

Old-Time Vittles

Tired of freeze-dried? How about some hardtrack and corn dodgers for a tasty change of pace.

By [Buck Tilton](#), BACKPACKER Contributing Editor, September 2000

The one time I went backpacking with my friend Chris, I found out what it's like to go the "all-natural way," as he calls it. He wears wool, sleeps on a sheepskin after wrapping himself in a wool blanket, and cooks in a black iron pot on open flames. "All natural," I found out, also applies to his cotton food bag with rawhide drawstring: the contents include cornmeal and flour, beans and dried meat, maybe a few raisins. Chris likes to experience the backcountry much like the grisly mountain men did in the early 1800s. In those days of yore, there was a lot of truly wild and rugged land to wander through, and wilderness adventures lasted for many months, even years. The original outdoorsmen saw food as fuel, rather than as an epicurean delight. Not that the first "backpackers"--the ranks included Native Americans, explorers, soldiers, pioneers, cowboys, as well as trappers--despised a tasty meal. Just the opposite, I reckon. Those who spent most of their days outdoors learned to whip up a culinary delight or two from some seriously basic foodstuffs, like dried beans and meat (satisfied the protein needs), plus flour, various forms of oats and grains, and cornmeal. Dried fruit, sugar, pepper, salt, and fat straight from the carcass of a fresh kill also figured into the daily menu, and all in all, these travelers managed to maintain a balanced, albeit predictable, diet that kept them relatively healthy.

Since that excursion with Chris, I've been intrigued by the prospect of making dinner from similarly slim pickins and have experimented with recipes gleaned from the pages of history. The resulting foods offer interesting variations on the traditional trail diet, not to mention edibles that'll outlast your favorite pair of boots.

Recipes

Snack

Corn Dodgers

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Cups cornmeal
- 1/2 Teaspoon salt
- 2 Teaspoons baking powder
- 2 Tablespoons butter
- 2/3 Cup reconstituted milk
- 2/3 oil

Serves: 8

Cornmeal packed small and light, making it the favored way for pioneers to lug the yellow grain cross-country. Johnnycakes, or hoecakes, were baked yummies of cornmeal mixed with a dollop of bear grease or lard. My personal favorites, corn dodgers, are easy to make on the trail and were eaten by many a U.S. infantry man.

At Home: Combine the dry ingredients in a zipper-lock bag.

In Camp: Soften the butter and stir into dry mixture. Add milk. Form into "dodgers," flat, thin patties or tiny bullet-shaped loaves. Fry in a pan of hot oil until both sides are brown. Yield: 20 2-inch dodgers.

Lunch Side Dish

Corn Dodgers (Old Way)

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Cups cornmeal
- 2/3 Teaspoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons bacon drippings
- 2/3 Cup milk

Serves: 8

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Dinner Side Dish

Cowboy Beans

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 1/2 Cups dried pinto beans
- 1/2 Tablespoon seasoned salt
- 1/2 Teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1/2 Teaspoon onion powder
- 1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 Dash hot sauce
- 3 Cups water

Serves: 6

Head 'em up, move 'em out, git along little dogie. The great cattle-drive era of the West lasted only about 20 years or so in reality, and another 50 (so far) on TV and in movies. The cattlemen's menu was dominated by beef, bread, and beans, which explains the blaze on many a saddle.

At Home: Place the beans, seasoned salt, lemon pepper, and onion powder in a zipper-lock bag.

In Camp: Place bean mixture, Worcestershire and pepper sauces, and water in a pot and bring to a boil. Simmer about 5 minutes.

Dinner Side Dish

Cowboy Beans (Old Way)

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Pounds pinto beans
- 2 Pounds salt pork
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 4 Tablespoons sugar
- 2 green chiles, chopped (optional)
- 2 tomato

Serves: 6

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Snack

Hardtack

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 1/2 Cups milk
- 4 Cups flour
- 4 Tablespoons butter
- 3 Teaspoons brown sugar
- 1 1/2 Teaspoons salt

Serves: 12

It was hard and it was hardy. Union soldiers supposedly marched toward the South in 1861 with hardtack leftover from the War of 1812. These crackers, wrote one Civil War correspondent, were "hard as bricks and indestructibly unappetizing." The newer version is surprisingly good, but still hard as a brick.

At Home: Mix the ingredients into a dough and roll out to a thickness of about 1/2 inch. Cut into squares.

Prick the squares with a fork or knife. Place them on a lightly greased baking pan and bake at 400 degrees F for 20 to 30 minutes, until golden brown. Yield: 24 2 x 2-inch bars.

Dinner Side Dish

Hardtack (Old Way)

Recipe Ingredients

- 6 parts flour
- 1 part water

Serves: 12

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Snack

Hudson Bay Bread

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 Cup butter, softened
- 1 Cup of sugar
- 3 Tablespoons light corn syrup
- 3 Tablespoons of honey
- 1/2 Teaspoon vanilla
- 9 1/2 Cups finely ground rolled oats
- 1/2 Cup sliced almonds

Serves: 6

This was a European staple before workers of the Hudson Bay Company packed it along on beaver-trapping excursions into what is now the American West. No light snack, this early energy bar reportedly stoked the metabolic fires of Sir Edmund Hillary as he ascended Everest.

At Home: Click on an item to delete it At Home - Cream together the butter, sugar, syrup, honey, and vanilla. Grind the oats using a food processor or coffee grinder, then slowly stir in the almonds and oats. Press it all into a 13 x 9-inch pan. Bake at 325°F for 15 to 20 minutes. Don't overcook; it crumbles. As soon as you remove it from the oven, press the mix firmly with a spatula. Cut into squares and let cool in the pan.

Dinner Side Dish

Hudson Bay Bread (Old Way)

Recipe Ingredients

- 3 Cups butter
- 4 Cups sugar
- 1/2 Cup maple syrup
- 1/2 Cup honey
- 19 Cups finely ground rolled oats

Serves: 6

This was a European staple before workers of the Hudson Bay Company packed it along on beaver-trapping excursions into what is now the American West. No light snack, this early energy bar reportedly stoked the metabolic fires of Sir Edmund Hillary as he ascended Everest.

Afternoon Snack

Jerky

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Pounds lean meat
- 1/2 Cup Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 Cup soy sauce
- 1 Teaspoon each crushed garlic, red pepper, black pepper, salt

Serves: 6

No one knows exactly when it was discovered that you can dry meat and store it for later consumption but for

centuries, the recipe has remained unchanged: Slice up the meat and hang it until all the water evaporates. At Home: Partially freeze the meat so it's easier to slice into strips no more than 1/2-inch thick. Trim away fat. Mix the Worcestershire and soy sauces with the garlic in a dish. Rub the meat with a little salt and pepper and place it in the marinade. Refrigerate the marinating meat for at least 24 hours. Pat the meat dry and place it in a dehydrator or oven for 7 to 8 hours, until it's dry yet pliable. For oven drying, evenly space the meat on the rack and spread foil beneath it to catch the drips. Set the oven to 150°F, and leave the oven door open slightly for better circulation.

Calories: 57

Carbohydrates: 1.1

Cholesterol: 15

Fat: 3

Protein: 5.9

Saturated Fat: 1.2

Sodium: 381

* High Protein

Lunch Side Dish

Jerky (Old Way)

Recipe Ingredients

- 2 Pounds elk, deer, or other game
- 2 Tablespoons salt
- 2 Teaspoons each red pepper, black pepper, crushed garlic
- 1 Cups water

Serves: 6

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