

# Yes, food does taste better outside

Dining while adventuring in nature isn't limited to burgers and s'mores

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SANDRA PHINNEY

It's day one of a three-day canoe trip on the West Saint Mary's River in Nova Scotia. We've seen bears and eagles, and also pulled our canoes ashore to hike to a couple of waterfalls. Later, approaching dusk, we are four happy but played-out paddlers—and famished.

While setting up our campsite, Nicola Roberts-Fenton starts a campfire. Within minutes she's retrieved four packets from her food stash. Each contains pork tenderloin, chunks of onion and potatoes to which she had added a splash of olive oil and a sprinkling of herbs. They were wrapped in parchment paper and re-wrapped in foil. She tucked these next to the fire on an egg carton filled with briquettes that had been wrapped in newspaper.

By the time our tents were up, dinner was ready. Someone murmured "Food always tastes better outside." An old cliché, but oh-so-true!

Nicola and I have since exchanged several recipes that we love to prepare either for day trips or longer ventures. One of her favourites is quesadillas. "These are super easy. You can get as creative as you like," Nicola says, "and prepare the fillings ahead of time."

Here's how to proceed: heat 1 tbsp of oil in your skillet. Place a tortilla in the pan, add grated mozzarella cheese, topped off with fillings such as sliced tomatoes, peppers, sweet onion, spinach, black beans, or corn. Top with another tortilla. Press together with a spatula. When the cheese has melted and the other ingredients are warm, flip over for a few more minutes. Cut in wedges and serve with sour cream or salsa.

You can also make breakfast quesadillas with scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, and cheddar cheese. Cook the meats and eggs





first, then follow the same procedure. Heat 'er up, flip over, and enjoy!

Another easy recipe to make in the bush (or your backyard) is falafel pitas. As a timesaver, Nicola recommends Epicure or Casbah falafel mix. The beauty of this is that you simply add water, form into 2-inch patties, cook in a bit of oil then place inside your pita "pocket" along with some hummus and chopped veggies. (I vote for cukes!)

On long trips, when weight is a factor, I love to make Murkha Dal. It's loaded with protein, and easy to pack. In a small container, put 1/2 cup butter, 2 tsp mustard seeds, 1 tsp ground turmeric, 1 tsp salt, 2 chopped garlic cloves and a finely chopped Jalapeno pepper. Bring along 1 C red lentils and one package of dry coconut milk powder. You'll also need 4 C water. Method: melt the butter ingredients and heat until seeds pop. Add the lentils, water, and coconut powder. Mix then cover and simmer for 30-45 minutes until thick. Stir often. Serve over rice.

TIPS: if weight is not a factor, you can make the dal at home and freeze it. This will help keep other foods cool in your backpack or cooler. If you are using a butane burner, instant rice cooks quickly and will use less fuel than regular rice.

It's easy to add smoked fish or meat jerky to any meal; they pack well; don't need to be cooked; and don't add much weight.

Have a sweet tooth? Make banana boats! Slice a banana lengthwise down the middle (not quite all the way through). Gently pry open and insert any of the following:

chocolate chips, mini marshmallows, coconut, dried fruit, nuts, sprinkles—you get the idea. Wrap in two sheets of tin foil and place on campfire coals. After 4-5 minutes, turn over; leave for another 2 minutes. Grab a spoon and eat right out of the tin foil. Kids of all ages (including their parents and grandparents) love this.

For a walk on the wild side, how about bannock on a stick? Mix 3 C flour, 2 tbsp baking powder, 1/2 tsp salt. Work in 1/2 C butter with a fork or your hands. Add 3/4 C of water. Mix and knead together. Now cut a 3-4 ft. branch about 1 inch in diameter. Roll out a handful of dough like a long cigar, flatten to 1/2 in., wind and wrap around the top of the stick. Roast over coals about 10 minutes, turning often.

A few moons ago I had the good fortune of paddling with Phil Tower on Ponhook Lake. When we returned to camp, he placed a whole chicken with carrots and potatoes in a cast iron pot, added seasonings, and put the lid on. Then he proceeded to light a small pile of briquettes on top of a rock (it could also have been on the ground), set the pot on top of the briquettes, then added more briquettes on top of the lid. One



hour later I was eating a delectable chicken dinner fit for royalty!

On one of my journeys to Labrador, while walking along a boardwalk on the coast of Rigolet, I came upon some kayakers who invited me to join them for dinner. They had made a fire flanked by rocks in a U-shape and straddled two flat rocks across the top over the fire. After oiling the flat rocks, outfitter Benoit Havard placed two salmon stuffed with corn, chopped onion, and diced green peppers on top.

Although the fish took more than 30 minutes to cook on each side, it was one of the most memorable meals I've ever eaten.

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Top: Phil Tower checks on the chicken he's cooked (yes, it's ready!). Left: Choosing the toppings for banana boats is almost as fun as eating them. Nicola Roberts-Fenton, her son Easton, Verna Wirth and Ken Pothier agree.