

Out of Town: Connecticut Shack Crawl

June 30, 2006

We just can't shake the Shack thing. No, not Madison Square Park's Shake Shack, but [Seafood Shacks](#) by Elizabeth Bougerol, which we wrote briefly about several weeks ago. In the book, Ms. Bougerol gives you the fried, steamed, and buttery skinny on shacks up and down the East Coast from Connecticut to Maine. Since she's gotten us obsessed with lobster rolls et al., we asked the author to give us and MUG readers a Connecticut shack crawl that would make an easy day trip. She's kindly obliged with five great dives between Westport and Noank, from 50 miles to 130 miles from your door. Happy 4th!

Westfair Fish & Chips

1781 Post Rd. E. (Rte. 1), Westport; 203.255.3184 Miles from Manhattan: 50
[map](#)

The Vibe: Nondescript, overlookable dive. Shoebox-tiny takeout joint tucked away in an old strip mall; the perfect sleeves-up antidote to tony Westport. One table outside with a nice view of the trash bins, parking lot.

What You're Having: Righteous fried sea scallops; delicate fried or broiled scrod and flounder, New England (milky) or Rhode Island (briny) clam chowder.

Details: Open year-round, lunch and dinner, 7 days. BYOB.

The Place

891 Boston Post Rd. (Rte. 1), Guilford; 203.453.9276
[map](#)
Miles from Manhattan: 91

The Vibe: Fish camp cookout. Woodsy clearing scattered with cherry-red tables, tree stumps for seats, and clam shells; in the middle of it all is a ramshackle fire pit where the staff roasts, grills, and steams the entire menu to order.

What You're Having: Fresh grilled bluefish and the clam special: juicy half-shell littlenecks from nearby Branford, dabbled with cocktail sauce and butter and flash-roasted. Or a lobster and some husk-charred corn, smoky from the hickory and oak used to fire the grill.

Details: Open Memorial Day to Labor Day, dinner 7 days, lunch weekends only; always weather permitting. BYOB.

Johnny Ad's

910 Boston Post Road (Route 1), Old Saybrook; 860.388.4032
[map](#)
Miles from Manhattan: 108

The Vibe: Sandra Dee's summer vacation. Roadside shack that's barely changed since it opened in 1957, right down to Patsy Cline and Buddy Holly warbling through tinny speakers that double as a PA system when your order's ready.

What You're Having: Lightly crumb-breaded fried scallops, soft-shell crabs (in season), and whole clams. Or the hot lobster roll: sweet pink meat on a griddled bun, dribbling with butter, butter everywhere, dripping down your arms. Goes nicely with a root beer.

Details: Open year-round, lunch and dinner (until 8PM), 7 days. BYOB.

Abbott's Lobster in the Rough

117 Pearl St., Noank; 860.536.7719 [Website](#)
[map](#)
Miles from Manhattan: 132

The Vibe: Maine lobster pound, in Connecticut. Peppermint-striped awnings, picnic tables, weather-beaten tin signs hawking ice cream or chowder, all sloping gently down to the water.

What You're Having: Noank-style clam chowder, lobster rolls (hot, with creamery butter, or cold, with a little mayo), and shore dinners, featuring clams, corn and a lobster that's steamed for the sweetest flavor.

Details: Open May to mid-October, lunch and dinner (until 9PM), 7 days. BYOB.

Sea Swirl

30 Williams Ave. (Rte. 1), Mystic; 860.536.3452 [Website](#) [map](#)
Miles from Manhattan: 133

The Vibe: 1960s roadtrip. The Googie-style ice cream stand (it started as a Carvel's) is perched on a marshy cove of the Mystic River and swarmed by fat, wily sea gulls. Great sunsets, but little seating -- eat on your car hood.

What You're Having: Perfectly fried belly clams, cod nuggets and Gulf shrimp, sided with crunchy dark onion rings. For dessert: Buck's ice cream, churned nearby in Milford.

Details: Open "during baseball season," lunch and dinner, 7 days. BYOB.

Shack Classic: The Lobster Roll

Most everybody in New England agrees on the bun: It should be a soft a soft, chewy top-loader (a.k.a. "split-top," "frankfurter roll"), usually from J.J. Nissen, Freihofer, or Pepperidge Farm, griddle-toasted with butter. Filling-wise, it's the version most common to Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts -- cool, hand-torn lobster chunks, naked or tossed with a touch of mayonnaise and maybe a dash of paprika -- that's become the Platonic lobster roll ideal, the one big-city chefs try to replicate. Tragically, Connecticut's most popular version doesn't show up much outside the Nutmeg State: Warm meat, pulled fresh from the shell, is drenched with butter and stuffed into a roll. Some places (such as Abbott's in Noank) serve even more melted butter on the side, for dipping. Like a full lobster dinner on a bun.