

# Dirt Road Cookery: Simplicity and Delight

A Tasteful Bookend to *Dirt Road Camping*

By Wells Shoemaker

## Foreword

Eating well off the tailgate of your truck...days away from stores and a refrigerator... does not need to be bland and boring. Unlike backpacking cuisine, canned foods and certain fresh vegetables are practical...and fuel does not need to be rationed parsimoniously. In particular, the Dutch Oven plays a feasible and deliciously versatile role. Frozen foods will stay safe, if not rock solid, for 4-5 days in a good cooler.

Simplicity and pragmatism are more important than 4 star Michelin aspirations... besides, we have excellent tires on the truck and stars in abundance after dark.

This culinary monograph serves as a natural adjunct to *Dirt Road Camping*, 2022. It's a 4-wheel drive sequel to a backpacking 'gourmet' collection I wrote long ago.



*Desert "Chef" and Sommelier  
Top of the alluvial fan, Hanaupah Canyon, Death Valley*

Acknowledgements—I’m an adequate outdoor cook and BBQ tender, but I’m not a real chef. I use the word “chef” just as shorthand...with a broad wink. However, I know some wonderfully talented *real* chefs, and I’ve learned a lot from them. Back in the 1990’s, I dove into the wine-and-health debates as a physician, journalist, and science advisor to the Wine Institute. I wrote about the Mediterranean diet from the aligned perspectives of tradition, flavor, biochemistry, epidemiology, and medical science. Those interests afforded me quite a few exposures to “serious chefs” both in California and Italy...and I paid attention.

Possibly the pinnacle of that phase of my life was the invitation to deliver the commencement address to the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. I sat back down at the head table after a cheerful presentation, whereupon Sandie quipped: *Hey, now he’s got a medallion as Honorary Diplomat of the CCA...but he’d starve to death if he didn’t have a can opener and a microwave.* Harsh, but probably true.

Most of the recipes in this booklet feature an Italian influence, tempered by some good advice and many decades of experiments on the tailgate. I’ll acknowledge three prime contributors:

*Jack Chyle*, for decades the culinary force behind the legendary Chez Renee in Aptos... and a skilled grape crusher, too...shared lots of advice which I have simplified for a less talented individual cooking on the tailgate.

*Sandie Shoemaker* is a fabulous, creative cook who teaches with directness, if perhaps some occasional deprecation of her husband’s efforts. I have adapted and streamlined a number of her recipes to Dirt Road Cookery.

*Salem Magarian* was the first “regular guy” who amazed me with how fast he could put together delicious meals for six tired hikers on a 3 burner propane cooktop in his cabin on the flanks of Boulder Mountain in Southern Utah. That was 25 years ago, and since then, Salem and I have mutually vetted most of these recipes in the red rock country.



*Salem’s Modest Cabin Table*



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## The Essentials:

### The Stove:

For nearly all of these recipes, you need a stable, non-tippy, wind-protected, heat source you can tamp down to a slow simmer. That generally means a stable propane stove with good valves. Two burners, please! (Primus, Coleman, and others)

**Long slow dishes on a poorly regulated heat source** tend to suffer hot spots with black gunge sticking to the bottom...generating rough flavors. You won't likely have spousal permission to bring your best, heat-distributing All-Clad pans on the truck, either. If you can't regulate a simmer, pick something simpler to cook...or prepare to stand at the stove stirring the whole time.

### The Fuel: Propane Rules

I love propane. It works in low temperatures. Butane doesn't. Propane burns odorlessly, doesn't make smelly spills, and most important...it's simple to use. It starts with a click, and seals up with a twist.

- o The one-liter green "disposable" cans, as mentioned in *Dirt Road Camping*, are handy, but painfully expensive as a source of fuel. The empty cans create a disposal problem for the user, a recycler, or in rural areas... the landfill.
- o Larger containers (ubiquitous 40 pound and less common but handy 20 pound propane tanks) will easily last an entire trip...or many trips. Refills are widely available in 10 minutes for around \$5 a gallon on the way to the woods.
- o Get in the habit of turning that main valve OFF when you're not using it...it's no fun to discover your tank is empty on a cold morning before coffee.





- I think the epoch of white gas has expired. It's temperamental, spill prone, and stinky. Experienced users can manage with determination.
- Jellied alcohol (*Sterno*) is not feasible to use when cooking for multiple diners...or anybody in a hurry. However, those cans are effective as a "chafing dish" warmer to keep the contents of a Dutch oven warm over a long meal.
- Open fires are great for grilling meat, but stinky, dangerous, dirty, and ergonomically awkward for cooking. There are increasing number of places and circumstances where open fires should not be started for any reason.



*Propane stove in its happy zone...on the tailgate.  
Well used for 20 years and still eager to please.*

*Weaknesses: The fuel hoses are not immortal, and fuel tanks can leak.*

*Bring back-up!*

## The Food: The Most Important Thing!

This booklet anticipates a typical 5 day trip for 4 hikers who reached their destination in a truck. You can do the arithmetic and adapt.

### Common Guideline for all Transported Comestibles:

These are going to ride in a bouncy truck and get carried over rocks and uneven ground...perhaps in the dark.

Glass is heavy and it breaks ever so easily, and it needs to come back with you no matter what. That's conspicuously relevant for beverages.

Off-the-shelf supermarket cardboard containers crush and collapse...a big problem if that's your salt supply.

Cans, well, they're featured heavily in this booklet!

Ziploc bags are handy, but they come undone surprisingly easily...especially when puffed up at higher altitudes.

Transfer your comestibles to plastic, unbreakable, screw top or at least resealable containers if possible...or at least "double bag" them.



*No break, no leak, no sorrow*

### Must-Have Spices and Ancillary foods

- Olive oil is essential for almost everything that follows in this booklet. Transport your oil in a plastic, **wide mouth** container for winter trips. Olive oil congeals overnight when temps dip below 40°, and it's rock solid in the 20's. A narrow mouth vessel is useless at breakfast time. Better if you can spoon it out and let it melt in the pan! Warmer weather trips...a squirt top bottle is handy. I bring a half liter or more.
- Basil, oregano, and tarragon flakes...or "Italian blend" herbs
- Capers—typically sold in vinegar, but salted dry ones are available
- Cinnamon—sticks or ground powder
- Hot sauce: Cholula, Tabasco, or your choice. I like Weitchpec Green a lot!
- Ketchup—know your audience!
- Mayonnaise...optional... but it needs to stay cool or else
- Mustard in a plastic squeeze container
- Red pepper flakes—the handy packets that come with takeout pizza are handy
- Salt & pepper in screw top plastic jars
- Soy Sauce—love those little packets you get with take-out sushi
- Sugar in some form (white, brown, maple syrup)
- Sun dried tomatoes—why are these genius ingredients such a secret!
- Vinegar...in a small plastic unbreakable container



**Two Hints:** Olive oil has a rather low flash point, and overheating it destroys many of the appealing flavors and health benefits. If it's smoking, you've gone too far. Never leave the skillet when you're heating olive oil! At the right temperature, a slice of onion will start to sizzle almost immediately.

Fire starter. Campers who venture out often will, sooner or later, encounter rain and snow. A fire is ever so welcome, but it's also hard to start one with wet kindling. Sacrifice a teaspoon or two of olive oil and mush it into a paper towel and give it a match. It's odorless and safe...and it will light your fire as reliably as Jim Morrison ever did.



## Beverages

**Coffee.** Starbucks Via packets of micro-ground coffee are unparalleled for simplicity and flavor! Nobody has surpassed this innovation yet. Not cheap, but worth it.

Drip grind filters and presses and other caffeination paraphernalia should stay home unless you are willing to fawn over it, spill it, have your coffee go cold before you're ready to enjoy it, and waste precious time you would rather spend hiking.

**Tea.** I like Irish Breakfast (English Breakfast, too), Darjeeling, and Earl Grey. It's smart to bring tea in those sealed foil packets...because things get wet or lose verve before their time. We have an abundance of personal choices for fragrant and novel teas.

**Water.** Please, no water in single-serve plastic bottles! Those bottles have become a littering scourge around the whole world. Bring tap water in jugs, and use a reusable cup or water bottle. (See *Dirt Road Camping*)

Wine, beer, and soft drinks if you like them. I like the first two. Cans are vastly more sensible than bottles.



### Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- Other than soft, squishy, and skinless ones, these will last a week in a cooler. In winter, consider that vessel an “insulated freezing-preventer” rather than a “cooler.”
  - Oranges, tangerines, lemons, limes, and apples will endure
  - Strawberries, blueberries, grapes, peaches, plums, and other stone fruits, leaf lettuce, and ripe tomatoes...delicious, but they just don’t travel well
  - Small melons reward the indulgent who are also willing to bury the rinds. A Green River watermelon in August will make you Governor of the Realm.
- Onions (lots of them!), Shallots, and Garlic— tailgate chefs need abundant allium



*Allium Alliance: White, red, and yellow onions...a garlic...and shallots*

- The Durable C’s: Cabbage, Cucumber, Celery, maybe Corn-on-the-Cob
- Root vegetables—mainstream potatoes, carrots, and parsnips. Slightly more adventuresome beets, rutabagas, and turnips for the curious—all durable and tasty

- Peppers—Anaheim, jalapeño, and others for the capsaicin *cognoscenti*



Green peppers:

Left to right

Bell (mild, sweet)

Anaheim (medium)

Pasilla (mild, flavorful)

Jalapeño (hot)

Habañeros and “serious” hot peppers are beyond the scope of this article

Know the range of tolerance for heat with your audience

### Canned Foods on the Essential List



4 oz

16 oz

For the purposes of these recipes, a “can” is a standard, grocery store 15 oz container. If a larger or smaller can comes into play, we’ll specify!

Crude estimate: A hungry hiker is going to want 8 oz minimum for supper, and that’s rather lean.



- **Beans**—a major part of your tailgate portfolio: Pinto, white (Tuscan cannellini, Navy, and Great Northern), black, pintos, kidney



- Baked beans, too
- Corn (*c'mon...you love corn*)
- Tomato sauce and marinara
- Black olives/kalamatas
- Chicken and beef stock
- Mushrooms—or dried shiitakes, porcini, and others

- Canned chili peppers (various heat levels)...usually in 4 oz cans.

*Fresh green peppers (p. 11) will usually last the several days you're "out there," but they're not always practical.*

*A can is a blessing when you're in a hurry when it's dark, cold, or rainy. I save those wee cans for shop projects.*

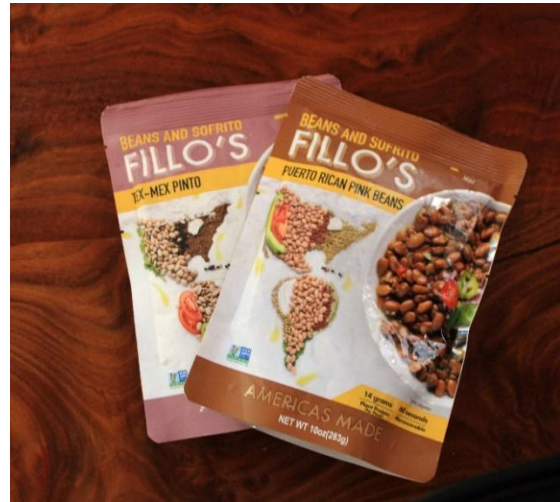


### Optional list of canned foods to surprise your companions

Canned peaches or, if you want to splurge, sweet cherries (see p. 72)  
 Hearts! Artichoke Hearts and Hearts of Palm...plop them into a bowl, done!  
 Pickles (if in glass, which is standard, transfer to plastic before your trip)  
 Black eyed peas and lentils...expand your horizons!  
 Pickled okra (you'll see!)

Prepared, ready to heat and eat out of the can or the pouch

It's hard to call dumping a can and heating the contents "cooking." There is no pretense of culinary intrigue, but there will be times for this...when hunger, cold, fatigue, and darkness rule.



Chili—when you're just too tired to chop vegetables or fiddle with more than one pot. I always keep one can on hand for "extenuating circumstances."

Soup, ramen, and baked beans all have their days for quick wolf-downs.



If you choose ramen, skip that nasty packet of chemical flavors and improvise. If nothing else...olive oil, salt, and pepper. Have more time? Toss in chopped onions, dried onion flakes, sun dried tomatoes, left-over shredded chicken or pork. Backpackers understand.

Good stores have an expanding array of single serving, pre-cooked, really flavorful dishes...frequently featuring beans. They're not cheap, but just heat in a pan for a minute and gobble.



### Meat (Vegetarian substitutes are well known and welcome)

- Bacon—for both breakfast and condiment roles with...almost anything
- Sausages—link, bulk. Endless choices! Ideal if shrink wrapped at purchase! (I love linguica in particular). Try chorizo if you're not yet a fan.



