



PART 2: Backwoodsman Cooking

Backwoodsman Cooking

Backwoodsman cooking has been dubbed as one of the toughest section after Pioneering in the annual Adventure Camp and King Scouts' Standardization. Nevertheless, there are many failures in this section, so a good foundation in the basics of backwoods cooking is necessary for Scouts.

The secret to successful backwoods cooking is to build a good fire that will provide hot embers, for it is on embers that we cook - not flames. One of the problems with embers is that they tend to become cool after a short while. The keyhole fire solves this problem. Build the fire in a large circle area and pull the hot ashes through into the smaller circle where the cooking takes place, as they are needed. A two inch bed of ashes is required for successful backwoods cooking, use beech or oak logs, as these will give longer lasting embers. Charcoal can also be used and it will hold the heat longer than wood embers.

Aluminium foil can be used if you want to take the easy way out. With it, it is possible to construct pots and pans for cooking food or you can place your food in an aluminium foil envelope.

The pioneers and backwoodsman of the past used only those materials that could be found locally for creating cooking utensils. They often used leaves and clay as well as ingenious cooking spits and holders made from green twigs and branches (green twigs and branches are less likely to go on fire and are pliable so they can be worked).

Hygiene

Although backwoods cooking is considered to be primitive in approach your food hygiene methods should not be. Wash all food before use and keep covered until you intend to use it. Take care not to burn food and avoid cooking the food quickly in a flame. Make sure all the food is properly cooked, thus the need for slow cooking over embers. Quick cooking will cause the food to cook on the outside and be raw inside. Clean up the area used after you are finished and dispose of all food scraps carefully. Don't forget to clean your hands also after you have finished eating as it is likely that it will be your hands that you use to hold and eat the food with.

Cooking methods



Roasting

For this method you will require a good bed of embers. For large animals and birds you will need a spit construction over the fire. For smaller animals and fish, the best way, is to peg them out on a board or a flat piece of wood and stand this next to the fire to form a kind of reflector.



Baking

This method is useful if you want to cook a meal while you are away - a bit like a hay box oven. Dig a pit around 60cm (2 feet) deep and 60cm (2 feet) across. Now light a fire in the bottom of the pit. Place a thin layer of soil on top of the embers then place a number of leaves (cabbage leaves are best) on top of the soil . Now place you food on top of the leaves covering it with more leaves. Cover this with more soil and then light a fire on top of it. It will take a hour or more to cook this food depending on how big the food is you are cooking.

Another way of baking food is to wrap your food in leaves or grass and then in mud. Then bury it in , or surround it with, a fire, and leave it for an hour or more. When you break open the cast of clay, you will find that the grass has kept the food moist.

Grilling

For this method, you will need some kind of grill which can be made from green sticks, and a hot bed of embers. The disadvantage of grilling food is that it tends to dry out.

Frying

You will need some form of pan or grill base, usually a flat stone which is placed in the fire to heat it up. The stone is then cleaned off and food fried on it. It may be necessary to place small pieces of twig around such things as eggs to stop them rolling off the stone.

Boiling

You will need some form of container. It is possible to use a paper bag to boil up water the trick is to ensure that the heat only touches that part of the bag that has liquid behind it to absorb the heat. In stone age times a water hole was created. Into this hole were placed hot stones, heated on a fire nearby. This resulted in heating the water and thus boiling the food.

Container cooking

It is possible to use food as containers for other foodstuffs, such as, orange skins in which eggs can be cooked. Onion 'shell' created by cutting an onion in half and scooping out the core of the onion and leaving three or four skins in place to form a container. You can also use potatoes or pineapples in the same manner.

Simple recipes

Orange eggs

Cut an orange in half and eat out the contents without breaking the skin. Break an egg into the orange shell and place on embers and allow to cook. When done, eat from container.

Onion eggs

Cut the onion in half after removing the outer skin. Remove internal contents except for the remaining three outer layers. Break egg into shell and place on embers. When cooked eat the onion container as well as the contents after removing the outer scorched layer.

Spud egg

Halve a large potato. Hollow one half. Break egg into hollow. Pin two halves of potato together with small sticks and roast in hot embers.

Twists

Mix flour, water and a pinch of salt together to form a thick dough, adding raisins and sultanas if you like. Make a snake like roll of the dough and twist this snake like fashion on a thick green stick (with bark removed). Support it over glowing embers turning occasionally until the outside turns golden brown.

