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BACKWOODS COOKING

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Editor's Note:

The reader is reminded that these texts have been written a long time ago. Consequently, they may use some terms or express sentiments which were current at the time, regardless of what we may think of them at the beginning of the 21st century. For reasons of historical accuracy they have been preserved in their original form.

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FOREWORD

"He that would eat the fruit must climb the tree."

If there is one thing a boy likes more than another it is his stomach! Just call "Grub up" or ring the provi' bell and he appears as if by magic. Well, this is about "Grub", so grab a bar of chocolate and get yourself comfortable. . . .

We are going away from the crowd and the Providore out into the Backwoods, alone or with a special friend, and we are going to be completely dependent upon what we pack into our rucker . . and our main objective will be feeding ourselves!

The Backwoodsman travels light... he has to, for everything must be carried on his back and still leave him free to enjoy his trek. Basic foods form a large part of the load (flour, for instance, is taken instead of loaves of bread); and luxuries are found or caught en route. Probably the only cooking gear he carries is a simple pot and pan; any other utensils are fashioned from whatever materials the camp site offers. Thus shall we travel....

CHAPTER ONE

FIRE, FIRE

“There is no smoke without fire.”

This old proverb may well be true, but it is no reason why every fire should smoke, and they certainly must not if we are to enjoy our cooking in the backwoods. Cooking on a smoky fire, as you know only too well, is a miserable business; it gives a peculiar taste to the food, blackens the pots, and quickly gives your position away. The last may not matter much to us, but I do like my bacon to taste like bacon, and I hate scrubbing inches of carbon off billies.

Cooking fires may be divided into two kinds – the quick and the slow: rather like runners, the sprinter and the long distance. The first gives all its energy or heat in a few moments and is soon over, whilst the other goes on and on giving a steady heat for a long time. Both of these serve our purpose, the first for the snack meal – boiling the coffee pot, etc., or when anxious to keep our position concealed. The other is a much more leisurely and companionable affair and, as such, is best suited to the end of the day for cooking the main meal and for its comfort. In both cases it is very necessary to know and be able to select the right wood. Much has been written on this subject of fires, but it seems to me that either Scouts do not read, or else they are very unbelieving. I have rarely seen any Scout, after he has passed his Tenderfoot test, take any trouble at all over the preliminaries of fire-lighting. Perhaps perseverance is a Scout’s middle name, and anyway, there are a lot of matches in a box!

There are many ways of lighting a fire, but I should like to recommend two especially. The first is particularly valuable when you haven’t any tinder or punk for starting. It is called

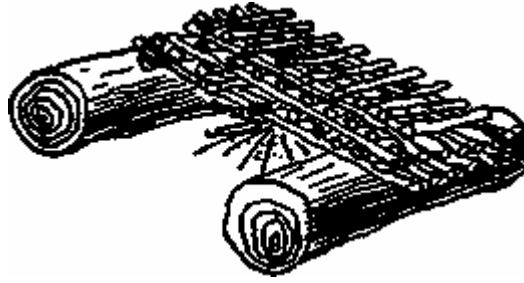


FUZZ STICK. Select three good sticks about the thickness of your little finger and, if possible, taken from heart-wood. With your knife shave each one almost through for half its length, leaving the shavings sticking out one below the other, giving the stick a fuzzy appearance. Stick these three fuzzes into the ground in the form of a pyramid with the shavings pointing downwards. Stand the rest of the kindling around on end and leaning into the top of the pyramid. The whole thing should be no

more than 6 ins. to 9 ins. high. Apply your light to the bottom of the fuzz-sticks and, if air space has been left between the sticks, the whole thing soon becomes a blaze.

The PYRAMID FIRE is especially suited to the quick snack, whether lit by tinder or fuzz-stick. The billy should be suspended over the fire before lighting so that every particle of heat goes into boiling the water. This should have been achieved by the time the pyramid has burned down, leaving the light embers for a quick fry. On one such fire, a pyramid made entirely from dead rose and bramble, I can remember cooking coffee and eggs and bacon for two and blowing the ashes away inside five minutes. There was not a single trace of smoke to give our position away nor evidence that a fire had been there, which, at the time, was as important as the meal.





The HUNTER'S FIRE is the second recommendation. For this, select two logs 1 in. to 2 ins. in diameter and about 18 ins. long. Lay these side by side 2 ins. apart, so that the wind blows between them. Spread the tinder between the logs, then lay very thin twigs, matchstick size, across the gap between the logs. As soon as one layer is complete, make another of slightly thicker twigs, this time parallel to the logs. After three or four layers, further sticks may be laid from the ground to the top of the pile on both sides and at the lee end, leaving the windy end open for the match to light the tinder. The wind will then fan the flame through the length of the fire. As before, remember to leave air space between the twigs, for fire depends as much on air as wood to make it burn.

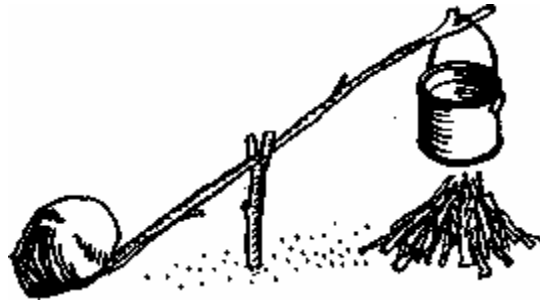
The fire for the evening meal is usually a more serious affair and is probably best made by the second method. A large fire will be wanted and, as you will see, the Hunter's is the best base upon which to build. The fire can be built up with quite large wood before lighting, with two large logs laid along its length to act as containers for the embers, and as fenders. To form a good bed of embers it is necessary to collect a good supply of hard wood, the best being oak, beech, hornbeam, ash or birch. The fire will have to burn steadily for *at least an hour* and, don't forget, will burn better if the wood is split. If the fire is made two feet high to start with, it will make the required amount of ember when burned down. When the fire is under way, settle yourself into camp and prepare the food and materials for cooking.



