



CHILCOTIN STUDIES:

FOOD.



BY: DAVE FALCONER.



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Indian Food

HISTORICAL

PIT COOKING

George Myers - Stone

Many of the older Indian people throughout British Columbia remember watching their mothers use steaming pits to cook food. The pit varied in size and design in different areas, but the basic method was the same.

In the Southern Cariboo the pits were made large enough to allow four to six women to cook their food together. A pit was dug 4' x 6' x 6' deep.

Sticks three inches thick were laid across the top of the pit. Stones, six inches thick, were placed on top of the sticks. One woman reported that stones from the bottom of the stream bed would crack and should not be used. A fire of fir, alder or cottonwood was built on top of the stones. The fire heated the stones and burned the supporting sticks, releasing the rocks which fell into the bottom of the pit. The hot embers and stones were spread with a stick evenly over the bottom of the pit.

Sticks, about one inch thick and four feet long, were stuck in the pit floor between the red hot stones. The upper end of the sticks should be above the top of the pit. (These sticks were used when water was added to the pit to steam the food.)

Next, the hot rocks and embers were covered with a two inch layer of earth. Small twigs of maple bushes, service berry bushes or rose bushes were spread over this layer of earth. These twigs were added for flavouring to give a sweet flavour to the food as it steamed.

Washed timber grass was placed over the flavouring twigs and used to line the sides of the pit to keep the food clean. Mats of closely woven cedar bark or bullrushes were placed on top of the timber grass and around the sides of the pit.

Each woman would place her food on top of the mats in a special area. The selection of food and the amounts to be cooked were important because the cooking time would be the same for all; i.e., it would not be possible for one woman to cook a five inch level of camas roots while her neighbour was cooking a ten inch layer. Food was shared so that each woman would have approximately the same amount to cook.

Mats were placed on top of the food, then more flavouring twigs.

A layer of damp timber grass was laid over the flavouring twigs. Earth was piled on the grass until the pit was filled to ground level.

PIT-COOKING



PIT-COOKING

The sticks sticking out from the hot rocks were moved from side to side to slightly enlarge the holes. A small amount of cold water was poured down the enlarged hole to the rocks to produce steam. The water was used in small quantities to keep the rocks from cooling too quickly. The sticks were taken from the holes and the holes plugged immediately.

A small fire was built on top of the covered pit and allowed to burn throughout the night. The next morning the food had cooked and was ready to be uncovered and eaten.



BANNOCK

Bannock was introduced to the Indian population by early explorers and missionaries. It is often used now as a substitute for yeast bread especially in areas where commercially produced bread is not available or is very expensive.

BASIC BANNOCK

Julia Gilpin - Anuham

Oven temperature 425°F.

In a large bowl combine:

4 cups flour

3 rounded teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

Mix dry ingredients well, and add a mixture of:

3/4 cup evaporated milk

3/4 cup water

Gently combine the ingredients to form a soft dough then knead eight to ten times. Overworking the dough gives a tough bannock. Stack four or five sheets of clean newspaper on a table and flour the top sheet well. Press the dough into a circle about one-half inch thick. Slash the top with a knife at two inch spaces making one and one-half inch cuts halfway through the dough.

Bake the bannock on the newspapers, aluminum foil or a cookie sheet for twenty to twenty-five minutes. When done it will be golden brown in colour. Cool the bannock under a towel for ten minutes. Cut into wedges or squares and serve warm with margarine and homemade jam.

Notes:

1. Bannock dipped in seal grease is reported to be delicious.
2. Two tablespoons shortening or bear fat cut into the flour makes a more tender bannock.

COMPILED

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BONFIRE BANNOCK

Prepare the basic dough. Press out the dough according to directions, but make it one-quarter of an inch thick. Cut in strips one inch wide. Wind the dough, spirally, around a stick about one-half inch thick. Holding the stick about eight inches from the fire, rotate it slowly until the bannock is golden brown.

CAMP BANNOCK

Bannock can also be cooked in a frying pan next to a campfire. Follow the recipe for basic bannock but press the dough to one-quarter of an inch in thickness; cut it into circles. Lean the frying pan against a rock or log so that it faces the fire at an angle. The bannock should be from six to eight inches from the fire depending on the heat. Cook until the top is brown; flip over, and continue cooking until the second side is brown.

FRIED BANNOCK

Prepare the basic bannock dough, rolling it slightly thinner. Cut out circles or squares about three inches in diameter. Deep fry in one and one-half inches of oil until golden brown. Serve warm.

Nutritional Notes:

1. An egg, beaten slightly, may be added with the milk to the bannock dough.
2. Bannock may be made with whole wheat flour.