- Salami—they vary...some are over the top fatty...choose one you know
- Prosciutto—another secret to delight your companions (see bruschetta below)
- Frozen marinated skirt steak (nearly foolproof) or fancier cuts if you please
- Frozen chicken if you're going to use it early
- Frozen ground beef...aim to use this early in your trip
- Frozen pulled pork—reliable and remarkably versatile. Get the plain, not the BBQ sauce variety, unless that's what you crave!
- Frozen shrimp—use these promptly (See *Camarones al Mojo de Ajo*, p. 43)

### Meat in cans:

- Tuna—compact, full of protein and flavor, superb contingency victuals when your best laid plans go awry.



- If you want to make paella: Shrimp, Clams, Smoked oysters, maybe chicken ( p. 28)



### Perishables and Dairy

- Tortillas—genius versatility and simplicity. Easily last a 1 week trip in a cooler
- Baguette: 8” - 10” sections tightly wrapped in aluminum foil—3 days
- Hard cheese (Parmesan, aged cheddar, Manchego, Dry Jack, Comte, others),
- Gruyere if you are feeling deserving or crave *au gratin* (p. 56)
- Grated mozzarella or mixed shredded cheeses in a sealed bag
  - Soft, gooey, fragrant cheeses should wait at home unless you just can’t live without them (we understand, but Brie travels poorly, Gorgonzola dislikes heat, and Bleu looks unappealing after getting squished).
  - See Morel and Gorgonzola pasta (p. 44) if you are feeling deservedly grandiose!
- Butter...an optional but compelling indulgence...but seal it in a secure plastic container in the cooler
- Something to amend your coffee if that’s your preference. Must be in screw top, tough container...dairy spills are yucky!



*Dirt Road companionship with attitude on Nevada Route 722, West of Austin*

*If this bovine wanders into your camp, don't try to milk the critter.  
Bring what you need in your cooler.*

## The Tools: Coolers...Important Choices!

*This information was lifted from Dirt Road Camping: In particular: How to keep your frozen foods safe for 4-5 days.*

Trucks carry medium and large coolers without complaining. Modern coolers keep perishables from perishing and defend beer from the scourge of tepidity. They're a source of emergency water when the ice melts. I do have a few suggestions.

1. **Ice.** If you're going to carry ice, get **blocks instead of cubes** if you can. Blocks last a day longer, but they all eventually melt to a puddle. The melt water inevitably gets into some packages if you're carrying food. Somehow, even with zip-loc bags, the water turns nasty in a couple days. After you pour out that cold meltwater, the remaining contents warm up progressively faster.
2. **Smarter—Bottled Ice.** I prefer to freeze water in tough, unbreakable one-liter plastic (Nalgene) bottles and use those instead of bagged ice. (Fill only 90% full to accommodate expansion in the freezer!) The frozen bottles are basically block ice, and they last 3-4 days in a good cooler...even 5 in winter. Once melted, the cool, clear water is a fine beverage after a hike.
3. Don't make a piker's mistake. We sometimes get **"freezer packets"** with shipments of perishables. They seem to be free! They're intended for single use for a day or two. They don't last very long, and some of them leak who-knows-what kind of material into the water which is bathing your food.
4. **Dueling Cooling:** I take 2 coolers. The big one is your best friend to protect your frozen goods.
  - a. Pack frozen goods and the ice on the bottom, **then cover those with an insulating layer (reflective bubble wrap or neoprene...such as a wet suit that no longer fits you).** (Please don't gloat if yours still fits!)



See Appendix 2 (p.75) for details

- b. Pack the perishables you want to keep at refrigerator temperature above that layer. I go into this cooler quickly and close the lid compulsively. Keep it in the shade, as opposed to a hot truck. Wrap it with a jacket or a fleece, and cover it with a reflective blanket if it's going to see sunshine. The ice bottles will still have some solid material on day 4...day 5 in the winter.
  - c. The second cooler is a smaller one, and that's where I keep the water, beer, and the snacks for the day.

### Tools: Wells' Traveling Cook Kit

This kit fits inside a durable plastic bin...a repurposed, sturdy grape harvest bin...approximately 12x 22" inches and 7" deep. It's easy to lift and move. I cover it with a towel and pack it inside the cab to avoid intrusion of dust, rainwater, ravens, and rodents. It has made at least 100 trips.

Superficial aesthetics don't matter, but the chef deserves properly functioning tools. It doesn't matter if the utensils don't match or a pot sports a little dent, but don't torture yourself with pots which wobble, handles which wiggle, knives which won't cut, or tools which are bent.

It contains:

- A 10" non-stick, good quality skillet—the most important of all. (photo p. 21) You don't need an elite one, but this is not the place you want a cast-off skillet with peeling coatings or a warped bottom. Folks who know how to care for a cast iron skillet swear by them...and the truck will carry one without complaining.
- A 10" shallow flat pan for tortillas, quesadillas, and bruschetta. This versatile device will serve as a lid for the skillet, too!
- A nest of pots from 8" down to 4". The largest pot is possibly the second most often used tool. For a large group, bring a bigger one!
- A coffee can will hold clean utensils—Knives, forks, and spoons, and chopsticks
- A cutting board and a judiciously sharp chef's knife and a paring knife. Make a cardboard scabbard for these so you don't find the edge with cold fingers!



- A good can opener. (No tolerance for cast-off dysfunctional can openers!)
- A large, plastic scooping spoon
- A wooden spatula





- Long tongs—don't cook bacon or sauté chicken without 'em!
- A heavy duty “hook” to lift the lid of the Dutch Oven when it's hot ( p. 49)
- A nest of durable plastic cups...or deluxe insulated stainless steel cups.



*No throwaways*

*No glass*

*Nests are smart*

- A small stainless steel bowl (Mine was once a dog bowl, found abandoned in Death Valley. *Woof*) Very handy for food prep and easy to clean. *Two might be better.*
- A lidded coffee can or sealable plastic container to keep principal spices dry in one place—salt, pepper, Italian herbs, sugar if you use it—ideally in screw top containers
- Dishwashing supplies:
  - o Non-scented, clear, low residue dish soap in a plastic squirt bottle. (Palmolive *Pure and Clear* is widely available...a fantastic product.)
  - o A plastic “credit card” style scraper with different arcs on the 4 corners to remove goo from internal contours without wasting water (photo next page )
  - o Paper towels. Yes, this is an indulgence, but I dry the used ones and use them to start campfires instead of newspaper. No waste.
  - o A clean cloth dish towel...two if you're out there a while. Makes it easy to ask for help with the clean up!
  - o Three “scrubbies”
    - One is the familiar 3M Scotch-Brite yellow sponge with its dark green, mild abrasive on one side
    - A more aggressive but nonmetallic pad or coiled device you can use safely on non-stick surfaces or plastic, and finally
    - A copper scrubber for stubborn material on a steel or cast iron vessel



- A hot pad or glove (*Smart! Not wussy!*)
- A pair of thin, flexible gloves...I like deerskin.
- A couple Bic lighters and a longer BBQ fire starter
  - o If your stove needs a match, or if the piezoelectric starter on your stove works inconsistently, you'll want a way to get a spark into the propane vapor without burning off all the hair on your fingers. An old one even without fuel still makes the spark required to ignite a propane burner.



*C'mon, Baby, light my.... Flame sources and a waterless pot scraper*



*I carry titanium pots in the backpack, but steel is just fine for the tailgate. Nests are smart.*



## Recipes: Five Sections

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*Elegance takes many forms. This particular one is named George.*

## The Skillet and the Tailgate



The non-stick skillet is the workhorse of the Dirt Road Chef—incredibly versatile yet simple for single vessel cooking...and easy to clean up. Cooks who know cast iron will insist on that traditional tool!

Any act of cooking exposes the chef to burns, needless to say. Adding moist ingredients to hot oil in a skillet carries a risk of painful splatters.

How to avoid that? If you simply “toss” ingredients into a pan with more than a scant layer of hot oil, they will splash unpredictably. *Murphy’s Law alert!*

I put the ingredients into a bowl, bring the bowl to the edge of the skillet, hook the lip of the bowl over the rim of the skillet, and gently tip it pointing away from the operator. Any splatter will be directed away from you, and most of it will be caught under the bowl. I also wear glasses when frying anything. Wearing light gloves in proximity to boiling oil is smart!

Recipes follow!

## Pasta Puttanesca: (Vegetarian without the anchovies)

In the native Italian terminology, this dish was supposedly popular with sex workers who needed something fast and fortifying between appointments.

You will need:

1. Rotini pasta, ½ pound for 2-3 diners. Do the arithmetic. It comes in 1 pound boxes. Any dry pasta will do, but the rotini trap the sauce especially well. The *al dente* transition is a little more forgiving than spaghetti or linguine, and it's easier to eat when the plate is on your lap.
2. Marinara sauce. Real chefs make marinara “from scratch” in their real kitchens with fresh vegetables. However, for dirt road camping, it's sensible to simply use a quart of store-bought marinara. You can amend that easily enough. Simplicity rules.
  - a. Sandie accepted my proposition of marriage only because Paul Newman and Ernie Banks were already married. We miss them both.
  - b. Even with the household affection for Paul, I prefer carrying cans, rather than jars. (A broken jar is a heart breaker!)



3. Fresh garlic
4. Capers (2 tablespoons in a small plastic container will be enough)
5. Chopped kalamata olives, or standard black olives if you prefer. It's easy to bring those in the same container with the capers—they're headed for the same destiny.
6. Fresh basil or dry basil flakes (the marinara often begs for more)
7. Olive oil
8. A little red wine and/or vinegar
9. Some red pepper flakes
10. Parmesan grated cheese—optional
11. Anchovies—you're out in the wild, remember! Chopped finely or available as paste



How to do it:

- In a skillet, simmer the garlic in a modest amount of olive oil until browned. You can use onions or shallots with perfect contentment.
- Cautiously pour in the container of marinara.
- Add the capers, olives, and basil.
- Once the sauce is up to temperature and barely bubbling, toss in a sacrificial glass of good red wine. (Never cook with bad wine! Verify quality, of course.)
- Depending upon the tang of the marinara, your sauce may benefit from an ounce or two of wine vinegar...or another glass or wine. Follow your taste.
- If you're going traditional, stir in the anchovies. They're small and life is short.
- Red pepper flakes—gentle with this! Too much masks other delicate flavors.
- When you're getting close, turn the sauce down to bare simmer and start the pasta water boiling.
- Boil the pasta until it's *approaching al dente*...but don't overcook, please!
- **Here's an important hint from an experienced Italian chef.**

*Pour out the pasta water, and promptly pour the sauce over the steaming hot but not completely softened pasta, and mix it all together.*

*Give it another 3-5 minutes off the heat.*

*The pasta will pull in moisture along with all those splendid flavors.*

*Instead of bland, pale pasta with sauce glopped on top, you'll have an integrated feast...which will also make spectacular breakfast or tangy soup the next day. If you are longing for love, this would be an intelligent bonding strategy.*

- Parmesan topping is an optional bonus, although not entirely necessary.
- Any subsequent appointments are your business.



*I have loved Chianti since the 1960's, but I serve Salamandre Primitivo with puttanesca. It's more of a Calabrian thing than a Tuscan one.*

## Pasta Pescatore

This is a simple backpacking recipe that works equally well, or more likely better, on the tailgate.

You will need:

- Pasta of your choice. ½ pound for 2-3 diner/hikers. I like Rotini, but any will do.
- Olive oil in generous quantity
- Garlic and/or shallots or onion. (I used fresh wild scallions once...*rapture!*)
- Chopped green olives (you can enjoy this with black olives, too)
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Italian spice blend...or basil and oregano flakes
- Capers...optional, but delicious
- Dry smoked salmon—*Have smoke will travel* reads the card of a chef.

How to do it:

- Start your pasta water about the same time as this simple sauce.
- In a skillet, brown the chopped garlic.
- When brown, add the chopped olives.
- A splash of white wine is not essential, but you'll want to do this, and you can. Leave plenty in the bottle for later.
- Italian spices to your taste. Moderation is smart, but experiment!
- Tablespoon of capers
- Stir the contents to blend the ingredients, then reduce heat to bare simmer.
- When the pasta is approaching *al dente*, pour off the water.
- Pour the sauce over the pasta and toss it thoroughly right away. Give it 4-5 minutes to integrate, similarly to the puttanesca strategy.
- Top with crumbled dry smoked salmon and parmesan.
- Verge peacefully into bliss.



## Simple Spaghetti

There is no shame...but rather infinite virtue...in making something simple that pleases you and your companions. Speed can be a virtue when people are hungry. A dirt road chef needs add only a few minor wrinkles.

You will need:

1. Spaghetti...or capellini...or linguine. ½ pound for 2-3 diners
2. Marinara sauce in a store-bought container. (Remember, this is simple)
3. Some red pepper flakes
4. Italian spices if the marinara lacks the complexity or the garlic tang you crave
5. A splash of red wine (important ritual!)
6. Grated parmesan cheese
7. Olive oil
8. Optional...and a little less simple: Meatballs you made at home, seared, and froze for the journey to the outback. Thaw those early, then heat those up in a skillet with some sliced onions for intrigue. When they start to hiss, they're ready.

