

If great fried fish is your Maine thing . . .

By Hilary Nangle
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Maine is renowned for its lobster shacks, but its fried fish joints are equally delectable destinations. At these 10 coastal gems — a mix of sit-down restaurants and take-out shacks — expect big portions, low prices, and homemade desserts as alluring as the catch of the day.

Fisherman's Catch, Wells The Cardinali family's shingled fish joint edges a saltwater marsh on the road to Wells Harbor. Snag a table inside or out. The secret to their light, crispy yet moist fried fish, says Ned Cardinali, is their labor-intensive dipping-shaking-frying process. Order fish 'n' chips (\$8.99), served with homemade slaw and a roll; splurge on the seafood platter (\$20.99); or split the Captain's Feast, a mountain of scallops, Maine shrimp, whole-belly clams, and haddock, with fries, rolls, and slaw (\$29.99). The Catch also gets raves for its fried smelts, calamari, and oysters. Don't even think about skipping the sweet potato fries or homemade desserts. The blueberry pie, served warm with ice cream, and the vanilla bread pudding, with a warm whiskey caramel sauce and whipped cream, are alone worth a visit. This place is extremely popular; go early to avoid a wait. Seasonal. *134 Harbor Road, 207-646-8780, www.fishermanscatchwells.com*

Ken's Place, Pine Point, Scarborough When it comes to fried clams, Ken's gets it right. No wonder: It's been frying clams since 1927 and has generations of Mainers as devotees. Owner Dave Wilcox daily selects the best-grade fish, right off the boat. While the whole-belly clams are justly praised, it's the made-to-order clam cakes that are the biggest sellers. Ken's sells upwards of 1,000 daily at \$1.45 each or as a dinner, three cakes with fries, slaw, and roll for \$6.99. Ken's fries all types of seafood; the seafood platter, at \$24.99, feeds two. Its fried oysters, available the first Tuesday of each month, have a cult-like following. Seasonal. *207 Pine Point Road, 207-883-6611*

Susan's Fish-N-Chips, Portland This garage-turned-fish shack evokes the sea, from the mermaids and fish painted on the exterior to the netting hanging over the counter inside. But don't expect a fishy odor. Susan's is clean, efficient, and dishes out some of Portland's best and cheapest fried seafood. Owner Susan Eklund makes sure Susan's delivers on its motto: "Our fish is so fresh, you'll want to slap it." Big portions, low prices, crispy flavorful fish, and daily specials reel in the locals. On Mondays



HILARY NANGLE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (ABOVE)

Clockwise from above: Try the fried clams both battered and breaded at Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster in South Freeport; aim for a riverside picnic table at Bagaduce Lunch in North Brooksville, and don't miss the clam cakes at Ken's Place in Scarborough.



and Tuesdays, two fish burgers are \$2.50, and Wednesday is haddock day, with fried specialties ranging from \$3.99 for a pint of nuggets to \$10.99 for a haddock and scallop dinner. Prove it's your birthday and get \$10 off your order. Year round. *1135 Forest Ave., 207-878-3240, www.sansfishandchips.com*

Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster, South Freeport On the harbor here, a world away from downtown Freeport's shopping madness, Harraseeket Lunch serves fried seafood in abundance. Order at the window, then grab a picnic table outside or a seat in the dining room. This is the place to settle that age-old question about fried clams: Which is better, battered or breaded? Order a half-pint of each, then decide. Finish with a homemade whoopie pie. This place is no secret, so expect crowds. Seasonal. *36 Main St.,*

207-865-4888, www.harraseeketlunchandlobster.com

Sea Basket, Wiscasset Healthful fried food? The Sea Basket uses a convection frying system that quickly sears the outer coating, so less oil is absorbed than in standard frying. The parking lot is nearly always full at this roadside restaurant just south of the state's self-proclaimed "prettiest village," especially on Sundays, when locals congregate after church. Fried haddock, scallops, clams, Maine shrimp, even clam cakes and crab cakes all are available, served alone, in rolls, and in baskets, with prices beginning around \$6. Don't miss the lobster stew. Seasonal. *303 Old Bath Road, 207-882-6581, www.seabasket.com*

