

Harvesting Wrinkled Pen Shells (“scallops”), *Pinna rugosa*, in Baja California, Mexico

by Rick Harbo

I traveled to San Ignacio Lagoon, Baja California, Mexico this April (2010) and was fortunate to harvest several large Pen Shells (also called Fan Clams), *Pinna rugosa*, at low tide in the lagoon. The shells are buried upright with the rim of the shell protruding a few inches. A simple metal tool with a blade is used to harvest these bivalves. The blade is slipped between the protruding shells and then pushed down and turned so that the blade takes hold in the flattened shell (photo). The shell can then be pulled up and out of the sandy mud (photo). The tool is then used to break the shell near the hinge to expose the large circular “scallop-like” muscle (photo). Lightly breaded and pan-fried, they were served at our dinner that evening and they were delicious.

The muscles of the Pen Shell are often found in restaurants, listed as scallops or **Callo de hacha** or **Concha de hacha**.



In Mexico, there are two members of the Family Pinnidae, known as 'hachas' (hatchet) shells, and they are a highly prized food item. The large posterior adductor mussel is widely marketed domestically and sometimes the much smaller anterior adductor muscle and even the mantle are occasionally consumed.

***Pinna rugosa* Sowerby, 1835.** Southern Baja California, Pacific and southern Gulf of California, to Guaymas, Mexico, and south to Panama on mud-sand bars in protected bays. Flattened, fan shaped shell with 8 rows of tubular spines that help anchor the shell in the sand; shell dark blackish or dark brown color. The shell length is up to 59 cm (23 in.).

The Brown Pen Shell, ***Atrina maura* (Sowerby, 1835)**, grows to 23 cm, and the flattened shell has thin or slender spines in about 18 rows.

Heaps of shells are common near coastal fishing villages. Pen shells have been harvested by the Comcáac Indigenous Community of Sonora (the Seri Indians) for centuries at extreme low tides from October to May. In addition to a food source, the shells were also used for adornment.

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