

FRESH AND WILD

SMOKED FISH

Hot-smoking a fish, like mackerel, over burning sawdust is a simple process that many fishermen have perfected. From the part-time angler to the full-time fisherman, they practise an ancient art. When fresh, salted fish was first left in hot smoke to cook is lost in the mists of time.

You might think that the discovery of refrigeration would have put an end to this hot — and also cold — fish smoking. But not a bit of it. Mackerel is one of the newer hot-smoked fish, which took off when the Scottish herring fishery was closed, in the late 1970s, and the Scots prejudice against mackerel, which they had thought “unclean”, disappeared.

The simplicity of hot smoking (cold is more complicated) involves just a metal box with a lid, some hardwood sawdust in the base, a rack to hold the fish and a source of heat to make the sawdust smoke. Compared to cold-smoking it's quick, too — 45-60 minutes at between 80C-120C, depending on the thickness of the fish.

Eating hot from the smoker is the special treat. But whizzing leftovers in a food processor, or beating by hand, with some melted butter and lemon juice to taste, spread on a crunchy oatcake, is just as good.

Home Smoking and Curing by Keith Erlandson, Ebury, £10 (new edition 2008); Isle of Skye Smokehouse, Broadford, Isle of Skye, 0800 781 3687, www.skye-seafood.co.uk

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