Bet's Famous Fish Fry, Boothbay "Free Beer Tomorrow" proclaims the sign outside this take-out shack on the town



TOM NANGLE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

common. Owner Bet Finocchiaro says she goes through 1,500 pounds of haddock and 800 pounds of potatoes each 4½-day week. Although she no longer catches the fish herself, she still uses her grandmother's breeding recipe, whips up her special tartar sauce, and makes the french fries. The haddock sandwich and the fish 'n' chips are legendary, but unless you're a big eater, plan

on splitting an order; portions are huge. No indoor seating, but picnic tables sprinkle the common. Seasonal. *Route 27, Town Common, 207-208-7477*

Angler's, Searsport This is the original of the Hall family's three Angler's restaurants, and it reels in both the locals and tourists heading up Route 1. They come not only for the fried haddock, Maine shrimp, oysters,

scallops, and clams, but also for the homemade desserts (coconut cream and blueberry pies are the top sellers). The biggest lure is the fried haddock dinner: two large, hand-battered filets served with a choice of potato and vegetable. It's enough to feed two, especially if you crown it with one of the dozen-plus dessert choices, most of which are made on site. Year round. *Route 1, 207-548-2405, www.anglersseafoodrestaurant.com*

Just Barb's, Stockton Springs The coffee's always on at this unassuming hole-in-the-wall, a dandy place for an unfussy meal at a low price. The all-you-can-eat fish fry, available daily after 11 a.m., is \$7.99 and comes with top-quality Alaskan white fish, fries, slaw, and a roll. Owner Doug Fraser mixes his own batter from three types of flour and fries the fish in canola oil that's changed every other day, creating an especially light and flavorful fish. Year round. *Route 1, 24 Main St., 207-567-3886*

Bagaduce Lunch, North Brooksville Judy and Mike Astbury operate this roadside take-out that was founded by Judy's grandfather Sidney Snow. In 2008 the James Beard Foundation named it an American Classic. Regulars know to order the clams, lightly breaded and fried in vegetable oil, or the fried haddock, a golden treat. Don't skip the onion rings. Aim for a riverside picnic table, where you can watch for gulls, eagles, osprey, and seals. Time a visit to coincide with a changing tide when the reversing falls on tidal Bagaduce River really rip. The place is being renovated for this season, so it might look a bit fancier. Seasonal. *145 Franks Flat Road, Routes 175/176, 207-326-4729*

Chester Pike's Galley, Sullivan The parking lot is always packed with Maine plates. Those local folks know a good thing. Jane Fogg and Amy McGarr are royalty in the kitchen of this cheery restaurant. Fogg's fish 'n' chips, a large portion of haddock and fries served with homemade slaw and homemade tartar sauce, are a lunch bargain at \$6.95, but the Friday night fish fry, which includes two pieces of fish, fries, slaw, tartar, and a homemade roll, is \$10.95, and includes free seconds. Be sure to pair it with an order of chowder. McGarr's desserts, which highlight seasonally fresh ingredients, greet diners at the door. Locals know to order one first and keep it aside. Seasonal. *Route 1, 207-422-8200*

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A railroad engineered as their labor of love

By Hilary Nangle
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

JONESPORT, Maine — Inside the garage-like building adjacent to Harold and Helen Beal's home is what may be

DETOURS Maine's largest model railway. The Beals' Maine Central Model Railroad covers 900 square feet and features 4,000 trees, 407 train cars, 3,000 feet of track, 11 bridges and trestles, and 200 switches.

