

Fish & Fishing

Clamming It Up...

At one time or another, you can see what appear to be numerous pickets sprouting from the surf of Santa Cruz area beaches.

These are clammers—or "clam diggers," if you prefer, participating in one of the long established, outdoor "sports" of Monterey Bay area residents.

Few people consider clamming a sport, except—that is—the clammers themselves.

Just as in hunting and conventional fishing, clammers get more out of their sport than victory, which in a clammer's case would be "limiting out" (taking the allowed maximum 10 clams). Pismo clams, the most popular and most frequently taken in the Monterey Bay area, are a delicacy and the foundation of numerous popular shell fish recipes, including — of course — clam chowder.

There are two main methods used in taking Pismo clams; forking and pull raking. Generally speaking, one method isn't more popular than the other, but usually when a person chooses one method, he sticks with that one.

The forkers usually take to the deep water and fight the breakers, and as a result, they'll find the largest clam beds and sometimes the largest clams. The fork is used as a spade — with short, choppy

strokes. The rake, used in more shallow water, is much more cumbersome than the fork.

Clammers watch the tide tables for low tide and try to be in the water an hour before the lowest tide, according to Fish and Game Warden Jack Wilson.

State regulations require the legal clam to be at least five inches in diameter. The average size taken varies from five to five and a half inches; on occasion, six inches can be taken, but usually at the beginning of the season, which runs from September 1 to April 30.

Most clammers take to Rio del Mar, Seascape, Sunset or La Selva beaches.

Wilson reports that cockel clamming is becoming more and more popular on the Greater Santa Cruz area. Cockels are much smaller than Pismo clams and are usually found in sandy, gravel areas. Popular cockel areas are Pleasure Point, East Cliff and West Cliff, Davenport and Greyhound Rock. Cockel diggers may use a fork or small shovel.

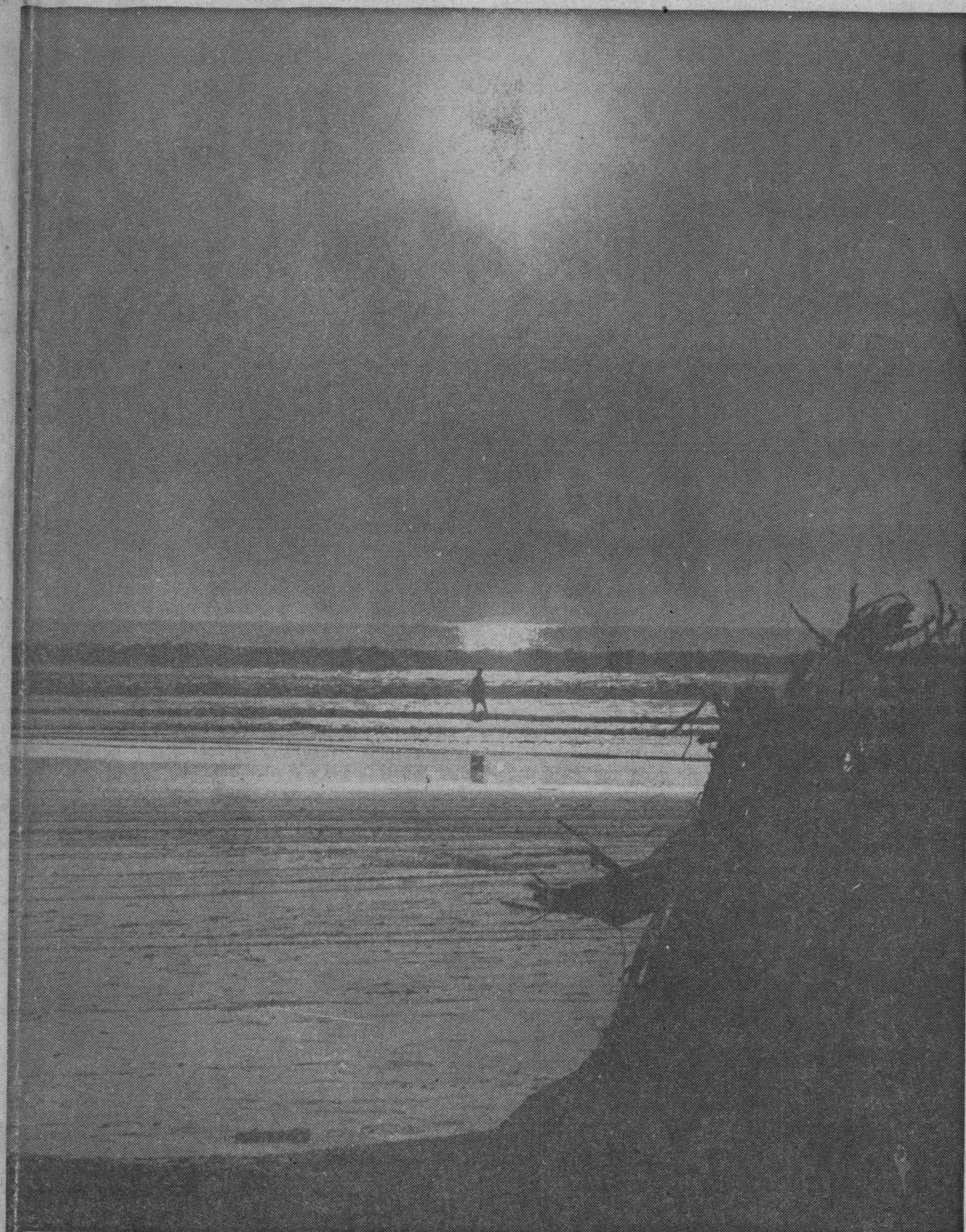
Whether you're digging for Pismos or cockels, all that is required is a three dollar basic fishing license, quite a reasonable price to pay for hours of enjoyment.

*Photos and Text
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Top Right—A woman clammer walks the Rio del Mar beach after spending an afternoon "forking" for Pismo clams. She is one of many Greater Santa Cruz area residents who participate in the long established and very popular sport.

Above—"There are better clammers than me." With these words, this woman explained why she desired not to divulge her name. Despite clamming in shallow water, she still took her share of Pismos.

Above Right—These two photos show two of the "deep water" clammers who fight the breakers for their limits. David W. Anderson, left, holds his fork high and throws back an under-sized clam. Right, Dan Fite—Anderson's son-in-law, turns his back to a large breaker. Anderson and Fite are regulars at either Rio del Mar, Seascapes, or Sunset beaches.

Right—There are just three of the clammers who take to the water in search of Pismo clams. See Scofield, left, and an unidentified clammer demonstrate the "rake" technique. Scott Graff, far right, uses the "fork" method.