How to do it:

- Start the pasta water about time you start the sauce, and toss in the pasta once you have a boil...*not before!* (*Common error*)
- Add some olive oil to the skillet and bring to heat...but not smoking.
- Pour in the marinara, and stir it in.
- Amend the marinara with spices if you please. (No harm in some garlic powder, and a wee bit of red pepper flake...and no foul if you just accept it as-is.)
  - If you're going to add your meatballs, now is a good time.
- Stir in a glass of red wine, after the chef verifies that it's worthy.
- Once bubbling, turn down to simmer. The pasta should be nearing ready!
- When the pasta is *al dente*, remove from heat and pour off the water.
- Pour the sauce over the pasta and mix together, let blend for a few minutes. This small trick makes a big difference!
- Serve from the pot!
- Diners can sprinkle parmesan if they please.





## Open Air Bruschetta—Appetizer or main course

When I studied in Florence in the mid 1960's, I went camping almost every weekend with a cheap frying pan, knife, fork, spoon, a *fiasco* of Chianti, and a folded over blanket for sleeping. Over a small, open fire, I sizzled slices of baguette in olive oil, topped with a slice of delicious cheese and a slice of salami. That simple meal served this lad nicely, and it would for you, too...but we've since taken this an extra step or two.

Bruschetta is basically a tangy, crispy piece of bread with tasty toppings, served either hot or cold. It can be made with just about anything, but, of course, I have suggestions. One or two pieces make a fine appetizer, and 4 or 5 constitute a righteous supper! This recipe works, I assure you, but so will almost any variation.

You'll use a skillet or shallow pan, some long tongs, olive oil, a tasty baguette, versatile toppings, and a stable heat source you can regulate purposefully...like a propane stove. Don't try this over a campfire! Seriously...hot oil isn't forgiving!

What you need:

1. Bring your baguette wrapped tightly in aluminum foil...and then wrapped in a plastic bag. It will last 3 days before turning into a cosh.
2. Slice the baguette into 1 inch thick discs
3. Chop up garlic, shallot, or onion into fine morsels, and toss into a bowl.
4. Consider whole capers—secret wow ingredient!
5. Slice sundried tomatoes into slivers. (You want tomato in some form on proper bruschetta!)
6. Consider chopping a mild pepper too—not traditional, but rules are lax outside.
7. Mix all of those cold delectables into a slurry with grated parmesan and olive oil.
8. If you want a meat topping, consider prosciutto or thin sliced salami—it drapes over the top of the bruschetta and helps to hold the package together

How to do it:

- Heat a generous 1/8" deep pool of olive oil...hot, but not smoking.
- Using tongs, drop the baguette discs into the oil, and expect instant sizzling. It doesn't take long to turn golden brown. This phase demands constant attention.
- With tongs, flip the baguette discs over and immediately spoon some of your slurry to the exposed top of each one. It will start to melt, and the air will become magical.
- If you're using meat, lay the slice on top of the slurry.
- Remove with tongs when the bottom turns crispy. This goes rather quickly.
- Put on a plate to serve. There will be a little "fall out" from the slurry, but all of that will be consumed, I guarantee.

## A Simple yet Elegant Variation for Bruschetta

I learned this recipe in a tiny shop in Bagnoreggio in Central Italy 30 years ago. This walled town charts a history dating to the Etruscan reign, punctuated by serial waves of nasty imperial conquest. The town earned fame as a resort for wealthy people who sought healing waters (*"Bath of Kings"*). The city was constructed upon an eroded, steep-flanked plateau connected to the surrounding countryside by a narrow land bridge. This defensible geography thwarted Teutonic invaders, but not tectonic perturbations. The bridge collapsed in an earthquake in 1695, and people abandoned the town for nearly 3 centuries. The Italian government reconnected the untouched time capsule to modern tourism with a modern pedestrian bridge in 1965.



*Bagnoreggio, Italy, 1994*

Close to the intersection marked Pax et Lux, a tiny sign advertised *Vino e Bruschetta*.

We went in...moths to the flame. The proprietor and I, discovering our shared winemaking history and affection for Italian history, sampled rather comprehensively.

Winemakers always bring out "the good stuff" for fellows in the trade! His was special!

My Italian steadily improved. So did his.

The enduring gift, however, was not the wine.

In the corner of a small, smoky room with a low ceiling, an attractive young woman was making bruschetta over an open fire. I heard her communicate with several visitors in French, Italian, and German. In Italian, I complimented her for her multilingual fluency, and she replied in impeccable English: "Yes, I spent last year as an exchange student in Phoenix."

She took the world's most flavorful bread, toasted it both sides over the fire, and then vigorously scraped a fresh garlic clove over the rough surface. Then she drizzled it with delightful green, extra virgin olive oil harvested less than a kilometer away. Then she sprinkled it with coarse salt. Simplicity again!

You can do the same thing, and it works fine on the tailgate. Sandie and I can attest that it's worth the effort.

## Tailgate Paella



This dish demands attention from the chef, but it's a knockout under the open sky.

You will need:

1. Rice! Zatarain's makes a yellow rice and a "Spanish rice" in boxes with spices. It takes about a half hour to rehydrate and cook to tenderness. Mahatma also makes a yellow rice, as well as a medium grain rice stated to be "perfect for paella," likewise requiring a half hour to simmer. The yellow color probably derives from turmeric rather than saffron, but that doesn't matter, really. If you can't find one of these, bring a packet of pre-cooked rice or go cowboy with Uncle Ben's or Minute Rice.
2. A can of cooked shrimp
3. A can of cooked clams
4. A can of smoked oysters—stronger flavor, maybe not for everybody
5. Sorry...no live mussels out there on the range or in the woods. Just not prudent...
6. Some chunks of cooked chicken. You can make these at home in a skillet, freeze, and bring with you in a sealed bag. It's available in a can, too...a little mushy.
7. Sausage of your choosing
8. Some red and green peppers...decorative mostly...not for "heat"
9. Two onions
10. Spices—saffron if you want perfection—and paprika
11. Optional—dried shiitake mushrooms



- If it's Zatarain's or Mahatma, or if you're starting with dry rice, you will need to simmer a half hour to plump up. If it's precooked, that's faster. These products vary a lot...so follow the directions.
- In the largest skillet you have, heat the olive oil and toss in the softened rice. Sauté until the rice is simmering.
- Add some saffron or a commercial "paella spice" packet. That's *not* cheating.
- Most real chef's recipes call for paprika. *Why not!* It's pretty, and it sounds exotic!
- Add the seafood, chicken, and sausage.
- Slice the onions coarsely and add to the pan. Mushrooms, too, if you please.
- Add the pepper slices late so they don't go floppy.
- Simmer 15 -20 minutes, and serve.
- It's better in Spain, but this works just fine in the American West.



### Escalante Roll Ups (for 2-6): Ancient Wisdom, Modern Pleasure

Native Americans lived in most of the places I visit for my modern enjoyment. That's a bitter realization. According to apocryphal lore, ancient native dwellers in arid country grew a "Trinity" of foods. They planted corn centrally in a mound. They planted beans in the mound, and those legume vines twirled up along the cornstalks. Squash vines rambled off to the side. Supplemented by occasional game, this was a nicely balanced diet. (Support the *Rural Utah Project* if this history resonates with you, please!)

In contemporary times, squash don't ride in a truck, but the other components travel!

1. Meat—so many choices!
    - a. Corralitos Market sausage, cut into ¼" thick "coins"
    - b. Pulled pork
    - c. Breakfast sausage or Italian sausage
    - d. Ground beef...if you pull it out of the freezer
  2. One large onion
  3. One Anaheim pepper (or more assertive variety if you please)
  4. Optional: Several small potatoes, leftovers ideal! If fresh, you'll need to boil or fry. before adding to the roll ups. Cut into pieces roughly same size as sausage nibbles.
  5. One can of corn, drained
  6. One can Pinto beans...or black beans...your choice...drained
  7. Tortillas—corn or wheat, your preference
  8. Red pepper flakes, Cholula, salsa...you choose the tang you like!
- Sauté the meat choice until crisp, then add onions and potatoes.
  - When the onion becomes translucent, add corn, beans, and peppers.
  - Stir together and simmer until steaming.
  - Add red pepper, Cholula, or your favorite hot sauce to desired warmth.
  - Heat the tortillas either over a burner or in a flat pan.
  - Roll up the goodies in a hot tortilla, and add cheese and salsa if you like.
  - Leftovers make a fantastic breakfast...or maybe an omelet.



### Alternative: Eureka Valley Quesadillas:

Same ingredients as the Escalante Roll Ups, just now made as a quesadilla instead of roll-up! You'll need a large shallow frying pan.

- Put a large flour tortilla in a pan on the burner with a scant amount of oil.
- Spread the sauteed ingredients over the tortilla.
- Top with shredded cheese...your choice. Mozzarella is great, but any will do.
- Flop another tortilla on top.
- When bottom tortilla is browned, using 2 spatulas, flop the assembly over.
- Brown that second tortilla, too, by which time the cheese will have melted and the whole assembly will be fabulously coherent.
- Cut into quarters, add some salsa if you have it, go directly to bliss!

### Yet another alternative: Basic Succotash

Observant readers will catch a trend here! Corn and beans are magic...easy and hearty.

I was raised with succotash, which I have since learned can be just about any corn and any bean with just about any other vegetable the chef has on hand.

Simplicity:

One can each of white corn (yellow fine) and beans (black, kidney, lima, pinto....)

Slice a half onion into fine pieces.

Slice a mild pepper...or an assertive one if you prefer...into fine pieces.

Put them all in a pot with some olive oil, salt and pepper, and heat until bubbling.

Serve it and salute your ancestors and celebrate your friends.





## Pizza—On the Tailgate? Are You Kidding?

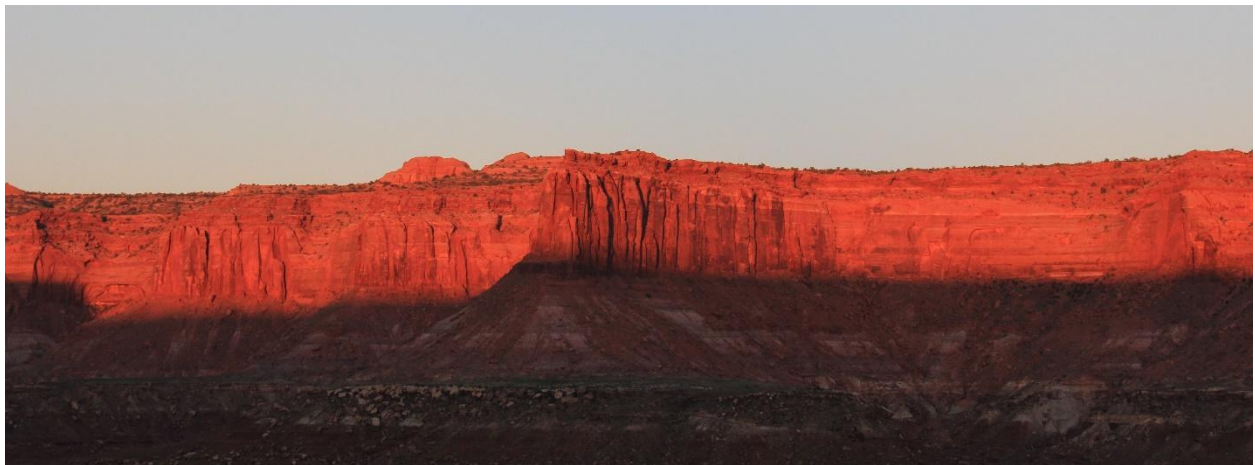
Nope! This might come up for you on the way in or the way out of your quest for enlightenment on the cusp of wilderness.

George and I once hiked out of the Trinity Alps with an empty snack bag, and we were mightily hungry. There's an improbable...and wonderful...pizza restaurant in Coffee Creek. Despite our appetites, we couldn't finish the whole pie.

We were heading for the night near the headwaters of the Trinity River, so we dutifully brought the box to our Dirt Road Campsite. By then, the remaining pizza slices had gone soggy. Cold, limp pizza just wasn't appealing, but meanwhile, our hunger had rekindled.

What to do? Dirt Road Chefs *do* know how to make things crispy. Sizzle them in oil.

We trimmed the pizza slices to fit in the skillet, heated a scant layer of olive oil to a point just shy of smoking, and carefully dropped them in. That meal was fabulously crispy ...and judiciously simple.



*Wingate cliffs catch the last rays of the day...Dirty Devil Overlook*

*Dusk is a beautiful time of day. Make your cooking simple and enjoy the show.*

## Black Eyed Peas (BEP's)



For some reason, these healthy legumes seem to be an acquired Southern taste, which is how I was introduced. However, they'll please even the stuffiest Yankee! They're available in cans, but you can occasionally find them in plastic bags in the frozen food section, and, by blessed serendipity, fresh!