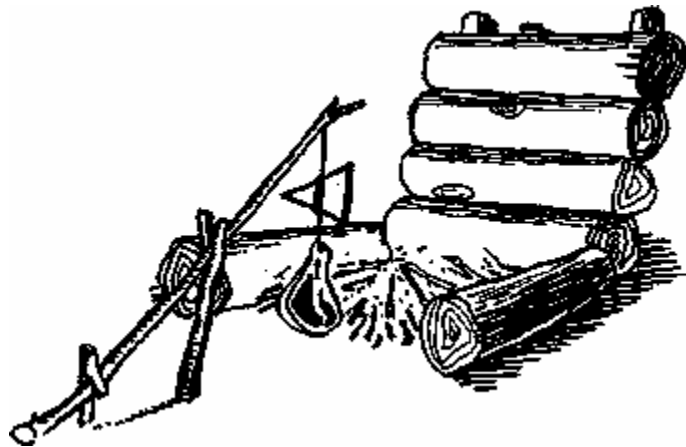
CHAPTER TWO
WAYS AND MEANS

“God gives the milk but not the pail.”

Now, how are we going to cook the food on the fires we have made? For the quick fire a CRANE is just the gadget for suspending a billy. This is very simply made as the illustration shows. Logs, stones, or forked sticks may be used for the supports. The height of the crane may be varied by moving the base towards, or away from, the fire or by hanging pot hooks from the tip of the jib. In any case, it is a good idea to notch this end, to prevent a disaster by the pot slipping.



There are many gadgets we can count on to help with more substantial cooking. Two large green logs set either side of the fire will keep the embers together, conserve the heat and support our pots. One such log only, or a sloping wall of smaller logs, or a large stone placed at the back of the fire will act as a REFLECTOR and throw the heat forward. This arrangement is especially suited to roasting when the roast is placed before the fire, opposite the reflector.



It can be suspended on a cord (in which case a flat triangular piece of wood stuck into the cord will catch the wind and twist the cord, making the roast turn round to cook all sides equally), speared on a spit or inclined towards the fire on a heated stone or split log. In cold weather a reflector fire built before the tent door will warm up the inside of the tent as well as cook the meal.



Another very simple way of baking or GRILLING is to use a large log which has been partly burned through . . . say the back log mentioned above. Turn it upside down and place the food on the hot ground under the glowing arch.

A MAORI OVEN is made by scooping a hole 1½-2ft. deep in the ground and lining it with medium-sized stones (flat, if possible). In this hole, light a fire and build it up to just above ground level with hard wood. When it has burned down, scrape out the ashes and either stand the pot on the stones or line the stones with large leaves and put the food directly on to these. From another fire take some more already heated stones to place on top. Cover the hole with damped material, green timber or slabs of stone and rake at least 12 ins. of earth over the top.

This is a very slow method of cooking, but ideal for cooking breakfast overnight or for leaving a meal to cook when you want to be away from camp all day. After five or six hours work you can come home tired and hungry, open up the oven, and there is your meal . . . luscious and piping

hot. If you use the Maori oven to cook something in a pot – porridge or stew – bring the contents to the boil before placing in the oven. The HAYBOX is a similar arrangement, but in this case the food must be partly cooked on a fire first and then put into the haybox to finish cooking in its own heat. The efficiency of a haybox depends on its insulation, which should be about 12 ins. thick *all* round. As the name suggests, the insulation can be supplied by hay or grass, sphagnum moss (the long straggly moss that grows in boggy areas, especially in moorland country), sawdust, or newspaper; but all must be packed in as tightly as possible between the pot and the sides of the box. The box can be any sort of container, even a sack will do, or a hole dug in the ground.

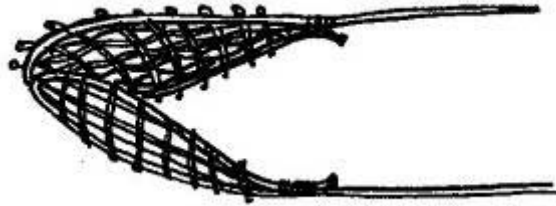
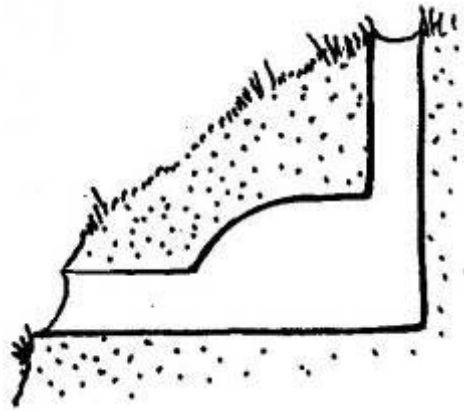


An excellent OVEN can be made in a clay bank or steeply sloping ground by digging out a vertical face to the bank and, about three feet behind this, drive in a four-inch diameter post to the depth of the oven floor. Work it loose all the time so that it may be withdrawn, the hole forming the flue. Now dig into the vertical face to meet the flue, keeping the opening as small as possible but opening into a larger space inside. Wet all the inside and smooth off, then light a very small fire inside to slowly dry and bake the clay. To heat the oven for use, burn a good fire for an hour and then rake out the embers. Put in the food and seal both entrance and flue.

