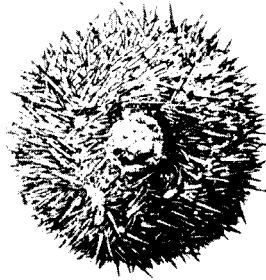


Miscellaneous Seafoods

A number of large and edible animals could be mustered for this section of the catalogue. There are the sea turtles, for example, of which several species enter our area. But I have left these out, for various reasons, not least the practical one that one does not find them in fish shops nor catch a specimen while having a holiday at the coast. Moreover, the sea turtles are mostly global in their distribution, and have been described in another book of mine, *Seafood of South-East Asia*, where they sit more suitably (South-East Asia being a region where they are plentiful and more in use as food). It was a tempting idea to include the diamond-back terrapin of the eastern seaboard of the United States; but this is a creature of the salt marshes rather than the sea.

Then there are the whales. But few people nowadays eat whale meat and there is general concern over the risk that certain species of whale will be made extinct. I have therefore left them all out and have allowed them to exclude with themselves the other edible sea mammals, notably the seals. The principles of conservation do not require us to leave seals alone. Indeed, most seal stocks need to be culled regularly to prevent their becoming too large. And I have not forgotten how I once saw a seal being opened up at a fishery station. 'Anyone want salmon paste for tea?' asked the technician jovially, as we passed by. He held up a bowlful of the stomach contents. It was indeed a salmon paste, fresh in aroma, pink in colour and only a little bit chunkier than the product one buys in jars. If seals can gobble as many salmon as they can catch, perhaps man may be allowed to eat seals. But the subject is a sensitive one and the catching and consumption of seals is best left to the Greenlanders and others who have a genuine and traditional dependence on what the seal provides.

These exclusions cause our catalogue to finish with some strikingly uncontroversial items. The sea-urchin is of course a living creature, which belongs to the Order *Diadematoidea* and is of pentagonal construction, like the starfish to which it is related. But it has never been invested with even a semblance of the pathetic fallacy and is in no danger of extinction. As for the seaweeds, with which the catalogue ends, they are acceptable even to the most strict vegetarians. My only regret is that I could not go into this interesting field more fully; but it is accompanied by the comforting thought that the books by Lily Newton (*Seaweed Utilisation*, 1951) and Euell Gibbons (*Stalking the Blue-Eyed Scallop*, 1964) from which I quote will provide further information.

SEA-URCHIN,
GREEN SEA-URCHINFamily *Echinidae**Strongylocentrus droebachiensis* O. F. Müller

REMARKS Up to about 8 cm in diameter. There are numerous species of sea-urchin. This one has a circumpolar distribution. Its range in the Atlantic extends down to the English Channel and to New Jersey. Europeans are more familiar with *Paracentrotus lividus* (Lamarck), the main edible species of the Mediterranean, where it is common to see basketfuls on display, with one urchin cut open to reveal the star-shaped orange ovaries which are the edible part. These can constitute as much as 10 to 20 per cent of the weight of the creature; but even so they make tiny mouthfuls. The main demand for them is in France, which imports some from Ireland, and in Japan, which has been experimenting with shipments from North America. Consumption in North America itself is very small, although sea-urchins from the Bay of Fundy have been marketed in New York. *Strongylocentrus droebachiensis* is abundant on the coast of Maine, but the creatures are there called 'whores' eggs' and regarded with horror. It does not seem to be marketed in northern Europe.

The sea-urchin takes its name from an old English meaning of urchin: hedgehog. (The spines of the sea-urchin are a real menace to bathers. They break off in the flesh and are difficult to remove.) Some of the other names cited above mean simply 'sea-egg'.

The Reverend James Wallace, writing in 1688 about Orkney, observed that: 'The common people reckon the meat of the Sea Urchin or Ivegars, as they call them, a great Rarity, and use it oft instead of butter.' The practice has died out and Orcadians now call the sea-urchin 'scarriman's heid', scarriman meaning a tramp or street child with unruly, spiky hair.

CUISINE Open the urchin (with a coupe-oursin, if you have one, a most satisfactory possession), take out the ovaries and eat them with nothing more than a drop of lemon juice. Or add them to an omelette.

Portuguese: Ouriço do mar
Spanish: Erizo de mar
French: Oursin
Dutch: Zee-egel
German: Seeigel
Swedish: Sjöborre
Norwegian: Kråkebolle
Danish: Søpindsvin
Icelandic: Skollakoppur

LAVER (Wales), SLOKE (Ireland)

Family *Bangiaceae**Porphyra purpurea* (Roth) C. Agardh

REMARKS Laver is a reddish seaweed which has for long been eaten in Britain. Camden's *Britannica* refers to it being gathered in Wales, to make 'a sort of food call'd Lhavan or Lhawvan, in English black butter'. Lily Newton gives a pleasant picture of it being gathered in Pembrokeshire in more recent times.



The pickers stride across the sands at low water, bag or bucket on arm, sack tied behind in a waist belt, and proceed to gather the laver with a quick crisp plucking sound, pleasantly reminiscent of the plucking of grass by cattle when eagerly grazing in a lush meadow. Later, very heavily laden, with a full sack balanced on their shoulders, these women return across the shore, with rosy, wind-tanned, broad faces that give a hint of their Flemish ancestry. (*Seaweed Utilisation*, 1951.)

The dried laver was then sent to small factories in Swansea and Gowerton to be boiled (which turns it green), cooled and packed for the market, where it was sold as laverbread (bara lawr). (Why the term bread should ever have been applied to what looks like a purée of spinach is not clear.)

The Welsh remain the great enthusiasts for laverbread, although their formerly abundant supply has dwindled and much of what is sold in Cardiff market now comes from Scotland. The Scots themselves used to make sloke jelly. Marian McNeill (in *The Scots Kitchen*) recalls that Caithness fishermen would take it to sea and eat it with oatcakes. Sloke is also the name in Ireland, where the product used to be treated with ceremony; witness the Georgian silver sloke pot, shown below, from the museum at Dublin. Germans know it as Purpurblatt, the French as porphyrée pourpre. Similar plants are harvested in North America as laver or nori.

CUISINE AND RECIPES Buy your little plastic bag of the prepared bottle-green mush. Then follow the Welsh recipes on page 465. Or warm the laverbread in a pan and serve it on toast with lemon juice. It is also good cold, made into a paste with olive oil, lemon juice and black pepper.

