



# Backcountry Food

From gorp to gourmet, *Washington Trails* dishes up a special issue of recipes, taste tests, tips and after-hike grub to fuel your next hike.

## Make Your Own

A compendium of backcountry recipes, from WTA members and cookbook authors

Nothing beats a good meal at 6,000 feet. You've worked hard, the air is cool and clear, all of your taste buds are humming in the alpine air. Whether you like old-fashioned cowboy stews or more contemporary or ethnic foods, we've compiled a brief selection of meals that'll make those evenings in Spider Meadow even more magical.

We've included breakfasts, dinners, and assorted drinks and snacks. Lunch tends to be a utilitarian meal ("spread bagel with peanut butter and jelly") so you're on your own there.

Have a great recipe to share?

Visit [www.wta.org/kitchen](http://www.wta.org/kitchen) and add your favorites.

## Breakfast

### Big River Apricot Granola

- ¼ cup canola oil
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 1 ½ tsp. vanilla
- 1 tbsp. nutritional yeast
- ½ cup wheat germ
- 2 ½ cups rolled oats
- 1 cup rolled rye
- ½ cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup Ocean Spray Craisins
- 1 cup chopped dried apricots
- ½ cup chopped dates
- 1/3 cup chopped almonds
- ½ cup unsalted sunflower seeds

At home: Heat oil, honey and syrup until thin. Add vanilla, yeast, wheat germ, oats, wheat and rye, stirring well after each addition. Spread on cookie

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## Dinner

sheet and bake at 250 degrees for 1 ½ to 2 hours. Stir periodically. Cool, then mix in fruits, nuts and seeds. Store in airtight containers in a cool, dry place until used.

On the trail: eat as is or with powdered milk and water, either hot or cold. Serving size is about 1 cup per person. This is a very hearty and nutritious breakfast.

Recipe by Brain Guldberg

From Tim and Christine Connors

*Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* (Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)

### Cinnamon 'n Sugar Couscous

- ¼ cup couscous
- 2 tbsp. powdered milk
- 1 tbsp. brown sugar
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- pinch of salt
- 1-2 tbsp. chopped almonds

Combine all ingredients except for almonds, in a quart freezer bag.

In camp add ¼ - ½ cup boiling water (add lower amount for dryer couscous). Pop in a cozy (see p. 26) for 5 minutes, add almonds and stir well.

Serves 1.

From Sarah Svien

Author of *Freezer Bag Cooking* (Lulu Press, 2006)

[www.freezerbagcooking.com](http://www.freezerbagcooking.com)

### Coconut Oatmeal

Add coconut milk powder to your favorite oatmeal recipe in lieu of powdered milk. This is an exotic change from plain oatmeal that adds calories to boot.

- ½ cup oatmeal (instant or regular)
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup of your favorite combination of nuts and dried fruit.
- 1-2 tbsp. coconut milk powder, or more if you like it rich.
- Pinch of salt.

Like powdered milk, coconut milk can be added at any point during cooking, or mixed after cooking for those who want to control richness and taste.

Powdered coconut milk is available at Asian food stores and on-line.

From Hally Swift

### Andean Quinoa Stew

Quinoa (KEEN-wa) has been cultivated in the Andes since ancient times. Touted as the "supergrain" by nutritionists because of its high protein content, quinoa is a perfect backpacking food staple. If it powered the building of Machu Picchu, it should be potent enough to fuel us through the Cascades!

- ½ cup quinoa
  - 1 cup water
  - ¼ tsp salt
  - ¼ tsp ground black pepper
  - 1 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
  - ¼ lime
  - handful coarsely chopped fresh cilantro leaves
  - ½ cup dehydrated corn kernels, rehydrated
  - 2 tbsp. diced sun dried tomatoes, or 2 tbsp. dehydrated, rehydrated
  - 1 tbsp. Chipotle Seasoning mix (Dan's, available at Larry's Market)
  - 1 sliced avocado
- Rinse quinoa thoroughly. Place quinoa in a medium-sized pan, add the water, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, until the liquid is absorbed, 10 to 12 minutes. The quinoa should be translucent. Remove from heat and fluff it with a fork.

Sprinkle the grains with the salt and pepper and stir, folding from underneath the grains. Fold the olive oil, juice from lime, corn and tomatoes into the quinoa. Adjust the seasonings to taste.