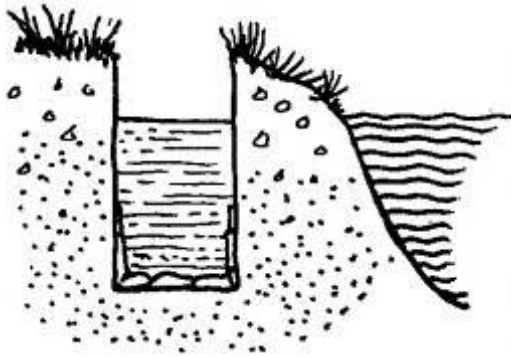
The GILWELL, or similar pattern canteen, will also make a jolly good oven with very little fuss. Food to be baked is placed inside the canteen and the lid firmly fixed on. Rake aside a good bed of

embers until the hot ground is exposed, place several stones or a couple of green sticks about one inch round on the ground and put the canteen on top of these. Then rake back the embers around the sides and over the top. Leave for the appropriate time, according to the contents. Be sure to blow the ash off the canteen before removing the lid.

A simple BROILER or GRILL can be made from green twigs, but avoid Sycamore., Laurel or Conifer as these may impart strong flavour to the food. Peel the sticks and weave as shown in the illustration. Cooking is easier if two are made and hinged together at the end opposite the handles. Food is placed between them, and as the handles are gripped together it is held firmly in place.



There is one other little gadget which will help with roasting over the embers and will give a choice of temperature range. I call it the LAZY MAN'S COOKER. At one end of the fire drive in two forked sticks so that the crutch is about 18 ins. above the embers. At the other end drive in two more, but this time only about nine inches high. Connect the high to the low in each case with a strong straight stick. Food to be cooked, e.g. barbecue, twist, etc., is skewered and laid across the sloping sticks and moved up or down to vary the heat as required.



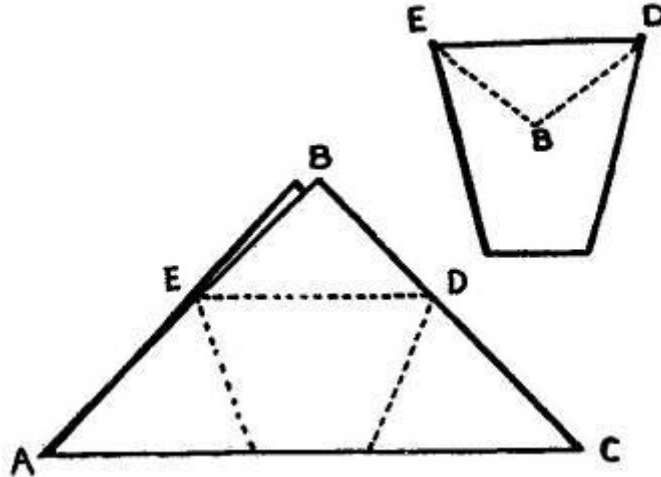
WATER is a vital necessity at all times, but in the backwoods you will hardly find it in taps. You will draw your water from springs, streams and pools, but due care must be taken to see that it is fit to drink. Clear and sparkling is no guarantee that the water is pure. If in doubt, always boil hard for at least half an hour before using for cooking. If the water is dirty, first filter it through some muslin or fine cloth. If you have no materials suitable, use the INDIAN WELL. Alongside your source of supply and 9 to 12 ins. from the water's edge, dig a foot below the water level. After a while, water will start

to seep through and fill the hole. Scoop out the first supply as this will be muddy, but subsequent supplies should be clear. Scoop your requirements from the top, being careful not to disturb the bottom or knock the sides. This is only clean *looking* water – it may still contain harmful bacteria and must be boiled. Bad flavour in water may be removed to a very large extent by adding some charcoal (black wood embers from the fire) to the boiling water. It will float on top, collect the impurities from the water and form a scum on the surface. Scoop this off and allow the water to settle – then decant. Repeat if necessary. Boiling drives all the air from water and makes

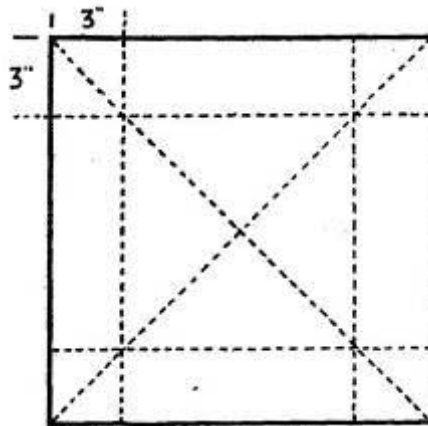
it flat and unpalatable. Beating with a stick or pouring rapidly from one pot to another will help re-aerate.

Remember, carelessness can be dangerous. The danger is animal, especially human, so if you can be sure there is no human residence above the spot from which you draw water you can be reasonably sure it is safe. This is only likely to be the case high up in the hills. If in doubt, go without; if you can't, boil and boil without; if you can't, boil and boil again.

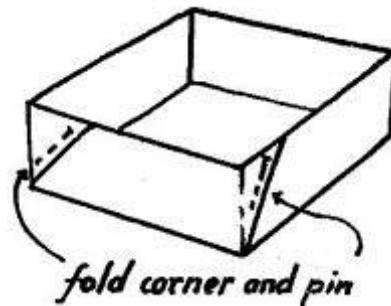
If you need a hot drink urgently and you have no utensil, it is still possible. Make an Indian Well as just described, but in such a position that you can drink directly from it by lying down. When It has filled with clear water drop in some hot stones which you have heated in a fire. These will not only heat but will also raise the level of the water. Remember the Rook and the Pitcher!



If you are caught without any pots whatsoever, don't give up the ghost, start making some. Your materials can be paper, any closely woven cloth, or thin bark such as birch.

