

Overlander Foods

When planning meals for a trek experience, keeping some key concepts in mind can enhance the experience for all. Focusing on historic food items that are pleasing to the modern palate, you add another dimension to the trek experience.

Good Taste

First on the list is good flavor! You'll want to plan menu items that taste good, and are familiar enough to satisfy the taste buds without upsetting the digestive tract. Beans for breakfast, lunch, and dinner may be one historic option, but the sudden addition can be traumatic to the digestive system of many! Plan tasty, fairly-familiar dishes.

Nutrition

The trek experience generally involves a lot of physical exertion, and in some very challenging climates. Hot weather plus exertion can cause a person to work through their nutrients and electrolytes more quickly than they otherwise would. Rather than falling back on chemical preparations, plan foods that help replenish the body. You'll cut down on the gear burden, and improve health.

Replenish

- Dill pickles (whole, spears, or chips) to replace fluids and electrolytes; eat them til they taste like dill pickles.
- Molasses as a sweetener, or a spoonful at a time
- Sweetened, flavored vinegar drinks like switchel and shrub.
- Juicy fruits in season for added liquid intake

Be sure to bring in a good supply of palatable drinking water, which should be easily and freely available at all times, and offered as the primary beverage. It should be served cool, but not iced, and sipped in moderate quantities to avoid hyponatremia (water sickness, where the body's electrolytes and nutrients are unable to be used properly.)

No-Chill Priorities

If you're depending on coolers for food safety, you're adding risk. Coolers are designed for very short-term use. Even with frequent ice replenishment, you risk unacceptable bacterial growth in foods that require full refrigeration for safety. By choosing foods that require very little to zero refrigeration while maintaining safety, you reduce risks of food-borne illness and other problems.

No Refrigeration Required

- Fresh fruits in season
- Fresh vegetables in season
- Root vegetables (carrots, potatoes, parsnips, etc)
- Dried fruits
- Dried beans (any); soak overnight and simmer for a very simple one-pot meal. Add veggies and a bit of salt pork if desired.
- Grain cereals (old-fashioned oats, cracked wheat, cream of wheat, cream of rice, etc; buy in bulk for the best prices.)
- Salt-cured bacon or salt pork, made with non-water curing. These preserved meats do not require refrigeration, but can be difficult to find and expensive to purchase.
- Dried meats (jerky)
- Dried egg noodles
- Canned meats
- Camp-baked bread and biscuits (wheat and cornmeal based)
- Gingersnaps and other hard cookies, homebaked if possible. Baking historic recipes for "biscuits" can be a great pre-Trek activity.
- Dill pickles (vinegar or lacto-fermented)
- Hard cheeses, such as cheddar and Parmesan, need to be wrapped and kept in a cool spot, but do not require refrigeration for Treks under 4 days; they'll be oily and softer, but with a great flavor.
- Condensed milk for cooking and cream gravies; check the dollar store for 4-cup containers of shelf-stable milks (non-condensed) to use in a similar way.
- Instant non-fat powdered milk (and homemade cocoa mixes)
- Cooked jellies and jams
- Dried herbs and spices

Most foods that need refrigeration also need cooking before safe consumption. Using non-refrigerated foods can lessen your time near a campfire and the fuel required to cook meals.

There are many opportunities to teach self-reliance skills while prepping for a Trek. Get the families and wards involved early. Ask families to commit to planting small quantities of produce that can be donated to the Trek, or get the youth involved in safely home-canning meats.



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Enhance the Historic

Trekking very naturally takes individuals beyond their comfort zone a bit; by serving carefully selected historic foods, you create a "time travel" feeling for the participants that makes very effective use of the time. Those who would normally chafe at outdoor living seem to get more in the spirit of it when there are immersive experiences.

Recipes

Breakfast ideas might include hot grain cereals of all kinds, breads and rolls, fruit, flapjacks, eggs, meats, biscuits and gravies. Adding warm cider or cocoa makes for a nice start to the day.

Lunch is simplest if you plan it cold. Slices of hard cheese, cold cooked meats or hard sausages, raw veggies and fruits, bread, and a goodie, along with lots of cool water, makes it easy to put together sandwiches, or just "graze" the buffet! Jelly in stoneware crocks can be considered your emergency back-up meal plan (jelly sandwiches) for the stubborn hold-outs. Cold lunches also free you from having the cooking fire going 18 hours a day.

