

you know you're in washington when...

... your college fight song is about geoducks

Puget Sound is home to the highest density of geoducks in the mainland United States. The state's most profitable shellfish is also the world's largest burrowing clam. An average geoduck weighs less than 3 pounds, but the Seattle Aquarium once had a 13-pounder.

Although it is spelled geoduck, the name is pronounced "GOO-wee-duck." It comes from a Lushootseed phrase meaning "dig deep." A young geoduck digs down 3 feet in its first three years of life and stays there, living up to 140 years off Puget Sound's phytoplankton menu.

The white oblong shell contains rings representing each year of growth, about 1 inch a year in shell length for a few years, then much less after that.

A newcomer can't help but think of male anatomy when sighting a geoduck, which features an elastic, phallic siphon up to 39 inches long—too long to fit in its shell. Less suggestive minds might picture an elephant's trunk!

When clambers walk on the beach at low tide, geoducks sense the vibrations and withdraw their siphons, the compression shooting seawater several feet in the air and giving away their location. Its small foot and large size don't allow for a fast get-away, so a digger armed with an open-

ended metal tube can force it down around a clam, then dig out the sand by hand.

Successful diggers often boil and skin the neck, then chop the meat for chowder. Some swear it's better than abalone.

Private diggers must wait for extreme low tides to hunt geoducks. Commercial divers harvest the clams in deeper water and then rush them to Asian markets, where a plate of geoducks sells for about \$60.

And that fight song? The mascot of Evergreen State College in Olympia is the geoduck, thus "The Geoduck Fight Song," written by Malcolm Stilson in 1971. Sing the chorus in your waders, and see if you don't get into the spirit, too.

*Go, Geoducks go,
Through the mud and the sand, let's go.
Siphon high, squirt it out,
Swivel all about, let it all hang out.*

Geoduck:

The most profitable shellfish in Washington, this creature lives below the sand of Puget Sound.

