

Experiencing shellfish harvest: Clam Cam's view of a valuable Maine fishery

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Introduction

Clammers are the foundation of the shellfishing industry in Maine. Soft-shell clams comprise an important fishery in Maine and provide a local food source to people throughout the region. The idea for Clam Cam came from clammers who want to raise awareness about what they do, why it matters, and to provide a visual and physical sense of the work involved. Clam Cam is designed to help people go out onto the mudflat, digging with clammers by using GoPro cameras strapped to their chests. This method allows audiences to experience what it is like to be on a clam flat and, to a certain extent, how it feels to dig clams. The video episodes will be made available to the public through a website, allowing people to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the work involved in clam harvesting.

Field Methods

Clam Cam relies on rhetorical field methods and engaged digital media approaches, which means we apply theories from the field of rhetoric that focus on understanding how people make meaning in their lives by spending time with them in the places that matter to them. In our case, this meant addressing questions that mattered to our partners and going out into the mudflats to record digging practices. Key steps for this method include the following:

- (1) Introduce study and explain how videos will be made public and confidentiality of the clammer and the location maintained.
- (2) Help clammers put on the GoPro, wearing a chest-mounted camera.
- (3) Ask clammers to dig a "hod-full" which usually takes about 15 minutes
- (4) Observe from a distance and take notes. After dig, conduct an informal interview about how the digging went and what it was like to wear the camera.
- (5) Upload and edit videos into discrete digging episodes and for public viewing.

We created 17 digging episodes from 16 different trips clam flats in southern, midcoast and downeast regions of Maine, starting in March, 2015 through August 2017. We shared a set of our videos of the Shellfish Focus Day at the Maine Fishermen's Forum in March 2017. Our next step is to set up engagement sessions with clammers to get feedback and build audiences for the website.

Descriptive Analysis

In sum, through Clam Cam, we learned how clammers' work is labor-intensive and highly varied. We highlight insights from a descriptive and thematic analysis of the digging episodes and our observations in the field, focusing on the following:

Socio-environmental characteristics

Mud type

Digging practices & equipment

Physical demands of clamming

While only faint traces of the environment and mud and twinges of physical exertion that shape clamming can be experienced through Clam Cam's lens, we intend that making this footage to the public through the Web, will promote a greater understanding of the work that is involved to one of Maine's most valuable fisheries.

Insights & Examples

Socio-environmental characteristics

Our episodes take place in a variety of weather conditions, from cold late winter mornings to hot summer afternoons. Additionally, some clammers tend to work alone, while others harvest alongside friends or acquaintances.

Downeast, late July: This episode features the pulling method of clam harvesting, in which clammers scoop their hands into wet, soupy mud and pull out clams. Conditions were foggy and mild, and tracks of other clammers' footprints circled the mud. These tracks often signal that the areas have been dug.



Mud type

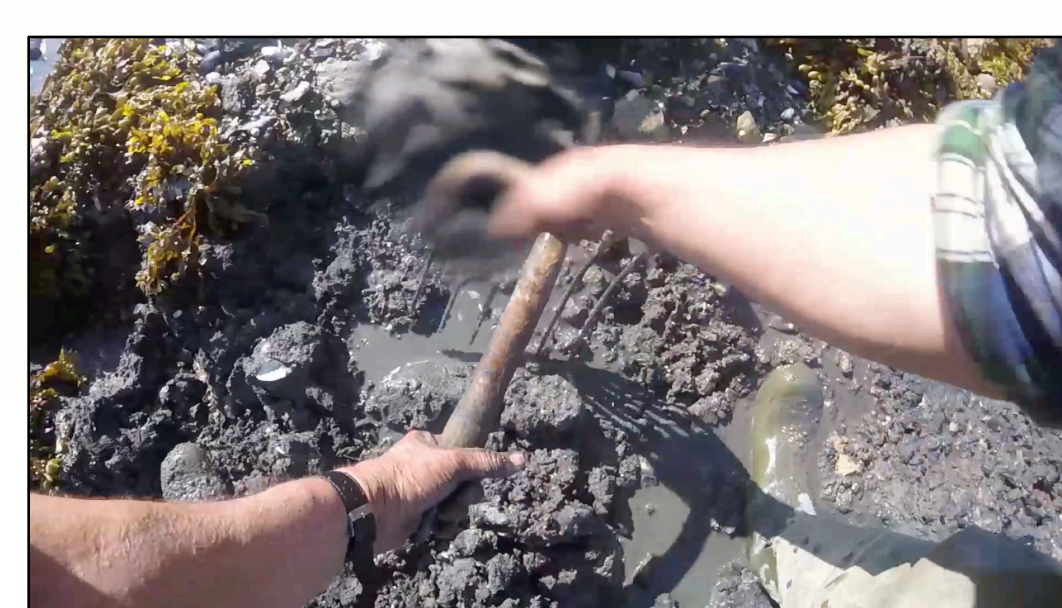
Mud type varies from soft, soupy mud to rocky, hard mud and many types of mud in between. Clammers have also described mud as feeling like clay, sand, or even sawdust.

Midcoast, mid July: Another example of the pulling method, this episode features an area covered in soupy mud that fills the plastic-handled wooden hod as the clammer leans on it for balance. The mud is also smooth enough that clam siphon holes can be clearly seen on the left side of the frame, and holes from the clammer's pulling hand on the right.

Digging practices & equipment

Of our 17 episodes, 3 demonstrate the hand-pulling style and 14 show clam digging with different types of hoes adapted for the mud. Heavier hoes with strong tines work well for exceptionally thick mud, while thin tines are useful for getting between rocks.

Southern Maine, early June: This clammer kept several pieces of equipment nearby, including a 6-tined hoe, a plastic bucket, and mesh bags to empty the bucket into. The clammer is also wearing thin gloves, which are common for both digging or pulling.



Physical demands of clamming

Clam Cam helps show how clamming can be great exercise and it can also be very physically challenging and painful. Clammers often spend hours with their backs bent over as they pull or dig clams out of the mud.

Downeast, late June: This mudflat was very rocky. About halfway through the episode, clammer's sweat dripped onto the lens making the image appear out of focus. This is a testament to both the heat of the day and the physical intensity of the work.

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