

Lewis and Clark's food journal inspires Depot dinner

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On their trip to the Pacific, members of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery took copious notes, documenting everything from what they saw to what they ate. From those exhaustive journals, writer Mary Gunderson assembled "The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark."

"We know when the explorers ate the last of their butter and when they first tasted buffalo," Gunderson writes.

Setting out from St. Louis in 1804, the expedition packed tons of dry goods, including flour, salt, coffee, pork, sugar, beans, lard and so on. While these rations enabled survival in leaner times, animal proteins provided essential energy for the grueling trek.

"We eat an emensity of meat," Clark wrote on July 13, 1805, "it requires 4 deer, or an elk and a deer, or one buffaloe to supply us plentifully 24 hours."

When meat was plentiful, expedition members were said to devour up to nine pounds a day — that's nine pounds per man. And while transforming one's body into such a high-intensity calorie furnace is almost unimaginable, the source of those meats is at least slightly tempering. Indeed, the Corps weren't pounding pounds of fatty pig and cow, but rather loads of lean, protein-rich game like venison, elk and buffalo.

Lest we describe their diet as some foodie cornucopia, it was repetitive and, at times, grim. Excluding Clark, members of the expedition ate dog when other meats were unavailable.

Hardships aside, "The Food Journal of Lewis and Clark" fascinated The Depot Restaurant owners Michael Lalewicz and Nancy Gorshe. The couple began playing with similar ingredients.



Pheasant breast stuffed with elk sausage, wrapped with bacon on sweet corn and leek succotash, topped with red wine gastrique

Earlier this month, The Depot, in Seaview, hosted its annual Lewis & Clark Wild Game Dinner (\$89). While hardly a note-for-note representation of what the Corps ate — as Gorshe said, Lalewicz "gourmet-ed it up" — the dinner was a marvelous, meaty celebration highlighting game rarely found in regional restaurants.

Based on what purveyors can deliver, the Game Dinner's menu changes each year. Sourcing, say, pheasant for 50-plus is no walk in the park.

Even in its 14th year, the event remains a joyful, creative outlet for chef Lalewicz to work outside the Depot's regular confines. It's also a return to his roots. He got his start as a teenager, cooking what friends hunted around the Detroit area, Gorshe said. For her part, Gorshe shared stories of revelry as the taste-tester in the weeks leading up to the event.

Each of the evening's five courses sprung from a passage of expedition notes, connecting, however tangentially, what Lewis and Clark ate with what we were about to.

Course No. 1: "*The Chief Set before me a large platter of Onions which had been Sweeted. I gave*

part of those onions to my party and we ate of them, in the State the root is very Sweet and the tops tender." —Clark, April 18, 1906.

An opening salvo of herbed focaccia and onion marmalade, the first course was a calibration of sorts: That oily, onion-y essence, however sweetened, invoked bygone times. As with each course, it was paired with a glass of wine from the Columbia Gorge's Ascendente Winery.

Course No. 2: "*I have eaten of duck in several parts of the Union and I think those of the Columbia equally as delicious.*" —Lewis, March 9, 1806.

And while duck breast is a staple of the Depot's marvelous regular menu, chef Lalewicz wasn't content with the status quo. Rather, he spent three weeks curing and smoking duck pastrami, which was served in a salad of field greens, Dijon mustard vinaigrette, crunchy roasted parsnips, candied hazelnuts and exceedingly fresh goat cheese.

To the usual pastrami pickling spices, Lalewicz added paprika (a Depot seasoning favorite). The fatty, supple slices were deep and smoky, a singular sensation. (Lalewicz later mentioned he would be



Cranberry and pear bread pudding with red current glaze

enjoying duck pastrami sandwiches with the leftovers, and I fought back envy, dreaming of such depth with sauerkraut and thousand island on rye.)

Course No. 3: "*Dear Brother, we met with a great many Showonee and traded with them for Biar, Venison, Ducs, Tongues and Beaver Tales.*" —December 18, 1805.

I've had venison a handful of times, each prepared by the hunter who'd caught it and never by an exceptional, professional chef. Lalewicz did it simply and exquisitely, with a quick sear of herbed crust, finished in an exceptionally hot oven. The deep-hued pink stretched from edge-to-edge, looking so perfectly even as to appear sous-vided.

While leaner than lean ground beef, the venison medallions were astonishingly rich, flavorful. They made me melt. My neighbor, upon his first bite, laughed out loud with joy. On the second bite he did it again. (And while it didn't need any punching up, the pistachio pesto, too, was absolutely vibrant and extraordinary.)

Indeed, the venison was, simply, one of the best bites I've had all year.

Course No. 4: "*I prosue'd a*

gang of elk through bogs, in maney places I sunk into the mud and water up to my hips without finding any bottom on the traile of those elk." —Clark, December 8, 1805.

The ensuing course found elk and then some. A pheasant breast stuffed with potently seasoned elk sausage, wrapped with bacon, drizzled with red wine gastrique, was a meaty melange, one that could make turducken feel inadequate. While a hair absurd, you didn't feel like a total jerk devouring the layers, salty, sweet and tender, wrapped with a fatty ribbon. And, thanks again to the leanness — and to the creamy corn and leek succotash — you could actually eat it all.

Course No. 5: "*...we found a large quantity of Graze the Buff. or Rabite Berryes of which we eat freely, they are a small red berry, Sower & good to taste. we have seen them plenty in this Country.*" —Lewis, August 15 1805.

It seems the Depot envisioned these many courses holistically, with an eye not only on the through line but the aftereffect. Besides the slivers of focaccia that began the evening, the meal was essentially carb-free. That strategy curbed bloating or feeling stuffed.

With dessert — a bread pudding with cranberry, pear and red current glaze — carbs were reintroduced, and were all the more comforting for it. Warm, pillowy and sweet, dessert was something to cuddle up in. It put dreamland in reach, amid exhalations of relaxation, satiation and gratitude.

Yet, even after dessert and all those meats — duck, elk, pheasant, pig and venison — I wasn't sleepy. I was, rather, energized, my engine revving on high-octane, low-fat game.

And while — after a transportive, reverent and spellbinding five-course meal — it can in no way be called an "expedition," I did, beneath clear, starry skies, enjoy my own little walk to the Pacific. 