They're all durable enough to travel.

I'll share 3 ways to use them:

First: **Basic Southern BEP's:** Make bacon or breakfast sausage patties, drain the can of BEP's...or fresh or frozen ones better...and toss them into the hot bacon grease along with some slivered onions. Careful with splatters! Heat, sprinkle with a little Cholula if you like (I like), and enjoy for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Second: **"Another kind of Beans"** Use BEP's in the recipes in place of other bean varieties for special baked beans, cassoulet, or chicken cacciatore. Branch out!

Third: Black Eye Peas Magnificent Appetizer. *This one is worth our attention!*

What you need:

1. BEP's if you can get them fresh...just a couple weeks of the year in a high end store. Frozen ones are not bad. It would be a stretch to do this with canned ones...but dirt road cooks do their stretches every day, right? *Namasté, y'all!*
2. Onion—I prefer white onions for this... but red or yellow will serve honorably.
3. Mild (sweet) red pepper. You can use canned sweet red peppers (pappardelle) successfully...but they take some searching.
4. Seasoned rice vinegar (it's slightly sweet...unlike plain rice vinegar)
5. A little fresh basil or a teaspoon of basil flakes
  - Chop the onion and red pepper coarsely.
  - Mix in with the BEP's.
  - Add fairly generous amount of seasoned rice vinegar. The mixture should be a little runny, but don't drown it.
  - Basil if you please
  - Salt and black pepper if your taste test indicates

Like revenge, this is a dish best served cold, except this is for your best friends. Really good with a Guinness. Try it with dipping chips. I guarantee you will have no leftovers.

## Cole Slaw

This is not really a “skillet prep,” but it complements your work on the tailgate. Fresh green salads might be possible the first night or two on a backroad trip, but after that, cole slaw will be your best bet. Cabbage travels well, tastes great, and lasts longer than lettuce and most greens.

There are two ways that work nicely out of a truck.

### Basic Cole Slaw:

Chopped cabbage, a couple tablespoons of mayonnaise, salt, and pepper...done...really fast. A fine candidate for delegation to the novice Dirt Road sou chef, too!

### Umami Cole Slaw Variation:

- Chopped cabbage
- Slivered onions
- Consider slivered apple (other folks like this sweet crunch more than I do).
- Consider slivering some carrots (common custom, optional).
- Make a dressing with olive oil, a small amount of red wine vinegar or rice vinegar, mustard, salt, and pepper. Shake well!
- Toss the cabbage and dressing and keep cool until you serve it.

## Hot Slaw

Or, more familiarly, steamed cabbage. This one needs two, nested pots

- Cut the cabbage into quarters (you don’t have to eat all of them in one sitting) .
  - Cut out the tough central stalk, and the leaves will relax, as you will, too.
  - Put into a small pot with a drizzle of olive oil, salt, and pepper. Toss it around gently to distribute the spices.
  - Find a larger pot, and put rocks in the bottom to create a space.
  - Add water to the larger pot until it comes up close to the top of the rocks.
  - Rest the small pot on the rocks.
  - Cover the large pot.
  - Steam away until the cabbage is tender but not mushy.
- 
- See also the recipe for Brussels Sprouts! (p. 40)



## Tamales: Virtuous Simplicity and Ravishing Flavor

Tamales come with a delectable core of seasoned, shredded pork, beef, or chicken, inside a blanket of molded masa—which is coarsely ground, seasoned corn meal. Vegetarian and cheese tamales are also popular and easily found, generally with some chiles in the center for vitality. I love them all. Tamales are wrapped in a traditional corn husk, which is a genius packaging strategy to keep them from falling apart in the steamer, facilitate handling, retain warmth, and protect from contamination.

They're fast and fabulous for breakfast, lunch, and supper.

Tamales are hard to make, and even harder to make well. *Let somebody else do that!* Excellent tamales can be found in nearly every Mexican market or bakery, usually fresh in a steamer or a cooler. I practically lived on these one summer in the San Joaquin Valley 50+ years ago. Now, I often stop on my way and pick up two for every camper on the trip. Tamales have been effectively sterilized by prolonged steaming, and the corn husks protect the delicious innards from mischief for at least a couple days if you keep them chilled. However, few tamales ever survive to see the sun reach its zenith the next day.

Frozen tamales of adequate character can be found in almost any large supermarket, and you can also purchase and freeze gourmet tamales before your trip. This might require some diligent local research for you.



What you need:

1. A large pot
  2. Some clean rocks about the size of eggs
  3. As many tamales as you can fit in two layers in the pot
  4. About 15 minutes
- Put a layer of clean, fairly closely packed rocks on the bottom of the pot.
  - Fill with water close to the top of the rocks, but not over the top.
  - Lay the tamales in their husks on top of the rocks. They're out of the water but close to the steam.
  - Cover the pot...the frying pan works nicely in that role!
  - Boil the water and steam the tamales for 10-15 minutes.
  - Dispose of the husks in your campfire that evening...they don't look natural blowing in the wind.

## Red Beans and Rice with Linguica

This dish takes about a half hour, but if you are willing to stand by and stir, it's worth the time! It's not too complicated, so if you're tired, you can manage.

You will need for 4 diners:

1. Zatarain's red beans and rice mix...or a comparable brand. It comes in a box that serves 4 moderate...or 2 ravenous...hikers.
  2. A big onion
  3. Sausage of your choosing...I favor linguica or andouille for this one, but any will do
- Follow the directions on the box—add the rice, bean, and spice mix to boiling water in the quantity described (2  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup per box for Zatarain's.)
  - When the boil is restored, turn down to simmer and stir periodically...especially important to avoid burned spots if your heat source is poorly regulated.
  - Chop that big onion into slivers. Put half in with the boiling victuals early, and they'll assimilate artistically. Reserve the other half to add late for an appealing crunchy texture.
  - Slice the sausage into  $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick "coins," and sizzle these in a skillet until crispy.
  - When the beans and rice are softening, you still have 10 minutes of simmering to go. Now toss in the fresh onions and the seared sausage coins and stir in.
  - When finished, this should be soft but not soupy, but it won't matter for flavor.
  - Any leftovers can make soup for breakfast







*Make beans, not war*



*Make supper, not trouble*

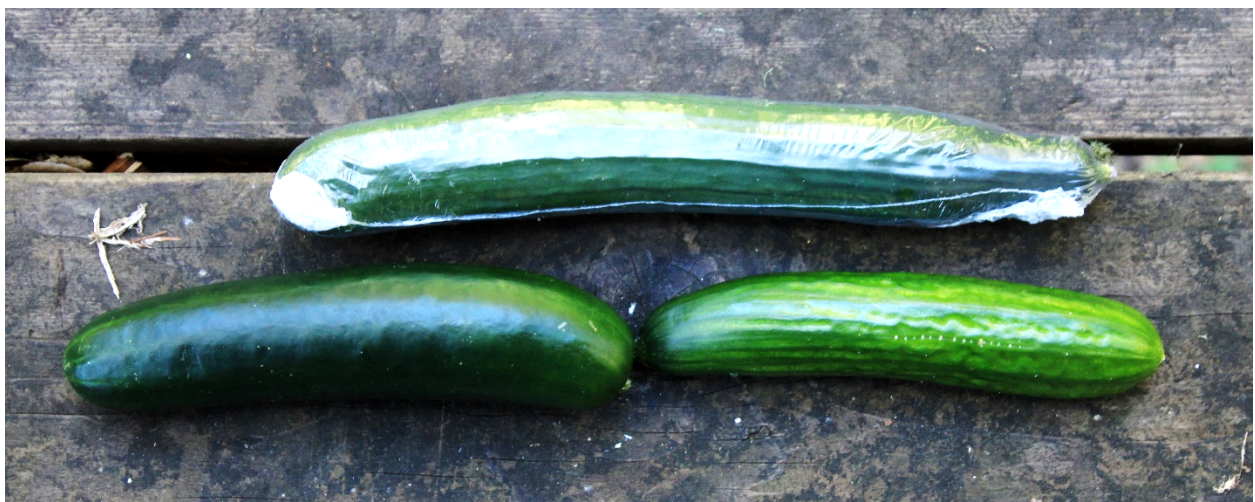


## Sunomono—Marinated Cucumber Salad

While this is nominally a Japanese appetizer, it's a fantastic, simple vegetable in the heart of North America. If you plan ahead in the morning, it will be perfect by supper.

You will need:

1. A reliable cucumber. I like the long “English cucumbers,” which are often sold wrapped in plastic, as opposed to waxed ones like many supermarket cucumbers. Small organic cucumbers are wonderful if you can find them. They all travel well!
  2. Vinegar—ideal is rice vinegar, and it's aesthetically pale. Wine vinegar has a little more color, but it works fine.
  3. A white onion
  4. Salt and pepper
  5. Sesame seeds
- Slice the cucumber into even slices 1/8” thick...or less if you can.
    - Up to you whether to peel off the skin. For the English ones...optional. For organic cucumbers...taste to see if the skin is too bitter. For standard store-bought cucumbers, which are often waxed...peel them!
  - Slice the white onion into similarly thin discs, and then further slice into slivers.
  - Cover with the vinegar.
  - Add salt and pepper to your taste.
  - Stir in thoroughly and place in a sealed container in your cooler for the day.
  - Ready to serve with dinner
  - Sprinkle with sesame seeds to garner applause. (They don't weigh much)
  - Wanna make something special? Add thin sliced fennel to the salad. *Yumm!*



*English above in typical plastic wrap, organic right, standard waxed one left*

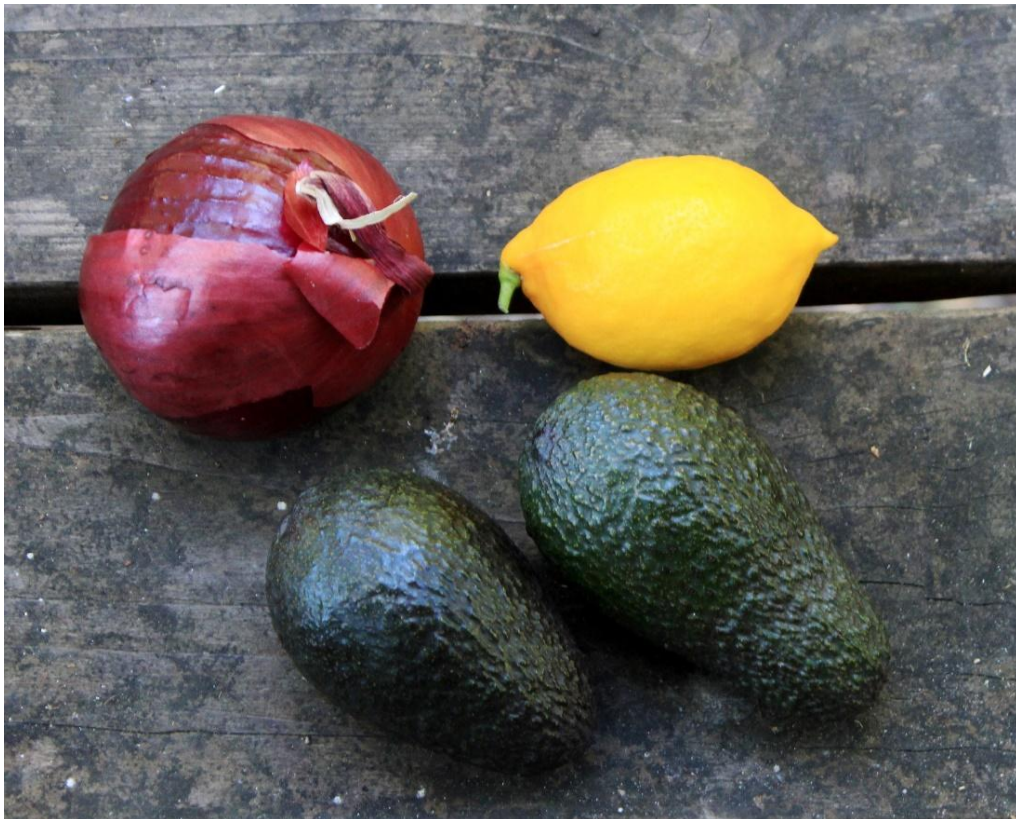
## Guacamole

Avocados come with tough skins which essentially are durable “wrappers.” When they’re not quite ripe, they’re hard and easily transported. They ripen in 3-5 days at room temperature...just getting slightly soft to the touch...which is good timing for a snack on the tailgate after a few days blending in with the scenery.

What you Need for 4 campers:

1. 2 avocados, finally softening. (Check these daily...you don’t want them overripe.)
2. 1 onion
3. 1 lemon...or a lime
4. Spicy seasoning or salsa of your choice

- Scoop out the avocado and smush into a paste in a bowl.
- Chop an onion finely and add.
- Squeeze a lemon over the blend.
- Add pepper sauce (like Cholula) or a can of salsa or (*yumm!*) fresh salsa.
- Mix it all together and dip with chips.