Garnish with cilantro and avocado slices.

Serves 2.

Optional: Served with grilled guinea, as served in Peru.

From Dayna Stern

### Bangkok Noodles

This recipe was created for the 2003 REI camp stove cook-off.

- 1 pound angel hair pasta
- 1 carrot cut in matchsticks
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 cup fresh snow peas, cleaned and stripped of strings

## Resources for Alpine Gourmets

*The Well-fed Backpacker*

by June Fleming

(Vintage Books, 1986)

This classic tome, while a little dated, explains general shopping tactics, dehydrating and meal planning. This book is more about technique, though there are many recipes included.

*Lipsmackin' Backpackin'* and

*Lipsmackin' Vegetarian Backpackin'*

by Tim and Christine Connors

(Globe Pequot Press, 2000, 2004)

These two volumes are chock-a-block with great recipes submitted by friends of the authors. If you prefer to cook from a recipe, these books are for you. Understanding of dehydration techniques helpful.

*More Backcountry Cooking*

by Dorcas S. Miller

(Mountaineers Books, 2002)

More than 150 recipes from the food writers at *Backpacker* magazine. Lots of tips on everything from cowboy coffee to cakes.

*NOLS Cookery*

Edited by Claudia Pearson

(Stackpole Books, 2004)

An longtime addition to the backcountry chef's bookshelf, this guide produced by the National Outdoor Leadership School includes scores of field-tested recipes.

*Freezer Bag Cooking*

by Sarah Svien

(Lulu Books, 2006)

Recipes and tips for making your own dehydrated meals. Visit Sarah's website at [www.freezerbagcooking.com](http://www.freezerbagcooking.com).

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Sauce:

¼ cup smooth peanut butter

¼ cup water

2 tbsp. fish sauce

½ tsp. hot red pepper flakes

2 tbsp. soy sauce

1 tbs. brown sugar

1 tsp. fresh grated ginger

1 tsp. curry powder

Black pepper to taste

Topping:

1 bunch scallions, sliced diagonally into ½ -inch lengths (optional)

¼ cup fresh coriander, chopped (optional)

¼ cup fresh mint leaves, chopped (optional)

At home: Clean and prepare carrots, red pepper and snow peas and store in a zip close bag. Mix all the sauce ingredients together in a small Tupperware or a separate zip lock bag. Clean, dry and cut topping and put in a zip lock bag.

Climb halfway up a mountain and make base camp. Prepare noodles per directions on package—remember that they may take longer to cook at altitude. One minute before they are done, add the pepper, snow peas and carrot. Drain pasta and vegetables. Toss in sauce.

Top with your choice of scallions, coriander, and/or mint.

Serves 6

From Dayna Stern

### Cascade Stew

1 pound potatoes, boiled and cut into small pieces

1 pound fresh carrots, boiled and cut

1 pound Roma tomatoes, cut into small pieces

1 (4 ½ oz.) jar Armour Sliced Dried Beef

3 tbsp. dried onion flakes

½ cup instant potato flakes

5 cups water

At home: In a food dehydrator, dry the potatoes, carrots, and tomatoes. Dehydrate the dried beef even further; when stiff, break it up into small pieces. Mix all of these ingredients together with onion flakes and store in a resealable plastic bag.

Carry potato flakes separately.

On the trail: Add stew mixture to water and bring to a boil. Stir frequently. Let boil about 1 minutes or so until vegetables are fully hydrated. Add potato flakes and stir. Serves 2.

Recipe by Ann Marshall

From Tim & Christine Connors

*Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* (Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)

### Cashew-Ginger Chicken and Rice

This is my all-time favorite meal. Sometimes I use almonds instead of cashews and home-dried savoy cabbage and carrots instead of corn. A packet of Thai Coconut Ginger Soup Mix, which contains ginger, lemongrass, and other ingredients, supplies the flavor; look for it or a similar product in the supermarket aisle with international foods. If you are not fond of ginger, substitute 1 tbsp. lemon-pepper seasoning or 1 packet lemon-chicken seasoning. The nuts,

freeze-dried corn, and chicken make this entrée more expensive than, say, chili, but it's still inexpensive compared to eating at a restaurant. Remember, you're on vacation.

At home, toast:

½ cup cashews

Let cool and pack in a zipper-lock bag.

