

## Camping Oz-Style Part 2 Cooking on Camp

“What’s for dinner? Not baked beans again, please!” No way, no need. A variety of dishes can be cooked on camp without the aid of electrical appliances and a proper oven. Making do with the bare essentials might seem an annoying inconvenience, but it doesn’t have to be. After all, the decision to go camping in the first place must have been some perverse desire for deprivation and to be eaten alive by insects; so preparing meals in adverse conditions can be just another enjoyable part of the experience.

There are certain aspects of camp life that need special consideration, in particular space and light. The “kitchen” will probably be a small section of the tent, or an area outside; nothing like the amenities at home. One of the great advantages is that most of the preparation and actual cooking can be done sitting down; either at the table cutting vegies, or stirring pots in front of the stove. As safety always comes first, these jobs should be away from the main traffic areas. That’s not the case in the picture, but there were just the two of us with no kids tearing around. Obviously you have to be able to see properly, so cooking meals by the inadequate light of a battery lantern is not my preferred option. Night-cooking, however, can be fun if you like socialising and plan on using the facilities in the campers’ kitchen which most tourist parks provide; but you may have to queue for the stove or barbecue, and there’s no guarantee they’ll be clean. It’s better, I believe, to adjust meal times and do it all at your own camp site.



Right – what to cook? Unless there is a store handy, many of the ingredients need to be reasonably long-life. Potatoes, carrots, green beans, peas in their pods, pumpkin and onions keep well in a cardboard box, provided they are left somewhere in the shade. A bunch of celery which still has some roots not only survives in a bucket with a little water, but it will continue to grow. Eggs also last a fair time. Meat can be a problem, but there are canned alternatives such as ham, spam, corned beef, chicken if available and, of course, salmon, tuna and the like. Those meals-in-a-can look good on the label, but some of them are mainly slop and vegies with very little meat. Strained, however, the solids make for a reasonably tasty pie filling if you add extras and use the liquid as a gravy base. Flour, rice, noodles, pasta, cereals and other dried food keep for an age and provide variety. Just remember to store them in a mouse, water and greeblie-proof container. As for milk and cream, supermarkets have a choice of UHT products. A short list of basics is included at the end of this article, but if you use your initiative you won’t go far wrong.

### **Pan-fried Meals**

The usual ones are pretty straightforward and if you can buy fresh or frozen steak, sausages, burgers and bacon once in a while they are easy enough for anyone to cook, thus giving the resident chef a break. Toast for breakfast can be a bit messy and leaves crumbs all over the stove top, but there is an alternative that our kids loved – eggy bread. Just beat up two or three eggs with a dash of milk, soak slices of bread in the mix, then fry in the pan or skillet, turning as necessary. A little sugar and spice added makes a quick dessert. Stir-fries can be done exactly the same as at home; so too some of the recipes to be found

on the website like: tuna & mushroom, Hoolie Doolies: Recipe 25, paella, pizza – see this month's inclusion - and Fried Spud Patties: Recipe 20.

### The Camp Oven

All of the above can be cooked in a frypan or skillet. Even a wok isn't out of the question if you fancy; but there are some dishes that need baking in an oven. No worries: here's my version of a stove-top (or open fire) camp oven. The items that make it up can be bought from supermarkets – a stainless steel stew pan with lid; a wire trivet plus an aluminium cake tin, both of which fit comfortably in the base of the pan; and, most importantly, a heat diffuser. What you see in the picture below sitting on the baking paper is damper, a yeast-free bread that I knocked up the other night as an example of the oven's versatility. The strip of folded foil sticking out from the baking tin is a safe, easy way of removing it from the pan. The damper recipe is pretty straightforward:

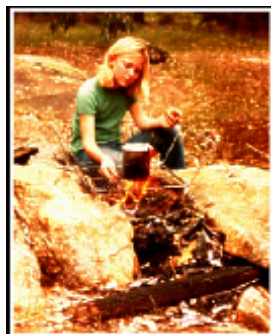


### Damper

2 cups plain flour            1 rounded Tbsp baking powder  
1 tsp cream of tartar        2 Tbsp light-tasting olive oil  
2/3 cup (approx) milk or water  
A pinch of salt (optional)

Mix the dry ingredients together, then work in the oil with the back of a fork to fine breadcrumb consistency. Stir in the liquid a little at a time to form a ball of soft (not sticky) dough. Line the tin with baking paper and lightly press the dough into it. Place the trivet in first, then lower in the tin using the foil "handles". Close the oven with the lid and place on the heat diffuser over a single gas ring set roughly to medium heat. Bake for approximately 40 minutes. The damper is ready when the top springs back and sounds hollow when tapped. The base may burn a bit, but it adds to the taste; and charcoal's good for the digestion! Sweet or savoury pies, quiches and flans are a breeze this way.

The pie in the picture on the right was made with the same setup, but swapping a stainless steel bowl for the cake tin. The recipe is basically the Steak and Kidney Pie Recipe 57. If you can't get fresh meat, try canned corned beef with chopped onion. The pans on the cooker beside the oven are available from hardware or camping stores and are the kind that sit one inside the other, saving space. Ours is a three-burner gas camp stove, the plate of which we lined with foil to make it spill-proof and easier to clean.



I'll leave you to figure out your own camp meals. And if you're really serious about this camping gig, try some of the dishes out at home like I did; experiment even; let the kids join in. One last thing – get yourself a tin billy; or make one from a large fruit-juice can and punch a couple of holes under the rim for a wire handle. Then you can make billy tea. All you need is a billy of fresh water and a handful of tea leaves. Start this boiling on the stove or a fire, then put in a sprig of gum leaves and stir occasionally with a stick for five minutes. Fish out the leaves, then pour into mugs (or whatever you've got) and add sugar if you like. As for milk, that's your choice – I reckon it tastes better without.

Remember: if you have it at home, you can probably make it on camp. Why not give it a go?

## CAMP COOKING CHECKLIST

### Basic Ingredients

Flour, baking powder, cream of tartar, sodium bicarb (for cooking and cleaning)

Alternatives to fresh food – canned, dried, UHT products

Dry foods like rice, noodles and pasta

Spread (butter goes off quicker), jam, marmalade, etc

Cooking oil, salt and pepper, plus any spices

Instant gravy powder, plus stock powder

Sugar, tea, coffee, etc

### Basic Equipment

A 2- or 3-burner gas stove plus gas bottle, matches and a heat diffuser (see Handy Hints)

An MDF (or similar) board large enough to sit the stove on

A plastic storage container for pots and pans big enough to sit the board on

Stew pan with lid, and trivet to sit in the bottom

Round, shallow baking tin plus a stainless steel bowl, both small enough to fit in the stew pan

Set of camp cooking pans plus billy

Aluminium foil – good for lining, wrapping, and lifting out baking tins – and baking paper

Frypan or skillet plus splash cover – wrapped with foil makes a lid

Plastic bowl plus spatula

2 wooden or plastic spoons

Egg/fish slice

Measuring jug and measuring spoon set

2 or 3 sharp kitchen knives (so that someone else can give a hand with the prep work)

Potato/vegetable peeler

Cutting board

Cheese grater

Tea towels – for handling hot pans etc

### AND 2 X 20 LITRE FRESH WATER CONTAINERS

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