

## TAB NABS



### Extreme cooking

With only one delivery a week, 110 mouths to feed, and five meals a day to prepare, who'd be chef on a North Sea oil rig

It is two hours since Dave Moodey's second meal of the day, and he has an arduous three-hour wait until his fourth. But, breaking the batter of a freshly fried haddock, rearranging his chips, Dave explains how this — meal number three — is more than just another fifth of his calorie intake. "Fish

Friday is the first milestone," he says. "Second milestone is Sunday lunch. Then there's another fish Friday, another Sunday lunch and you're home. Offshore," he explains, "food is all you have to look forward to."

For Rachel Clayton, the chef responsible for each of those meals, the knowledge that her kitchen's output is the highlight of 110 workers' days is just one more problem. Rachel runs the galley on the Captain WPP oil platform. Working 12-hour shifts for two weeks without a break, she and her team prepare everything from scratch — they have to be bakers, butchers, patisserie chefs and salad washers. They do it all on one delivery a week. And, if the weather is bad, even that delivery may not arrive. "That happened on my last trip," Rachel says. "We were due a boat on the Saturday and it didn't arrive until Wednesday. We got by though." Rachel, 31, has been doing this now for four years.

In a bright dawn the Captain WPP oil platform rises above the waves like a majestic golden skyscraper. Ninety miles northeast of Aberdeen, and 100m above the seabed, rusting and salt stained, it works at half its original capacity — and oil prices are two thirds what they were two years ago. Still, the Captain WPP pumps £2 million of oil a day: even in bad economic times, it is a giant, bubbling, creaking cash machine. And it, like everything offshore, is powered by food.

Rachel's day begins at 7.30am, when she takes over from the night chef. For those beginning their shift, breakfast is a fry-up or a choice of cereals and milk — but it is also an evening meal for those who are about to go to bed. Shutting down the platform is impossible, so 40 staff work through the night — and expect to be fed. Some of the night workers will stay awake until lunchtime — their midnight — to squeeze in a final sixth meal before going to their cabins.



Above the Texaco Chevron production platform –  
Right crew change oil rig style.

The meals are planned in advance, but the kitchen is expected to be flexible. “If someone comes up to us and says they want an omelette, we’ll do an omelette. If they want a steak, we’ll do a steak,” Rachel says. “If they’ve been on board a week and a half and want something else that they haven’t had yet, they’ll come and ask me for it. Nine times out of ten, we’ll put it on for them.” Because there’s no guarantee that the next delivery will make it, the kitchen holds several weeks of stock — most of it, of necessity, frozen or dried. Bread is baked overnight, while enough fruit and vegetables are brought on to last the week, with a little bit to spare.

“They like to make sure we don’t get scurvy,” one of the more grizzled oilrig veterans pointed out.

In a normal week, the fixed points are Sunday lunch, fish and chips on Friday, and a themed night on Saturday — this week it’s Indian. Other than that, Rachel has freedom to choose. Lunch and dinner are always three filling courses, with a choice for the main (see sample menu), and a salad bar. Much of it is school dinner fare – chips, beans, batter, bread and butter pudding — but there is also the odd stir fry or curry.



A giant floating crane used to build the Captain Oil production platform it dwarfs the actual platform

“Surely,” I ask Rachel, “people get rather large?” “You would be surprised how many people choose salad,” she replies. “Some do probably eat too much, but we try to encourage healthy eating. And anyway, they’re only here for two weeks at a time.”

Most of those working on the platform are employed two weeks on, three weeks off. With alcohol banned, and DVDs the only other entertainment, there are few who don’t have a view on the meals. “Aye, they’ll tell you if it’s good, and they’ll certainly tell you if it’s bad,” Rachel says. “Food is a big part of the community.” Perhaps that is why they decided three meals a day was not enough, and they needed

### “tab nabs” as well.

The origin of the name “tab nabs” is uncertain. Some say it is a corruption of a type of cake served in the Navy, others that it comes from “nabs” — American slang for crackers (originally made by the National Biscuit Company). Most think it’s neither. But either way, it is now a term used throughout the Merchant Navy and offshore world to refer to a meal between breakfast and lunch, and another between lunch and dinner.