Instant hot dogs

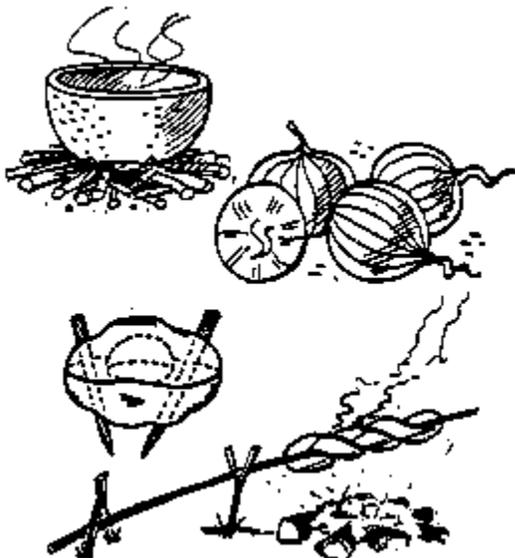
Lay sliced onion on a cabbage leaf add a sausage or two and place more onions on top. Wrap up the cabbage leaf tightly and secure with a number of small green sticks. Place in embers for about 7 - 10 mins turning occasionally.

Boiling

You will need some form of container. It is possible to use a paper bag to boil up water. The trick is to ensure that the heat only touches that part of the bag that the liquid is in contact with so it can absorb the heat. In stone age times a water hole was created, into this were placed red hot stones, heated on a fire nearby.

Container cooking

It is possible to use food as containers for other foodstuffs such as orange skins in which eggs can be cooked. Onion Skins 'shell' created by cutting an onion in half and scooping out the centre leaving 3 or 4 skins to form a container. You can also use potatoes or pineapples in the same manner.



Baked potato

Perhaps the easiest to cook backwoods . Take a potato and place it in the embers of the fire. When it is cooked , after about 25 - 30 mins slice open the skin and place a piece of cheese or butter on top.

Simple Kebab

Remove the bark from a green stick and onto it spear slices of bacon, mushrooms, sausage, carrot, tomato, peppers, pieces of pork. Support the skewer over glowing embers turning occasionally. Eat when the meat is crisp and golden brown.

Fish

It will be necessary for you to clean and gut any fish before you cook it. The fish should be cleaned thus:-

Wash the fish thoroughly in clean water

Remove the scales by scraping with the back of a knife(that is not the shape edge), working from the tail towards the head.

Cut the spine at a point just behind the gills and tear the head off with a steady, slow, forward motion. If you are careful, the fish innards will come out with it. (Dispose of carefully)

Slice the belly open from tail to gills and thoroughly clean the inside.

Finally, cut of the fins and tail and cook as desired.

Cooking methods for fish

Wrap method - wrap fish in grass and cover in mud and place on fire. Or wrap fish in cabbage leaf and pin together a with small twigs and place on fire.

Planked method - Pin the fish flesh side forward on a plank or piece of flat board and cook be reflected heat, place a knob of butter on the fish when it is cooking and later a splash of lemon - delicious.

Broiling method - Construct a broiler as shown and place your fish in it cook of hot embers turning regularly.

Fish cook very quickly so be careful you do not burn them.

Meat and burgers

Meat and burgers can be cooked by a number of methods some of which are described above such as the Kabob method or the wrap method whereby the meat is wrapped in cabbage leaves. Meat may also be cooked using a broiler or by frying on a hot stone.

Burgers in leaves

Place three layers of cabbage leaves directly onto the hot embers and put the burgers or mince patties on top of them. After approx. 10 minutes, turn the meat over, putting it onto three new cabbage leaves. Repeat this process until the meat is cooked.

Note: Cabbage leaves can replace foil in most instances when using backwoods cooking recipes. It is important that at no time should rhubarb leaves be used, as they contain a highly poisonous resin.

Instant oven

You will need about 1.5 meters of foil and a number of green sticks.

Fold the sheet of foil in half and peg one end to the ground with the bottom of a stick in each corner at the end.

Fold the foil in half and bring the free end up, attaching it to the top of the two sticks as shown.

Place the food on the bottom half of the foil and light your fire by the open end of the reflector oven.

Cooking tips

Make a fire according to your needs. You don't need to light a fire fit to roast an ox so that you can boil a kettle of water. Likewise you will not simmer your stew contentedly for the morning with a few small twigs.