Fruit Bannock add 1 cup berries, dates, raisins or currants.



WILD MEAT

WILD MEAT (Warning)

Sometimes pork or meat from wild animals is infested with a tiny worm called *Trichinella Spiralis*. If infested meat is not cooked thoroughly the worm can cause a disease called Trichinosis. It is important that wild meats be well preserved and well cooked. If the meat is to be preserved by smoking, it should be smoked thoroughly and not used until forty days after the animal was killed. (The worms will all be dead after forty days.) Freezing meat at -16°F for 36 hours or $+5^{\circ}\text{F}$ for at least twenty days will also kill the parasite. Always cook wild meat to the well-done stage (until there are no pink parts of the meat remaining).

SMALL ANIMALS

Susie Alphonse - Anaham
Margaret Boyd - Anaham



Various types of meat are barbecued over the open fire. Beaver is skinned, cleaned, and the head and tail are removed. Rabbit is skinned, cleaned and the eyes are removed, but it is not necessary to remove the head.

Porcupine is a very interesting animal to prepare and is said to have a very rich and occasionally gamey flavour. The animal is often skinned before cooking, but this has a drying affect on the meat. A second method of preparing porcupine involves placing the animal in an open fire for one-half hour or until the quills are all collapsed and burned. The burnt quills and scorched skin are removed by scraping. The eyes and viscera are also removed.

According to one Indian woman, the quills of the porcupine may pop in the fire as they are being burned. Parts of the popping quills may fly out and penetrate the skin of persons too near the fire. The quills are said to get under the skin and move like "sharp needles" causing great pain and infection.

Small animals are barbecued whole after cleaning. To hold the stomach cavity open, small sticks are placed crosswise in the cavity. The animal is then pierced with a long sharpened stick from end to end, through the center. The stick should be two feet longer than the distance across the fire and strong enough to support the meat. The meat should be placed in the middle of the stick; the stick being supported one or two feet above the fire with two forked sticks. Turn the animal occasionally until it is well browned and well cooked.



LARGE ANIMALS

Deer, moose and cariboo, because of their large size, are not usually barbecued whole. The rib and shank (or front shoulder) sections of the deer, and the rib sections of the larger animals are barbecued. The meat is pierced with a sharp willow stick through the center from one edge to the other. The stick should be approximately three and one-half feet long and strong enough to support the meat. The opposite end of the stick will be embedded in the ground about one and one-half feet from the fire at an angle which places the meat approximately one foot above the flame. The stick may be moved closer to the fire or farther away depending on the size of the roast. Cook the meat, turning periodically, until the meat is thoroughly browned and tender when tested with a sharp stick.



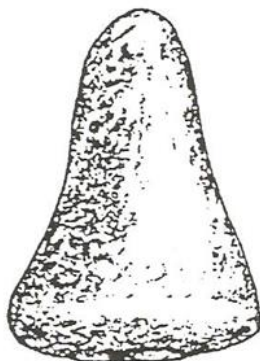
ROAST MOOSE HEAD

Margaret Boyd - Anaham

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The heads of many animals were used for different dishes. Deer, moose and caribou heads were often roasted over an open fire. The tongue was removed from the head and boiled over the fire. The nose, often considered a delicacy, was also removed from the head and roasted until soft.

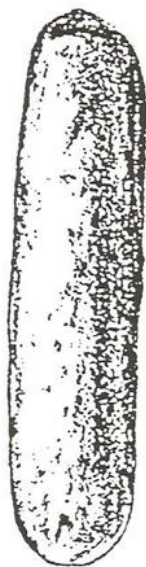
After the tongue and nose had been removed, the head was skinned and the eyes and horns removed. One end of a three foot stick, large enough to support the head, was forced into the centre of the head. The other end of the stick was stuck in the ground, one foot from the fire, at an angle that placed the head one foot over the fire. The head was turned occasionally as it roasted, until the meat was tender.



BONE MARROW

Josephine Jaffe, Kitty Gilpin - Anaham

After the meat was removed from the long bones of large animals, they were cooked to make the bone marrow available for eating. The bones were placed directly on the coals of open fires to cook until they cracked, and the lard-like marrow showed through the cracks. The bones were then removed from the fire, and the tasty marrow was eaten.

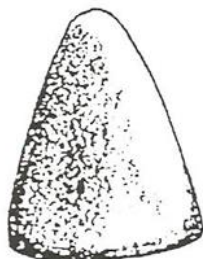


DEER INTESTINES

The Indian people had a variety of uses for animal stomachs and intestines. The cod fish stomach was used as a casing for "Indian Cheese" made from salmon eggs. (Because it caused many people to have food poisoning, the recipe for Indian Cheese has not been given.) The small intestine of the bear was used as sausage casing, and the small intestine of the deer was dried over a fire and eaten.

