

Scallop diving is a tough existence — nomadic and seasonal, it involves early starts and being tossed around on unheated boats. So it's little surprise that when a new, safer and more peaceful method of harvesting scallops was pioneered, Grant Campbell made a career change from diver to rancher.

He remembers his crazy diving days with fondness, but today, his life is altogether more restful, as he sits on the banks of Loch Ewe, in the northwest Highlands, looking out over his scallop ranch. Clear skies throw sunlight over the Torridon hills and silence fills the air. There's something Midwestern about Campbell's setup — a serenity that calls for a porch and a rocking chair.

It's unusual to associate such calm with a potentially game-changing method of farming — no frantic schedule of feeding or watering, no bleating or bellowing. Just the gentle lap of the water and the quiet knowledge that beneath the surface the scallops are getting bigger by the day. They grow first in trays that hang in the water like macramé planters, and then on the loch bed, where they remain for three more years, before Campbell straps on his scuba kit and descends to harvest them by the bagful.

It's a far cry from the usual perils surrounding the pursuit of scallops. In his diving years, Campbell spent many winters travelling up and down the west coast, from Applecross to Lochinver, and summers based at a bunkhouse in the Hebrides, diving off Harris and North Uist. It's treacherous, but there's always a market for hand-dived scallops, which are generally larger and ethically preferable to dredging, whereby the molluscs are scraped from the seabed using rakes with long spikes and chain-mail baskets. Scallop ranching presents an attractive third option.

It's also a way to boost stock size, Campbell explains. First, he selects his biggest specimens to send to a Norwegian hatchery. They produce larvae that are kept in a nursery until they reach 1mm-2mm. Then they're flown back to Loch Ewe. This scallop-eugenics scheme is returning them to their former size: ranched scallops hover about 16-20 per kg, unlike the 27-35 per kg in supermarkets.

Another consequence of ranching is the slower pace of life it permits. After his last season of hand-diving, Campbell and his wife, Fiona, took their first holiday in 14 years. They aimed for the south of France, but ran out of steam 280 miles short, in the Auvergne region. They fell in love with the area and set down roots, leaving Campbell to



Good

**Rachel Walker meets
the Scottish scallop
rancher Grant Campbell
in his native loch**

catch



split his time between the Tronçais forest, where Fiona now lives with their German shepherds, and Loch Ewe.

Campbell chuckles as he describes his polar existences. In France he potters about in the couple's allotment, which is laden with tomatoes, red peppers and aubergines. In Scotland he lives a bachelor's existence. Days start with a cup of tea and yoghurt with a tin of fruit cocktail, before he heads out to the ranch. Then it's all winches and hydraulics, lifting out the long line and checking the young scallops in trays before breaking for lunch: two bananas and two tangerines.

The long evenings play out to a backdrop of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and Metallica. And supper? "You're going to despair," he says, as he goes on to describe the frozen bags of pasta sauce made from allotment vegetables that are dispatched from France. It seems madness when he's surrounded by luxurious scallops — a rare treat for most.

As we part ways, he throws out an interesting statistic: "By my calculation, China currently produces 434,000kg of farmed shellfish per kilometre of coastline," he says. "We're only producing 3kg per kilometre in Scotland." With more than 10,000 miles of Scottish coastline and a bright future for scallop ranches, the delicious white flesh of a scallop may not be such a rare treat for much longer. ■



Nick Nairn

The youngest Scottish chef to win a Michelin star in the 1990s, he has several restaurants and a cooking school.

Sautéed scallops with toasted oats, bacon and chive oil

This starter or light lunch is a comforting combination of flavours, elevated by the vibrancy of the chive oil.

Serves 4

For the chive oil	50ml vegetable oil
A handful of fresh chives, roughly chopped	100g jumbo oats
100ml olive oil	For the scallops
For the oats and bacon	8 king scallops, white meat only, patted dry
150g bacon, cut into small pieces	2 tbsp sunflower oil
	50g pea shoots or watercress, to serve

Place the chives and oil in a blender and blitz. Pour into a small pan and heat gently, until the colour changes to vibrant green, then pass it through a fine sieve. Leave to cool and store in the fridge for up to 48 hours.

Fry the bacon pieces in the oil until crisp. Remove, then fry the oats in the same pan for 5 minutes. Mix with the bacon and drain off any excess oil. Heat another pan, brush the scallops with the oil, then sear for 1 minute (don't move them). Turn them and fry the other side for 30 seconds. Place on a warm plate, then season.

To serve, divide the bacon mix between 4 plates, with 2 scallops on top of each. Garnish with pea shoots or watercress, then drizzle the chive oil around the plate.

Martin Wishart

He has two Michelin-starred restaurants, one in Edinburgh and the other at Loch Lomond.

Endive and apple salad

On a recent holiday, I took the ferry to Arran and travelled through the Kilbrannan Sound, a deep and fast-moving stretch that is home to some of the best shellfish in Scotland. As soon as I got my hands on some hand-dived scallops, I made this.

Serves 6

For the salad
2 endives
2 granny smith apples
150g roquefort cheese
20 fresh almonds, roasted for 3 minutes
50g golden raisins

For the dressing
75ml extra-virgin olive oil
20ml white wine vinegar
¼ tsp Dijon mustard

For the scallops
18 scallops, patted dry
2 tbsp olive oil
1 lemon, halved

Slice the endives in half lengthways, then cut each piece in half again. Cut the apples into thin batons, break the cheese into small pieces, then place in a bowl, along with the endive leaves, almonds and golden raisins.

Make the dressing by combining the ingredients with a pinch of sugar. Season, then pour three-quarters over the salad and toss gently.

Season the scallops with a dash of salt, then heat the oil in a nonstick pan and fry them until golden on each side and just cooked. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice. To serve, put a handful of salad on 6 plates, place 3 scallops on top of each, then drizzle over the rest of the dressing.

