



Quality cattle of the cuddliest kind.

shimmering below us. Game on! Down on the harbour front, among banks of neatly stacked crab pots, we witness the latest arrival of crustaceans. And what a fine healthy bunch they are. After a perfunctory weighing ceremony, we whizz up the hill and round the corner to see Eric and Ron Noble, who, with very little help from anyone else, shell 300 of these crabs by hand, in a little over three hours.

Quiet nods of appreciation from the chef contingent disguise feelings of utter inadequacy in the face of such an awesome feat of speed. As if reading our admiration, Eric informs us that faster, industrial extraction methods involve blasting the meat out of the shells under high pressure, reducing the meat to a sludgy pulp. And then there's the matter of high temperature pasteurisation in the name of longer shelf life. And who needs that when they all fly out of the door in the same day. After the necessary taste test, and satisfied that we have indeed sampled greatness, we head off on the next leg of our gastronomic journey in search of pigs.

With the help of clear skies, and Nick thrashing the hell out of his unsuspecting girlfriend's car (I just hope she's forgiven him for the mud and the lingering smell of fish), we're back on

schedule. After more twists and turns than a 1960s' dance night, we finally turn up a muddy driveway into rare-breed heaven. The scene in front of us makes me think we've arrived on the set of some Walt Disney/Hans Christian Andersen collaboration rather than a working Yorkshire farm. I assume that the peacocks at the front gate are just to add a little colour – not that it's needed, given the array of unusually plumed ducks that waddle freely in and out of their enormous field.

This looks like one big happy family of fowl, as every shape and variety of duck, goose and chicken waddle, peck and prod their way around the rural idyll.

Farmer Roger Hebdon – a jovial, giant of a chap who does nothing to alter my view that we're still on the aforementioned film set – greets us and ushers us into the barn where the pigs are hanging out.

Normally they would be foraging around in the field, he informs us, but it being a freezing February day, they've elected to stay indoors. And what a sight these creatures are. I block out thoughts of that over-sentimental animation Babe, as I force myself to consider the quality of meat these babies are going to produce. There are Berk-

shires, Saddlebacks, Gloucester Old Spot, Oxfords and Sandy Blacks. But it's not just the breeds themselves that make this place so special. Roger feeds them a traditional diet of carrots, sugar beet and potatoes. This is Michelin star fodder for pigs – nothing intensive or chemical about this place.

What's more, it's only a 10-minute drive down the road to the slaughterhouse. Pigs are not big on travel and the low stress factor of such a short journey will undoubtedly be reflected in the quality of the meat. In short, Roger Hebdon is the kind of man I want making decisions about the food that winds up on my plate.

As far as the people making decisions about how it's cooked are concerned, Andrew Fern, proprietor and head chef of the Michelin starred, Star Inn at Harome, is about as good as anyone. The thing is, by the time we arrive it's 3pm, lunch service is over (not on a Sunday, mind you – it goes on all day), but small technicalities like service times don't prevent you from getting top tucker at The Star out of hours.

Andrew, being genial host as well as chef (now there's a stereotype shattered), escorts us over the road to the Star's very own deli, and one of the finest I've ever had the good fortune to

frequent: it also serves as village shop for the locals, stocking everyday items from beans to the daily papers. There are Saddleback sausage rolls, enormous vats of marinating feta cheese and hand-made chocolates. Andrew also portions up dishes from the restaurant menu, which are available fresh or frozen, giving you the opportunity to enjoy Michelin Star cuisine with *Coronation Street*.

Can't say fairer than that. Having satisfied our appetites on the awesome sausage rolls, it's back over to the bar for a well earned pint. But we've only got just enough time to down it before barman Elliot exchanges cellar apron for cap, wellies and Barbour and we all troop back across the road to feed his charges – several Highland cattle of the cuddliest kind. Our day is now taking on a kind of magical, rural surrealism, and we love it – I just can't wait to return for the full restaurant monte. In short, the Star Inn is the end-user embodiment of the high food production values we've experienced throughout the day. It's a unique establishment with extraordinary job descriptions, but a healthier, happier looking bunch of staff and cattle I have never seen. I just hope Elliot is not the sentimental type.