

MAKING WOCUS COMPLEX JOB, ONE THAT DIFFERS LITTLE FROM EARLY DAYS

Following is the first part of a two-part article on the art of wocus processing, past and present.

While few may realize it, the wocus season has just reached its culmination.

What is wocus?, it may reasonably be asked, as about the only general usage one now finds for the term is as a placename for several local points.

Wocus, or wokus, is a Klamath Indian word. In the Klamaths' native culture, the term referred to a basic part of the tribal diet, a food as staple as, for instance, bread in other societies. Wocus amounted to the wheat of the Klamath Indians, a grainlike substance for which they found diverse dietary uses.

Today, of course, wocus has receded into the background as a Klamath food. It is still gathered, however, by a rather exclusive group, composed of several elements: a limited number of tribal members, carrying on the tribal tradition; gourmets or other persons seeking ultra specialized fare; persons with a scholarly interest in the Klamath culture, learning more about this particular phase through a reenactment of it. Some wocus gathers would no doubt fall in all three of these categories.

Wocus, in the rough, is the seed of the water lily plant, found in such plenitude in bays and marshy areas of Agency and Klamath Lakes and in Klamath Marsh. As such, it might be equated to grains growing in watery areas such as rice. Wocus itself appears to be classifiable as a grain under Webster's definition of grain as "the seeds or fruits of various food plants . . .". Certainly it is a seed and the degree to which the Klamaths gathered it served to classify them as a seed-gathering tribe.

Having found wocus to be a food, readers will doubtless want to know the procedure for processing it—from lily pod to dinner (or breakfast) table.

Comparing the procedure followed by the Klamaths when gathering wocus as a vital food crop, and that adopted by modern devotees, it is plain that the changes are merely in the equipment used. Thus where the early gatherers embarked in dugouts, today the more maneuverable canoe is used. Where the Klamaths used their hand-woven tule baskets to accumulate the lily

Pods, a gunny sack is now a more likely receptacle.

But whether one is in dugout or canoe late summer is the time to gather wocus. Guiding the craft through the water lily ponds of Agency Lake, Klamath Lake, Klamath Marsh, or other localities, the easily-found pods are plucked and placed in the gunny sack (or tule basket or other container). A fact long noted, the pods vary according to maturity. The fully mature pod was most prized by the Klamaths as containing larger, whiter, more palatable seeds. These qualities would presumably serve to make the fully mature variety the most popular today. Full maturity is indicated when the pod bursts open irregularly at the base on being picked with the white, mealy interior beginning a mucilaginous dissolution as soon as it is brought into contact with the water and the seeds being scattered in the water. The Klamaths had a special name, spokwas, for this fully mature seed, which applied as well to the dissolving pod and to the mass formed when gathered. This spokwas, however superior, constitutes only a small part (about 10%) of the pods available at a given time, due to the rapid dissolution of the fully ripened pods, and thus it is customary to pick the less mature pods also to secure a reasonably large gathering.

What was done with the pods once gathered and brought into the dugouts? What is done with them today? Comparing the old methodology of processing the seeds into edible wocus with the new, it is again apparent that the changes have been mainly superfluous. Thus where the original gatherers used stone mullers and platters to grind the seeds a coffee grinder might be employed today as a means of less exertion. The wind was originally relied on to winnow out seed shells from the seeds, but an electric fan is often used now to speed things up. And of course, various other implements used today in the wocus process—frying pans, wire screens, metal tubs, etc.—were unknown to the earlier gatherers. But the objective of the wocus processor remains: to convert the raw material, the seed in the pod, into one of the basic types defined by the Klamaths—spokwas, lowak, stontablaks, or awal, and thence into various savory derivatives.

Next month—How to make spokwas.

HUNTING SEASON SLATED TO OPEN, HUNTERS CAUTIONED ON FIRE HAZARD

SALEM, ORE., September 26 (Special)—There will be no closing of the forests to hunters when the big game season gets under way next Saturday in case present weather conditions hold, according to a statement issued today by State Forester D. L. Phipps. However, he added, that at the present time the hazardous areas of the state are under controlled entry and all hunters should check with the wardens and rangers to determine whether conditions are such that the permits will be issued.

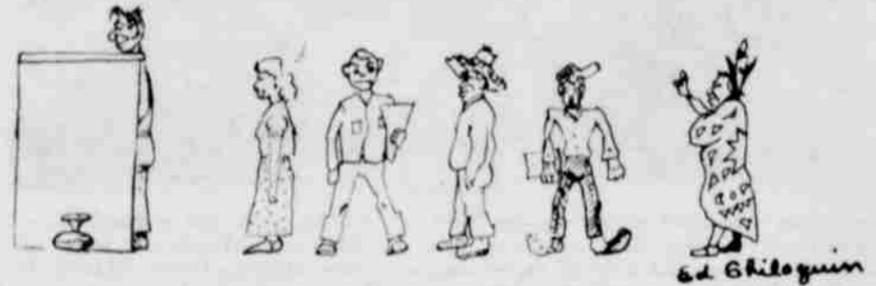
Where entry permits are issued the hunter must carry tools suitable for fighting forest fires if he plans to camp at some spot other than a posted and designated camp ground, the forester added. The tools include an axe, shovel and bucket.

"At the present time hazardous conditions exist in the southern and eastern part of the state," the forester said. "There has been little rain for the past two or three months and the hunter should exercise extreme care in the use of fire.

"Warming fires are not permitted during the closed season and the season will not end until general statewide rains occur and a proclamation is issued by the governor."

In the northwestern part of the state there has been some rain and at present the hazard is low. Phipps added that with high temperatures and east winds fire conditions could get extremely hazardous in a very short time. He pointed out that some of Oregon's most disastrous fires have occurred in late fall.

Have you registered to vote?



DEADLINE FOR REGISTERING IN OREGON IS OCTOBER 7, 1960

[Registration is necessary if: 1. You are a new resident [but will have been in Oregon six months by Nov. 7]; 2. You have moved since the last time you voted; 3. You have changed your last name; 4. Your registration was canceled for failure to vote in at least one election in 1958.]

For the County, State and National Elections Register at any of the Following Places:

BEATTY: Jesse L. Kirk, Sr., residence.

CHILOQUIN: Markwardt Garage and Claudia Lorenz residence.

KLAMATH FALLS: County Clerk's office in Klamath County Courthouse; Fire Station at Broad and Wall Sts.; Union Hall at 202 Main St.; Southern Pacific office, Helen Moss.

FOR THE CITY OF CHILOQUIN ELECTION REGISTER AT THE CHILOQUIN CITY HALL.

REGISTER -- THEN VOTE

Power in a democracy springs from the People.