge amounts to Europe,' she adds.

A WELCOME ADDITION

The Snack Shack has been welcomed with open arms by local residents, both the dyed-in-the-wool Dungenessers and the newcomers. Ken, David and Joe have two boats between them – the *Annalouision* and the *Doreen T* – from which they use static nets to catch hauls of sole, huss, cod, gurnard and dab, depending on the season. Then, moments after it is offloaded, Kelly selects some choice pieces and cooks them for her customers. ➡➡➡







LEFT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT **Dungeness Fish Hut**, where the family sell their fish, is next to the **Snack Shack**; Kelly's uncle David from the family business brings in a crate from the day's haul; lobster pots on the beach; the desolate beauty of Dungeness; busy at work THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT Diners tuck in to Kelly's treats; the shack is popular with visitors and locals



She serves homemade fish fingers with Mexican-style slaw in homemade flatbread, or crab and lobster rolls. Paper plates and plastic forks, sun-bleached wooden tables and benches, deck chairs and blankets to take the edge off the wind all come together to create something utterly charming. Kelly opens Wednesday to Sunday, 11am-3.30pm, spring to autumn, depending on the weather. Her cousin Sarah is on hand to help with accounts and ordering, and Kelly has help in the kitchen. 'It has been a big learning curve, getting to grips with the realities of running a business,' she says.

DUNGENESS MAGIC

Kelly is among the lucky few to have grown up roaming the coastline at Dungeness. 'I was born in my parents' house, just along the road,' she says. 'Dungeness was a brilliant place to grow up. While the boats were coming back in, you could climb aboard, jump off and go swimming. I remember

building rafts from driftwood and oil drums with my cousin Stephen.'

Dungeness is well-known for being home to the late film director and artist Derek Jarman, but the SSSI status landscape is divisive. People either love it or hate it, which is perhaps why it holds such an allure – it is on a left-field tourist trail but never gets mobbed – and, while there is a smattering of eateries and London émigrés, it is still full of locals. The small community is made up of a mix of fishing families, artists and weekenders, all united by their affection for this mystical place.

'I love my job,' says Kelly. 'I feel very privileged to be able to spend my days on our special beach watching the seasons change, with a great view over the Channel and an endless supply of the very freshest fish.'

◆ **Dungeness Snack Shack, The Fish Hut, Dungeness Road, Dungeness, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 9NB (07825 598921; dungenesssnackshack.net)**

The Mexican-style slaw (SERVES 4)

- ½ red cabbage
- ½ white cabbage
- 6 radishes, topped and tailed
- 2 carrots, topped and tailed and peeled
- Large bunch of coriander, chopped
- 3 limes, juiced
- Sea salt

METHOD

1. Peel and wash the cabbages and carrots. Wash the coriander thoroughly and dry.
2. Using a Magimix or mandolin, finely shred the red and white cabbage and radishes and grate the carrots. Mix the vegetables together and add the chopped coriander, squeeze the lime juice over the veg and add lots of sea salt.