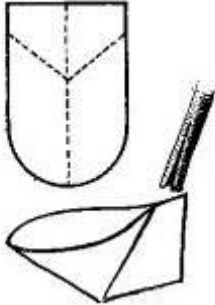


A CUP may be made by folding diagonally a piece of paper about seven inches square. Fold corner A over to D, and C over to E. Separate the two points at B and fold one forward into the pocket formed by point C, and fold the other backwards over the side. Open the cup out ... drink your fill, fold flat again and pop it into your shirt pocket until the next time!



A BILLY. For this, your piece of paper needs to be about twelve inches square. Fold along both diagonals and open out. Fold in a three-inch edge all the way round. Lift up two adjacent sides and the corner between them will be forced out. Fold the

corner along one side and pin in place with a thorn. Repeat at the the three other corners. Carefully fill your pot and place it on the embers. If the fire does not reach above the water line the paper will not burn. Don't believe me, eh? Go and try it on the gas stove then; but don't blame me if Mother catches you!



A LADLE may be made from a piece of paper 8 ins. by 10 ins. with one end rounded as shown. Fold it lengthwise down the centre and open out. Place second finger under edge of crease at A, with thumb and third finger above and on either side. Press thumb and third finger downwards and together. This should result in a scoop. Push a split stick into the fold and voila! a ladle.

There are many other useful little dodges, but they are only to be found in certain places or under certain conditions, and it is much more fun to find out for yourself than just to read about them in a book.

CHAPTER THREE

COOKING

“God sends meat and the devil sends cooks.”

At last, after the preliminaries we can now do some real cooking. Let's start with BREAD. Like all good cookery books we will have a list of ingredients:

- 40 parts Flour (preferably self-raising).
- 1 part Salt.
- 1 part Baking Powder.
- 12 parts Water.

Notice the proportion of salt to flour. It is very important that the bread taste slightly salt or it will be unpalatable. (Before working with flour, rub the utensils and your hands with it. This will stop the dough sticking to the dish or your hands.)

Well, that is simple enough and doesn't cost much. Mix the flour, salt, and baking powder. Scoop out a hollow in the middle of this mixture and pour in the water. Mix with a knife to a soft and easily handled dough. Work quickly and lightly, handling as little as possible, or the dough will be heavy and not rise.



DAMPERS. Pull off portions (about | egg size) and flatten in the hand to one-eighth of an inch thick. Put on to a hot dry pan or stone, or before a reflector fire. The cakes can be shuffled in a pan to prevent sticking. Turn as soon as one side is golden brown. The cakes should rise to about three-quarters of an inch thick and take about five minutes to cook. Split in half and butter.

TWIST. First cut a straight green stick one inch thick, peel and thoroughly heat it until the sap bubbles out at the end. This will ensure that the inside of the twist is cooked. Now lightly flatten the dough into a strip about three-quarters of an inch thick and one inch wide and wind it firmly round the prepared stick. Cook over the embers, turning regularly, until a golden brown all round. The Lazyman's Cooker will come in handy here. Twist may be broken into pieces, or the centre stuffed with a prepared filling, e.g. sausage, cheese and tomato, or butter and jam.

EMBER BREAD. Take all the mass of dough and slightly flatten into an oval shape. Rake the embers aside until the hot earth is exposed; place the raw dough on the ground and cover with the embers. Cook for fifteen minutes. Won't it burn? Yes, but only on the outside, which can be cut off to leave nicely baked bread. Incidentally, if your tummy protests from rich living, the burned outside is the remedy you will need!

Now this simple recipe of flour and water forms the basis of more exciting things. By rubbing fat into the flour, adding sugar, four parts each to the above recipe, and mixing to a smooth batter with milk or water, we make **FLAPJACKS**. Well heat a pan and rub over with a piece of fat or greasy paper (the batter should sizzle as soon as it touches the pan), pour batter into the centre of the pan, tilting it to spread the batter until the bottom is covered. When the surface is covered with little bubbles, shuffle the pan to loosen the cake and then toss or turn over. Lightly spread with butter and eat hot. The secret of tossing is to have the courage of your convictions and to toss high . . . which gives you time to decide where it is going to land!

DROP SCONES are made by substituting an egg for the fat in the flapjack mixture, and cooking by the spoonful to make small cakes. (One egg to half pound or pint of flour.)

For **PANCAKES**, leave out the sugar and baking powder from the Drop Scone mixture, make it thinner, beat well and fry in a little hot fat until brown and crisp on both sides. Any of these cakes can be varied by the addition of fresh or dried fruit, herbs, chopped cooked meat, vegetables, fish or whatever you have to spare. Pancakes rolled round a savoury filling and heated in a cheese or tomato sauce and browned before the fire make a super supper. If you like to give yourself a special treat, try **SNOW PANCAKES**. To a thick flapjack mixture, lightly fold in a heaped dessertspoonful of freshly fallen snow to each pancake immediately before putting it into the pan.



BATTER for fritters or to coat fish before frying, or for making a baked batter pudding is the same mixture with only half the amount of milk or water. For **FRITTERS**, dip portions into the batter and fry on both sides in hot fat. For **Batter pudding**, heat a lump of fat in a dish, pour in batter and bake in a hot oven for 20 to 30 minutes. It should

rise considerably, so leave room for this, but if the oven is opened before the pudding is done, it will fall flat and not rise again.

FLUFFY PANCAKES. Beat the *yolk* of an egg with a table-spoonful of sugar until creamy, and carefully fold into the stiffly beaten *white*. Pour into a pan in which a little butter has been melted and cook for two or three minutes to set the bottom. Eat at once, preferably sprinkled with a little lemon juice.