Have everything you'll need ready at hand before you start. That includes timber for the fire, fresh water for cooking with, and all the cooking utensils and ingredients you'll need.

Always have a billy full of water on the boil - you can probably do most of your washing up as you go along.

Meat that you are going to use in a stew or casserole should be 'seared'. This means putting it in a very hot pan for a few minutes. This seals the juices of the meat and keep all the goodness in the meat.

Plates can be heated by putting them over a billy of hot water a few minutes before they are needed.

Plastic bags keep bread moist, and protect cheese, bacon etc.

When you take the top off a billy leave it top side down.

Serving spoon and ladles should be put on a tray or plate and not on the ground

Most meat dishes can be improved with gravy, and you can make it very easily by following the instruction on a packet of Bisto.

If a billy gets burnt inside, fill it with salt and water, let it stand for some hours and then let it boil for a few minutes, after which it can be easily cleaned.

Cleaning billies can be made easier if they are filled with water above the food line and left to soak on or near the fire. The food particles remaining never get a chance to harden and the billy is easy to clean as a result.

Soap rubbed on the outside of billys and allowed to dry from a protective film on the outside of your billys and makes them easier to clean.

One of the discomforts of cooking on open fires can be smoke getting in your eyes, usually at the most crucial part of the meal. Why not have a part of cheap swimming goggles to combat this occurrence.

Damp matches can be dried by rubbing them in your hair for a minute or two. It is however a far better idea to ensure they stay dry in the first place.

Roast meat 20 minutes for every pound.

Never pierce meat when it is cooking or the juices escape.

Always put enough water to cover the bottom of your billy before boiling milk.

Put a match stick or small twig in your billy when boiling water for tea and it will prevent it from having a smokey taste.

The secret to successful camp cooking is the control of your cooking fire.

Vegetables

Ideally, vegetables should be prepared immediately prior to cooking. Green vegetables should be washed quickly without cutting them up and roots should be scrubbed, then peeled or scraped. Do not leave them to soak, but cut fairly fine with a shape knife and cook at once. If for any reason cut vegetables cannot be cooked immediately, you should cover them with a cloth and put them in a cool place, but do not soak. Alternatively, soak in the minimum of water, and use the water for cooking the vegetables. The flavour of all vegetables is improved by cooking with salt, a pinch of salt should be added to the water before boiling.

Potatoes

Boiling

Potatoes should be cleaned and scrubbed before cooking. They can be cooked either by peeling them or in their skins. Preference will dictate which way to cook them. Potatoes should be placed in a large billy and covered with water just above the top of the potatoes. The water should be salted and brought to the boil. The potatoes will take approx. 20 minutes to boil on a reasonable fire. Take care that they do not boil dry. They can be checked by inserting a fork into them to check softness.

Baking

Potatoes can be baked very easily. They should be scrubbed and cleaned and dried before use. The potatoes can then be placed in a camp oven or wrapped in tin foil and placed in the embers of the fire. They can be checked by pinching them to see if they are soft or checking with a fork. If the potatoes are placed in the embers of the fire they should be turned regularly to prevent burning. It will take about half an hour to bake small potatoes and three - quarters to one hour to bake large ones.

Cabbage, greens etc.

Wash well in cold running water; shred coarsely, removing all fibrous stalks. Cook in a billy of boiling salted water for about twenty minutes. Then drain, and add salt, pepper and a little margarine before serving.

Carrots

Carrots should be scrubbed and scraped lightly, then cut into lengths or rounds. They should be cooked in a billy of boiling salted water until tender - about twenty minutes if young and up to forty five minutes if coarse.

Beans

French and runner - string the beans and slice then very thinly. Cook in a billy of boiling salted water for fifteen to twenty minutes. Drain, and melt margarine over them before serving

Baked beans

Place contents of tin in billy and heat up slowly. Cooking beans over a very hot fire results in the sauce thickening and becoming gooey. Do not boil and stir constantly to prevent burning and sticking to billy.

Peas

Green garden peas should be cooked in a billy of salted water perhaps with a pinch of sugar for about fifteen minutes; then drain and serve.

Dried peas should be left to soak over night. To cook, place in fresh cold water, salt, and bring to boil until tender taking care they do not turn to mush.

Frozen and dried vegetables

If you are using any prepared vegetables such as frozen or dehydrated vegetables and foodstuffs please follow the instructions on the packs carefully. A measuring jug is normally a useful utensil to ensure success.