In another bag, pack:

1 cup instant brown rice

2/3 cup freeze-dried corn

½ cup thinly sliced dry shiitake mushrooms

¼ cup onion flakes

Also pack:

1 (10-ounce) can of chicken, mixed white and dark meat

2 (1-ounce) packets of Thai Coconut Ginger Soup Mix paste

On trail: place dry mix, chicken, and 1 packet seasoning in pot and cover with water; mix well. Bring to a boil; simmer 5 minutes; taste; add some of second seasoning packet if needed. Simmer 5

## Tasty Tip: Growing Greens on the Trail

If you crave green stuff on backpacking trips, there's a simple way to turn your pack into a garden: grow sprouts. Bean sprouts add a fresh, nutty crunch to pasta, salads, and sandwiches. Time it right and you can harvest fresh greens every day of your trip. (Use purified water at each step.)

Materials:

- Plastic 1- or 2-liter wide-mouth bottle

- 2 x 2-inch swatch of cheesecloth or mosquito netting

- Rubber band

- 1 cup dried beans or lentils, or radish or alfalfa seeds

Step 1: Wash the beans or seeds, then place them in the bottle with enough

water to cover. Screw on the cap and keep the bottle in a warm, dark place until they begin sprouting, usually one to two days.

Step 2: Once the beans have sprouted, drain the water and cover the bottle opening with the cheesecloth or netting; secure with the rubber band. Now air can circulate, so the sprouts shouldn't rot. Keep the bottle in the sun; fasten it to the outside of your pack if you can.

Step 3: Twice a day, rinse the sprouts by pouring water into the bottle, shaking gently, and then draining.

In about three days the sprouts are ready to eat. Rinse and drain every day, and your sprouts will last up to a week.

From *More Backcountry Cooking* by Dorcas S. Miller (Mountaineers Books, 2002)



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minutes (adding more water as needed) or until done. Serves 2.

From Dorcas Miller,

*More Backcountry Cooking* (Mountaineers Books, 2002)

### Chicken with Chinese Ginger Lemon Sauce by Perk

dash of Five Spice powder, granulated garlic, black pepper

½ tsp. powdered ginger

1 tsp. dry onion

1 cube chicken bullion, crushed.

1 tsp. brown sugar

½ tsp. lemonade powder

½ tsp. cornstarch

Also take:

a 7 oz. pouch chicken

1 pkg. soy sauce

On trail: combine all but meat with ¼ cup boiling water and shake to mix well. Add meat and put in a cozy (see p. 26) for 10 minutes.

Serve over instant rice, or instant mashed potatoes.

Optional: For a real treat, replace powdered ginger with a chunk of candied ginger, diced. Also, ¼ cup of dry sherry is nice to add.

Serves 1-2.

From Sarah Svien

Author of *Freezer Bag Cooking* (Lulu Press, 2006)

[www.freezerbagcooking.com](http://www.freezerbagcooking.com)

### Cowboy Paella

Friends from Spain tell me that paella originated under the stars on open campfires by gauchos. Snails, rabbit, marmots and anything found on the high plateau can be thrown into the pan.

2 tbsp. olive oil

1 one-inch chunk of pepperoni, cut in small dice

2 cups instant rice

Platypus full of dry white wine

2 cups water

2 chicken bouillon cubes

¼ red onion, ½ green pepper, ¼ medium fennel bulb coarsely chopped, 2 cloves minced garlic, ¼ tsp red pepper flakes, ½ tsp saffron threads, 2 sprigs



DAVE SCHIEFELBIN

*It takes some extra preparation before your trip, but making your own backpacking food can save you money—and add some zip to the old mac-and-cheese routine.*

fresh thyme—chopped and bagged together before leaving home

1 package Chicken of the Sea whole baby clams and juice

1 small jar artichoke hearts (optional) and oil (put in zip lock at home)

¼ cup of your favorite Spanish olives

Handful fresh parsley

Heat olive oil in pan; add pepperoni and sauté a minute. Add rice, sauté another minute. Add vegi/herb mix and sauté another 2 minutes. Add water and bouillon (or substitute half the water with wine), bring to boil, cover and simmer 5 minutes or until rice is cooked. Add clams and artichokes and cover until heated.

Garnish with olives and diced parsley. Enjoy with the wine you carried!

