Ravalli County
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Indians, Pioneer and foods.

America Eats

Montana Dishes

In the days of the early pioneers it was found that the Indians had many excelent dishes unknown to the white man one of them was the tail of the beaver.

The beaver tail is quite long and flat and fleshy. The Indians placed the tail in the hot ashes with few coals and allowed it to bake slowly until done then removed the outer skin and eat the flesh while hot.

Pemmican is a dish common to all Indian tribes and especially so to the plains Indians, where buffalo was so plentiful. It is the favorite way of preparing meat that is to be kept for a long time.

Well prepared pemmican will keep indefintely is very condensed and easily carried.

The Indian squaws prepare the pemmican and when the tribe is on a big hunt it is strenuous work for the women, and was the excuse for a man to have more than one wife. If there was captive squaws in a tribe these women were compelled to do all the drudgery--Now to the preparing pemmican------

The meat is cut in thin slices and spread out to dry. The squaws cut willow branches stick them in the ground and then bring the tops together, tie them and weigh them down this makes a large oval shaped cage--in this they build a slow fire and on top they place the slices of meat. In drying this way the meat is also smoked. One squaw must stand and watch and turn the meat all the time so it is dried evenly and thoroughly. If

there is any wild fruit ripe other squaws go after that. The favorite fruit is choke cherries or bull berries, wild raspberries and goose berries are not overlooked. The pemmican is made in a green buffalo hide. The hide is placed on the ground, with the hair side down. A layer of dried meat is placed on the skin and then the women begin pounding it with round stones when the meat is all pounded fine they put on a layer of the wild fruit and pour some melted fat all over it, like pouring molasses on a pancake-- then they pound it some more until all is thoroughly mixed and a smooth paste---then addmore meat, berries and fat and pound that mixing all well together. This process is kept up until enough of the mixture to fill the hide, usually from 25 to fifty pounds. The hide is then sewed securely around the misture. Two squaws do this work, one holds the skin securely while the others does the sewing.

When it is all securely sewed the package is put in the sun to dry. The green hide will shrink until when it is dry it is as hard as a rock. Prepared in this way it will keep for years. Is easily carried on pack horses and is security against a hard winter.

All hunters, trappers and prospectors like pemmican and it was as much an article of barter as a beaver skin.

Another truly American dish is the smoked buffalo tongue. Smoked buffalo tongue was a Christmas dinner for the old trapper.

Stewed dog was another delicacy among the early Americans. If the Chief of a warlike tribe offered you a dish of stewed dog you could reckon your scalp safe. I will not give the receipt for stewed dog. It was never a favorite dish with the early white settler, though many times an unlucky white man welcomed the dog stew in the Council tent.

A dish relished by white and Indians in this Bitter Root valley, was the Bitter Root. This plant grew luxuriantly all over this western section of Montana. The Indians dug the root and dried it and boiled it with their meat. It is very bitter but the whites soon learn to like it. The memory of the Bitter Root must linger long in the minds of the Pioneer.

When we visited with the L. L. Bla[illegible]s and Thos. Adams' in Washington, D. C. the first thing asked was--"Did you bring any Bitter Root? They had not been west for more than thirty years.

Another Indian dish relished by all white people who have ever tried it is the Camas root. It grows in rather damp soil and has a beautiful blue flower (The Bitter Root is a dainty pink blossom) The camas roots are small, round and look much like an onion, They have a delicious flavor and are sweet.

The Indians cook it by putting the roots in an iron pot with a little water then cover it tight, dig a hole and place hot coals in it then set the pot in, cover it with a thin layer of earth and build a fire over it. The camas is delicious. We have no vegetable that is more nutritious or has a finer flavor.

The camas grows in all sections of western Montana where it is damp. I have often wondered why some of our horticulturists have not tried to domesticate the camas.

From my own recollections and old note books of James and Granville Stuarts. Allis B. Stuart.