Tracks wind through towns modeled on real Maine places, winding past mines and mills, lobster boats and lighthouses, cities and villages. Sharp eyes can spy Stephen King's house and Dysart's Truck Stop in Bangor, Champion Paper in Bucksport, lobstermen docking at Cape Split, Harbor House in Jonesport, lumbermen rolling logs, a hunter surprised by a bear, even an accident scene complete with ambulance.

"We hit about everything," says "Buz" Beal. "There's even an outhouse. Now that's getting down to the nitty gritty."

"I've got railroading in my blood," says Beal, 73, a Jonesport native and 26-year Coast Guard veteran whose grandfather was a Canadian Pacific engineer. Beal began planning the model's layout as a boy, but it wasn't until around 1989, when he had returned to Jonesport after nearly 50 years away, that he began building his dream. It took 12 years and thousands of hours to complete.

"You have to have the place, the opportunity, and the patience," he says. And the right partner. "Helen's family were railroad people. We've been married 25 years and never had an argument. We're two peas in a pod."

Beal had a track plan, and he knew the model would fill the building before they started construction. They did everything by hand using tweezers, glue,



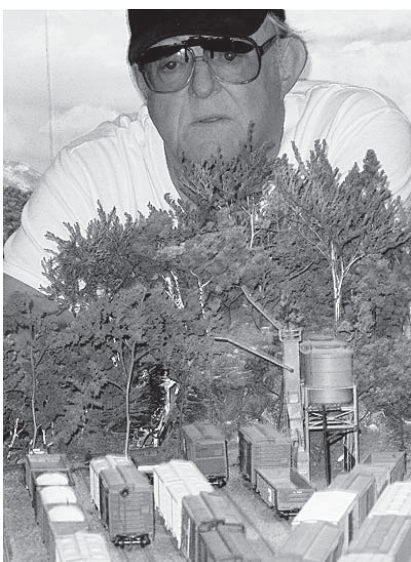
PHOTOS BY HILARY NANGLE/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

"I've got railroading in my blood," says Harold "Buz" Beal, whose grandfather was a railroad engineer. He and his wife, Helen, built the Maine Central Model Railroad, which covers 900 square feet and took 12 years to complete.

and plaster of Paris.

"We didn't know what the heck we were doing. We did it as we went along, 6 to 8 feet at a time," Beal says. The model rests on a maze of tables with varying heights. "I didn't want it all the same; it gets humdrum if you do that," he says. The design allows visitors to walk through the layout.

Helen Beal built the little houses and cut 600 windows by hand using an X-Acto knife. She also affixed trees and painted all the small pieces. Buz Beal painted the houses and built the larger structures. Some cars were built from scratch, some made from kits, others bought. The granite cliffs and wooded mountains were created with layers of



plaster-soaked paper towels.

The model has three sections, and full operation requires a trained volunteer manning each. There are boxcars and grain cars, gondolas, and cars de-

If you go . . .

Maine Central Model Railroad

Route 187, Jonesport, Maine
207-497-2255

Open weekdays and whenever the Beals are home, but call first. Donations appreciated.

signed to carry gas, oil, or coal.

"You have to know all the businesses, how many cars can fit on a siding by each business, and know what every car is and what it carries or is used for. There's a lot to it. People look and don't realize that," Beal says.

Word of mouth has been the biggest advertising. Most visitors to off-the-beaten-track Jonesport are coming for a puffin-sighting excursion to Machias Seal Island or to hike the trails on bridge-connected Great Wass Island. But once they are here, innkeepers such as Maureen Hart, whose Harbor House is included on the train layout, refer them to the Beals. A large US map is filled with pins, showing that visitors from every state have made their own tracks to the model railway.

Beal operates one train through the full layout for most visitors, and that takes nine minutes. When he flips the power switch, lights come on inside the building and the clang, whistles, and chug of trains fill the air.

"I don't know what it is about a train that's so fascinating. It's just two engines pulling cars behind; it's not rocket science," he says, as his eyes follow the train through the Maine landscape. "It's just mesmerizing. I never tire of it."

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KARI BODNARCHUK