Serves 4

From Dayna Stern

### Doctari's Tuna Casserole

3 cups water

½ tsp. salt

1 ½ cup basmati rice

Two 6-oz. cans water-packed tuna, drained (or salmon)

1 (10 ¾ oz.) can of Campbell's Cream of Mushroom Soup

1 can sweet peas, drained

1 (10-oz.) package frozen chopped broccoli

2 tbsp. dried parsley

1 (13.2 oz.) can mushrooms, chopped with juice

¼ cup shredded cheddar cheese

1 tbsp. cayenne pepper (optional)

1 ½ cups water per serving

At home: Rinse and drain the rice. In a large pot, bring 3 cups of water and the salt to a boil. Slowly add rice. Simmer

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covered for about 45 minutes or until tender. Add tuna, soup, peas, and broccoli. Stir and simmer for 5 minutes. Add parsley and mushrooms and simmer 10 additional minutes. Stir in cheese until melted. Line four dehydrating trays with plastic wrap. Place 2 cups of casserole on each tray. Each tray represents one serving. When dry, store each serving in a 1-gallon resealable plastic bag.

On the trail: for each serving, bring 1 ½ cups of water to a boil, then add one package of casserole. Stir frequently. For a bit more flavor, carry an extra can of tuna and add toward the end of the cooking time. Serves 2.

Recipe by Gary "Doctari" Adams

From *Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* by Tim & Christine Conners  
(Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)

## Oriental Takeout

1 pound shallots  
1 pound bok choy  
1 pound Asian eggplant  
1 pound carrots  
1 pound spinach  
3 cups jasmine rice  
3 ounces dried mushrooms, chopped small  
4 ounces pork sung (Asian-style dried pork, or use beef jerky)  
2 (1-ounce) packets Noh Oriental Stir-Fry Seasoning  
3 cups water  
per serving

At home: chop shallots, bok choy, eggplant, carrots, and spinach and dry in a food dehydrator. Once dry, combine with rice, mushrooms, pork sung, and stir-fry seasoning.

Toss all ingredients together. Divide into four separate plastic bags of 3 cups each. Each bag represents one serving.

On trail: For each serving, bring 3 cups water and contents of one bag to a boil. Cook until rice is soft. Add more water if needed.

Recipe by Benedict Go ("Ben Go")

From *Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* by Tim & Christine Conners  
(Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)

## Preservative Stew

1 cup potato flakes  
½ cup Minute Rice  
½ cup dehydrated vegetables  
Favorite spices  
1 Landsjaeger sausage

Prehike: mix together dehydrated potato flakes, minute rice, dehydrated vegetables and assorted dried seasonings (1 tsp each of salt, paprika, oregano, thyme and rosemary is good).

In camp: Boil 2 cups of water, dump in the dried stuff. Dice up the sausage and dump that in too. Boil for 2 minutes, stirring well, then turn off the torch and let sit for 5 minutes or so. Don't forget to burn your tongue!

From Big Adventure Steve

## Salmon Chowder

½ cup instant mashed potatoes  
½ cup dried powdered milk  
1 tsp. Old Bay seasoning  
1 tsp. dried chives  
2 tbsp. dried veggie flakes or Just Veggie freeze-dried veggies  
½ tsp. granulated garlic  
½ tsp. salt

Put all items in a Quart freezer bag.

Also take a 3 oz. pouch of salmon.

In camp put the salmon in the freezer bag, and add 2 cups boiling water. Stir well, pop in a cozy and let sit

for 10 minutes. Great with 2 or 3 packets of parmesan cheese.

Serves 1-2.

From Sarah Svien

Author of *Freezer Bag Cooking* (Lulu Press, 2006)

[www.freezerbagcooking.com](http://www.freezerbagcooking.com)

## Spring Family Pasta

1 pkg. pasta  
1 pkg. dried pesto sauce  
1 pkg. (small) sun dried tomatoes  
olive oil

Cook pasta until tender and prepare the pesto sauce according to instructions on package. Drain and add pesto sauce, sundried tomatoes and olive oil to taste. This recipe requires very little time or fuel, and provides you with a lot of carbohydrates and energy for the next day's travels. Only slightly dirties one pan that can be quickly cleaned and used for water for after dinner tea. Note: make sure the olive oil is kept in a well sealed container.

