Baking Beside the Fire with a Reflector Oven

Claude P. Fordyce, 1922

Selected pages from Trail Craft.

Build and position a folding reflector baker, then try the chapter?s camp biscuits, cornbread and cookies.

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CHAPTER VIII

Using the Reflecting Baker

THE more one camps out, the more he accords cooking the first place in contributing to the success of the outing. Nothing will more quickly disorganize the morale of a bunch of good fellows on a wilderness tour than mistreated stomachs. Many men and most women dislike camping because they have to cook with a meagre equipment and under an unhandy environment, the proper utilization of both of which calls forth that peculiar knack which marks the expert camp craftsman. Nowhere else is one blessed with such an appetite as in the active life led in camping, and the knowledge of how to cook right, when it is one's turn to be the culinary artist, becomes a coveted gift.

Most camp cookery is elemental—that is, one must so combine and cook the standard grub list of flour, bacon, beans, salt, sugar, and dried fruit as to yield a palatable, varied, and easily digested diet. The list may now be augmented by the addition of dried milk, eggs, and vegetables, which greatly widen the range of eating variations, and should be included as essentials. The wise vacationist limits his outfit to actual necessities to keep down the weight and bulk to suit his transportation, so he must eliminate as a rule, canned goods, fresh fruits, vegetables, and "store bread".

Just as the grub list must be limited to necessities, so must the cooking utensils be few in number, light in

weight, and of maximum utility. In considerable experience with campers it is surprising to find how few employ that ingenious device known as the Reflecting Baker, and yet were its uses known it would occupy a high place as one of the needed items. The old school of campers stick to the frying pan method of making bread, and they usually fry instead of roast their meats. Where transportation allows, other men use the Dutch Oven—a heavy, cumbersome, iron kettle on legs, made to sit on a bed of coals and having a sunken lid to hold more coals. In the average moving camp a heavy stove capable of cooking as at home is out of the question, so we have been in a quandary as to just what method to use.

Altogether the most satisfactory baker for the camp and trail is the Reflecting Baker. It is extremely portable, being made of aluminum, and folding flat, and capable of producing most excellent breads, biscuits, cakes, pies, cookies (the production of bread-stuffs being a most difficult task with most outdoor men). With it one can prepare fine roasts of the different meats; he can brown potatoes to a turn and bake fish which would be the envy of the most skeptical "chef de eats" of the metropolitan hostelry.

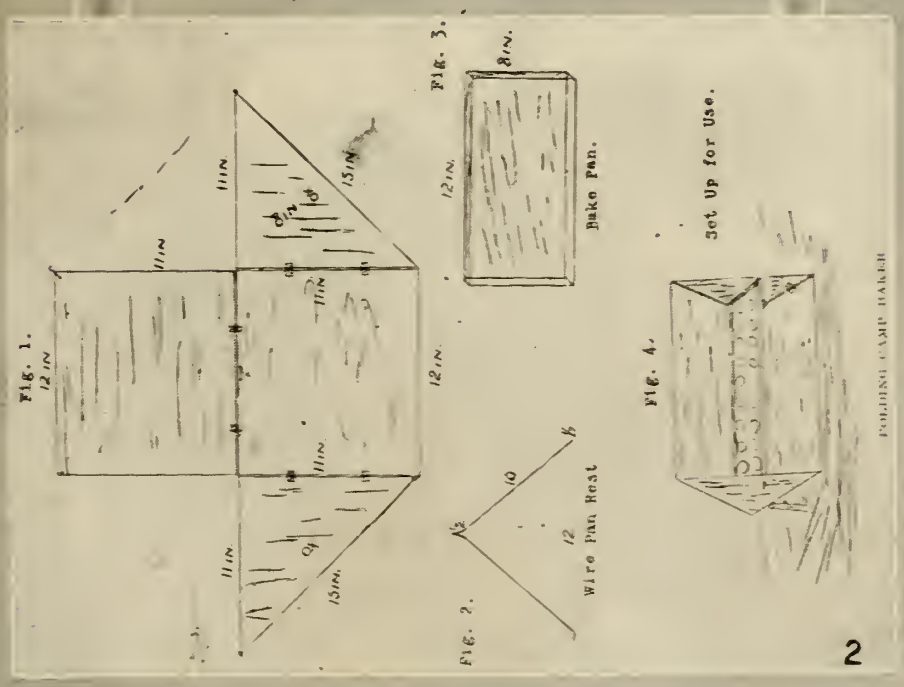
The Reflecting Baker is used with the open fire or next the side of the camp stove. It consists of two flat sheets of bright aluminum attached on one side with the opposite sides flaring and which become, respectively, the top and bottom of the baker—the top slanting like a shed roof upside down. Ends are provided for further retaining the heat, and a baking pan or shelf reposes in the center, where it gets the com-

bined heat reflecting in from all angles. The principle is similar to the hearth fire of our forefathers, which utilized the angles to get the heat reflected evenly from the bright surfaces onto the bread or roast. The baker must be kept bright and shining, which is easily done by scouring with ashes.