## Brussels Sprouts on the Wild Side

Brussels Sprouts are actually edible buds, although they boast no particular talent for cognitive enhancement...or distortion. However, like contemporary politics, Brussels sprouts can create a dire social cleavage. People either love or hate them, and the twain just don't meet. If you know your crew, Brussels Sprouts travel exceptionally well, and this recipe will foster congenial behavior.

What you need:

1. A bag of sprouts—small ones are more tender than the gamey big ones.
  2. Several good sized leeks (these typically carry a little soil, so rinse them well).
  3. Bacon. Vegetarian cooks would delete the bacon and use olive oil for the sauté.
  4. Grated parmesan
  5. Cholula or red pepper flakes—optional
  6. Balsamic vinegar—optional
- Slice the sprouts in half—the long way.
  - Cut the leeks into “coins” about 3/8” (yes, that’s a centimeter!) thick.
    - Optional—blanching. You can toss these freshly sliced sprouts and leek coins into boiling water for a couple minutes to preserve the bright green color. Otherwise, they turn “olive drab” in the pan, but taste fine.
  - Cut bacon into postage stamp sized squares and cook until crispy.
  - Pull out the cooked bacon and put aside in a bowl, but save the grease. (OK, this is not a diet-supportive, salt-restrictive dish, but you’re a hiker. Pour out some if modesty insists...easy to discard into the campfire ring.)
  - Toss the sprouts and the leeks into the hot bacon drippings. This is not for timid cooks. It will spit and spatter. (Tip the bowl gently away from you.)
  - Flip the sprouts so they brown on the flat, cut side.
  - Salting is usually unnecessary because of the bacon...add only after testing.
  - When they’re nearly done, drizzle with a modest amount of pepper sauce and toss the crispy bacon bits back in.
  - Not into pepper heat? Balsamic drizzle...optional but memorable!





## Carrizo Chorizo

The Carrizo Plain in central California produces occasional spectacular “super blooms” after favorable winters (history lesson), and the San Andreas Fault runs smack down the middle. You can stand with one foot on the North American Plate and one on the Pacific Plate and use your imagination. Flights of fancy, however, will make you hungry.

This simple supper could be assembled any number of ways, but I know this one works.

What you need:

1. One can of corn and a can of beans
  2. An onion
  3. Either a mild-moderate fresh pepper or a little tin of diced chiles
  4. Pork chorizo...it comes in a plastic tube that travels well in your cooler
  5. Olive oil
  6. A frying pan
- Fry the chorizo in the skillet until crispy. Stir frequently. Crispy is important!
  - Dice an onion and the pepper and toss it in when the chorizo is nearing desired crispiness. Simmer until the onions go translucent.
  - Drain the cans of corn and beans, and add them to the pan.
  - Stir it all together, and once it starts to bubble...you're done.
  - Eat with a spoon, or roll it up in a tortilla.



*The flanks of the Temblor Range above the Carrizo Plain in 2017*

## Tuna Fish Salad

This is not an innovation, but it's practical and fast...and healthy.

What you need:

1. Several cans of tuna or albacore. Figure one can for 2 hungry hikers.
  2. Want to go over the top? Salmon salad rocks!
  3. Several stalks of celery
  4. Half an onion
  5. Mustard
  6. Optional—pickle relish
  7. Mayonnaise or olive oil
- Dump the tuna into a large bowl or pot, break it up with a fork.
  - Chop the onion finely and toss it in.
  - Cut the celery into pea sized chunks and toss those in.
  - Optional: Add a generous tablespoon of Dijon or coarse ground mustard.
  - Relish is also optional.
  - Several tablespoons of mayonnaise...or olive oil if you prefer...and stir it in. Add more if it seems dry, but don't overdo it!
  - Ready!



*You're not from around here, are ya, Charlie!*

## Camarones al Mojo de Ajo

I first enjoyed this dish on the beach in Zihuantanejo more than 45 years ago. If a person can cook spectacularly on the beach, it has to be possible on the tailgate. It's simple, but you'll never forget it. It's an ideal supper for your second night. You won't want to stretch the welcome of frozen seafood....

What you need:

1. Gulf shrimp (check the label!), large, shelled, cleaned, and frozen. Seriously...you don't want to be cleaning shrimp in your truck. "Tail-on" is helpful. About ¼ pound per diner...more if they're ravenous. (They're not inexpensive, but these memories are priceless!)
  2. Several garlic bulbs
  3. A lime...or a lemon
  4. A stick of butter or olive oil (or a little bit of both)
  5. Salt and pepper
  6. Parsley fresh or flakes
  7. Rice...optional...takes time and planning. Sliced baguette works fine, too.
  8. Your bottle(s) of white wine
- Take the shrimp out of the frozen food cooler in the morning and let the crustaceans thaw in a regular cooler over the day. It only takes an hour or two. Don't let them get hot!
  - Chop finely a generous amount of garlic—one bulb for every 3-4 people, diced finely. More if your party agrees (they usually will).
  - Sizzle the garlic in a skillet with half and half olive oil and butter...hot, but not smoking.
  - When starting to brown, toss in the shrimp. Turn with tongs!
  - Squeeze a lime over the shrimp when they begin to turn from translucent to opaque white.
  - It makes a spectacle when the juice hits the oil...so remember your spectacles.
  - As soon as they turn opaque white on both sides, they're done. It's a transgression to overcook the shrimp!
  - Sprinkle them with chopped parsley or dried flakes...or just serve.
  - If you have time, these go nicely over a bed of rice. (I like the Mahatma Yellow Rice for this.) If you don't have time, you can serve with sliced baguette...or just enjoy the shrimp with a fork.
  - I love this with a crisp, cold Sauvignon Blanc. You might want a second bottle, since the first one seems to vaporize under an open sky.
  - You won't have any leftovers, but burn the tails in your fire that night—shrimp leftovers don't age well in the sunshine.



## Gorgonzola Pasta with Morels and Walnuts...or Pine Nuts: Granddaddy Recipe

My daughter, Aimee, spent 1993 and 94 as an exchange student in Sion, Switzerland ...headwaters of the Rhone River. As a bold 16 year old, she took an overnight train to meet Sandie and me at a culinary science conference in Rome. We had a glorious time in Rome, Umbria, and Tuscany. When it was time for her to return, we shared a meal at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant near the Rome train station. That meal left memories which I have reprised in a backpack to various mountains, deserts in 3 states, and multiple Utah backcountry splendors. Lugging the ingredients required a sacrifice in effort, but it works with considerably more easily on the tailgate...with an added personal twist with morels!

Mushrooms were not part of the Roman dish, but they have elevated the standard fabulously. Morels, beyond their unique and intense flavor, have all sorts of little hollows which trap the sauce and deliver gangbuster impact. Morels don't grow commercially. They're all foraged in the wild, but they can be purchased dried, notably in Oregon. Drying solves the problem of spoilage of fresh mushrooms. A word, though, about that. Keep the precious baggie of dried ones in the freezer until you are ready to travel. Even dried ones will occasionally carry microscopic eggs...that hatch.

This recipe is the most difficult in this little cookbook, but it's worth it. Merely uttering the word *Gorgonzola* is worth the effort for the delight of feeling it slip off your tongue.



*Wild morels in the Escalante NM*



*Sliced on a plate, ready for butter and the pan*

What you need for 4 people about to enjoy a treat:

1. Rotini pasta, 1 pound
2. 1 large or 2 small white onions. Garlic may be over the top for this dish.
3. A half cup of chopped walnuts or, especially in high Utah, pine nuts
4. Olive oil, of course, and black pepper
5. A half pint of cream...or a can of *plain* condensed milk. NOT sweetened!
6. A cup of dried morel mushrooms. If you can't find these, dried Shiitakes will do! The latter are available dried in most supermarkets.
7. 6 oz of real Gorgonzola. Another blue cheese will work, but Gorgonzola rules.
8. 2 oz of bourbon, optional.



*Dried Morels ready for rehydration*

## How to make it:

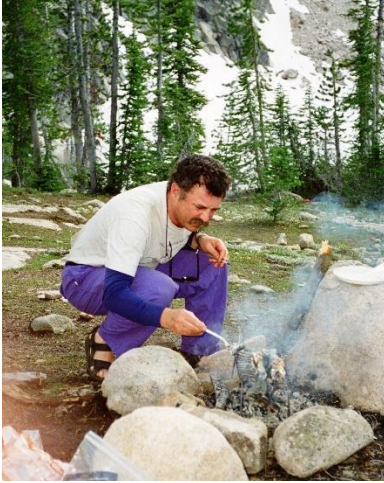
- In the morning, add the dried morels to a quart of water in a pot and cover. They'll plump up while you're hiking and be ready for supper.
- Pour off the water *and save it for the pasta boil*. No sense wasting that precious flavor! It will have some grit in the bottom, which will settle in a half hour. You'll decant the clear fluid before you use it.
- Chop the white onions finely.
- Heat olive oil in a skillet, and when hot but not smoking, toss in the onions.
- About the same time, start the water for the pasta on your second burner.
- Then toss either the chopped walnuts or the pine nuts into the skillet.
- Once the onions go translucent and the nuts start to brown, add the cream and stir nearly constantly. Lower the heat to simmer.
- When the cream is hot, add the Gorgonzola and mush it up until it assimilates with the cream. Keep stirring all the time.
- Somebody put a glass of red wine into the chef's non-dominant hand, please.
- Now is the time to start heating the pasta water. Carefully decant the brown, aromatic mushroom water into a clean pot, and if necessary, add enough additional water to cover the pasta.
- Back to the skillet! Toss in the morels and stir them in thoroughly. Squish them a bit, and as they expand, they'll pull sauce into those enchanted crevices.
- Add a teaspoon of black pepper, more if you like. You probably won't need salt.
- The aromas will attract an audience, so try not to drool in the pan.
- Optional chef's secret: Add 2 oz whiskey to the sauce and keep stirring.
- As soon as the pasta water is boiling, toss in the dry pasta and a tsp of salt.
- When the pasta is *al dente*, about 10 minutes, more at altitude, now is the time. Don't cook all the way to soft. Carefully pour off that noble water.
- Pour the Gorgonzola, morel, nut, and cream sauce over the pasta and stir it in.
- Give it 4-5 minutes to integrate, by which time the pasta will be perfectly tender.
- Practice humility, but get ready to absorb applause.

Next Page: A deliberately short note about cooking over an open fire





## The Open Fire in Changing Times



As I hinted earlier, I think cooking over an open fire should be reserved for a very few selections. Yes, it's a rustic remnant of human history for at least a hundred thousand years. But smoke is unhealthy, and blackened pots are unsavory. Spills are unforgiving. Simmering is nearly impossible. The cook's clothes will stink. Fire rings can be an eyesore, especially when campers inexplicably build new ones near an established one.

In our drought-afflicted times, there are fewer and fewer locations where we should even make an open fire. The desert is still pretty safe...at least below the pinon-juniper forest!

Charcoal is a prudent option...less visually satisfying, but effective for grilling with substantially fewer sparks and a minimal footprint. Compact, portable charcoal grills like the Weber Go-Anywhere Grill (around \$65) should be safe in most locations except in extreme conditions.



All of those downers acknowledged, there are two dinners, however, where a grill over an open fire yields unsurpassed delight.

First, of course, is **steak**. My favorite is a marinated skirt steak, transported frozen in a sealed container. Why this choice, aside from ravishing flavor and the certainty of effusive praise from your companions? The marinade has a tenderizing effect, which is helpful. It's relatively thin, so it cooks quickly, so you'll not be inhaling smoke for long. It's great rare, and it's wonderful well done...convenient flexibility if you're cooking in the dark! These flat steaks rest securely on the grill, so a calamitous spill is unlikely.

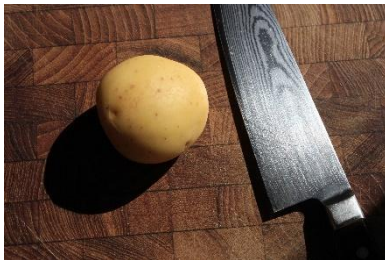
Then there are **sausages**. The choices are legion, but my favorites are linguica and German sausages from my star of all sources, the Corralitos Market in Watsonville, California. (They ship.) I bring them frozen, move them to the cooler in the morning to thaw judiciously, and cook them for supper. Sausages on a grill are easy to manage with tongs, almost laughably simple, and they taste spectacular with the short smoking.

As we all learned with less epicurean sausages in our youth, there's always the choice of impaling the little fellers on a stick and roasting them directly over the flame.