From John E. Spring

## On the Menu

A typical menu from chef-and-crew leader Tim Van Beek on WTA's week-long Volunteer Vacations:

### Breakfast

*Cinnamon/vanilla French toast, sausage (veggie and regular), fruit*

### Snack

*WTA Special Gorp, Granola or Clif bar and an Orange*

### Lunch

*Turkey Swiss wrap w/ everything, Tim's Chips, Apple. In a meadow with a view.*

### After work snack

*Chips and Fresh Salsa*

### Appetizers

*Sautéed Morel Mushrooms*

### Dinner

*Garlic and butter Poached Wild Salmon, fresh veggies, spinach salad and garlic bread.*

### Dessert

*Mountain Huckleberry Cobbler*

## Share Your Recipes

Have a foolproof recipe you crave in the backcountry and want to share it with your fellow hikers? Or want to find even more recipes? Visit:

[www.wta.org/kitchen](http://www.wta.org/kitchen)

## **Backcountry Food**

### **Tofu with Peanut Sauce**

This recipe is elaborate by backcountry standards, but will make herbivores and carnivores equally happy.

½ cup dried shitake mushrooms (at home, cut into smaller pieces)  
4 squares of dried tofu  
2 tbsp. oil  
2 tbsp. nutritional yeast  
1-1/2 tsp. garlic powder  
1-1/2 cups couscous  
2-1/2 cups water  
½ cup freeze dried peas  
1 package dried peanut sauce  
Salt and pepper

Optional: coconut powder, fresh basil and chopped peanuts. Basil can last longer on the trail when stored in olive oil.

Rehydrate shitake mushrooms in hot water, set aside to soak for 30 minutes. Discard water, which may contain dirt and grit.

Rehydrate tofu by placing in ample hot water, not cold. Allow to steep for 5 minutes. Once rehydrated, squeeze out excess water. Water can be reserved and used for couscous. Tofu can be cut into chunks for easier handling. Heat oil and fry tofu until outside is crisp. Remove from oil and dust with nutritional yeast, garlic powder, and pepper. Set aside.

Boil 2-1/2 cups water, add couscous and pinch of salt. Return to boil then remove from heat and set aside.

Make peanut sauce per instructions, adding in ½ cup additional water. Add shitake mushrooms and freeze dried peas. Add coconut powder and fresh basil if available. Let simmer 4-5 minutes. Add salt and pepper according to taste.

To serve, place tofu on top of couscous and top with peanut sauce. Garnish with peanuts.

From Hally Swift

### **Trail Sushi**

In a quart freezer bag put:

2 cups instant rice

Also take:

1/3 cup rice wine vinegar

1 package nori (seaweed sheets, about 10)

1 cucumber

1 avocado  
2 ounces sesame seeds  
1 can or preferably, pouch of shrimp or crab meat

Soy sauce packets or preferred dipping sauce

Ginger and wasabi in tubes (Get at an Asian food store or online.)

At home: If you've never made sushi before, practice at home. You'll need a sushi mat (most weigh just a few ounces and cost about \$2).

In camp: Add 1 3/4 or so cups boiling water to rice, and let sit in a cozy for 10 minutes. Add vinegar to the rice to make it sticky. Let the rice cool completely before rolling sushi. Place a nori on top of a sushi mat, and layer rice, veggies, sesame seeds, and seafood on top, then roll and cut to your desired length. Serve with soy sauce, reconstituted wasabi, and ginger. Serves four as an appetizer.

From Sarah Svien

Author of *Freezer Bag Cooking* (Lulu Press, 2006)

[www.freezerbagcooking.com](http://www.freezerbagcooking.com)

### **Tree Frog Soup with Rattlesnake**

4 serving-size cups Near East Split Pea Soup

1 (12-oz.) tin of Spam

4 cups water

At home: pour the contents of all four soup cups into a resealable plastic bag. Leave the cups at home. Carry Spam separately.

On the trail: chop the Spam into small pieces. Heat water in a pan. Add soup mix and Spam to pan and eat when soup is hot.

Mark "Crawls with Bears" Davis

From Tim & Christine Conners

*Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* (Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)

## **Snacks, Desserts and Beverages**

### **Backcountry Cheesecake**

1 packet Jell-O instant cheesecake pudding/pie filling

½ cup powdered milk  
1 tsp. lemonade crystals  
Dehydrated sliced strawberries or fresh huckleberries  
1 package graham crackers

At home, premix Jell-O pie filling, lemonade crystals, and powdered milk. While getting dinner ready, add 1 cup water (according to package directions) and let sit if it's a cool evening. If weather is warm, put cheesecake mix in a water bottle and float it in a creek (make sure to tie it down first!). Top with dehydrated strawberries or fresh huckleberries and scoop up the mix with the graham crackers.