“Morning **tab nabs** is normally a bacon roll or a sausage butty,” Rachel says. “Afternoon **tab nabs** is cakes and biscuits.” These will have been made by the night chef. “He makes all our sweets and cakes. When we can do food fresh, from scratch, we do. After all, you can’t just send someone out to get doughnuts.”

Sitting in the dirty tearoom a few hours after lunch, half a dozen workers in overalls are crouched around a plate of cakes — afternoon tab nabs. The dirty tearoom is aptly named. Officially, it is so-called because it is where workers can get a cup of tea without removing their dirty outdoor clothes. But the clothes are not all that is dirty. The seats are dirty, the floor is dirty and the language is extremely dirty. I praise one of the cookies, spraying out a mouthful of crumbs. “You’re easily pleased,” says a man with a large oil stain on his crotch, and an emphatic desire to remain anonymous. “Are you single? You can’t have a wife to cook for you.”

Catching Rachel on her way to prepare the evening meal — rushing through the warren of corridors that feels like the bits left behind after the industrial zone in Crystal Maze was built — I ask her what her daily budget is per person. “Our daily budget is. . .” she pauses, “. . . a sore point.” The representative accompanying me from Compass Group, the company contracted by Chevron to organise the catering, is unable to give me an answer either.

Twenty-five years ago the budget wouldn’t have mattered so much. Not only are oilrigs a natural reef, but they are also an exclusion zone for fishing trawlers. The waters below are some of the most plentiful in the North Sea. “I remember a time,” Dave Moodey says, “when you would fish off the side of the rig. One platform I was on was like a Grimsby fish factory — with one guy fishing, while another gutted.”

Another worker, who was recently stationed in the Gulf of Mexico, says that they ate fresh crab and shrimp, fished from the side of the rig.

But this practice has been banned in the UK, for fear that any broken lines would catch on the offshore divers.





**Left**—The floating production, storage and offloading vessel (FPSO) built at Astano's shipyard at El Ferrol, in Spain. The vessel is permanently stationed 1.5km from the WPP. The vessel is 214.7m in length, 38m in breadth and 24m in depth. It has a displacement of 114,000t and a storage capacity of 550,000bbl of oil. It can accommodate 50 people. The FPSO provides processing for the crude, the water for injection and has the ability to export the product to the shuttle tanker for transportation. It rotates around a central fixed point, the turret, through ~~which the well fluids are brought onboard the vessel.~~

If there really is a place where Health and Safety has gone mad, it is on an oilrig. Since 167 people died in the 1988 fire on the Piper Alpha rig, the North Sea has striven to be the safest oilfield in the world — imposing a culture where working towards the prevention of accidents is almost fetishised. Before flying out on the helicopter, we are shown a 15-minute safety video about the aircraft, and another about Magnicide B — a chemical used on the platform, which sounds like a reject from a Nazi research programme.

If we did the same journey the next week, we would have to watch the same videos again — most of the workers can recite them by heart.

But the efforts have worked. It is socially unacceptable for anyone to sneer at or ignore safety measures. Walking around the platform, gruff Scottish men will reprimand you for not holding

the banisters when travelling between floors. Signs in the lounge warn those over 50 to have a medical test before using the Nintendo Wii. And when Rachel chops anything — whether broccoli or meat — she wears cut-resistant gloves. “If anything goes wrong here,” Rachel says, “we’re a long way from help.”

But she wouldn’t change it. “I’ll do this for ever,” Rachel says. “It’s the perfect job — most chefs have to work every Friday and Saturday night, and have odd days off in the middle of the week. Here, I have two weeks focused on work, then three weeks on my life.”

Fraser Milne, who is equally enamoured of the lifestyle, has worked offshore for 26 years. Scraping up the last of a bread and butter pudding before finishing work for the day, he declares the meal “not bad”. A drill safety trainer, Fraser has visited scores of platforms, and is something of a connoisseur of offshore dining. He looks around the mess room, taking in his fellow diners. “Oh well,” he says, “the clean plates say it all really.”

The shuttle tanker, MV Aberdeen, prior to its launch in Bilbao, Northern Spain.

The field infrastructure comprises a wellhead protector platform, which is connected by a network of pipelines to an FPSO, (above) on which the crude oil is processed and stored.

Oil from the field is exported by shuttle tanker, either directly to customers or to the Nigg Bay terminal in the Cromarty Firth.

