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Fish Cakes, Napoleon's favourite

Sun, 28/06/2009 - 14:45 | Crystal

Today's recipe is: Napoleon's Fish Cakes



Okay, so maybe they weren't exactly historically speaking his favorite, but if he were in exile today, they would be. For sure. I mean, how could they not be?? (Sigh) It seems I am once again getting ahead of myself so I will attempt to start at the beginning. You see, I made Napoleon fishcakes for supper last night and they got me remembering.....

April 1994, Joerg and I set sail from Port Owen (on the west coast of South Africa) heading to St. Helena island, 1300 sea miles away, literally in the middle of the ocean. Just the two of us on a beautiful catamaran and the wide open ocean. The first letter to arrive back at our friends on the yacht "DIGNITY" tells a slightly different story. An abridged version goes something like this:

"On the 13th day, when the mother of all fronts hit us - 43 knots of wind, driving rain and 10meter high waves - I was ready to sell the boat and get a big ship back home. No actually, I was ready to give the boat away and swim back! However, the next day the sun came out and I reckon cruising could be my full-time profession."

We sailed for 2 years and it was an amazing time. One night we were surrounded by a school of dolphins and although it was pitch black you could see them clearly because there was so much phosphor in the water. It is the most fantastic sight. You can see them far below the surface of the water as their whole outline is visible - as they come into contact with the phosphor they are "lit up" so to speak. We couldn't see our hands in front of our faces, but we could see the dolphins BELOW the water!

We took a lot longer to get to St. Helena island than planned as we either had no wind or too much and when we did eventually arrive the Coast Guard said, much to our surprise, "Oh, we'd been wondering where you were". Huh? Seems both of our parents had become a little concerned and had alerted the Coast Guard in about 20 different countries in both hemispheres! Slight exaggeration, but we finally made it and proceeded to sail into the Mediterranean over the next few months.

We ate well on the boat, but we were thrilled to hit solid ground and go out for a

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meal upon our arrival. but here can be interesting and we had a few hurdles to overcome to be able to relish in the pleasure of a non-home cooked, home cooked meal. (Yes, I will explain, just give me time.) Firstly, we had none of the local currency, we'd arrived after banking hours and the next day was a bank holiday/public holiday, but this seemed not to worry the Customs and Immigrations man, who said we should go to the restaurant Anne's Place and she would loan us money. Huh? Total strangers and she would loan us money.....we were a bit concerned that he might be hallucinating due, but decided to go anyway.

Then you have to actually get to the restaurant. Sounds simple to you? Well picture this. St. Helena is an island that was once a volcano MANY millions of years ago, so it rises steeply and abruptly from the ocean floor. The waves roll in from the ocean and form about 2 meter high swells at the landing. What you have to do is "row, row, row your boat, gently up the swell" and wait for a wave to carry you to the steps. Then the one without the oars grabs the bags, grabs the ropes hanging down, and makes a jump for the steps hopefully without getting completely soaked. The other person gets pulled back out as the wave pulls back, and rides back in on the next wave. He then grabs the rope AND the dinghy and makes a jump for the steps, also hoping to have the same waterless success as the first person. A lot of the locals stand around enjoying the sight of sailors soaked to the skin (we joined them some days....hee hee). And NOW you can go and eat.

Anne's Place is the only restaurant on the island, but there are a couple of hotels that serve food too. BUT nothing compares with Anne's fishcakes. These babies have bite. I don't know what it's like now, but one was supposed to pre-order one's dinner earlier in the day (we are talking about the dark ages 1994..), but Anne was kind enough to serve us dinner "sans" pre-order. And she did lend us money!!!!!! We had a couple of cold beers and Fishcakes that I will never forget as long as I live. Maybe it was 23 days at sea, but they were just so good. Made with fresh fish and chillies, they are to die for. I have come up with my own recipe, but hope someday to re-visit St. Helena again and get Anne's original recipe. During dinner, the island lost power, so we ate by candlelight with Anne sitting knitting at the table with us and all the family chattering away - a memorable evening so thank you Anne!



