



FORAGING IN GOWLLAND TOD PROVINCIAL PARK WITH HOUSE OF BOATENG GAIL GABEL—PHOTOS DAVID IZARED

Twelve Chaîne members and their partners along with Maître Rôtisseur & Executive Chef, Castro Boateng, and three chefs from his staff joined professional forager, Lance Staples, for a very unusual but immensely enjoyable day. The event started with a short visit at the back of the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific (HCP), moved on to Gowlland Tod Provincial Park and later we relaxed beside Durrance Lake where Chef Castro wowed us with a picnic lunch that incorporated many of the flavours and some of the plants that we had seen on our foraging expedition.

None of our Chaîne Members had any foraging experience though Lance has a very busy career in supply-

ing exotic native and wild produce to many well-known restaurants in Vancouver and Victoria. Chef Castro had arranged the day so that Lance could guide our group while also introducing us to the edibles that we would see growing in the wild. To begin, Lance retrieved a long Cat Tail stalk from the hundreds which were growing near the lake at HCP. The peeled lower section of the stalk, especially in a younger plant, has an almost white centre and we tasted its surprisingly delicate cucumber flavour. There were also many plants growing along the path that Lance pointed out and described their various characteristics. Some with parts being edible, while others may have medicinal qualities or both.

While there were places for the less energetic to relax and enjoy the Park, all were prepared to hike with Lance along one of the Trails at Gowlland Tod. What was eye-opening, was the quantity of plants and trees that produce tasty seasonable greens. While we were close to the end of spring, there were still many young green tips on pines and spruce that were very tasty with flavours ranging from a tangy grapefruit-like citrus through a range of aromatics. These are already prized by chefs for flavouring desserts such as panna cotta. There were many types of low growing leafy plants Lance identified as being excellent in salads and we did get to enjoy some later. The oyster mushrooms growing high up on trees were quite safe from our close inspection. However, seeing them did motivate many of us to want to join one of Lance's fall mushroom foraging expeditions. The trail finally led down to the shore where more examples of delicious edibles were growing in profusion. One of my favourites, sea asparagus, covered a wide area of damp ground near the beach and can often be found growing in the same area as specific companion plants.

Castro and his team departed a little ahead of the group to start lunch preparations. After the return hike, we were rewarded with our traditional glass of chilled Bubbles, this time *a Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco Superiore Brut*. The wine paired beautifully with a selection of three tasty bites including fresh crab garnished with a small piece of a marinated wild plant stem that tasted quite like a caper. The first course, a salad of freshly harvested wild salad greens was dressed with a spruce infused vinaigrette and garnished with fingers of a cured wild salmon. Our rather exotic picnic continued with a main course of grilled asparagus and green onion, braised beef rib meat served with a piquant sauce from Castro's home country, topped with a crusty rice ball and garnished with a crispy fried leafy green and a scattering of flower petals. The beverage served with the meal

was Castro's own chilled Elderflower Lemonade, refreshing and delicately flavoured. We were receiving interesting looks from folk nearby and whose picnic of PB &J sandwiches was possibly losing its appeal?

Castro announced that Dessert was a crême brule into which he had infused spruce flavours and garnished with wafer thin slices of unsweetened poached rhubarb and a scattering of small flowers. The sight of three chefs torching the sugar on each

dessert plate did cause more interested glances from sunbathing neighbours.

Lance and Castro's team did an outstanding job in making the foraging experience not only great fun, but also informative.



Castro's skill in producing a delicious feast in the forest was remarkable. Probably the most important lesson learned from Lance, our foraging expert, was his respect for nature's bounty on land and sea, and his encouragement to protect the wild flora from lethal harvesting to ensure that plant life continues from season to season.