The people of the Caribou area prepared deer intestines in the following manner:

The small intestine of the deer was removed from the animal, cleaned, washed well and turned inside out. Small amounts of fat, for flavour, were retained on the intestine. The intestines were placed on a rack about two feet above an alderwood fire, turned frequently until dry, sliced in strips and eaten.



FISH: SALMON.

Salmon continue to be very popular and are the staple food of many coastal and interior Bands. Food fishing is carried on as long as the salmon are running, and in coastal fishing villages most summer hours are spent either commercial or food fishing.

In the interior, families often leave their homes for weeks during the salmon runs and camp near the rivers. The winter supply of salmon is caught, cleaned, and preserved on the

THE SMOKEHOUSE

FISH

Although the methods of cutting fish for smoking may differ from Band to Band, the smoking process is relatively unchanged. The typical smokehouse is a wooden building about nine feet square. It has a hole in the roof to allow smoke to escape and a place for the fire on the floor. Sometimes a circle of bricks or concrete, about three feet in diameter, contains the fire. Wooden poles, about one inch in diameter, hold the food. Placed horizontally, the poles are five feet above the fire.

A hard wood such as cottonwood or alder provides the smoke. The fire is not large; its purpose is to smoke, not cook, the meat. Hung on the rack, above the fire, the fish or meat must be turned daily. The time required for smoking will vary with the type of food being preserved, the amount of smoke the fire produces and the degree of smoking desired.

Fish and game may be half-smoked or fully-smoked. Half-smoked food has a smoke flavour but is still soft. It can be eaten immediately, if cooked, but if it is stored for the winter it must be preserved by canning or freezing. At the fully smoked stage, food is dry with a pronounced smoke taste. It may be stored without further processing in a cool dry place for the winter.

DRIED SALMON

In the interior of the Province of British Columbia, drying is the usual method for preserving salmon. The fish hang on racks over small fires which provide only enough smoke to keep flies away, but not to add any flavour. Although alder wood is used to produce the smoke, any type of wood may be used for the rack.

The racks are constructed with crossbars five feet from the ground. (See illustration.)

Prepare the salmon for drying as follows:

1. Remove the head, cutting just below the gills.
2. Split the fish lengthwise down the underside, and clean out the insides.
3. On either side of the backbone, leaving one-half inch of meat on the bones, make a long cut right through the meat and the skin on the back. Leave the backbone attached at the tail. The fish will be in three large pieces which remain joined at the tail — the backbone with meat attached and two large pieces of meat on either side of the centre strip.
4. Split the two large side pieces in half lengthwise so that the fish is in five strips held together by the tail.
5. Hang the fish on the drying rack with the backbone and the two strips of meat next to the backbone on one side of the pole. The outermost two strips are on the other side of the pole for balance.
6. Leave the fish for two to four days or longer depending on the weather. Let it dry thoroughly, then store it for the winter in a cool, dry place.

Occasionally Indians of the interior of British Columbia store dried salmon as did their ancestors. They hang the dried fish high in trees away from dogs and pests. Now that plastic bags are available these are sometimes used to cover the food. The bags should have small holes like the bags vegetables are sold in and should be large enough to allow air to circulate.

DRIED BERRIES

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Before home canning became a widely used method of food preservation, drying was the main way to keep food through the winter. Berries were dried whole, after crushing or after they were boiled.

BERRIES

SUN-DRIED BERRIES



Berries such as huckleberries, blueberries, wild cranberries and saskatoon berries were placed on mats to dry in the sun for several days. Canvas is more commonly used now for drying berries. When the berries are hard and dry, they may be stored in a cool dry place for winter use.

To Serve

1. Soak the berries overnight in fresh water.
2. Boil for a few minutes
3. Serve with eulachon grease and sugar.

DRIED BERRY CAKES

George Myers - Stone

In the last century, berries were commonly dried in cakes. A rack, like the one used for drying meat, held the drying berry cakes. When the rack was built for drying berries, the lengthwise sticks on the top of the rack were split in half so they were flat on top and about two inches wide and two inches thick. They formed a flat platform on which was placed a layer of timber grass about one-quarter of an inch thick. The berries were cooked in baskets with the addition of a small amount of water. When the berry mixture was soft and juicy it was poured over the timber grass to a depth of one-quarter inch and left to dry. When the first layer was dry another was made on top of it until a berry cake about three inches thick had built up. Sometimes the finished cakes were wrapped in birch bark and stored for winter.