Should you be careless enough to burn a cake when cooking, thoroughly clean and dry the pan before trying again. An easy way to cure a pan which continues to stick is to well heat some salt in it and then wipe clean with a dry cloth,

An excellent substitute for baking powder is right there in front of you . . . the white wood ash from the fire. Use the same quantity as for baking powder.

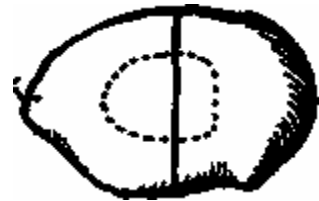
OMELETS. Now we have reached the other end of the scale and have only eggs and a little milk. Beat up the eggs well and add only one tablespoonful of milk per egg, with seasoning and any filling, mix up and pour into a hot greased pan until the bottom is well covered. Cook quickly, but not so that the omelet burns. As the sides and bottom set, lift up the edges and let the top liquid run underneath. Continue doing this until the surface is set and bubbly; do not turn over, but serve folded and eat at once. Some fillings such as grated cheese, parsley, etc., are better added to the omelet after it has started to cook.

Obviously a Backwoodsman will not carry many POTATOES about with him; in fact he is more likely to take the dehydrated variety, Pom, etc., but the real potato can easily be acquired in this country and will give us much fun and satisfaction.

Simply buried, whole and unpeeled, in not too hot embers around the edge of the fire, it will BAKE in about fifteen to twenty minutes, largely depending on the size of the "spud". Cut in half and fluff up the contents of each piece either in its own shell or on a plate, add salt and pepper and a nob of butter and/or grated cheese. Small pieces of potato will boil or fry quicker than large ones; evenly diced they will all be ready together.

A quick and exciting way to cook potato is to GRATE a few peeled raw potatoes into a basin, stir in salt and pepper and sufficient flour to soak up the water formed. Fry by spoonful in hot fat until browned. This is scrumptious and quite different from ordinary fried potato. Don't bother to scrape new potatoes, just wash and cook in their skins. The skins are good to eat, but if you don't like them they fall easily from the cooked potato.

SPUD EGG. Cut a large potato in half along its shorter axis (or cut the ends off two smaller potatoes so that they may be joined together). Scoop out part of one of the exposed ends and make a small hollow in the other. Into the larger hole break an egg. If the hole is the right size, a little white should run over the edges and the yolk should be just sticking up. Fit the other piece over the top and, holding it like this, place carefully in the embers, wedging the two halves together. After a few moments the white will harden and stick the two halves together, and in about fifteen minutes the whole Spud-Egg will be cooked. Remove from the fire and cut along the longer axis this time, and there we have hard boiled egg and potato together! Season and butter as before, and it is magnificent. Other quickly cooked things can be put into the potato, but you must have white of egg to stick the two parts together.



KABOBS. Originally these were small fragments of *tender* meat speared on to a thin green stick, seared and then quickly roasted over the embers. However, ambitious cooks have added vegetables to this and made a complete meal, but the danger is adding anything that does not cook as quickly as the meat. I think the best arrangement is to rub the stick and the pieces of meat with onion or garlic before spearing these alternately on to the stick with thin slivers of potato and pieces of bacon fat; do not press the pieces too closely together. Sear quickly in a clear flame and then cook over the embers, turning the stick and keeping it sloping first one way then the other to let the melting fat run over the potato and meat. Season with salt and pepper when cooked and eat from one end by pushing the food up the stick. The success of cooking the potato depends very much on the fat.

BROILING. If you are lucky enough to have a decent-sized piece of tender meat, say steak, cook it on the broiler. Plunge it for a few moments into a flame to seal the outside and then cook *before* a bed of good embers, catching the drippings in a dish or on a piece of bread. This is better than doing it over the embers when the drippings will go into the fire. A piece of steak an inch thick (just think of it!) will take about five minutes done this way. This business of passing the meat through flame before cooking is called searing and seals up the outside of the flesh to stop all the good juices running out, otherwise you would have just a piece of well-cooked leather! All meats should be seared before cooking, either by passing through flame, by putting into a very hot pan or into rapidly boiling water. Broiling is a very quick method of cooking, but if you have plenty of time it pays to **ROAST** before the fire, using one of the methods already described; this way the meat is more succulent. A properly cooked steak or chop should ooze juices when it is stabbed or cut. It should not be dry. Be very careful when turning not to pierce the meat and let out the juices. Broiling fish is done in the same manner, but it is necessary to place some strips of bacon fat with the fish and cook over a not too ardent fire. Large fish should be split down the back and layed out (remove head and gut, of course). Small fish can be cleaned through the vent (the small hole underneath the tail), speared on a thin stick, through the mouth down the gullet and out of the vent, and placed on the lazy man's cooker. Turn frequently and rub with a piece of fat on the end of another stick. These are better cooked on a quick fire, but be careful not to chip them.

The constant references to bacon fat will no doubt be causing some rude noises from some readers. Perhaps an explanation will help. Bacon fat is the ideal, but other firm fats will do – beef, mutton or pork. It is often possible to buy pieces of fat or bacon rind from a butcher or grocer, and they are not on the ration. I am sure your trader will help if you tell him what it is all about; and remember to ask politely. Failing this, soak a piece of clean rag in some melted lard or margarine and when it has dried tie it to the end of a thin stick and rub it occasionally on the cooking food. Bacon rinds from your rashers will do at a pinch, and in any case are excellent for flavouring especially in soups, sauces and stews.



