

## Lightweight Food

### Food for the Lightweight Trail

*Helen Singh The Leader, April 1984*

With members of your patrol, prepare a menu and buy the food for your camp, giving special attention to nutrition and storage--Campcraft Achievement Badge, Gold Stage.

Demonstrate lightweight individual and patrol backpacking equipment, food and clothing to Scouts working on the silver stage -- Exploring Achievement Badge, Gold Stage.

Organizing for a lightweight camp can get pretty complicated when you consider that the ideal weight ratio for your pack is 20% of your body weight; some of us carry 10 to 20 lbs. of excess baggage before we even hoist packs onto shoulders; fast-growing teenagers may have the weight of an adult, but not adult stamina to go along with it; and some 11 year old Scouts weigh 60 to 70 lbs. soaking wet.

If you keep personal gear and patrol equipment to a bare minimum, carry nylon tents, and can afford a sleeping bag which is both warm and light, your next area of concern is choosing the right menu. That means you have to consider a number of factors about food.

**Weight--**You can reduce weight by removing the outer cardboard package (keeping the instructions) and repackaging the contents in plastic bags. Avoid cans where possible, and never take along glass containers. Reduce water content by choosing dehydrated foods.

**Crushability--**Put bread and cookies at the top of the pack, leave fresh eggs in their styrofoam container, secured with masking tape. Dehydrated eggs are available, but our Scouts complain so bitterly about the smell and taste that we've only been able to use them by sneaking them into pancake mix.

**Meltability --** Because margarine mooshes and leaks in hot weather, pack it in its original plastic container. Frozen meat bleeds all over your pack as it thaws if you don't double-bag it in ziplock bags. Chocolate-covered cookies and chocolate bars melt and stick together but, if you close your eyes while eating, they still taste scrumptious.

**Perishability --** Whether or not you take perishables depends on the time of year and length of trip but, if you do, use them first. We prefer "real" bacon and eggs and steak for the first couple of meals and accept the extra weight for the luxury of flavour. Steak starts the trip frozen, well wrapped and double bagged. If you are careless with perishables, especially meats, you risk food poisoning. It, like gastroenteritis from unclean drinking water, can leave you exploding at both ends, unable to travel, and a worry and handicap to the rest of the group.

**Bulk --** The recommended weight consumption per person per day is two pounds. A strenuous hike is no

time to be on a diet. You need to eat nutritious, energy-producing foods to keep going.

### Menu Tips

Sometimes it feels like I've been cooking for the past 200 years, so it's difficult to think in terms of the novice chef and remember to point out that two glugs of soya sauce equals two tablespoons, and a dash of pepper doesn't mean to dump the whole shakerful into the stew. Oh yes, and you have to drain the water after you've cooked the noodles and, if the noodles spill out during the process, it's nice if they land on moss instead of sand.

When you are a backpacking chef, you have to consider the likes, dislikes and food allergies of all members of the group. You have to plan cooperatively and share reasonably. For instance, it is reasonable to exclude onions from the menu if you and onions don't get along, but it is not reasonable to insist you will die of starvation if you can't have your six eggs for breakfast. Listen and read as much as you can, ask the advice of parents for shopping and pre-camp preparations, and then decide what is convenient for your group.

Many of my suggestions deal with the two biggest problems in menu planning; enhancing the flavour of foods and judging exactly how much of each kind of food to take in order to satisfy everyone's needs. Because our troop has six Scouts, I've based my recipes and suggestions on the magic number 6.

### Suggestions & Recipes

#### Bread

Allow four slices of bread per person if the menu calls for sandwiches on the trail, but only two or three slices if it's part of breakfast.

#### Cereal

Of all the supermarket dry cereal varieties, the granola types are the most tasty, nutritious and filling, so that 3/4 of a cup is plenty for one serving.

#### Spaghetti

I'm not partial to spaghetti on the lightweight menu because noodles are heavy compared to instant potatoes or instant rice. If you do choose spaghetti, make a meat sauce with 2 lbs. hamburger; 1 package spaghetti sauce mix; 1/2 lb. cheddar cheese and a small can of tomato paste or tomato soup. You can add a teaspoon or two of sugar to sweeten the acid taste of anything in which tomato is used. I measure spaghetti noodles by the fistful; one fistful per person. (If you want to be technical, I counted them. One fistful equals 123 noodles).