Just for the record, **Napoleon** was exiled to St. Helena and died there in 1821. We visited his grave and his residence - not a bad place to be exiled to if you have to be exiled! They also had a female and male Madagascan giant tortoise that were 90 and 150 years old respectively and they were still sexually active - incredible some males. There is a staircase with 699 steps (there were 700, but the road was re-tarred) - or there's a tourist taxi that will take you to the top (much more sensible). There's also the Governor's mansion with 52 bedrooms just in case the Queen comes to stay..... St. Helena is well worth a visit and don't forget the fish cakes!!!!

so welcome to Napoleon's world of spicy fish cakes!

NAPOLEON'S FISH CAKES

Serves 4-6

I used cooked salmon as we had leftovers, but you can use your favorite fish or even a tin of tuna.

For the chilli, you can de-seed it if you prefer less bite - it's entirely up to you! I leave in a couple of seeds...

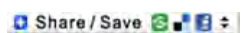
I shallow fry my fishcakes in very little oil - you do have to be more careful with them but I don't like too much fat. Have the oil hot but not scorching so that they can brown nicely without absorbing too much fat - if the oil is too hot, they brown on the outside too quickly and are soggy in the middle.

We ate ours with sweet chilli sauce (I'll give a homemade recipe asap) but some people like a mayonnaise type sauce like tartare sauce (mayo with capers and pickles) - you decide.

4 potatoes (about 400g / 500ml / 2 cups)
1 tbsp butter
200g fish, white fish or salmon
1 chilli, finely chopped
½ onion finely chopped or 1 bunch of chopped chives
Salt, pepper, paprika to season
Squeeze of lemon juice
1 egg, beaten
250ml / 1 cup dried breadcrumbs
Oil for frying
Sweet chilli sauce, or tartare sauce to serve, optional

1. Peel and boil the potatoes until they are tender, then drain and mash them with the butter. Add the onion and chilli and season with the salt, pepper, paprika and lemon juice.

2. Form into 6 patties, dip first in the egg and then in the breadcrumbs. Fry in hot oil till browned, turn over and brown the other side and then enjoy!



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Thanks Andy for the new version which I will try

Submitted by Crystal on Wed, 10/03/2010 - 14:38.

Hi Andy

Thanks so much for your email and sorry for the delay in responding. I actually agree that your recipe looks better than mine and I will be giving it a try this week. Please feel free to add more comments - I love hearing from readers and a Saint is extra special. St Helena is still one our absolute favorite places in the world.

Thanks again
Crystal

[reply](#)

Andy is the child of a Saint

Submitted by Crystal on Wed, 10/03/2010 - 14:36.

Andy sent a message using the contact form at

<http://acookonthefunnyside.com/articles/contact>.

Hi. It was very nice to see you had included St Helena fishcakes on your site as I have just returned from a visit to the island and my mum is a Saint. She raised us on fishcakes and pumpkin fritters so i know them well

and they are delicious. we a never tried making them as your recipe states, but we gave it a go, just to see if the came out like the ones from Anns Place. Well, they did, kind of, but I swear Mums method, which is similar to the one I found on another site, gives a fishcake with far better body and much fuller flavour. Also, in your recipe you dont really mention when to put the fish in...kind of important I thought! Anyway - give this one a try, and thanks again, Andy

...Peel and boil potatoes in lightly salted water until soft. Drain and mash - leave to cool. Shred fish with knife until fine. Add to mashed potato. Heat frying pan on medium heat. Add approx. 2 tablespoons cooking oil. Fry onion, parsley, thyme, spice, salt, (chili) (bacon) until slightly browned. Cool, then add to fish and mashed potato. Add egg and mix together. Form patties with hands to about ½ inch to ¾ inch thick and about 3 inches round. Heat cooking oil in pan on medium heat. Fry patties until brown on both sides.

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