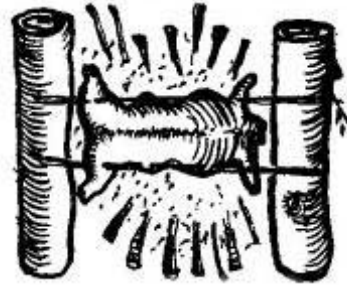
Frying is too well known to need much description here. It is intended only for tender flesh or flesh that has previously been cooked or parboiled, that is, partly cooked by stewing. There are two main ways: deep frying when the flesh is totally submerged in the fat, as fish is at the local fried fish shop, and frying with just a thin covering of fat over the bottom of the pan. In both cases the fat should be hot ... with a faint blue haze just coming from it ... do not let it boil. This will sear the flesh and lock in the juices. If you are frying vegetables and meat, cook the meat last. Vegetables will not spoil by being kept warm for the few minutes required to cook the meat. Be careful not to pierce the meat when turning and so release the goodness.

The best way to **GUT AN ANIMAL** is to lay it on its back and to insert the point of a sharp knife either in the vent or immediately in front of it and to draw it up towards the ribs, cutting the skin and flesh of the abdomen. This will lay the entrails bare, and if the animal is turned over they will fall out and can be drawn gently away with the hand. Withdraw the stomach and the lungs. Near the liver will be found a small, almost black, little sac. This contains the gall, and if it is broken will give the flesh a very acrid taste. Normally it comes away easily, and turning the animal over saves most of it from damage should the sac be broken.

When the animal has been gutted, skin by cutting off the ends of the legs and tail and then pushing the hind legs from the ends, turning them inside out from the skin, draw the skin off the ends and

then draw it all over the back with a strong pull. Treat the front legs as the hind and pull skin off the head or cut the head off at the neck. Rinse the insides with cold water before cooking. Rabbit liver is delicious fried with bacon . . . and don't forget the brains. It is easier to pluck fowl before gutting, and the hand has to be inserted into the aperture to draw out the innards.

BARBECUING is suitable for small animals – squirrel, rabbit, duck, etc. Gut and skin the animal and rip up the underside. Spear on to strong thin green spits by passing a spit through the back leg, the side of the extended stomach and the front leg on each side, so that the whole animal is stretched out. Place this on the lazyman's cooker over a good bed of embers, turn frequently and baste with the usual piece of bacon fat. This is a fairly slow method of cooking, as it is important to cook the animal through without burning the outside. Give the outside a final brown-off by a few moments close to the embers. When cooked, gash the flesh to release the juices, and butter. Barbecued food is usually served with a special dressing, but you will find some of the sauces in a later section will do admirably for this.



BAKING IN CLAY is perhaps the ideal way to cook meat, especially small animals. Moisten and work some clay until it is the consistency of putty and roll out into a flat sheet *one inch thick*. On to this place the gutted and cleaned, but not skinned, animal, and press the clay tightly all round, sealing all joints well. Bury this deep in the embers and, if necessary, build up the fire on top. A herring will take half-an-hour, a rabbit one-and-a-half-hours, but stuffed, it will need two hours. Remove from the fire, blow off ash and crack open. The skin, feathers, scales, etc., will come away on the clay, leaving, the flesh clean and full of flavour, since it has been hermetically sealed in the clay. You will need a little practice at this before you become expert, and be very careful not to disturb the clay and break it while still in the fire.

Hedgehog is cooked this way. Don't bother to gut it (almost an impossibility, I should think). When cooked, the spines come away in the clay, leaving the meat to be carved off. The entrails improve the flavour, which is almost identical to chicken, and are not harmful, although not usually eaten as well. I know you will not always be able to get rabbit or duck, but it is very rarely that you cannot get herring, mackerel, whiting or similar small fish. The difference in flavour between a herring cooked in the frying pan and one cooked in clay is unbelievable. I can hear the disbelievers saying: "I bet it is!" Well, go out and try; you'll soon find out.

ALUMINIUM FOIL has recently been introduced into this country for wrapping food, to preserve it and for storing in refrigerators. This can be bought at most grocers and is also champion stuff for cooking. Simply wrap the food to be cooked in the foil and place it on to cool embers and cover over with ashes. The principle is the same as clay cooking *but* the clay was an inch thick, whilst the foil is only a fraction of an inch. Thus the heat gets to the food at once and will very quickly burn if the embers are at all hot. If you want to cool a too hot fire, sprinkle ash onto the embers. A covering of ash is a good protection for foil cooking before putting it on to the fire.

If you cannot find clay, several wrappings of wet paper, or large green leaves, bound in place by roots or grasses, will do instead, but, again, the embers must not be too hot. Avoid using newspaper and rhubarb leaves.

Tough meats, such as stewing meat or old rabbits or squirrels can be BRAISED or STEWED. Braising, I think, nearly always gives a more appetising result. Lightly fry in a deep pan some chopped onion, carrot, and any other vegetable you want to include . . . the haricot bean goes very well indeed in a braising. Place the meat in the pot and add about two inches of hot water; put a lid on and cook gently for at least fifteen minutes to the pound weight of meat. Add pepper and salt about twenty minutes before the meat is done. Mix a little flour with some of the gravy from

the pot, brown it with a little burned sugar and stir back into the gravy to thicken. Remove the meat during this operation, and to serve, pour the thickened gravy over the meat. Braising can also be done in a Dutch oven, putting a lid over the food.

A stew can be started in the same way by frying the vegetables and also the meat, which should be cut into small pieces. Water is added until it just covers the contents of the pot, which should be set by the fire to simmer, that is, little bubbles rise slowly to the surface. An hour is the minimum time for a stew, and potatoes can be added with the seasoning about twenty minutes before it is done. If you do not fry first, it is important to put the meat into fast boiling water to sear it and then add the vegetables. Pearl barley, very light and small to carry, makes a very good thickener for this type of stew. Most Scouts make the mistake of putting too much water into the stew, so that the dish, when served, represents a vast puddle with a few scraps floating about in it. Remember, just enough water to cover the contents of the pot. A few bacon rinds added to the stew or braise will greatly improve the flavour, so will a little thyme, sage, parsley, or other herbs. It is unlikely we shall find these often in the backwoods, but a small packet of mixed dry herbs weighs only an ounce and will last a very long time. If your stew is very fatty, add a little vinegar at the seasoning time as well.