From Andrew Engelson

### **Chocolate Milk Shake**

½ pkg Milkman instant milk

2-4 pkg instant cocoa mix

Clean snow

I had trouble convincing the Youth Corps to drink the Milkman left over from making pudding. They didn't believe I could make it into a milkshake. Thus... In a 1-liter wide mouth polyethylene bottle place Milkman, cocoa mix and as much snow as you have the patience to scoop in - leave a bit of shaking space. Shake it up well. Get yours first!

From First Lady, ERC

### **Vasquez Tea Mix**

½ cup Nestea (with sugar)

2 cups powdered Tang

½ cup powdered lemonade mix

1 ½ cups sugar

1 tsp. cinnamon

½ tsp. ground cloves

1 cup water per serving

At home: mix all dry ingredients together. Store in sealed resealable plastic bags. This recipe has a very long shelf life.

On the trail: To make one serving, bring 1 cup of water to a boil. Add 1 tbsp. of mix to a mug and pour in water. Stir well. Makes 70 servings.

By Peg Spry

From Tim & Christine Conners

*Lipsmakin' Backpackin'* (Three Forks, \$15.95, 2000)



# Quick and Easy Chow

We sample nine prepackaged backpacking meals. Here's the good, the bad and the ugly.

ANDREW ENGELSON



Prepackaged meals are easy to prepare, weigh little, and are quick to clean up. They're aren't cheap, however. And quality varies. Backpacker's Pantry Katmandu Curry and Mary Janes Farm Couscous and Lentil Curry were our favorites.

BY ANDREW ENGELSON

Dehydrated meals have come a long way from the days of desiccated eggs and chili mac. There's a seemingly endless array of varieties, flavors and ethnic blends. Some meals now include little packets of everything from salmon to real peanut butter. You can choose from breakfasts to dinners and desserts. For simplicity, our panel of three judges sampled nine prepackaged dinners.

There are tradeoffs when buying prepackaged meals. On the plus side, prepackaged meals are convenient and lightweight. Most meals can be cooked directly in the package, which allows you to save both fuel and clean-up after dinner. They're easy to prepare and pack: No need to worry about repacking food into Ziplocs, mixing ingredients or

dehydrating foods.

But there are down sides, most notably, price. At 6 bucks a pop for a single serving, they're not cheap.

And then there's the issue of taste. Backpackers differ widely on just which meals are tasty and which aren't. Having hiked for 12 miles and gained several thousand feet of elevation can do wonders for the taste of these meals. But it can also be a severe bummer to have to choke down a meal with an off taste when you're 20 miles from civilization.

In our very unscientific test, we found that prepackaged meals vary widely in quality. Even though the technology of dehydrated food has improved, it's amazing how many meals still rely on simple noodles and the ubiquitous trio of dehydrated peas, carrots, and corn. Those we awarded four or five "thumbs up" broke

away from this tired formula.

So here are the results from our select panel of tasters, who braved a very damp day at Federation Forest State Park for a day of hiking and chowing down.

## Mary Janes Farm Couscous and Lentil Curry (Vegetarian)



A good all-around meal with a nice curry flavor (but not too strong or spicy) and a good mix of textures. All Mary Janes Farm meals are organic, and for those who want a prepackaged meal that is minimally processed and preservative-free, these are a good choice. One downside is that the self-cook packages don't seal, but that's a minor quibble.

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### Mary Janes Farm Ginger Sesame Pasta (Vegetarian)



Two of our testers felt the combination of spices in this pasta dish didn't work—one thought overall, the dish was too sweet. All agreed the noodles had a nice texture.

### Mary Janes Farm Santa Fe Pasta (Vegetarian)



Results were mixed on this one—one tester thought this was her favorite of all the meals we tested. "It scored big points for just being good, simple, cheesypasta." We all agreed there wasn't much southwestern about the dish, but it was very edible, and the noodles were tender.

