Outdoor Cooking

In recent times the popularity of compact camping stoves has brought outdoor cooking within the reach of many who would never have attempted it previously. The stoves are very convenient and when on you're on the trail and want something quick to eat or drink they are hard to beat. However, nothing will ever taste the same as food cooked on an open fire of your own making. Apart from purely aesthetic considerations a cooking fire is also more practical in many situations and allows a wider variety of cooking opportunities. As well as roasting and toasting over the flames or just boiling something up in your billy there are many other possible cooking methods, none of which require recourse to store bought equipment, here are a few ideas.

COOKING ON HOT ROCKS Simply light a fire above a bed of non-porous rocks, allow it to burn for half an hour or more while you prepare your food. Let the fire die and brush away any embers with a handful of long grass. Cook directly on the rocks, ideal for fish, small game, fillets and frying eggs.

COOKING IN MUD Wrap your food in fresh grass, tie the grass off using natural cordage ensuring that the food is completely covered. Cover the package in at least 2.5cm (1") of wet clay or mud, ensure that no grass is visible. Place in your hearth and build a fire above, good sized trout take around an hour to cook to perfection, a rabbit takes about 4 hours.

STEAM PIT Steam pits are wonderful for cooking all sorts of food, they are useful because this method retains much of the goodness in both meat and vegetables, if you're on a hard routine you'll need all you can get! Also it is difficult to overcook or burn food using this method so it is ideal if you are busy with other tasks and cannot tend to your cooking constantly.

- **1.**Dig a pit large enough to hold the food you want to cook.

- **2.**Build a fire over the pit, interlaced with rocks, either sandstone or volcanic rock, avoid flint as it can explode when heated. All rocks should be of similar size up to about the size of a large apple.

- **3.**When the fire burns through the supports the rocks will collapse into the pit. Brush away loose ash and insert a stick in the pit's centre. Cover the hot rocks and embers with fresh green grass.

- **4.**Wrap food in leaves and cover with more fresh grass.

- **5.**Cover the pit with a mat woven from ferns or strong grass, seal any gaps with soil to insure airtightness.

- **6.**Pull out the central stick and pour in a little water to create steam, plug the hole and leave for at least four hours.

MUD OVENS It's hard to beat the smell and taste of fresh baked bread, all the more so when it's coming from your own improvised oven.

- **1.** Dig a narrow trench and fit a coking pot sideways over it, so the opening faces along the trench, you could improvise with rocks or clay if you're feeling handy...or stuck.
- **2.** Push a stick atleast 2" in diameter into the trench behind the "oven".
- **3.** Cover the pot with clay, remove the stick to form a chimney.
- **4.** Fit a lid to form an oven door, prop it closed with a stick and light a small fire in the trench, wait until the clay is fully dried before attempting to cook. Just keep the fire burning to keep your oven hot.

Just a few Ideas to get you thinking, there are more ways of cooking outdoors than are immediately apparent, if nothing else you can enjoy trying these on a visit to the backcountry and I know people who have employed the mud oven in a town house garden during a general workers strike.