**Burgers?** OK, but I think it's not the best idea to carry ground beef for multiple days.

For traditionalists who like steak, there is a companion idea: **Fire Baked Potatoes**

- Choose small red or yellow potatoes, not huge Russets.
- Cut them twice criss-cross, so they fall into four quarters.
- Place each potato in an aluminum foil pouch; spread the segments slightly apart.
- Put onion slices, maybe some thin pepper slices, some sliced olives, and perhaps sun dried tomatoes in the crevices between the quarters. Cheese, too, if you like that (I do). This sounds like the formula for bruschetta, no surprise! (See p. 26)
- Drizzle olive oil fairly liberally over the assembly.
- Wrap the foil tightly. Don't skimp on the amount of foil...you don't want these to leak!
- Place at the edge of your coals and give them a half hour to bake. This is tricky, because too long or too close to the coals—you'll have made seasoned charcoal. Too short, well, crunchy potatoes are hard to eat. Check one after 20 minutes with a fork. If the fork slides in without much pressure, they're done.
- Figure the steak will cook in 5-8 minutes, so work back in time to put in the potatoes.



*Olive oil*



*Ready for the coals*



## The Dutch Oven

Dirt Road Chefs need to plan, assemble, and prep the ingredients for supper. No getting around that! However, with a Dutch Oven, instead of stirring and fussing over a skillet while others kick back, the chef can relax while supper is bubbling in the DO...and enjoy the company, the advancing shadows, and the freshening air.

These recipes are intended for a modest, 10" Dutch Oven. That usually serves 4-6 Dirt Road Campers nicely. Larger ovens, larger crowds, and tedious preparation are fine for the back yard but beyond the scope of this article.



*The lid lifting hook is essential for safety and avoidance of great sadness.  
The tongs handle the charcoal.*



### Charcoal Opinions:

In brief summary, start 22 briquettes in a chimney, and as soon as they have “caught,” use tongs to place 10 underneath the oven and 12 on that heavy cast iron lid. That will give you roughly a 350 degree temperature inside. Each 2 additional briquettes—one on top and one on the bottom—will add 5-10 degrees.

1. I use “regular” charcoal briquettes, ignited with a chimney and a couple sheets of newspaper or used paper towel, *never* the awful petrochemical “charcoal starter.” I carry briquettes in the typical tough paper bag, in turn inside a bucket for security.
2. “Match light” charcoal, overpriced and often the only species available in general stores close to your destination, is soaked with low grade solvents at the factory. That’s why it lights so easily. Right out of the bag, it stinks like a refinery committing an EPA violation. Then it makes putrid smoke for a long time. The cook’s clothes will stink. Your truck will stink. Your food will probably stink. Murphy’s Law will guarantee you’ll have no merciful breeze when you use this product. Buy the charcoal you want when you have better choices.
3. Coals from a campfire work fine, but they’re obviously trickier to handle, usually requiring some dexterity with a steel bucket, tongs, and shovel. They may need frequent reinforcements. Timing the cooking and the campfire can be a challenge, too. If you aren’t making an early campfire, it’s certainly legitimate to set up the oven in your fire ring...call it “ash management” and earn an honorary MBA!
4. Increasingly, commercial charcoal seems to burn down to white ash in less than an hour. Most DO recipes call for a one hour cooking time, so it’s close. Occasionally the chef will need to reinforce the original charcoal load with some fresh ones...a small nuisance on the scale of things in the world.



There are fabulous, advanced recipes for devoted Dutch Oven cookers...and wonderful books to expand the horizons of the art. Keep in mind, however, that the Dirt Road Chefs and their consumers are likely tired after hiking all day. It’s not fair to ask the conscientious cookers to spend hours in prep while others relax. The following recipes represent “starter level” DO recipes, not graduate division course work.

## Chicken Cacciatore for the Dutch Oven

Serves 4-6

What you need

1. 1 quart marinara sauce in can or jar
2. 1 can beans...white cannellini best...black, or kidney...doesn't matter too much
3. 1 can corn
4. 1 skinless chicken thigh for each diner. You'll bring these frozen!
5. Handful of mushrooms...porcini ideal. Dried ones are easy.
6. One large onion sliced coarsely
7. Sun dried tomatoes handful optional
8. Some thin sliced salami or crumbled Italian sausage optional
9. Salt and pepper to taste
10. Some red pepper flakes to taste

- Sear the chicken in olive oil until browned outside.
- Mix the hot chicken together with the beans, vegetables, sausage, and condiments in the Dutch oven.
- Cook for an hour.
- Serve with parmesan cheese.

## An alternative: Chicken Cacciatore in the Skillet

See the recipe just above for chicken cacciatore for Dutch Oven . The ingredients and steps are the same if you choose to cook this in a skillet with a lid. It should cook slowly...just barely bubbling...for 30-60 minutes for the flavors to blend.



## Lasagne for the Dutch Oven

Lasagne describes layers of tender lasagna pasta sheets with tasty things in between, usually featuring a red sauce and lots of cheese. Beyond that, there are no hard rules, and on the tailgate, you make the rules, anyway.

Serves 4-6

You will need:



1. One box “oven ready” pasta sheets, available in every grocery store. You use these simple genius sheets dry—they pick up moisture from the other ingredients as they cook. You don’t need to roll and boil your sheets! Otherwise, this wouldn’t be on the tailgate list.
  2. One jar marinara sauce, enhanced with your spices (basil, oregano, garlic) to taste
  3. One large onion and one garlic
  4. One can spinach
  5. One can mushrooms or a bag of dried, sliced mushrooms. I once used freshly picked, flat, wild oyster mushrooms once...pretty smug that evening, yessir.
  6. One bag julienne sliced, sun-dried tomatoes (optional)
  7. Optional: Chopped black olives...or kalamatas (which add a puttanesca theme)
  8. Capers (optional but simple and delicious, likewise a puttanesca theme)
  9. Meat if you choose—Italian sausage, breakfast sausage, ground beef or pork.  
There are plenty of versatile vegetarian options.
  10. One bag shredded mozzarella or mixed shredded Italian cheese blend
- In a 10 quart DO, coat sides and bottom with generous layer of olive oil.
  - Pour in  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the marinara and distribute on the bottom of the oven.
  - Then a layer of pasta sheets. You can put these in dry and break them to fit the circular contour of the oven. (They’ll plump up during cooking)
  - Then a layer of canned spinach intermingled with a sprinkling of cheese.
  - Add another layer of pasta sheets.
  - A layer of mushrooms (fresh, canned, or dried) mixed with sliced onions and chopped olives with another  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the marinara and a sprinkling of cheese (this starts sounding like making a pizza!)
  - Another layer of pasta sheets....

*More steps continue on the next page!*



- Shredded or crumbled meat if you wish, sun dried tomatoes if you like them, covered with another  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the marinara and a sprinkling of cheese. Vegetarian options abound, of course.
- Another layer of pasta sheets
- Cover the last layer with the remaining marinara and generous cheese.
- Cook for about an hour. It should be slightly firm rather than soupy when you serve it...but you'll get by either way.



*Dedicated to the color Red! Lasagne on the Rim of the Dirty Devil Canyon after hiking to Happy Canyon Narrows. Robin seems to have noticed the UFO circling for a taste.*



*This happened after we finished*

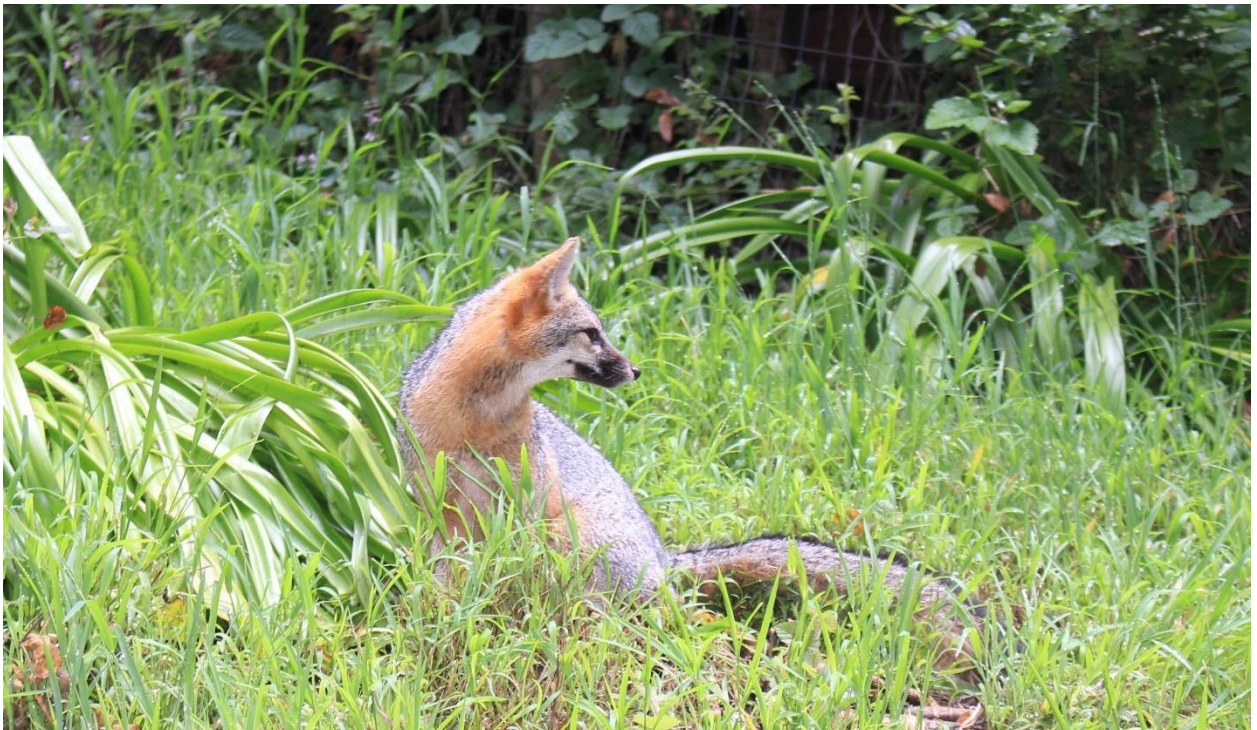
## Chicken Parmigiana for Dutch Oven

This is a classical dish for which a key feature is: Simplicity.

What you need:

1. One boneless thigh for each diner (up to 6). Bring that chicken frozen! Flattened breast is an alternative, but more work and more meat handling than ideal.
2. One container store-bought marinara
3. Shredded Italian cheese mix or mozzarella (Try to get some Parmigiana in here!)
4. One garlic (or an onion...you're on the tailgate, remember!)
5. Two eggs
6. Breadcrumbs or Panko

- Break the eggs into a dish and mix. Dredge the chicken in the egg.
- Then roll the meat in the breadcrumbs or Panko.
  - Forgot the crumbs? You can make your own breadcrumbs if you let the baguette go stale! Put the crust in a cloth towel, beat it with a stick, and...*presto!* Close enough for the Dirt Road Chef.)
- Sizzle the garlic in olive oil in a skillet, and when it starts to brown, toss in the chicken pieces and sauté until they are browned and crispy.
- Pour the marinara into the DO, and lay the crispy chicken on top.
- Cover the surface with shredded Italian cheese mix or mozzarella.
- Cook for 1 hour.



*We all love chicken. Don't worry about your gray hair.*



## White Beans with Tomatoes and Cheese

This sounds simple, and it is...and it's tasty and very quick. Serves 4

What you need:

1. One can of white (cannellini) beans
  2. One can (15 oz) tomato sauce or stewed tomatoes or paste
  3. Garlic
  4. Olive oil
  5. Shredded mozzarella
- Anoint your Dutch oven with olive oil.
  - Finely dice garlic—quantity to taste...1 or 2 cloves up to a whole garlic. Remember that if you're going heavy on garlic...everybody needs to be on board.
  - Drain a can of white beans and toss into the Dutch oven.
  - Stir in a full size can of tomato sauce or stewed tomatoes. You can thicken with a 4 oz can of paste. If it's a little runny, just cook a little longer.
  - Cover with a layer of shredded mozzarella...although other cheese would work.
  - Cook in the Dutch oven for 15-20 minutes after the briquettes have reached full heat. It will create a "cake" about an inch thick...ravishingly yummy.
  - Serve with a spoon



*When the light is changing, you value simple cooking!*



## Potatoes *au gratin*

This dish makes a spectacular accompaniment to a steak grilled over the fire, but it's fine as a main course. In the purest form, it's sliced potatoes baked under Gruyere cheese. No harm in adding other things...like sliced mushrooms, slivered leeks, or extra onions...but keep it simple.

