

The Survival Foods And Gardening Section

CAMPING AND WOODCRAFT 1917

CHAPTER X : CONCENTRATED FOODS

The first European settlers in this country were ignorant of the ways of the wilderness. Some of them had been old campaigners in civilized lands, but they did not know the resources of American forests, nor how to utilize them. The consequence was that many starved in a land of plenty. The survivors learned to pocket their pride and learn from the natives, who, however contemptible they might seem in other respects, were past masters of the art of going "light but right." An almost naked savage could start out alone and cross from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, without buying or begging from anybody, and without robbing, unless from other motives than hunger. This was not merely due to the abundance of game. There were large tracts of the wilderness where game was scarce, or where it was unsafe to hunt. The Indian knew the edible plants of the forest, and how to extract good food from roots that were rank or poisonous in their natural state; but he could not depend wholly upon such fortuitous findings. His mainstay on long journeys was a small bag of parched and pulverised maize, a spoonful of which, stirred in water, and swallowed at a draught, sufficed him for a meal when nature's storehouse failed.

Pinole.—All of our early chroniclers praised this parched meal as the most nourishing food known. In New England it went by the name of "nocake," a corruption of the Indian word nookik. William Wood, who, in 1634, wrote the first topographical account of the Massachusetts colony, says of nocake that "It is Indian corn parched in the hot ashes, the ashes being sifted from it; it is afterwards beaten to powder and put into a long leatherne bag trussed at the Indian's backe like a knapsacke, out of which they take three spoonful a day." Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, said that a spoonful of nocake mixed with water made him "many a good meal." Roger did not affirm, however, that it made him a square meal, nor did he mention the size of his spoon.

In Virginia this preparation was known by another Indian name, "rockahominy" (which is not, as our dictionaries assume, a synonym for plain hominy, but a quite different thing). That most entertaining of our early woodcraftsmen, Colonel Byrd of Westover, who ran the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728-29, speaks of it as follows:

"Rockaliominy is nothing' but Indian corn parched without burning-, and reduced to Powder. The Fire drives out all the Watery Parts of the Corn, leaving the Strength of it behind, and this being very dry, becomes much lighter for carriage

and less liable to be Spoilt by the Moist Air. Thus half a Dozen Pounds of this Sprightful Bread will sustain a Man for as many Months, provided he husband it well, and always spare it when he meets with Venison, which, as I said before, may be Safely eaten without any Bread at all. By what I have said a Man needs not encumber himself with more than 8 or 10 Pounds of Provision, tho' he continue half a year in the Woods. These and his Gun will support him very well during the time, without the least danger of keeping one Single Fast."

The Moravian missionary Heckewelder, in his History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations, describes how the Lenni Lenape, or Delawares, prepared and used this emergency food:

"Their Psindamooan or Tassmanane, as they call it, is the most nourishing- and durable food made out of the Indian corn. The blue sweetish kind is the grain which they prefer for that purpose. They parch it in clean hot ashes., until it bursts, it is then sifted and cleaned, and pounded in a mortar into a kind of flour, and when they wish to make it very good, they mix some sugar [i.e., maple sugar] with it. When wanted for use, they take about a tablespoonful of this flour in their mouths, then stooping to the river or brook, drink water to it. If, however, they have a cup or other small vessel at hand, they put the flour in it and mix it with water, in the proportion of one tablespoonful to a pint. At their camps they will put a small quantity in a kettle with water and let it boil down, and they will have a thick pottage. With this food the traveler and warrior will set out on long journeys and expeditions, and as a little of it will serve them for a day, they have not a heavy load of provisions to carry. Persons who are unacquainted with this diet ought to be careful not to take too much at a time, and not to suffer themselves to be tempted too far by its flavor; more than one or two spoonfuls, at most, at any one time or at one meal is dangerous; for it is apt to swell in the stomach or bowels, as when heated over a fire."