#### Hamburgers

Pre-mix hamburger patties at home. To 1 1/2 lb. hamburger (1/4 lb. per person), add 1/2 cup quick oats; 2 tablespoons each bran and wheat germ; and 2 eggs. For flavour, use 1 tsp. onion powder (or 1

### **Lightweight Food**

finely chopped onion, or 1/2 package onion soup mix); 2 glugs each of soya and Worcestershire sauce; and 1 tsp. thyme. Freeze, wrap, double ziplock, and make this one of your first meals.

### Stew

For mulligan stews of a lightweight variety, use 2 cups dried beef; 1 package each onion, vegetable and mushroom soup mix; 1 cup vegetable flakes (cabbage, tomato, celery, carrot and parsley); 1/2 package dried peas; 1 cup elbow macaroni; 1/4 cup ketchup; and 1/2 cup instant rice. Add water as needed. If you prefer thick gravy rather than the watery-soup style, use 2 tbsps. cornstarch mixed in 1/4 cup cold water as a thickener. When we make stew for a standing camp, we use fresh vegetables and hamburger and add a bonus can of golden mushroom soup for flavour and colour. Serve stew on a bed of instant mashed potatoes.

### Pancakes

Spruce up pancake mix by adding 1 cup chopped, dried apple slices. If you don't want to carry liquid pancake syrup, you can make your own on the trail with hot water, 4 big glugs of honey and 1/2 teaspoon mapeline.

### Jerky

I make jerky basically the way Doug Cunnington described (the Leader, April 1983), except that I marinate the meat slices overnight and use brown sugar. I give each layer of meat slices its own sprinkling of spices and sugar, and leave out the liquid smoke, much as I love its flavour.

### Gorp Balls

Make sure the Scouts don't pack food in the same place as their socks and underwear. Food and patrol cooking gear go in the top of the pack, and personal gear in the bottom and the side pockets. Reserve one side pocket for trail munchies: nuts, dried fruits, smarties, hard candies and chocolate bars. Each Scout should have his own bagful to ration out to himself so that it lasts the duration of the trip. Our favourite is gorp balls; chopped dehydrated fruits and nuts "glued" together with honey, peanut butter and melted chocolate chips and rolled in icing sugar. Use 1/3 cup each raisins, apples, apricots, dates and coconut. Add 1/2 cup sesame seeds, 1/3 cup walnuts and 2 cups peanuts. For the glue, use 1 cup chocolate chips, 1/3 cup honey and 1/2 cup peanut butter.

### Porridge

Plain old porridge is almost palatable when you add 1/2 cup chopped dates and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon.

### Ichiban Soup

I don't know a Scout who doesn't like this "bird's nest soup". You use 3 packages Sapporo Ichiban, 1/2 package dried peas and 3 eggs. Cook the peas in six cups water. While they're still in the package, break the Ichiban noodles into quarter sections and add to peas. Scramble eggs and stir into soup.

### Mini-pizzas

Our Scouts have begun to experiment with different cooking methods. We tried cooking bacon and eggs in a paper bag and found the bag didn't disintegrate, but the eggs stuck to the sides a bit. I thought they tasted delicious, but the boys were only politely enthusiastic. An experiment which met more approval was mini-pizzas baked in a cardboard box oven. Smear ketchup on hamburger buns, sprinkle with ground oregano, lay on slices of garlic sausage, top with cheddar and sprinkle with parmesan (optional).

### **Judging Quantities**

It's easy to judge how many eggs, bacon slices, steaks, cheese slices, packages of instant porridge or hamburgers you need for each person. To judge quantities for hot chocolate, oatmeal, instant rice, soups, potatoes and puddings, and pancakes, read the package instructions. I usually pack too much margarine because it doesn't spread well when cold and some like it thin while others like it thick. An educated guess for a group of six who use margarine quite heavily is 1/4 lb. per meal. Iced tea, which is just as delicious hot as cold, is also very difficult to gauge because the consumption rate depends on the weather.

### **Home-made vs Ready-mixed**

Whenever practical, use home-prepared foods instead of commercially-made items. Spaghetti sauce mix, soup mixes, liquid smoke for jerky, fruit leather and other similar products contain some chemicals; preservatives, monosodium glutamate and suspected carcinogens. The Canadian Consumer (May 1983) survey on canned and dry-mix soups showed: the high heat used to process canned soups destroys many of the nutrients and leaves vegetables mushy; the dehydration processing of dry-mixes robs vegetables of their vitamins; and all commercial soups are far saltier than necessary, with dry-mixes the worst offenders. It appears that, since I rely heavily on dry-mix soups for flavouring, I should stick to the Knorr-Swiss brand, which the survey showed to be the least of the evils, and continue to cook with as little added salt as possible.

