How long does it take to make the world’s largest bagel and lox sandwich?

About an hour and a half. Plus about a century.

Acme Smoked Fish Corp. put on a mighty fine show Friday afternoon to try and create a new Guinness World Record for a gargantuan version of the New York favorite: a smoked fish sandwich. There were highs. There were lows. There were capers.

Brooklyn used to be the epicenter of smoked fish, says Adam Caslow, co-CEO of Acme and one of the fourth generation of Caslows running the business. Now, Acme is among the last ones standing.

It’s a tough business. “Cutthroat,” Caslow calls it, and over the years, the number of Jewish delis dwindled. But in the last 20 years or so, smoked fish has had a renaissance—now you can find it in your supermarket aisles. Caslow attributes renewed interest to people seeking alternative protein sources, and “they’re not just consuming smoked fish on a bagel,” he says, standing a foot away from the most enormous bagel I’ll ever see in my life.
comfort food brings together friends and family. (Caslow has a history with Guinness World Record food challenges. While attending Cornell University in 2005, he and a group of friends constructed the world’s largest spring roll. It was a terrifying 435.6 meters long. Tragically, their record was broken in 2014 by a 500-meter version of the appetizer constructed in Vietnam.)

That’s what brought hundreds of fish fanatics out at noon on Friday to Acme’s Gem Street headquarters in Greenpoint, where the Caslows have been slicing and smoking fish since 1954, part of a family tradition that got its start around 1906. People wanted to be wowed.

A three-piece band entertained, Brooklyn Roasting Co., poured free coffee, and Acme employees threw out T-shirts to the crowd. A few feet away, a long line stretched onto the sidewalk—these hardcore souls were there for Acme’s Fish Friday retail outlet, where up to 500 locals each week buy their favorite fish straight from the source at wholesale prices from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For five hours every Friday, the fish factory becomes a store, offering its products at wholesale prices

The rest of the time, you have to pay retail for Acme at specialty shops and supermarkets around the U.S., supplied by the Greenpoint plant and more recently added factories in Florida and North Carolina. All told, Acme makes more than 300 products, from pickled herring to ready-to-eat poke bowls. Trendy!
But back to the show.

There are simple ingredients: a monster bagel from Zucker’s Bagels, giant tubs of cream cheese, raw red onion, sliced tomatoes, and capers.

Oh, and Acme’s Nova Scotia smoked salmon. Forty-five pounds of it, cured in salt and smoked for 18 hours.

As Zucker’s Bagels founder Matt Pomerantz says, “We’ve never done something quite like this before.”

**To read more about Brooklyn companies that do things the old-fashioned way, see our story “Everything Old Is Cool Again.”**

They start to schmear, using what look like silver canoe paddles. The multi-step process is slow going. “This is gonna take awhile to build a quality sandwich,” says Caslow, “This is not a Subway sandwich.” They’re craftsmen, keen to get it right, and gingerly lay down each piece of fish.

You’ll pay around $15 for a regular bagel sandwich in a shop in NYC, but if you want to order this bad boy? You’re looking at $3,500. Keep that in mind for your next bar mitzvah or bris.

An update: The schmear is officially done. Free T-shirts and hats are thrown into the crowd. It’s like being at a Phish concert.

Anticipation builds. Giant food takes careful construction.
Backstage, racks of smoked fish await packaging

People of all kinds come to Fish Friday. Richard Schiff, Acme’s VP of sales, who started working at Acme when he was 18 years old, tells a story of one New York couple who came to a Fish Friday directly after getting married at City Hall.

Another update: “We’re 15 lbs. in.” An ask to the crowd: “Do you want more salmon on that bagel?” The crowd roars, Instagramming and hash-tagging the occasion (#bagelandloxrecord).

The bagel does look like a traditional bagel, perhaps a bit more pillowy, and was made in the traditional way, too: boiled and made in a bagel oven. Acme’s frequent collaborator Zucker’s Bagels has stores in Tribeca, the Upper West Side, Grand Central Terminal, and just announced a new flagship store in the Flatiron District, opening next month.

Another update: 27 lbs. of lox on that bagel. It weighs as much as a three-year-old.

There’s something spiritual about a smoked fish counter. So pristine. The gleaming pink against the cool metal counters. The care and artistry by which they carve each slice. Russ & Daughters is a holy place. (They use Acme. So does Zabar’s. All the best shops do.)


Shirley from Kew Gardens asks a tall fellow in front of her to snap a photo. She’s been coming to Fish Friday for two and a half years: “I couldn’t wait to retire so I could come every week,” she
says, and takes the train and bus to get here. Only takes around 45 minutes or so. Her recommendation? The sable—“it’s like butter,” she says—or the whitefish, a steal at $8 a pound.

Her haul today? Salmon four ways (pastrami, lemon pepper, plain and a spread) and gravlax, safe in her insulated Zabar’s bag.

An update: They’ve pulled out a saw. A wood-handled, razor-sharp saw that belongs in Home Depot. You thought a butter knife would cut it?

The crowd marvels at its girth. A man near the front says, “Holy cow.” But there’s no beef here.

The mammoth sandwich is ready for its measurements to be taken. The unofficial stats: 36” by 29” by 13”.

Now, a hitch: They can’t get the sandwich on the scale. Flattened cardboard boxes are brought over. “It’s a dense weight!” says one hoister.
An Acme salmon in the raw, before heading to the smoker Photo courtesy of Acme Smoked Fish)

Finally, it’s shifted onto a new surface, and the moment of truth arrives. Joy and anticipation and ambition mingle in the air, just above the smell of raw onions and fish.

It’s 213.75 lbs.

Victory! “You wanna eat this bagel?” they ask. The crowd roars—or perhaps that’s their stomachs—and merges into a long line.

I get a moment with Schiff, who said he’s been talking about this idea for 15 years. “But why would we do it?” he asked. The bigger question: Why not?

The bagel was the wildcard. “I can make all the lox in the world,” says Schiff, but it wasn’t until Zucker’s owner Pomerantz birthed a 30-lb. bagel in 2015 that the vision became attainable.
National Bagel and Lox Day became the perfect moment. And so I ask the obvious: is this the happiest day of your life? "Yeah," he says, "It goes: birth of my children, my wedding, then today."

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Turns out applying for a Guinness World Record is harder than it sounds. The event must be documented, measured, photographed, videotaped. There was a surveyor on hand, a health inspector, a lawyer.

After the saw did its duty and the crowd waited patiently, all those avid fish mongers ate their prize on paper plates in 35-degree weather—and many went back for seconds. Still, a huge amount of the carb-bomb remained, and the plan was to take leftovers to a local charity.

So, did Acme do it? Did they achieve everything they wished to achieve? Let’s hear from Caslow, who could only say, “This exceeded my expectations.”

The final verdict from Guinness won’t be known for 10 weeks, but judging by everyone’s cold, smiling, oil-slicked faces, at least one mission was accomplished.