You will need:

1. Potatoes sufficient for your crowd. For the DO, you really need to make enough to fill the floor of the vessel, which would be about 4 good sized potatoes or the equivalent in small, luscious ones.
2. A big onion (optional, but desirable)
3. A can of chicken broth
4. Gruyere cheese grated or cut into slices. No Gruyere? It's good with almost any tangy cheese, but plan ahead to do this properly.
5. Salt and pepper
6. Olive oil
7. Optional: slivered leeks, Shiitake mushrooms (dry or fresh)
  - Lube the oven with olive oil.
  - Slice the potatoes into thin wafers about 1/8" to 1/4" thick
  - Put them into the oven as if recreating the whole potato, and then tilt the stack to the side so they look staggered. That allows the precious juices to get in. You can randomly toss them, or layer them like playing cards, but it's actually easier to do it artistically...and easier to serve, too.
  - Add salt in moderation, black pepper to your preference. (This is not a dish designed for hot chili pepper heat, but you are in charge.)
  - Drizzle olive oil over the assembled masses.
  - Then pour in a half can of chicken broth...or the amount required to raise the level about 1/2" deep. (This is important, or else the potatoes may burn on the bottom. This way, they'll steam tastefully, and the fluid will be gone by the time you're done.)
  - Optional but tasty: Cover with a layer of coarsely sliced white onion...or splurge with a big, sweet Vidalia or Maui onion!
  - Cook for about 45 minutes...by which time the potatoes should be soft enough to pierce with a fork.
  - Cover the vegetables with the slices of tangy cheese, Gruyere the optimum.
  - Put the lid back on the Dutch Oven and cook for another 15 minutes...by which time the cheese should be melted but not scorched.

*Please see Appendix 1: How to slice a slippery, skiddy vegetable without drawing blood—works for potatoes, onions, and more.*

## Wells' Special Baked Beans

When I was 12 to 14, living in New Jersey, I loved to go fishing. In March, the snow was gone, but the rivers near Princeton ran high and fast. I took my bike, my pole, a beater frying pan, a can of beans, and some bacon...and spent the day by the river. I don't remember catching anything spectacular, but lunch over a small open fire was fantastic. Sixty odd years later, I reenact that combination of food and experience rather often.

Baked beans right out of the can are tasty, nourishing, simple, and quick. No disrespect from me! This Dutch Oven approach, however, takes them to a new plane!

Serves 4...and you can expand that service easily.

You will need:

1. Store-bought baked beans. I like Bush's and B&M, but they're all pretty good. I tend not to favor the really sweet ones or the ones with the ersatz BBQ sauce, and I like some firmness to the beans rather than mush. I buy the "originals"...but there are no stodgy rules when you're hungry and the sun's going down. Baked beans come in small, medium, large, and very large cans...and you're going to choose a big one... around a quart for 4 campers. Any leftovers are durable, delicious, and quick.



2. Pinto beans are firmer than the others, and they add a nice texture. Black beans, white beans, kidney beans...they're all fair game
3. Some bacon (unless you prefer vegetarian fare, in which case you know what to choose)
4. A big onion, two if you have a crowd
5. Some judicious red pepper flakes

- Cut bacon into postage stamp size pieces, and cook until crispy but not burned. You can do this in a separate skillet...or you can do it long in advance, freeze them, and bring them in a baggie in your cooler. That makes life simpler.
- Depending upon your attitude about fat, save some or all of the bacon grease to blend in with your special beans. (Hike an extra hour if that helps rationalize.) I usually incorporate about half of it. Bring what you want in the same baggie.
- Remember...bacon can be very salty, so don't add any salt until you're certain you want some. I usually add none.
- Slice up your onions—coarse slices are fine—and keep about a quarter of that pile aside in a little bowl.
- I like a subtle “pepper heat”—maybe a half teaspoon of red pepper flakes, more if you want. Test it, but remember the dry flakes yield heat only after cooking into the beans...not immediately. Don't overshoot.
- Pour the baked beans into the pot. Pour the water off the Pintos, and add those.
- Add the slivered onions and the bacon bits and stir them in. Red pepper flakes go in at this time if you elect.
- Stir the pot a few more times as it cooks to distribute the flavors.
- Cook on the DO for about 45-60 minutes. All of these ingredients have been previously cooked, so you can simmer at lower heat than you would for a chicken or beef dinner! Say 8 briquettes beneath and 10 on top instead of 12 for a 10” oven.
- The original onions will have caramelized and blended in with the beans. Add the last ¼ of the onions, and they'll retain some texture when you're finished.
- Cook another 15 minutes and serve.



*Utah Kokanee salmon photo by Barbra Berry*

*Fishing makes campers hungry for beans...especially if the fish stay in the stream*



## Boeuf Bourguignon...Call the boeuf!

There are lots of variations on the concept of beef stew...and the rules for Dirt Road Cookery are loose. Stews take a lot of time, however, so for this one, I prepare the meat and broth in advance at home, and freeze it for the trip to the outback.

This one has a thin, flavorful broth (gluten free, even!) as opposed to a thick stew sauce, which often has flour or thickeners. It's just a preference. Thanks to Jack who taught me how.

What you need to serve 4-6:

1. Beef cubes about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " across. Usually it's inexpensive chuck, often sold as "stew meat."
2. 1-2 cans of beef broth or "stock." You could get by adequately with water with beef bouillon if you forgot the canned broth.
3. One full, sacrificial bottle of decent red wine. (Taste it to be sure it qualifies! After all, conscientious chefs must verify.)
4. One can of sliced tomatoes
5. Two white onions, 3-4 carrots, and several young potatoes
6. Pearl onions. Buy them by the bag in the frozen food section. You really don't want to be peeling baby onions out there in the wind.
7. A bay leaf, salt, and plenty of black pepper

*Phase One Prep: At home before you go...take this frozen to your campsite*

- Cut the beef into cubes, and trim off excess fat.
- Sear the meat in the skillet with a little olive oil until browned on the outside.
- Cut the two onions into small pieces...they'll assimilate into the broth.
- In a large vessel, pour in the 2 cans of beef broth and the bottle of red wine. Add the chopped onions, a bay leaf, and black pepper.
- Optional—pour in the fluid from a can of stewed tomatoes. You can use a can of tomato puree if you like even more tomato flavors in your stew...matter of taste.
- Don't add salt yet...until you're sure. The broth will be reduced, and saltiness accentuated. Oversalted stew is not great.
- Bring to a boil, and toss in the browned meat.
- Either simmer on low for about 6 hours, or use a slow cooker to do that.
- Let it cool, and pour it all into a reliable (not flimsy!) plastic container and freeze it. (You'll be so happy to have something simple out there, and in the meantime, it works like block ice in your cooler.)

*Phase Two Prep: Dutch Oven in the Back Country*



- Pull your frozen stew broth out of the freezer in the morning...fine to let it thaw under the lid in the Dutch Oven. Lube the oven with olive oil first.
- You're going to add the vegetables "in the field." Freezing the vegetables ahead of time turns potatoes into mush.
- Slice carrots into "coins" about  $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick and toss them in with the stew.
- Slice potatoes into spoon sized pieces  $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick so they'll cook in your time allotment.
- Toss in a generous handful of those cute pearl onions.
- Cook them all together for an hour. Yes, you could do this in a large pot on your stove, but the DO takes care of itself and frees you for photography, conversation, and wine tasting.
- Check for saltiness, correct if necessary, and serve.



*Long White Cloud above Sevier Lake on a surly day in Western Utah*

## Root Vegetable Mélange

Root vegetables travel well, and if you, the Dirt Road Chef, want to flex some creative muscles without getting tediously cutesy...this recipe will earn you a star.

Everybody knows potatoes and carrots, but some of the most phenomenal bargains in the produce section are also underground vegetables...roots...parsnips, turnips, rutabagas, and beets. These have been staples for centuries in temperate climates.

For this recipe, I generally skip the potatoes unless I need them for quantity for the group. Potatoes have an honored presence in many other dishes in this booklet.

I like parsnips a lot...but buy the smaller ones. Some can get as big as a respectable shillelagh, and possibly as tough.

Small carrots, cooked this way, become candy.

Rutabagas and turnips are like Brussels Sprouts...some people love their “earthy” flavors and history. Others not so much.

Beets, well, the red ones taste great and add striking color...but they don’t “agree” with everybody. The golden beets are more forgiving.

Onions grow beneath the soil surface, so they qualify as root vegetables...and they are essential for this recipe. Leeks are a secret charmer, even though part of that leek grew above the ground.

What you need:

1. Root vegetables of your choice. Minimum would be carrots and parsnips. Golden beets...if you can find them. A rutabaga and turnip for intrigue. Try the leeks!
  2. Several large onions. I favor sweet Vidalia or Maui onions, but a regular white onion will do fine.
  3. Optional: A half cup of brown sugar
  4. A can of chicken broth
  5. Salt and pepper
  6. Cheese is optional.
- Coat the sides and bottom of the DO with olive oil. Be generous.
  - Slice the vegetables if they’re more than ¾” thick...but be careful with that knife.
    - These roots tend to skitter around when handled. You know the drill: Cut the round ones in half. Lay the flat, cut side down on a cutting surface, and then slice them with control and safety. (See Appendix 1, p. 73)
    - Chef’s blood is not a recommended part of the recipe.
  - Spread them out evenly on the floor of the oven, not much more than 1 ½” deep.



- Pour in about a half can of chicken broth...enough to raise the fluid level to about ½" deep.
- Optional: Sprinkle brown sugar over them. I usually don't.
- Cover the entire contents with a mound of coarsely sliced sweet onions.
- Variation: Some folks would go more lightly on the onions and cover instead with Gruyere or another tangy cheese. It's all good. I'd suggest: Keep it simple the first time.
- Cook for an hour. This sometimes would like to go a little longer. At 45 minutes, probe one of the carrots with a fork. If it resists, figure at least an hour. Check again every 15 minutes. You may need to reinforce the charcoal supply.



*Parsnip, Turnip, and Rutabaga. You already know about carrots*



Check out Appendix 1 (p. 73)



For hints about slicing slippery skiddy round vegetables safely.

No blood on the saddle...or the cutting board!

## Cassoulet

Cassoulet, again with homage to Jack Chyle, started as a rustic French stew that often incorporated leftovers...especially morsels of meat in quantities perhaps no longer sufficient for a full meal. It features white beans. Traditionally, it's baked until it develops a crust on top, often in small bowls.

Cassoulet became a shining star novelty for good chefs in fancy restaurants, like Chez Renée, and lots of creative variations emerged. This recipe includes some Italian influence, and it also involves short cuts for which we shall not apologize in the woods.

This really isn't a dish for a vegetarian preference gathering.

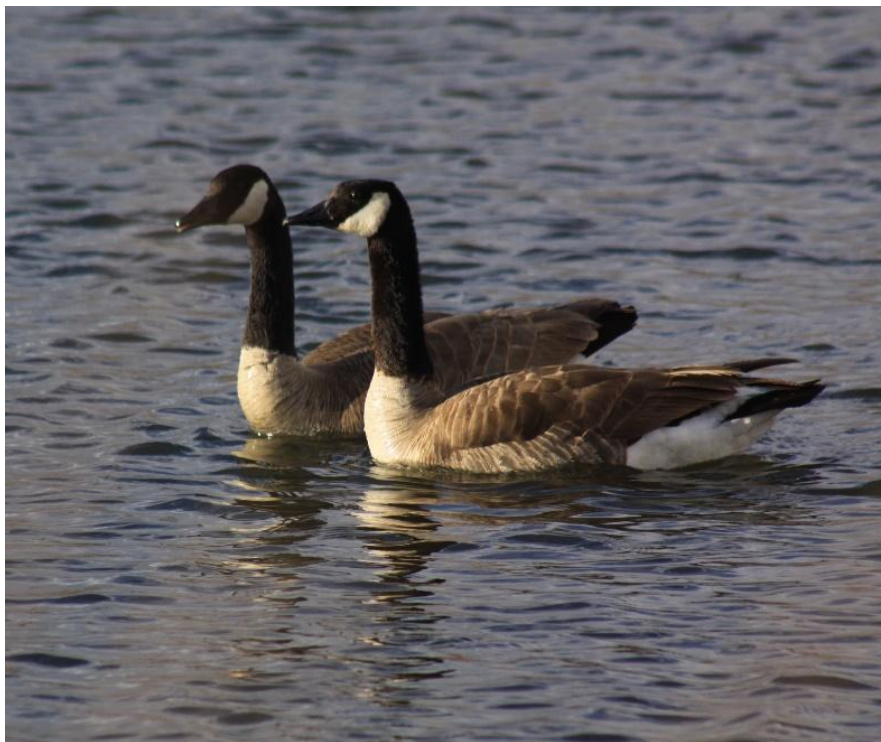
What you need:

1. Several kinds of meat. You can acquire these at different times and freeze them until you're ready. There's no way you want to do that prep on a windy evening in the desert. Bring them frozen and plop them into the Dutch oven...good enough.
  - Traditionally this includes duck meat salvaged from the carcass after the duck breast with Burgundy pomegranate sauce or *Canard à l'orange* has had its day.
  - Chicken morsels, picked from a roasted whole chicken. Dark meat prized!
  - Turkey is not traditional, but dark meat should be just fine. Freeze some.
  - Sausage...handy when you have a leftover Italian link or other kind of sausage...they're all welcome.
  - Shredded pork, chunks of pork, or pork belly...or all of these. Lacking that fancy fare, go with bacon.
2. 2 cans of *cannellini* beans (white Tuscan beans). Regular white Navy beans work.
3. 2 white onions
4. Garlic cloves
5. One bay leaf (It won't stress your shock absorbers.)
6. One can chicken broth
7. Salt and pepper
8. Tangy cheese
  - Oil the walls of oven and leave a generous layer of olive oil in the bottom.
  - Dump in the frozen meat.
  - If you are using fresh sausage, either as crumbled loose sausage or coins of a firmer one, sear it in a pan and toss it in. Timing doesn't make much difference.
  - Pour in the can of chicken broth.
  - Pour off the water from the white beans and toss them in.
  - Shred 2 onions and toss them in, along with some cloves of garlic if you like it.
  - This stew loves black pepper, but go cautiously on salt until you taste it as it cooks down.
  - The traditional recipe does not use breadcrumbs or cheese on top. I, on the other hand, think either or both would be good. Which cheese? Gruyere reigns supreme, but almost any tangy cheese will do.