The 8x10-inch size holds a dozen biscuit and weighs two pounds, while the 10x16-inch size weighs five pounds and is of about double the capacity. The bakers are equipped with folding legs, and when the top, sides, and bottom are folded in for carrying, they become a compact and almost negligible part of the camp outfit. Canvas carrying cases may be provided, and a smooth pine board for mixing and rolling are furnished, if so desired. This bread board may be eliminated by taking a two-foot square of white oil-cloth, which can be laid on the ground, table, or any level surface and used similarly. Even on back-pack trips and portages the Reflecting Baker is worth including because of its supreme utility, and a midget baker, particularly adapted to the needs of back-packing, is soon to be marketed.

You can make one of these bakers at home and for this you will need two pieces of tin, twelve inches wide and twenty-four inches long; a half-dozen small hinges; tinners' shears and punch; two dozen tinners' rivets and a hammer. Cut the tin into four twelve-inch squares. Of these, two will go to make the top and bottom of the reflector. They are hinged together so that they will fold like the covers of a book. Fig. 1. Between the hinges at X cut a small opening for the insertion of the apex of the wire pan rest. Fig. 2. (facing p. 76.)





BAKING IN CAMP

1. A high fire with a backlog reflector is used with the Reflecting Baker.
2. The folding camp baker.

The sides are made by cutting the third piece of tin, size 12x12, diagonally across, producing two-triangular sections, which are both hinged to the bottom piece of the baker. When these are folded to meet the top and hooked, the baker is in proper angle relation to the heat rays from the camp fire to evenly bake the contents of the pan. Near the center of the sides, punch holes at OX for inserting the ends of the wire pan rest.

When ready to use, two small stakes are driven into the ground, and the rear edge of the baker rests thereon. Or a permanent wire stand can be improvised. The bake pan can be made of the remaining square of tin. Its dimensions should be 8x12 inches. The whole affair folds to the thickness of an inch and an area of 12x12 inches. In travel it is best kept in a cloth case.

Baking can be started as soon as the cooking fire is built. The special points about the fire for the reflector are that it must be built high and preferably with a back-log reflector. A low fire burns the lower side of the biscuits before the upper side browns. The open camp fire is preëminently used by campers, and they generally use a wire grate or andirons on which they set their kettles or pans. If such is used, we build a fire on the top of the grate as well as below it. If built as above with any of the following woods, the fire gives a wall of flame two feet high, in front of which we set the baker. Later is will yield a fine set of coals, which are utilized for other cooking. The best woods are hickory, hard maple, oak, and birch. If no grate is used, it is best to build a reflecting back-log of wood sticks, each about two inches in diameter

and two feet long, piled one on top of another, leaning against stakes driven into the ground, or held upright by crotched sticks. The regulation of the heat is done by moving the baker to or from the fire, and by laying a green log on the ground before the top is done. Your baking or roasting will be a success if you know how to handle the heat to enable the top and bottom to reflect the heat evenly above and below and in front and back of the pan holding the dough or meat.

Perhaps the best way to judge a cook's proficiency is by the bread he makes, and no one article of camp equipment was ever invented which has contributed so much to the convenience of the cook and the health and well-being of the vacationist as the Reflecting Baker, which allows not only of properly preparing baking-powder products, but also yeast breads, meats, roasts, and the sour-dough breads which are imperatively used where the temperature is near freezing.

Practically all of the commoner recipes in baking and roasting can be successfully used with a Reflecting Baker, with the exception of beans, whose baking requires a more intense heat than the baker can produce. We must keep in mind that small cakes and biscuits must bake quickly before a hot fire, whereas large loaves, such as johnny cake, must have a slower, more even heat, so as to get done through. The secret of the camp oven is the envelope of hot air, which must not be too hot and must be kept even. The bread supply is the real problem in camp cookery, and for this the Reflecting Baker offers practically all the advantages of the home cook stove, provided we know how to use it. Just as good bread can be baked in camp as in a hotel,

USING THE REFLECTING BAKER

Whole wheat flour bakes easier than white and is more tasty and nutritious. Yellow corn meal surpasses the white, and if using baking powder, stick to the proven Royal or Price's.