Tea

Bring water to the boil, drop in tea, or tea bags and leave on fire while you count to twenty. Serve . Never place tea into water unless it is bubbling fiercely.

Eggs

Fried egg

Crack gentle on side of pan and let egg slip into clean oil or fat. Fry until the white is firm. The yolk can be cooked by spooning some of the hot oil over the top or the egg can be flipped over .

Boiled eggs

Place eggs in boiling water from a large spoon and boil for three and a half minutes or according to taste. A cracked egg can be boiled by wrapping in a piece of tissue paper.

Omelettes

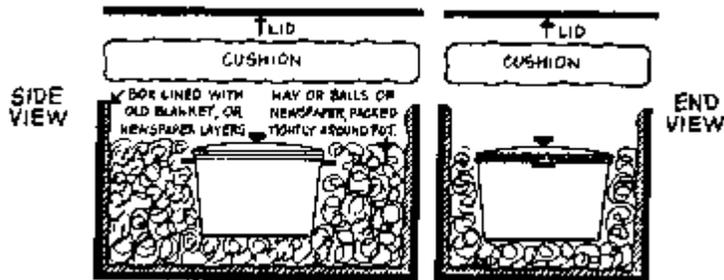
Omelettes are made by beating 2 - four eggs depending on rations and adding a tablespoon of milk and seasoning in a cup or bowl. The contents are then placed in a pan and stirred slightly with a fork until it is set. Tomatoes or mushrooms or what ever can be added at this stage. The omelette is then folded in half and allowed to cook slowly on each side to soften tomatoes etc. then served.

Scrambled eggs

Pour a small quantity of milk into a billy and add a piece of butter or margarine and put on the fire to melt. While melting whisk up your egg (s) in a cup. Pour into a billy and stir briskly with a fork keep stirring at all time to prevent it burning to the bottom of billy. It is cooked when mixture becomes dry and solid. Serve on toast.

Poached eggs

Put a pint of salted water in a large frying pan. If you have any vinegar, add two teaspoonfuls into the water - it keeps the whites from running too much. Bring water to a gentle boil. Break the eggs separately into a saucer and slide them into the water. Let the water simmer for no longer than three minutes, meantime you should ladle water over the yolks. Serve on toast.



Haybox Cooking

The hay box is an ideal way of cooking dishes that need to be simmered for a long time such as stews.

It has the big advantage that it is only necessary to bring the stew to the boil and to put it in the hay box. It then cooks itself, without any other attention. If you put the stew in the hay box at the beginning of the day, you can then go on a hike or expedition and a nice hot meal will be ready to be served when you return.

To make a hay box you will need a large box, which maybe made of wood or cardboard, and some insulating material such as hay, straw, polystyrene or newspaper.

First pack a layer of the insulating material in the bottom of the box, and then stand a billy on this layer while you pack more of the hay, straw or paper around it. Pack the insulating material nice and tight. When the contents of the box are level with the lid of the billy prepare a lid of the material that can be placed directly on top of the billy.

Gently remove the billy from the box, and a well will be left in the straw or newspaper that you will be able to slide the billy back into.

In order to prepare a stew using the hay box, simply make a stew in the usual way in the billy and bring it to the boil on the fire. Then place the billy quickly into the well in the hay box and put the lid of material carefully and firmly in position on top of the billy (remembering to put the lid on the billy first) The heat contained in the boiling stew will not be able to escape through the straw or newspaper, and so the stew will continue to simmer and cook for several hours. by log

Hot Water in Camp

This camp water heater consists of a metal drum with two metal pipes soldered in position - an inlet pipe and an outlet pipe. As the sketch shows the inlet pipe, which goes almost to the bottom, inside the drum, has a funnel placed in the top to receive cold water.

The drum is placed over a fire, and filled with water. The water is heated by the cooking fire. Once the water is heated up, you'll have hot water as long as there's a fire going. The drum maybe placed to one side of the fire, but a central position is more effective, because then the drum is heated left, right and centre.

To get hot water

To get hot water from the outlet pipe, you simply pour cold water into the inlet pipe. This raises the level of the hot water in the drum, so that it flows out the outlet.

Before using the drum for this purpose, be sure that it is thoroughly well cleaned out of oil or other residue. Avoid using a drum that has contained insecticide or some other poisonous substance. In any case, do not use the water for cooking or drinking, but for other purposes such as washing dishes or clothes.