- Cassoulet traditionally cooks for hours in a real oven, and it gradually thickens and acquires a crust. Ours takes less time, since reinforcing charcoal can be tedious, and besides...we're hungry. It works great as a loose stew after an hour cooking...but more important...it loves to be reheated even a day or two later.



*This old coot would remind you that, while cassoulet is traditionally made with duck meat, you are not in France and definitely not bound to obey French traditions. Chicken, brother...*



*We agree*



## Breakfast

Few sensory experiences surpass the aromas of coffee and bacon on a crisp mountain morning. Breakfast doesn't need to be complicated, and it should be fast, which is another reason for a one-click fire on a propane stove.

We'll share a few novelties here, but dirt road campers came out here mostly to hike. Expediency may be the watchword for breakfast. There's more time to cook resourcefully for dinner.

When there are leftovers from the night before, it requires a trivial amount of creativity to incorporate those into breakfast...just heat it up, make it into soup with some quick ramen, or add it to the potatoes.

### Mixed Heritage Breakfast (for 2-4)

I was born in North Carolina and raised by a mom who elevated hominy, sausage, and biscuits to an exalted standard. She wasn't so good with vegetables, alas. I think she considered them done if they were boiled long enough to ooze through the holes of a colander. However, I remember her fried okra fondly.

I have spent much of my career caring for children of immigrants from Mexico, and I esteem that cultural heritage and savor that cuisine. This breakfast merges those two cultures in the crucible of a skillet.

What you need:



1. ½ lb bulk breakfast sausage—form into little patties or bite sized chunks. More if your appetite indicates. Chorizo would be a novel touch.
2. 1 can white or gold hominy, drained! (For 4 diners, get the big can)

3. ½ onion, diced coarsely
4. 1 Anaheim pepper (use hotter ones if you please) diced coarsely
5. 1 packet red pepper flakes (pizza delivery bonus) or Cholula to taste
6. 2-4 oz canned salsa verde



*Have time? You can make your own fresh salsa verde with diced peppers, tomatillo, some finely chopped onions, some heat, and a splash of vinegar.)*

- Sauté the sausage until crisp, then toss in the onions and peppers.
- Once onions become translucent, then add the hominy and pepper flakes.
- Stir until blended and steaming hot.
- Then add a can of the salsa verde, simmer until flavors melded.
- Note: Wait before adding salt, as the sausage is often plenty salty.
- Enjoy the early light show around you.



*Red sky at morning, not great for sailors, they say, but fantastic for Dirt Road Breakfast!*

## Righteous Fried Potatoes

Potatoes work great for breakfast, and this dish would serve just as well for supper. Leftovers can find their way into a tortilla for another meal! Adjust proportions to serve 2-6. Wear glasses because this can spatter!

1. Potatoes—I prefer small, fresh ones, but any will do. Quantity for your audience
2. One or two onions...garlic is welcome, of course, as a matter of taste.
3. A mild-to-moderate pepper (I like Anaheim peppers...but milder and hotter ones are fine. A little 4 oz can of chopped chilis works just fine...they come as mild and hot.)
4. Bacon—optional for vegetarians who will use olive oil instead.
5. Capers—optional
6. Olive oil
7. Salt and pepper to taste

- Slice the potatoes about ¼" thick. They'll cook faster than large chunks. Otherwise, you may char your onions and other ingredients before the potatoes turn brown and crispy.
- Slice the onions coarsely and keep aside.
- Chop the peppers more finely.
- Boil the potatoes for 3-5 minutes to soften.

*Warning! If you do soften your potatoes before frying, pour off that hot water right away. Otherwise, they turn to mush pretty fast.*

- Start by cooking bacon. Instead of whole strips, I cut it into 2" sections for simplicity. I suppose sausage would do fine, too.
- Once cooked, remove the meat and pour off half the hot grease. (If you're planning a campfire that night, discarding into the ashes of the fire pit avoids making messes that attract pests. It's better not to bury it, or else some 4 legged creature will just dig it up and eat it while lounging upon your sleeping bag.)
- You can also use yesterday's bacon grease if you have left-overs that have been protected from critters.
- If you're doing this in vegetarian mode, just heat olive oil instead. Be liberal with quantity...you'll be hiking today, and it's the oil that makes things crispy.
  - Toss the onions into the hot grease or oil.
  - When the onions go translucent, toss in the softened potatoes and the peppers. Capers if you wish.
  - Cover until the potatoes are steaming, then open the cover.
  - Stir to avoid sticking and burning...black potatoes are a little too rustic.
  - Taste a few potatoes and add salt only if it needs it. (Bacon is salty!)
  - Black pepper to taste. I'm fairly liberal with this!
  - Remove when the potatoes reach the level of browning that appeals to you.
  - Diners who like hot-and-spicy can add Cholula to their hearts content.



## George's Classic Oatmeal

Oatmeal travels easily, waits patiently, and hits the spot reliably! I harbor a prejudice that the ultra-quick/instant oatmeal, a staple for backpackers, is just too close to wallpaper paste to really enjoy when you have a functioning kitchen at your disposal. Slower cooked oats do require some attention, but after coffee, that's not too much to ask from one diligent camper.

What you need:

1. Slow cooked oatmeal, quantity intended for your group for one breakfast, in a new Ziploc bag. Gold standard? Steel cut oats.
  2. Dried fruit of your choosing: cranberries, raisins, possibly apples or cherries...pre-mixed in same bag as the oats
  3. Cinnamon, mixed in with the other delectables.
  4. Brown sugar (if you like). Transport in a baggie.
  5. Tear off the directions from the original package and keep them in the bag, a good habit with so many products available.
- Dump the pre-mixed bag into the boiling water, following the directions for quantity.
  - Tamp down heat.
  - Stir nearly constantly until finished. Add a little water if too sticky.
  - Rinse the pot and utensils promptly.



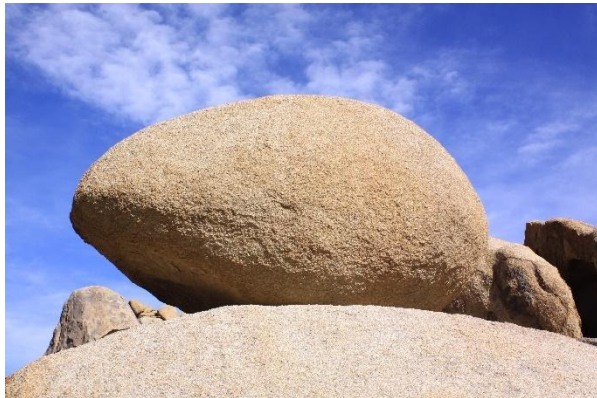
## Eggs

Confession: I don't eat many visible eggs, probably a vestige of some long-expired childhood trauma rather than anything "medical," but my friends gobble them up!

There are sturdy plastic containers specifically designed to transport fresh eggs. If you use one of these, pad it with a towel in your cooler. Don't trust the snaps on the container! It's prudent to encircle the container with an "insurance rubber band."

People who love eggs obviously know how to cook them, and the techniques on the tailgate with a propane stove are no different from home. Go for it!

Important responsibility: Either bury those eggshells or take them out of the woods in your garbage bag. They create unwelcome litter for people who may follow you, and the shells don't reliably burn unless a fire is really roaring hot.



*Some eggs are hard to crack.*



## Cold Cereal

This may sound unpatriotic, but cold cereal requires milk, and milk travels poorly. The containers are unreliable, and milk makes wretched messes when it spills.

I'd rather have dry granola and an apple...or oatmeal. You will decide!



*Dawn light on Mt. Whitney from the Alabama Hills. I'll have coffee first, then maybe bacon.*



*Bristlecones before dawn, Powell Point, Utah. Potatoes this morning.*



## Desserts

### Irish Peaches (for 2)

If you make a campfire, you'll love the glow of the fire...and these peaches!

What you need:

1. One can generic sliced peaches in syrup...use more for more celebrants!
2. One cinnamon stick, two if the flavor enchants you
3. One Meyer Lemon (2 if they're small)
4. Two Twining's Irish Breakfast tea bags
5. 2 oz Jameson's Irish whisky
6. Honey

*Before supptime:*

- Put the peaches in a pot, along with the fluid in the can, the cinnamon stick, and two tea bags.
- Squeeze the lemon into the pot, and then toss in the rinds, too.
- Add a generous 2 oz of honey, less if you like sour, more if you wish. Sampling is prudent!
- Bring to a boil and remove from heat.
- Add the Jameson's, cover, and put somewhere safely out of traffic...maybe with a rock on top of the lid to avert sadness.
- Let it steep with all the goodies in the pot until it's time for a fruity nightcap.
- Remove the tea bags and bring back to a boil.
- Serve in a cup with a spoon.
- Honoring the Irish heritage, this one will come across a little bitter at first, and then charming.
- If you're cold, you won't stay cold for long.

### A Variation: Hanaupah Cherries: A Memorable Indulgence

Substitute canned Bing Cherries in heavy syrup for the peaches, and do the rest the same way.

Canned cherries are labeled as pitted, but you'll find an occasional rogue seed.



## Apple Brown Betty

This dessert is a Fall camping specialty, and it requires a Dutch Oven. It can cook peacefully while you're enjoying supper, starting a campfire, and firing up your imagination...then expect to be amazed!

What you need:

1. Crisp apples
  2. Some oatmeal—the traditional slow cook kind, not instant
  3. Brown sugar and/or maple syrup
  4. Cinnamon powder
  5. Butter—although olive oil will work
  6. Optional: A lemon or an orange, and a half ounce of vanilla
- Cut the apples into thin slices and lay them in the oven an inch or two thick.
  - Throw in a handful of oats.
  - Sprinkle with brown sugar and a generous amount of cinnamon.
  - Cut butter into many small “pats” and distribute.
  - Optional—Squeeze a lemon into the mix.
  - Optional—add a tablespoon of vanilla (Common practice, but I don't think necessary, especially if you use the last direction on this list).
  - Flour? I say no, at least out in the wild. Just keep it simple (and gluten free, too).
  - Cook in the DO for an hour.
  - Optional—toss in an ounce or two of bourbon or rum when it has 10-15 minutes to go.





Appendix 1: How to slice a slippery, skiddy vegetable without drawing blood



Let's begin!



Slice it in half



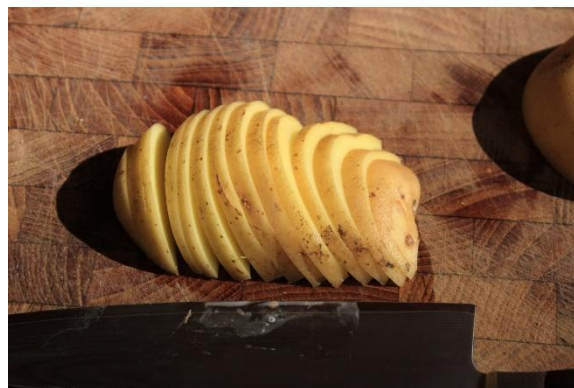
Lay the flat sides down...they'll stay put!



Easy slicing



Finished slicing!



Tilt the stack for an artistic effect



## Appendix 2: How to keep your frozen goods cold an extra day or two



*Frozen water bottles & food first*



*Then a layer of reflective bubble wrap*



*Then your refrigerator temp goods*

Compulsively close the cooler as soon as you retrieve your stuff. Wrap in a down jacket or a blanket. Keep out of the sun, remembering that the sun moves while you're hiking.

## Afterword

In the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, Keira Knightley's spunky character stands up to the grizzled pirate Barbossa, played by Geoffrey Rush. She exclaims: *I invoke the Pirate Code!*

The pirate flashes a wry smile and responds:

*Well, actually, it's more like a guideline.*



Most of the ideas, suggestions, and recipes in this booklet are reasonable guidelines. It's my hope that you will take some of these ideas and expand upon them with your personal creative touches, and then come home with great memories, fabulous photographs, and a happy tummy.

Wells Shoemaker MD  
Spring, 2022



*Life is short. Dust is everywhere. It's crunchy. Shelter your supper from the wind.*

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