The best of our border hunters and warriors, such as Boone and Kenton and Crockett, relied a good deal upon this Indian dietary when starting on their long hunts, or when undertaking forced marches more formidable than any that regular troops could have withstood. So did Lewis and Clark on their ever-memorable expedition across the unknown West. Modern explorers who do their outfitting in London or New York, and who think it needful to command a small army of porters and gun-bearers when they go into savage lands, might do worse than read the simple annals of that trip by Lewis and Clark, if they care to learn what real pioneering was.

It is to be understood, of course, that the parched and pulverized maize was used mainly or solely as an emergency food, when no meat was to be had. Ordinarily the hunters of that day, white and red, when they were away from settlements or trading posts, lived on "meat straight," helped out with nuts, roots, wild salads,

and berries. Thus did Boone, the greater part of two years, on his first expedition to Kentucky; and so did the trappers of the far West in the days of Jim Bridger and Kit Carson.

Powdered parched corn is still the standby of native travelers in the wilds of Spanish America, and *it* is sometimes used by those hardy mountaineers, "our contemporary ancestors," in the Southern Appalachians. One of my camp-mates in the Great Smoky Mountains expressed to me his surprise that any one should be ignorant of so valuable a resource of the hunter's life. He claimed that no other food was so "good for a man's wind" in mountain climbing.

In some parts of the South and West the pulverized parched corn is called "coal flour." The Indians of Louisiana gave it the name of *gofio*. In Mexico it is known as *pinole*. (Spanish pronunciation, *pee-nolay*; English, pie-no-lee.)

Some years ago Mr. T. S. Van Dyke, author of *The Still Hunter* and other excellent works on field sports, published a very practical article on emergency rations in a weekly paper, from which, as it is now buried where few can consult it, I take the liberty of making the following quotation:

"La comida del desierto, the food of the desert, or pinole, as it is generally called, knocks the hind sights off all American condensed foods. It is the only form in which you can carry an equal weight and bulk of nutriment on which alone one can, if necessary, live continuously for weeks, and even months, without any disorder of stomach or bowels. . . . The principle of pinole is very simple. If you should eat a breakfast of corn-meal mush alone, and start out for a hard tramp, you will feel hungry in an hour or two, though at the table the dewrinkling of your abdomen may have reached the hurting point. But if, instead of distending the meal so much with water and heat, you had simply mixed it in cold water and drunk it, you could have taken down three times the quantity in one-tenth of the time. You would not feel the difference at your waistband, but you would feel it mightily in your legs, especially if you have a heavy rifle on your back. It works a little on the principle of dried apples, though it is quite an improvement. There is no danger of explosion; it swells to suit the demand, and not too suddenly.

Suppose, now, instead of raw corn-meal, we make it not only drinkable but positively good. This is easily done by parching to a very light brown before grinding, and grinding just fine enough to mix so as to be drinkable, but not pasty, as flour would be. Good wheat is as good as corn, and perhaps better, while the mixture is very good. Common rolled oats browned in a pan in the oven and run through a spice mill is as good and easy to make it out of as anything. A coffee mill may do if it will set fine enough. Ten per cent. of popped corn ground in with it will improve the flavor so much that your children will get away with it all if you don't hide it. Wheat and corn are hard to grind, but the small Enterprise spice mill will do it. You may also mixm some ground chocolate

with it for flavor, which, with popped corn, makes it very fine . . . Indigestible? Your granny's nightcap! . . . You must remember that it is "werry fillin' for the price," and go slow with it until you have found your coefficient. . . .

Now for the application. The Mexican rover of the desert will tie a small sack of pinole behind his saddle and start for a trip of several days. It is the lightest of food, and in the most portable shape, sandproof, bug and fly proof, and everything. Whenever he finds water he stirs a few ounces in a cup (I never weighed it, but four seem about enough at a time for an ordinary man), drinks it in five seconds, and is fed for five or six hours. If he has jerky, he chews that as he jogs along, but if he has not he will go through the longest trip and come out strong and well on pinole alone."—Shooting and Fishing, Vol. xx, p. 248.

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Phone - 870-437-2999, Fax - 870-437-2973, Email - cary@survivalplus.com