BAKING POWDER BREAD

Flour, 1 pint; sugar, 1 tablespoonful; baking powder, 1 heaping teaspoonful; salt, 1 teaspoonful; cold water, 1 cupful. Mix by stirring with a spoon the baking powder, sugar, salt, and flour together; then add water enough to stir the mixture into a thin batter. Pour into a well-greased pan and put into the baker. Never knead this kind of bread. If the dough sticks to a sliver stuck into the bread it is not yet done.

CAMP BISCUITS

For one dozen use the ingredients as given above for baking powder bread, adding ¾ teaspoonful of cold grease, as lard, pork fat, etc., to the mixture. Mix the grease in well so that no lumps remain and no grease sticks to the pan. Enough water is added to make a stiff dough. Now sprinkle the flour on the dough, mixing pan, and hands, and with the roller (may be made out of a sapling) roll out to a ¾-inch thickness. Cut the biscuits with the lid of the baking-powder can and put them into a well-greased bake pan and set before the fire.

ARMY BREAD

This is easy to mix, is made without grease and keeps fresh for a long period, and will not dry up or mold. It is good cold, and is just the thing when laying in a supply for a week. For routine it is the best of the baking-powder products. Take of flour, 1 quart; salt, 1 teaspoonful; sugar, 1 tablespoonful; baking powder, 2 heaping teaspoonfuls. Mix 1½ pints of cold water to make a thick batter and pour out level into the pan. Bake forty-five minutes, or until a sliver will not stick in the dough.

JOHNNY CAKE OR CORN BREAD

Mix corn meal, 1 cup; flour, 1 cup; baking powder, 1 tablespoonful; salt and sugar, each a half teaspoonful; and grease, 1 heaping tablespoonful. If you have it, add ½ tablespoonful of milk or 1 tablespoonful of milk powder into enough water for a thick batter, pour into a greased bake tin. A tablespoonful of egg powder is also a good addition to this bread.

CORN PONE

This can be mixed up before starting so that all that is needed is to add water. It must be kept tightly sealed from moisture

when traveling. Take of yellow corn meal, 1 quart; white flour, 1 pint; sugar, ½ cup; salt, 1 teaspoonful; and baking powder, 4 teaspoonfuls. In camp add sufficient water to make a heavy batter and allow to stand a few minutes. The water causes the baking powder to give off gas and so lighten the dough. Drop the batter in big teaspoonfuls on a hot, greased pan and bake. By using less water and getting a thicker batter you can turn all into a pan and bake and you will have a very acceptable johnny cake. Yeast bread dough can be raised by setting in a pan of warm water. One cook I know of, on a pack-horse trip poured the dough into a paraffined muslin bag and slung it over the pack saddle and it was ready to bake when he reached camp.

SOUR DOUGH BREAD

In cold climates like Alaska, the sour dough bread is mostly used because it rises at near a freezing temperature, while yeast will not, and it is a welcome change from baking-powder bread which, when continually used, upsets the stomach. The method is simple, and since using this kind of bread I prefer it to all others for winter and summer camp trips. A very excellent discussion of sour-dough breads and reflector baking is contained in Mrs. Pinkerton's *Woodcraft for Women*. She prepares the "sourings" by stirring together two cups of flour, two tablespoonfuls of sugar, and one of salt in sufficient water to make a creamy batter. She then stirs in a tablespoonful of vinegar and sets near a fire or in the sun to sour for two days. She says:

"For each loaf of bread use one cup of 'sourings', one teaspoonful of sugar, half a teaspoonful of lard, one large teaspoonful of salt, and a quarter of a teaspoonful of soda, the last two dissolved in hot water. The procedure from this stage depends upon the amount of time at your disposal and your ambition. If you wish to break camp in the morning, make a ball at night, divide into loaves, allow them to rise overnight, and bake at breakfast time. If, however, you are to remain in camp the next day or even make a late start you can improve the bread by allowing it to rise twice, once over night in a ball, and again after it has been formed into loaves. Bread should be baked an hour. In the first half-hour, the baker should be eighteen inches from the fire; the last half-hour, it should be nearer, that the bread may brown. If the bread, when baked, is grayish, you have used too much soda. The amount of soda must be varied with the sourness of the yeast."

