

Econo-eating:

Light, easy foods for hiking

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There I was on top of the world. At least it seemed that way to me because the mountain was straight down on both sides of the trail. I had my husband take a picture of me in my hiking boots and backpack with the mountains below me. I figured my kids would never believe that their somewhat sedentary mother would be able to walk that far.

I'm sure my husband hasn't any idea how much my lifestyle has changed. About the only walking I used to do was around the neighborhood to walk the dog. This walk usually featured an ice cream cone and was a leisurely stroll on flat ground done only in the summer on good weather days. But, I'm just loving it — the flowers and the outdoors and the hikes and even some backpacking. It's been great fun.

There are very special needs as you backpack. I'm just amazed by my husband's ingenuity with the foods we eat. Of course, he's been doing this all his life and he looks on it as a challenge.

You need to carry things that require no refrigeration. Since everything must be carried on your back, you need to conserve weight. You also need to pack your cans and containers back out, so you don't want to take many. Foods need to be cooked using one or two pots for the whole meal. You need to save time and fuel so you can't cook things for very long. And you need to be aware of your nutritional needs, including your energy needs, because you can get very hungry doing all that hiking. Food tastes good out there in the wild, too, so appetites seem to increase.

There are many freeze dried foods available in recreation stores that are made specifically for backpacking. Unfortunately, they cost quite a bit. The special dried meat items cost from about \$3 to \$6 for enough for two or three people for one meal. They are light though, weighing just two or three ounces. If you're going for a long time, you just about have to invest in some of these to be able to carry enough food for the whole time. We stretch time, though, by combining them with some of the convenience foods from the grocery store. With some meals we can get by for about \$2 using only items from the grocery store.

Planning, which is important any time you're trying to save money, is even more important for backpack meals. You need to write down menus for simple meals. Remember to plan snacks, too, otherwise you may be tempted to raid the food from a meal. If you plan the meals you can put more thought into doing your own seasoning from your stock at home or things purchased in the grocery store rather than just buying the ready-made packets from the recreation stores.

The commercially packed foods are in strong pouches that make them almost indestructible, but some of the plastic sacks, especially the ones that zip shut are handy to pack your own combination foods and with some careful loading into a stuff bag can be quite well protected.

Since you have no refrigeration and must conserve weight, you can use foods such as small cans of tuna, chicken or sardines for the meat group. Cheese is also a good choice on the trail because it's so versatile. If you're going for a long time, you can even cut it into meal amounts, wrap the chunks in cheese cloth and dip in paraffin, though this isn't necessary for a few days. Eggs will also keep well for three or four days and can be kept from breaking by packing in a special plastic container.

Dried foods are available in the grocery store, too. Dried beef, jerky, soups, sauce and gravy mixes, instant mashed potatoes, instant rice, pancake and biscuit mixes and instant oatmeal are readily available and they are lighter than taking the fresh fruits or vegetables. Our delightful Oregon prunes are easy to carry and provide a good source of Vitamin A — they're much better than raisins. It's kind of hard to find a good source of Vitamin A, so that's a real bonus on the trail. Dried apricots are good for Vitamin A, but are more expensive.

As far as I have been able to tell, about the easiest source for Vitamin C is the powdered orange drink, which I like to drink hot for break-

fast — it goes well with the instant oatmeal for a quick, hot breakfast just made by adding hot water.

Whole grain crackers, such as wheat or rye, that are packaged in tubes or boxes are easy to take for your breads and cereals. You can also take oriental noodles. Other longer cooking pastas are quite easy to take, but will usually require an extra pot for cooking — a great spaghetti can be made using spaghetti seasoning mix, tomato paste and freeze-dried hamburger.

Here are a couple of recipes that are tasty and fit the needs of the backpacker.

BACKPACKER'S SPANISH RICE

- 1 1/2 cups instant rice
- 1 teaspoon taco flavoring mix
- 2 packets instant tomato soup mix (the kind made for one cup serving)
- 2 to 3 ounces of cheese

At home, put the rice, seasoning mix and soup mix together in a heavy plastic bag. In camp, boil water, measure 1 1/2 cups water into a container with a tight fitting lid. Add the mix and the cheese cut into cubes. Put the lid on and keep near the fire but not on it. It's ready to eat in 7 minutes. Generous amount

for two, a nice side dish for three. This basic recipe can be varied using other soup mixes and small cans of meat. For instance, use the rice, cream of chicken soup and a small can of chicken.

BOB'S FAVORITE NOODLES

- 2 to 3 ounces flat noodles
- Tuna (small can, packed in oil)
- Freeze-dried peas
- Margarine, butter, or substitute

In camp, cook noodles in water. Drain, add tuna, including oil, reconstituted peas and enough margarine to make it a moist casserole.

If this sauce doesn't send you, you have nowhere to go . . .



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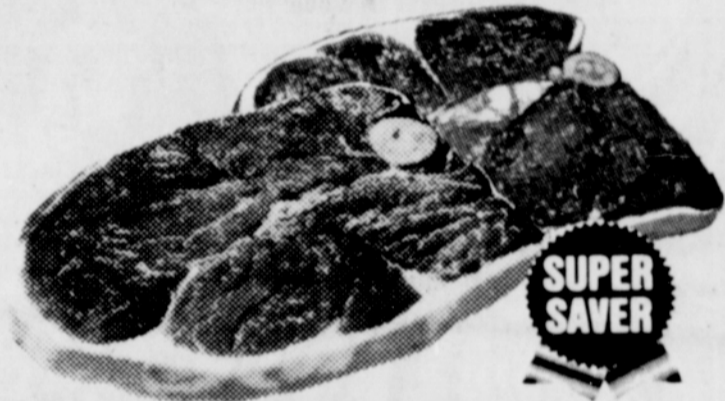
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