



'Familiar stories about childhood memories of discovering plants and flowers in local woods provided a nostalgic soundtrack to the walk ...'

Above
Yun Hider, co-
director of the
Mountain Food
Company

Nature's Kitchen



If you go down in the woods today, you'll be able to feed yourself for a lifetime. That is so long as you spend it with Yun Hider

Text/Photography Sarah Allen

Beaches and forests and estuaries – oh my! While Dorothy would quickly have realised she was not in Kansas anymore on the FDA's latest excursion, one gets the feeling this would not have been an entirely bad thing if the trip was anything to go by.

Guided by professional forager Yun Hider, co director of the Mountain Food Company, FDA members were invited to Pembrokeshire, Wales, to find out just how their seasonal salads and dressings are procured. The order of the eight hour day was muck in and eat what you find.

With such an incentive in mind the team, accompanied by FDA director Richard Fagan, was on the hunt for ingredients to create a quick lunch during a break among forests in the hills followed by a slap up supper of more findings. This included line caught sea bass – admittedly

bought the previous day – at the final destination of a beach on the coast of Newport.

Much like Dorothy on her travels to Oz, you got the impression that you were transported to another world once you'd left the Narberth village car park, trailing behind Hider. Having spent most of his life in Wales, he knows virtually every nook and cranny of Narberth and took the group to the best locations for foraging including a forest in a location he wishes to remain a secret.

The first of three foraging locations was Marros beach where mussels were the morning's treasure hunt. Hunters braved a light drizzle and winds in search of what was to be the centrepiece of the first earned meal of the day.

Sprawled across the beach were hefty rocks laden with the blue gems – some promisingly locked, others

Above
FDA foragers
get stuck in



disappointingly gaping and empty. There was something satisfying about knowing that pulling these shells, which had attached themselves with fleshy clutches to their cold homes, would lead to a meal later on.

An hour later and the hunt for dressing was in full swing. En route from the beach, Hider stumbled upon a bush full of nettles – and dived right in. Little did onlookers know, but among the nettles he had spotted something far less perilous. Alexanders, once freed of their strangling nettles and weeds, were to prove instrumental in creating a complementary flavour to the mussels later. The root tastes much like celery and even resembles the vegetable.

In the hills more salad hunting culminated in lunch at the secret location. This was a bit more trying as rather than sing for your supper, everyone had to hike for their lunch, negotiating all the awkward twists and turns of nature and avoiding a muddy fall into a ditch.

Fortunately, it was easy enough as the walk was regularly broken up by Hider discovering another plant on the list. Familiar stories about childhood memories of discovering plants and flowers in local woods provided a nostalgic soundtrack to the walk.

It's no coincidence that the sweetest find of the day came here. The hedge sorrel tasted a lot like sherbet and acted as a reminder that in order to taste a plant in its raw state, it must be allowed to settle on the tongue for a time. The reward can really be quite refreshing.

With the alexanders plus new discoveries wild garlic leaves and flowers added to the mix, all the ingredients for

lunch were present.

Hider, clearly a seasoned man of the woods, took everyone to a little known spring around the corner from what would be the "dining room" where he cleaned the mussels with fresh water.

Then over to the "kitchen", also known as an ancient burial mound erected between 4,000-6,000 years ago. Hider created a makeshift cooker from rudimentary objects and soon got a fire going. When lunch was served, no one could help but smile at the fact that this meal would cost a small fortune at a Michelin starred restaurant – even some of the ones the Mountain Food Company supplies.

Clients on Hider's books vary from Claridge's and the Dorchester to chefs including David Everitt-Matthias at Le Champignon Sauvage in Cheltenham and Gordon Ramsay for his Boxwood Café Restaurant in Knightsbridge.

Ingredients needed for lunch were sea beet, which tastes a lot like spinach, and sea purslane for the salad with wood sorrel to garnish.

Hider sent sea beet and wood sorrel to be served to the Queen for her 80th birthday celebrations. He also says these are his most popular orders.

After a visually nourishing journey across the Preseli mountains, the day concluded with a relaxing retreat to a beach near Newport.

Sea bass with heated sea beet provided a generous supper and the perfect end to a tough but enlightening day, especially as everyone can now boast to have eaten a meal fit for the Queen.

Above
Hider cleaning
mussels
Far right
Hairy bittercress,
red clover and
nettles were a
worthy find;
Hider's
makeshift
cooker proved
effective; sea
bass served;
cooked mussels