So much, then, for our main food. The backwoodsman does not usually bother himself with a pudding. He relies on fresh fruit and nuts when he can get them, or if he needs more when the main meal is finished, he will eat "bread ** and jam. Life in the backwoods differs considerably from life at home, and we must adjust ourselves to the different circumstances.

There *are*, however, one or two things we have not yet considered in cooking.



SOUPS. These depend very much for their value on the basis of the liquid part. The ideal for this is a stock pot into which go bones, cooked or uncooked, odd scraps of meat and vegetable, etc. Water is added and the whole is boiled for an hour or so and the liquid strained off when required for soup. So long as the stock pot is boiled every day, you can go on adding to it for a long time. From now on, the technique of making soup is very largely a matter of experience and courage to go on experimenting. Anything added to the stock should be finely chopped or sieved, that is, rubbed through a fine strainer or muslin, so that only a puree goes into the soup. Any vegetables can be included – tomatoes, apples, herbs, meat or vegetable extracts, or cereals. Add these to the stock and simmer for about twenty minutes, not forgetting to season. Take a sample to see if the seasoning is right. Most boys prefer a thick soup,

so mix a little flour to a smooth paste, add to the soup and stir well. If you have them to spare, a knob of butter and a drop of milk will add the finishing touches. Little cubes of fried bread added to the soup when served make a grand change.

SAUCES. The basis of our sauces is going to be: —

¼ pint of Milk.

1 dessertspoonful of butter or margarine.

1 dessertspoonful of flour, or preferably cornflour.

Salt, and a sprinkle of pepper.

Melt the butter in a pan and mix in the flour to a smooth paste. Cook this for a few minutes, stir all the time, then add the milk drop by drop; add pepper and salt and stir until it boils.

MUSTARD SAUCE. Mix half a teaspoonful of mustard with the flour and add a little vinegar or lemon juice to taste when cooked. For CHEESE SAUCE add grated cheese. Thus the formula is easy to see. Add powder flavours, e.g. cocoa, to the flour, dry; add solids, e.g. parsley, shrimps, etc., to the cooking sauce; add liquid flavours, e.g. lemon juice at the end.

Be careful of adding acids such as tomatoes as these may curdle the milk. If in doubt, mix with water instead of milk. A very quick and substantial meal can be made by adding cooked meat or fish or vegetables to the White Sauce and eating with fried bread or toast. Any left-overs can be bound—that is, kept together with a little sauce and used to stuff a pancake or omelet to make a good meal. You can have tremendous fun inventing and making soups and sauces. . . . Try some at home on the family!

COFFEE. This is the real drink in the backwoods, and although you may not have acquired a taste for it, you will on hikes and lonely adventures into the wide-open spaces. Coffee becomes more than just a drink, it is a travelling companion who refreshes in the early part of the day, and soothes and gives peace of mind in the evening. It is the ever-open door to the fellow traveller, the extended hand that overcomes introductions. I can well remember one evening, camping in a little nook amongst the rocks on the way up to Scafell, in the Lake District. David and I were sitting back after a very satisfying meal, silently drinking coffee and watching the evening purple descend on to the distant hills. Suddenly we heard the sound of nails on the rocks, and presently a lone climber came down to us. “Gosh, I’ve never been so glad to smell coffee,” he said. “I caught a whiff of it about 200 ft. above you or I should never have seen your tent.” Whilst he drank a good strong cup, for he was played out, he told us his story. He and his friend had met a young lady high up on Scafell. She had fallen when walking alone, had hit her head and lost her memory and was wandering about in a very troubled condition when they had found her. One decided to go down for help and try to make some arrangements for the night, etc., whilst the other was coming down more slowly with the girl. We were able to help, of course, and the incident was soon just one of those little adventures. But, had that climber not smelt our coffee he would have descended another six or seven hundred feet to the valley and spent some time finding the farm, etc. He could not possibly have returned to his descending friend before darkness fell. A coincidence? Of course, but adventure is made up of coincidences; without them, adventure often becomes tragedy.

However, to return to making coffee. Whenever possible, use the real ground bean and not a substitute. Boil some water and add a good pinch of salt. On to the surface quickly sprinkle the coffee grounds, the middle of your hand full for each person. This will form a crust on the water. It will heave and start to burst as the water comes to the boil again and you must lift the billy off the fire just before this happens. Then as the water cools down, replace over the fire and repeat the ritual three times. Then put a lid on the pot and let it stand in the warmth of the fire for five minutes. The grounds will have settled to the bottom by this time and the coffee can be decanted into mugs. Add warm (preferably) milk and sugar to taste. It is very important to make coffee

strong and dilute to taste with milk. To make it weak is to make dish-water, and who can blame you then if you do not like it. Coffee is best white in the mornings, but, in the evening after a meal, it should be black. If you are out for super lightweight, try Bantam Coffee. It is the best concentrated coffee I know, the nearest to the real thing, and only sufficient to cover a sixpence will make enough for two. Another great value of coffee is its ability to camouflage the taste of polluted water which you may be called upon to use in a possible emergency (after taking the necessary precautions, of course).

CHAPTER FOUR

ODDS AND ENDS

“Hungry dogs will eat dirty puddings.”

