

Rustlin' up cowboy grub

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Cowboys on chuckwagon in the late 1800s and at the beginning of the 20th century mostly ate beef, beans, biscuits, dried fruit and coffee. Occasionally, a type of bread known as pan de campo (or "camp bread"), which was cooked on a cast-iron skillet was also available. It was sort of like a biscuit version of cornbread. These, along with a little bit of sugar, were the staples of the chuckwagon pantry.

After spring roundups in the 19th century, cowboys herded their cattle out on the trail on a cattle drive heading to a cowtown with a railroad station where the cattle could be corralled and loaded. To herd cattle on a long drive (such as Texas to Kansas) a crew of 10 or more cowboys was needed. And most ranch owners wanted their cowboys fed well so that they would stay healthy along the trail.

The crew also included a cook. But as cattle drives increased in the 1860s cooks found it harder and harder to feed the 10 to 20 men who tended the cattle. That's when Texas-Ranger-turned-cattle-rancher Charles Goodnight created the chuckwagon.

Herding cattle on the trail would often last two or more

months moving cattle miles each day, with some drives lasting up to five months.

Goodnight, knowing the importance of daily meals for his crew, had an idea. He took a surplus army wagon made by Studebaker and added a large pantry box to the wagon rear with a hinged door that laid flat to create a work table. The cook would then have everything he needed at arms-length.

The larger pots (which included a cast-iron Dutch oven), cast-iron skillets, and utensils would be carried in a box mounted below the pantry called the boot. The Army wagon merely was a light supply wagon of that period with Goodnight's added design creating the invention of the chuckwagon.

The cook, often known as "Cookie," managed the wagon and performed all the needs for the campsites along the cattle drives. He was one of the most well-respected members of the crew. Chuckwagon cookies were the lifeblood of cattle ranches that dotted the Old West frontier like a cowboy tapestry.

You might be surprised how well cowboys were fed after the chuckwagon arrived on the scene.

Chuckwagon staples had to travel well and not spoil.

Cowboy Cookies

- 1/2 cup margarine
- 1/2 cup vegetable shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups uncooked oatmeal
- 1 (12-ounce) package chocolate chips



Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream margarine, shortening, sugar and brown sugar in mixer bowl until light and fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla; mix well. Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in separate bowl. Stir flour mixture into dough until combined. Add oatmeal; mix well. Fold in chocolate chips. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased cookie sheet. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until done. (Bake for 10 minutes for soft cookies.) Let cool on wire rack.

The list included flour, sourdough, salt, brown sugar, beans, rice, cornmeal, dried apples and peaches, baking powder, baking soda, coffee and syrup.

Fresh and dried meat were essential to the cowboy diet, providing protein and energy for their exhausting work. Their dried meat was like modern jerky but drier, not as heavily seasoned, lightweight and nonperishable. The meat was cooked into stew, soup or added to chili beans.

Fresh beef was readily available, but cowboys also hunted wild game and fished in streams along the trail and during roundups. The cook used bacon grease to fry everything, but bacon also served as the main meat when supplies ran low.

Beans made up the bulk of a cowboy's protein intake. Since beans were readily available, there were loads of simple recipes that were shared along the cattle trails of the American West, including chili, mashed beans and bean soups. Cooked overnight in a Dutch oven, beans would last for many meals.

Coffee was one of the few luxuries given to cowboys on long trail rides. The enamelware coffee pot was large, holding at least 20 or more cups. Cowboys relied on coffee to keep them alert and warm in the wilderness.

The cowboys rose from their bedrolls, put on their hats and boots, and straggled over to the chuck wagon for their morning coffee.

On July 4, 1936, the

Willamette Valley town of St. Paul, Oregon held its first rodeo. Lasting four days, the rodeo included a parade, a western art show, and a barbecue cook-off. The rodeo cowboy's fare consisted of mainly beef, with beans and sourdough bread and canned vegetables and plenty of coffee, and maybe a cowboy cookie for dessert.

They say that cowboy cookies originated back in the 1800s and were a popular treat for cowboys to enjoy while out on the trail, kind of like an old-fashioned power bar. Now, there's little to no evidence that this is true in any way. After all, the chocolate chip cookie itself wasn't even invented until 1938. But cowboy cookies are still a delicious treat.



To the Rodeo Board and Volunteers,
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