RAISIN BREAD

Raisin bread is a baking-powder bread which can be made in a loaf, keeps fresh, and is best when cold. Beat together one cup of sugar and one egg or its equivalent in egg powder. If neither

is available, the egg can be omitted. Add to this two cups of sweet milk, one teaspoonful of salt, two cups of graham flour, four level teaspoonfuls of baking powder, and one cup of seeded, chopped raisins. Let stand in the loaf twenty minutes, and then bake only moderately at first until it has risen, and then move closer to the fire to brown. The substitution of nuts for raisins in this bread makes it even more delicious.

BROWN BREAD

A brown bread which is good either warm or cold can be made with soda and comes as a most welcome change after much baking powder. The use of soda demands an acid. This variety of raising powder is made possible by the addition of a teaspoonful of vinegar or lemon juice to a cup of evaporated milk. The acetic or citric acids will act as a good substitute for the lactic acid of sour milk. Mrs. Pinkerton states that this discovery opened for her wonderful possibilities in the making of camp breads, muffins, and pancakes. Her directions for the brown bread are to stir together ¼ cup of molasses and ¾ of a cup of brown sugar. This can be varied by using no molasses and a half-cup of white sugar. Add to this two cups of milk in which two teaspoonfuls of vinegar or lemon juice have been stirred, two and a half cups of graham flour, one cup of white flour, one teaspoonful of salt, and one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in a little warm water. It should be the consistency of a soft dough. Bake for two hours in a very slow heat. Soda and acid baking require more time and much more moderate heat than the baking powder and sweet milk variety.

CAMP PIE

The fruits should be prepared before beginning the paste for the pie crust, and the stewed fruits are excellent substitutes for the fresh. In making a pie crust handle it as little as possible, make it quickly, and keep the hands and all ingredients cool. Use a cupful of flour, a half-teaspoonful of salt, and with a knife cut into the flour a half-cup of cold lard to the size of peas. Add four tablespoonfuls of cold water and stir with a spoon. If more water is needed, sprinkle in a few drops, but not as much as a tablespoonful. Divide this paste into two parts, roll out one part and fit into the baker tin. Roll out the other half one-eighth of an inch thick, dot it with a tablespoonful of butter, dredge it lightly with flour, fold into the smallest compass possible, beat with a rolling pin, and roll out once, pressing the rolling pin this way and that during the process. Slash with a knife in any desired pattern, lay it upon the fruit which reposes on the under-crust and pinch the edges together. Bake in a hot oven three-quarters of an hour.

CAMP CAKE AND COOKIES

For cakes we cream together one cup of lard and two cups of sugar, add a cup of water, stir in sufficient flour to which has been added a pinch of salt and two rounded teaspoonfuls of baking powder to make a cake dough. This is seasoned with any spice or extract. This should be baked in moderate heat and allowed to rise before it is browned. The same mixture is made into cookies by using sufficient flour to make a dough which can be rolled out. Cut with the top of a baking-powder tin.

ROAST MEAT

Meat for the reflecting baker must first be seared in a fry pan so as to retain the juices. To supply enough grease for basting a roast, we pin thin slices of bacon or pork over the meats and set it in the baker pan which contains water; set it before the fire, frequently pouring with a spoon the juices which lie in the pan over the meat to prevent its drying. These drippings later make excellent gravy by mixing smoothly with flour with the pan partly over the fire and then pouring in slowly a mixture of milk and water, and allowing it to heat to the point where the bubbles begin to rise. The consistency is governed by the amount of liquid added. Before removing from the fire, salt to taste.

ROAST FISH

There is no better way to prepare fish, with the possible exception of planking it than by roasting it in a reflector. The fire should be as for biscuits. In preparing the fish, it is drawn, the scales or skin left on and evaporated, or fresh onions are put inside to modify the fishy taste. To keep it from drying, we cover the surface slightly with butter drippings, bacon grease, or lard, and put morsels of grease in the pan. We never allow the grease supply to fall short and keep basting the fish and adjusting the baker in relation to the fire to a nicety so as not to overheat.

Apparently our best cooks follow no set recipes but instinctively know what proportions to use, but the tyro will follow the directions to a letter for assured results. The Reflecting Baker being of such supreme utility will many times over repay for its place in an outfit and will endear itself in the esteem of the outdoorsman who prides himself on being a connoisseur in wilderness cuisines.