For serving, the berry cake was broken into serving sized chunks and dropped into a basket. A small amount of water was added and when the water was absorbed the pieces of berry cake were eaten. They were reported to taste like jam. In coastal areas eulachon grease was added before serving. When sugar became available it was added to the cooked berry juice.

CANNED SOOPALLALIE BERRIES

1. Wash and drain the berries.
2. Add a small amount of water but no sugar.
3. Boil the berries until they break and juice forms.
4. Pack hot into hot jars, leaving 1/2 inch head space.
5. Adjust caps.
6. Process pints 10 minutes and quarts 15 minutes.

INDIAN ICE CREAM

Indian ice cream is a traditional fruit dish made from soopallalie (buffalo or soap) berries. Long ago the berries were gathered by placing a cedar bark mat under the bushes. When the bushes were hit the berries would fall onto the mat. From there, they were put in wooden boxes which were made especially for carrying berries. After gathering, the berries were rolled down a damp board. The berries would fall into a basket but the twigs, leaves, and dirt would stick to the plank.

Before beaters were used people would use their hands to whip up the berries. The hands and arms were scrubbed as well as the boxes used for making ice cream so that no grease would come in contact with the berries. Grease would prevent foam formation.

Method

1. In a clean metal, porcelain or glass bowl combine:
2 tablespoons canned soopallalie berries
1/4 cup water
2. Beat until a foam forms. Gradually add:
3-4 tablespoons sugar
(up to 1/2 cup may be added if desired)
3. Continue beating until the foam is stiff. Serve immediately.
Serves 4-6.

Note: If fresh berries are used, one cup of fresh berries is equal to two tablespoons of canned. Crush 2 tablespoons fresh berries and mix with 1/4 cup of cold water. Begin beating the mixture then add the remainder of the cup of fresh berries. Follow above recipe beginning at step 2.

WILD ROSE JELLY

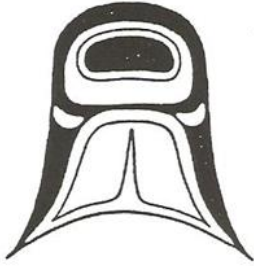
Bella Bella Newspaper

The ripe fruit or hips of wild roses make an excellent jelly. This jelly is high in Vitamin C, a vitamin which is important for health. We should eat food containing Vitamin C every day.

1. Boil until tender:
1 pound rose hips
1/2 pint water
2. Sieve the pulp and add:
1 pound sugar for each 1 pound pulp
3. Return the rose hip mixture to boil until it gels. The jelly point is reached when the jelly breaks in a sheet or flake from a cool spoon dipped in the mixture.

BERRIES

PRESERVING BERRIES



Chokecherries and other berries used to be preserved in pits. The berries were cooked by the pit method. (Refer to Pit Cooking.) Toasted skunk cabbage leaves rather than timber grass lined the pit. Berries were piled on top of the leaves almost level with the ground and covered with a cedar mat. Hot rocks were used and the berries cooked fifteen minutes before the cover was removed. When cooked, the berries turn almost white.

The berries were transferred to another pit that had been lined with toasted skunk cabbage leaves. They were then covered with additional skunk cabbage leaves, cedar bark mats, earth, and stored until winter. The head of the household would dig out the berries and take the first spoonful. It was said if this person made a loud noise spitting out the leaves this was an invitation for everyone else to join in.

Dandelion Greens -- Cut off the group of leaves at the top of the root. They are much easier to gather and clean when cut in this way than when each leaf is cut. Wash and discard the blossoms, eat the leaves in salad or cooked.

Lamb's Quarters Or Silver-Leaved Pigweed -- This is a common garden weed; the stems and undersides of the leaves have a silver-grey appearance. It can be served raw in salads or cooked like spinach.

Fireweed -- The new leaves and young shoots may be cooked in a little salted water or eaten raw.

Wild Onions -- These you find growing among other plants, usually close to water. They can be stored and used in stews or salads.

Water Cress -- This plant grows at the edge of brooks, rivers, or in any place where water stands, such as swampy places. It can be used in salads right after picking.

All recipes, pages 1 to 10... were taken from a Health and Welfare Canada publication, INDIAN FOOD. This superb little "cook-book" (it's much more than just a cook-book), is available from Health and Welfare Canada (Federal Gov't) Office, 145-S.4th Ave., (basement of Atwood Medical Clinic), Williams Lake, B.C. Telephone: 392-6578 or 392-6579.