Storage in the terminal will enable a wide range of destinations and sizes of delivery, for worldwide distribution.





The Captain FPSO  
(floating production, storage and offloading )  
Vessel after its launch

Below  
The Captain FPSO  
on-station, offloading into  
a shuttle tanker.



### **Oil platform menu**

Breakfast -Full English or a choice of cereals and bread

Morning tab nabs –Bacon butties, sausage sandwiches or toasties

Lunch - Beef broth, roast lamb or vegetable biryani, jam and coconut sponge

Afternoon tab nabs -Chocolate brownies, choc-chip cookies

Dinner -Chilled fruit, Scotch pie or pan-fried hoki, orange bread and butter pudding

**This a list of the amazing number of Onshore & Offshore oil production wells and sites in the UK**

**I had no idea it was so big and widespread**

Onshore

Wyth Farm - BP's largest onshore development

Singleton, West Sussex - situated across the valley from Goodwood Racecourse

(several other prospects along strike on the South Downs)

East Midlands oilfield, centred on Eakring, Nottinghamshire and extending up to Eskdale, North Yorkshire and the

Pickering / Kirby Misperton structure under Ryedale.

Offshore (Southern North Sea) (serviced from Easington, Lowestoft, Hartlepool, Yarmouth and near Skegness)

Hewett - Triassic, operated by Tullow Oil

Dotty - Triassic

Leman - Rotliegend

Vulcan - Rotliegend, operated by ConocoPhillips

Indefatigable - Rotliegend

Viking - Rotliegend - operated by ConocoPhillips

Audrey - Rotliegend - operated by ConocoPhillips

Ann - Rotliegend - operated by ConocoPhillips

Amethyst gasfield - Rotliegend - operated by BP

West Sole gasfield - Rotliegend

Rough gasfield - used for Natural gas storage

Cleeton gasfield - Rotliegend

Ravenspurn gasfield - Rotliegend

Caister gasfield - Carboniferous sandstone, - operated by ConocoPhillips

Murdoch gasfield- Carboniferous sandstone, - operated by ConocoPhillips

Gordon gasfield - Triassic

Forbes gasfield - Triassic

Esmond gasfield - Triassic

Offshore Irish Sea (serviced from Liverpool, Blackpool and Morecambe)

Douglas gas field - Triassic, operated by BHP

Lennox gas field - Triassic, operated by BHP

Hamilton gas field - Triassic, operated by BHP

Morecambe gas field - Triassic, Operated by Centrica

Millom gasfield - Triassic, operated by Burlington Resources

Offshore (Central North Sea) (serviced from Aberdeen and Hartlepool)

Argyll & Duncan Oilfields - Rotliegend / Zechstein

Auk oilfield - Rotliegend / Zechstein, Operated by Talisman Energy

Clyde oilfield - Fulmar sandstone operated by Talisman Energy

Fulmar oilfield - Fulmar sandstone, Operated by Talisman Energy

J-Block gasfield - Triassic, Chalk and Palaeocene, operated by ConocoPhillips

Elgin and Franklin gasfields - Fulmar sandstone and Middle Jurassic, operated by Total S.A.

Shearwater gas/condensate field - Jurassic Fulmar sandstone - operated by Shell U.K. Limited

Erskine gasfield - Middle Jurassic sandstone - operated by Chevron

Gannet oilfield (A, B, C, D, E, F and G) - Eocene, Palaeocene and Jurassic - operated by Shell U.K. Limited

Scoter gas/condensate field - operated by Shell U.K. Limited

Merganser gas/condensate field - operated by Shell U.K. Limited

Pierce oilfield - Palaeocene - operated by Shell U.K. Limited

ETAP gas field complex includes Marnock, Machar, Monan, Mungo, Madoes and Mirren fields, Operated by BP

Heron Cluster oil fields - Triassic Skagerrak Formation - includes Heron, Egret and Skua - operated by Shell U.K.