There are many WILD FOODS growing in Great Britain, the more common I will just list: blackberry, wild raspberry, wild strawberry, elderberry, crab apple. On moors and heaths there is a low shrub which, in July, bears masses of dark purple berries which will stain your lips and fingers very quickly. They are variously known as dewberries, whortleberries, whinberries, bilberries and blueberries, and may even have other names according to their locality. They are very wholesome and can be eaten raw or cooked. Young nettles are like spinach when cooked in the same manner; you will need gloves to pull them unless your hands are very tough! Dandelion leaves are similar though stronger flavoured, but one or two chopped improve a green salad. Mint can often be found in damp places. It has a fluffier leaf than the cultivated plant, but there is no mistaking the smell. Mint is grand for flavouring vegetables, and, used in small quantities, for soups and concoctions. Garlic is also found in damp and shady places – again the smell will guide you, phew! The Italians love it in nearly everything, but, if you want to try it, start by just rubbing a leaf round the plate before laying out the salad, or round the pot before cooking; then add more if you wish. Hazel nuts are good value, and so are beechnuts if they are baked and salted.

There are many edible fungi apart from the common and horse-mushroom, but do not make experiments with these unless you have been shown the right type by someone who knows. One mistake can be fatal. However, it is impossible to mistake the puff-ball for anything else, and it is a useful addition to your fare. Either small or the giant may be cooked and eaten, providing the flesh is firm and white when cut. Cut into slices and fry with the lid on, season with lemon or pepper. Cut up into small pieces they will make an excellent soup. In an emergency the common snail, like its French cousin, is also edible. Boil for half an hour in slightly salted water, remove shell, rinse and cook in a covered pot for ten minutes with butter, chopped herb, onion flavour and well season. Many seaweeds are not only edible but are most nutritious and tasty. There is not room in this book to describe these, but all are mentioned in *Wild Foods of Britain*. Grey squirrels are being killed all over the country because of the damage they do. Most keepers throw the body away, but in the backwoods it is looked upon as a delicacy and is much sought after. It is cooked in the same way as rabbit and is particularly tasty in casserole. When gutting, it is important to remove the little fatty looking knobs (scent glands) two from just behind the forelegs and two in the small of the back. These are not poisonous but will impart a strong flavour to the meat. I have found boys very squeamish about trying squirrel, but once they have tasted it they have come back for more.

RUBBISH in camp always seems to present such a lot of trouble. Answer, don't have any! As any rubbish arrives, put it at the lee end of the fire so that the heat will be blown through and dry it. When you have finished cooking, rake it on to the fire, where it will burn more readily for being dry, and help to keep in the fire. This applies to paper, vegetable peelings, waste scrapings, tins, etc., but not glass of course. Tins can be raked out, bashed, and buried deep. Glass should be washed and buried with the tins.

The amount of dirty water you will have on such a trek will be small and very easily poured under the fire into the hard-baked earth. The water will sink in and the scum will be burned. Don't pour it on to the fire or you will be smothered with ash and it will make an awful smell.

A regular trekker will carry his food in little bags made for the job. These are most useful for *STORING FOOD* when in camp; they can be hung from a convenient bough in the shade and a waterproof thatch or cover put over them. Make sure all meat is protected from flies which will blow through muslin if the food is touching the sides. It is not a good practice to store food in the sleeping tent. If your stay in any one spot is to be more than a day or so, you will be wise to construct a fairly permanent and rigid larder. Some foods like tea, coffee, oranges, etc., have the property of imparting their flavour to other foods if they are stored close together. Keep the larder spotlessly clean at all times.

STONES have been mentioned many times, and a warning now may save you some discomfort when you come to use them. Do not use stones which are made up in layers and flake off, such as slate, or any stones from a river bed or what has, at one time, been a river bed. All these are very liable to explode when heated. This may be dangerous to you; in any case it is likely to be disastrous to whatever you are cooking. Ever since I saw my dinner shoot up into the air, gracefully somersault and return on to the fire upside down – to the ruination of both – I have paid careful attention to the stones I use. It so happened that on the hike in question, we were on very short rations for a few days, and the loss meant an empty tummy until breakfast. That's mighty serious to me!

BARK. It is very wrong to take bark from living trees, as its removal will most probably kill the tree or subject it to diseases which will cripple it, if not eventually kill it. Only take bark from fallen timber. This applies even to peeling the thin papery bark from birch, hazel, etc.

When cutting *GREEN WOOD* for twist sticks, etc., use your commonsense and cut sucker wood or a branch that will not be missed. Avoid spoiling the shape of a bush or shrub and make a clean cut. In any case *ask permission* of the landowner. Never remove firewood from a hedge. Possibly it has been put in to fill a gap, and its removal will weaken the hedge.

The backwoodsman has to be a little more careful in his choice of *CAMP SITE* than the civilised camper of today, and he will do well to look for it fairly early in the afternoon, so that he is not caught napping later. It is a great joy to be happily settled into camp in good time, to



have leisure in which to prepare the evening meal and to attend to whatever else the spirit moves one to do. You should aim to be in camp at least three hours before sunset. A very good guide to TIME is your fingers. The width of each finger held at arm's length represents a quarter of an hour, so that if you put your hand on the horizon where the sun will set and then see how many fingers' width there is to the edge of the sun, you can easily work out the time till its setting. Thus two hands would be two hours; six fingers would be an hour and a half. The same method can be used for estimating the time for cooking, the difference between the first reading and the second being the time elapsed.



Well, out you go ... and in these immortal words . . .

“THE BEST OF LUCK.”

Books to read:

Camping and Woodcraft, by Horace Kephart.

Wild Foods of Britain, by Jason Hill.

Outdoor Cooking, by “Lone Wolf.”

Good Cooking on One Ring, by Ambrose Heath.

The Gentle Art of Tramping, by Stephen Graham.

Alone in the Wilderness, by Joseph Knowles.