For **dinners**, plan soup or other one-pot meals. The preparation for one-pot meals is minimal; you can rely on non-refrigerated soup ingredients, with small bits of perishables for accent only. Add bread or biscuits, and feed a dozen people with just a few pounds of vegetables and a gallon of water.

In the following recipes, only items in *italic* require any amount of cold storage.

"Instant" Oatmeal for Four

Bring 2 cups of water to a boil. Add:

- 1½ cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup raisins

Stir briefly to combine, cover, and remove from the heat. Let it stand 5 minutes, then stir and serve with a drizzle of canned or shelf-stable milk.

Bean Soup

(*Bean and Vegetable soups are taken from The American Frugal Housewife, by Mrs. Child, published in the 1850s and 1860s.*)

- 2 cups dried beans
- Water to cover

Simmer beans close to the coals (not in flames!) in water to cover until they have softened, several hours; be sure to check the pot fairly frequently, adding water as needed.

Add seasonings, such as salt, pepper, a bit of tomato catsup (recipes for home bottling found in many period cookbooks), bay leaf, etc, in the last half-hour of cooking. Slightly smashing about half a cup of the cooked beans makes for a more rich broth.

It may be odd to some to eat plain bean soup with no meat in it. One could certainly simmer a ham hock or salt pork with the beans, but the taste of beans with a bit of salt and pepper is really quite pleasant.

Vegetable Soup with Meat

This is truly a vegetable soup, with meat used only as a seasoning. It is a very adaptable recipe, easily expanded.

Chop a variety of your favorite root vegetables (in season).

Ingredients might include:

- Onion, garlic, celeriac (fry lightly)
- Carrot, leek
- Potato, parsnip, turnip
- Dried vegetables if fresh are not available

Add root vegetables to a pot, with water to cover plus about 3 inches. Simmer near the coals until veggies have become tender, then add a mix of other favorite veggies, in season which might include:

- Celery (don't duplicate this if you've used celeriac, though!)
- Shelled fresh green peas
- Fresh green beans
- Fresh corn cut from the cob
- Diced tomato
- Fresh herbs

Add seasonings, such as salt, pepper, dried garlic, and other spices. Add a handful of bit of *cooked ham, chicken or beef*, or sliced cured sausages if you like, though this is not imperative. Add liquid to the soup throughout cooking, to keep all the veggies covered and suspended. Again, slight mashing enriches the broth.

Gingersnaps

(*From The New England Economical Housekeeper, 1845, on the Feeding America web archive.*)

- 1 cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- Flour to make a stiff dough.

Roll thin, cut into rounds, and bake in a quick (400°) oven.



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Ginger Cakes

(from the same source)

Beat

- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup butter
- 2 *eggs*
- 1 cup *milk*
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger,
- Flour to make a stiff dough.

Roll thin and cut rounds or squares. Bake in a quick oven as above.

Grandma Mary Beth's Chicken & Noodles

(From my Great Grandma Mary Beth, whose grandmother made it for her family in the 1860s.)

Boil *one chicken* with garlic, a quartered onion, and a stalk of celery. When the meat is tender, remove it from the bone and chop. (This can be done at home, and the cooked meat chilled for transport, or, bring frozen chicken pieces, and drop frozen into boiling water. The other option is to bring a chicken, kill and clean it, then cook.) Reserve broth, removing the solids.

Make egg noodles:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 *egg*
- Dash of salt and pepper

Make a mound of flour and seasonings on a board or table, with a well in the middle. Mix the egg with about ¼ cup water, and pour into well. With a fork or fingers, work the flour into the liquid, forming a stiff paste. Rest as needed to relax the dough.

Roll out very thin (use flour to prevent sticking) and slice into noodles. Set aside, coated in flour, to dry slightly before cooking.

Lightly fry some garlic and onion (we were a smelly, disease-free family); add it to the broth. Chop and add carrots; bring the broth to a boil. Return chicken to the broth. Drop noodles a few at a time into the boiling broth: stir to prevent them clumping. Boil until noodles are tender all the way through, slightly plumped and “wrinkly” looking. Balance seasonings with salt and pepper.



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