Limited

Arbroath oilfield - Palaeocene, Forties Sandstone, operated by Talisman Energy

Blane oil field - Paleocene, Forties Sandstone, operated by Talisman Energy

Montrose oilfield - Paleocene, Forties Sandstone, operated by Talisman Energy

Lomond gasfield - Palaeocene, Forties Sandstone operated by BP

Everest gasfield - Palaeocene, Forties Sandstone operated by BP

Armada gasfields - Palaeocene and Jurassic Fulmar, operated by BG Group

Kittiwake oilfield - Operated by Shell

Nelson oilfield - Palaeocene, Forties Sandstone, Operated by Shell Oil  
 Forties oilfield - Palaeocene, Forties Sandstone operated by Apache Corp.  
 Britannia gasfield - Lower Cretaceous, Operated by ConocoPhillips and Chevron  
 Alba oilfield - Eocene operated by Chevron  
 Buchan oil field - Devonian Sandstone - Operated by Talisman Energy  
 Ettrick oilfield - Upper Jurassic  
 Buzzard oilfield - Upper Jurassic operated by Nexen, largest discovery in last 25 years  
 Andrew oilfield - Palaeocene, operated by BP  
 Moira oilfield - Palaeocene  
 Maureen oilfield - Palaeocene (abandoned, platform removed was operated by Phillips Petroleum)  
 Cyrus oilfield - Palaeocene  
 Balmoral oilfield - Palaeocene  
 Gryphon oilfield- Eocene Operated by Maersk  
 Harding oilfield - Eocene Operated by BP  
 Tiffany oilfield - Upper Jurassic  
 Toni oilfield - Upper Jurassic (subsea tie back to Tiffany)  
 Thelma oilfield - Upper Jurassic (subsea tie back to Tiffany)  
 Sycamore oilfield - Upper Jurassic (subsea tie back to Tiffany and Brae)  
 Brae oilfield Upper Jurassic (several satellite accumulations) operated by Marathon Oil  
 Miller oilfield - Operated by BP  
 Offshore (Moray Firth) (Serviced from Aberdeen)  
 Beatrice oilfield- Upper Jurassic operated by Talisman Energy  
 Unnamed, yet, Senergy  
 Claymore oilfield - Upper Jurassic operated by Talisman Energy  
 Piper oilfield - Upper Jurassic operated by Talisman Energy(produced from Piper Bravo platform after loss of Piper Alpha  
 Tartan oilfield - Upper Jurassic operated by Talisman Energy  
 Scott oilfield - Upper Jurassic operated by Nexen  
 Ross oilfield - Upper Jurassic (small development by Talisman Energy; within sight of Peterhead)  
 Blake oilfield -Lower Cretaceous, operated by BG Group  
 Offshore (Northern North Sea) (serviced from Aberdeen)  
 Beryl oilfield upper Jurassic operated by ExxonMobil (with offshoots to Linhe, Ness...)  
 Bressay oilfield  
 Emerald oilfield  
 Captain Oilfield operated by Chevron it contains two platforms the WPP linked to the BLP by a bridge and an FPSO for oil storage. The field also has a tie in to the Frigg system to pump gas  
 Strathspey oilfield (Subsea tie-back to Ninian Central)  
 Columba oilfield (extended-reach drilling from Ninian platforms)  
 Ninian oilfield 3 platforms operated by Canadian Natural Resources Limited  
 Lyell oilfield - Operated by Canadian Natural Resources Limited  
 Heather oilfield Middle Jurassic operated by DNO  
 Brent oilfield Middle Jurassic operated by Shell (4 main platforms, plus the Brent Spar fiasco.)  
 Dunlin oilfield Middle Jurassic operated by Fairfield  
 Hutton oilfield (produced from the innovative Tension-leg platform; decommissioned 2001 was operated by Conoco)  
 Cormorant oilfield Middle Jurassic operated by Shell, (production started sweet, but has turned slightly sour over the decades. which is very interesting. And worrying.)  
 Tern oilfield Operated by Shell Oil (The 'Black Pig' to its friends. Captain Pugwash reference.)  
 Eider oilfield Middle Jurassic operated by Shell  
 Murchison oilfield Straddles the Norwegian median line. Operated by Canadian Natural Resources Limited  
 Don oilfield  
 Magnus oilfield - Operated by BP  
 North Alwyn oilfield - Operated by Total S.A.  
 Dunbar oilfield - Operated by Total S.A.  
 Offshore (West of Shetland) (Serviced from Aberdeen)  
 Clair oilfield - Operated by BP. A very large, but high viscosity field.  
 Schiehallion oilfield - Operated by BP  
 Foinaven oilfield - Operated by Teekay Petrojarl on behalf of BP