### **Commercial Freeze Dried Dinners**

A bit of advice about commercially-prepared dehydrated and freeze-dried dinners: their servings are not generous. When the instructions say "serves 6", I presume five and add extra vegetables of my own. I suggest you sample any package unfamiliar to you before you leave home. We had a "Far Eastern" dinner with so many grains in it that it looked and tasted like birdseed. We've had "frontier stew" which, although delicious, had so many beans that, for the next 24 hours, it was a fight for who was going to lead on the trail! Despite the disadvantages and expense, we always carry, as emergency extras, two packages of freeze-dried beef or chicken stew. If you're caught in a blizzard in July (it happened to us) or you're delayed because someone is lost, sick or injured, you'll need the extra meals.

### **Packaging Ideas**

**Lightweight Food**

Using the magic formula of two pounds food per Scout per day, our six Scouts need 12 pounds of food a day. Multiply this by the number of days (two if it's a normal weekend), and we need 24 lbs., or four lbs. of food for each Scout to carry. Allow smaller Scouts to carry less and give them the meals you'll eat first. Have the patrol leader carry a copy of the menu and record which boy is carrying which meal. You'll have to organize and package the food in some systematic manner, and you'll want to do it as inexpensively as possible.

Film Canisters--35 mm film canisters, excellent for packing spices, salt, pepper, soya sauce, mustard, cooking oil and liquid detergent, are available free from film processing shops. We've found black plastic canisters the most leak-proof. Remember to store detergents and scouring powders away from food.

Plastic Bottles--Our friendly neighbourhood druggist, who is also a Scouter, is more than willing to save plastic bottles, good for carrying coffee, sugar and ketchup, for us. Those who are allergic to penicillin or codeine need a different bottle source though because, even after washing, there can be enough residue left to affect someone who is highly sensitive. Each Scout carries his own plastic drink bottle as a canteen on the trail. It contains a measured amount of iced tea powder. When we come to a stream suitable for drinking, we fill up with cold water, shake and drink. In Japanese specialty food shops, I've also discovered small plastic fish-shaped soya containers for about \$ .06 each. They are perfect for toothpaste and, if Scouts remember to brush their teeth, hold enough for a weekend. You have to squeeze the air out of the fish before you try to squeeze the toothpaste in.

Jerry Tubes--These cost anywhere from \$ .50 on sale to \$1.50 each. They are super for packing jam, peanut butter, relish or honey, but be careful in cold weather because peanut butter hardens enough that you'll break the tube before you squeeze any out. When it's cold, remove the filler clip and use a knife to get at the peanut butter.

Ziplock Bags--Package meal portions in plastic ziplock bags and label with cooking instructions (e.g. Add 2 tablespoons margarine; add milk add 3 cups cold water). You can use a bag as a bowl when adding water to powdered milk or making instant pudding. The bags also convert into small washbasins, each custom-made for one face-cloth.

Garbage Bags--Place the meal portions for an entire meal in one plastic bag of "kitchen catcher" size (51 X 56 cm) and label with masking tape (e.g. Saturday supper). Pack the condiments you use at every meal (coffee, tea, creamer, sugar, spices, Jam, honey, peanut butter, cooking oil, margarine) in a separate bag.

**Menu Planning**

Study the food rules in the Scout Handbook and sort foods according to the "colour" of the food group: white for milk (powdered milk, cream soups, instant pudding, cheese); red for meat protein (hamburger, steak, jerky, dehydrated beef, farmer's sausage, eggs, bacon, peanut butter, nuts, cheese); green for fruits and vegetables (fresh oranges, instant potatoes, dried peas, dried vegetable flakes, dried fruits, fruit leather); and yellow for breads and cereals (bread crackers, macaroni, spaghetti noodles, instant rice, pancakes, porridge, cream of wheat, bannock, granola).

The next step is to draw up a rough menu plan. A helpful rule of thumb is to choose something from each food group for every meal. Once you have basic menus, you can develop a shopping guide by systematically going through them and listing all ingredients and patrol equipment you'll need for your meals. Tick off the things you can BFMK (borrow from Mom's kitchen), and make a shopping list from what's left.

Good luck. May you have fair weather, good eating and many happy wilderness trails. ---