### Alpine Aire Santa Fe Beans and Rice



This version of Southwest cuisine was much zippier than Mary Janes Farm's Santa Fe Pasta, but several reviewers noted that the jalapeno spice only served to cover up what was essentially "just rice with dried peas, corn and peppers."

### Inferno Self-Heating Chicken Pasta Parmesan



This was a novelty: you heat this meal by pulling the "rip-cord" and letting the mysterious chemicals heat things up. The Inferno was heavy and the food wasn't exactly piping hot. Taste was bland and the chicken "tasted kind of like chicken." All of us agreed that a can of Chef Boyardee warmed in your coat pocket would give you about the same taste experience.

### Natural High Thai Shrimp



Please, please take at least one piece of

advice from this article: do not buy this product. The mushy spaghetti noodles in this dish were bathed in a glue-like sauce that was extremely fishy. If the Thai people knew their country was being associated with this meal, diplomatic relations might sour. One tester summed up thoughts on the mealy little shrimp thus: "Natural High has no business introducing Sea Monkeys into the backcountry."

### Backpacker's Pantry Pad Thai (Vegetarian)



This meal comes with some neat additions: real peanut butter and peanuts get added to a mix of Thai noodles. But that's where the authenticity ends. Unfortunately, the veggies in this prepackaged meal are the usual suspects: corn and carrots. It did, however contain textured vegetable protein (TVP) which helped the meal seem filling. One reviewer noted "I suspect I might nosh it down just fine after a long day with a pack."

### Backpacker's Pantry Katmandu Curry (Vegetarian)



This was a winner all around: we liked the range of textures, the complex curry flavor (but not too strong) and the authenticity of the dish. The spiced lentils and firm potato chunks provided a great break from the usual rice-or-noodle backpacking fare. Backpacker's Pantry meals also have the a self-sealing cooking envelope, saving fuel and clean-up.

### Backpacker's Pantry Cajun Salmon Inferno



This rice-based dish included a foil packet of salmon, which was flavorful and not too fishy. This dish is not for those who can't handle a little heat—it's got quite a spicy kick, and also a tasty, complex mix of flavors and textures.

Thanks to Elizabeth Lunney and Janice Van Cleve for lending us their refined and opinionated palettes!

# Grocery Store Grub

## Navigating your way through the aisles

BY ALLISON WOODS

Freeze-dried foods are definitely an easy choice for their convenience and light weight. The downside of them is the



high cost, and if you normally cook from scratch, you will want more flexibility in your food choices. That's why many of us forgo pre-made freeze-dried meals

and head right for the grocery aisles. There's a world of good eating to be had for a fraction of the cost you'd spend on the fancy pre-made stuff.

So, where to start? There are a few things you can do in the off-season to prepare for making our own dinners from the grocery store. First, try cruising the aisles of the stores, looking for ideas. The Asian section and the pasta aisles are good places to start. Second, pick up a book or two on the subject, at least to use as a starting point. See the list of books on p. 19 for a few suggestions.

Recipes can be as simple as a package of instant noodles with sauce, dried milk and a bit of real butter, with maybe a handful of pine nuts, to something more complicated that might require pre-soaking dehydrated foods. Dishes can be bothersome in the woods, so consider doing something with zipper-lock bags if that's an issue with you. As far as deciding what to eat, let your normal food tastes be your guide. If you're partial to Mexican food, try something with dried corn, ground beef, and beans, tortillas and maybe a little cheese and taco sauce packages. Curry makes a great addition to even the blandest of dinners, and olive oil adds body and richness when you need the calories the most. One thing that can't be stressed enough: when trying out new



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ANDREW ENGELSON



Asian specialty stores (such as Seattle's Uwajimaya) offer a wide array of light-weight and dried ingredients that add variety to your backpacking meals. Soup mixes, dried mushrooms and dehydrated coconut milk are just a few.

recipes, make them at home once just to see how it tastes. The preparation may be more than you want to take on, and the food doesn't always taste so good either. Better to discover this in the relative comfort of one's own kitchen than then be forced to eat a "mistake" in the backcountry. Once you get your recipe dialed in, portion out the ingredients into zipper-lock bags labeled with the meal "Beef Stroganoff" and what you need to do with that ingredient (add 1 cup H<sub>2</sub>O, then add to mix), otherwise you might find yourself staring at a bunch of mysterious packages in the middle of the woods. Don't ask how we

know this.

If you plan to bring this sort of food with you on a regular basis, consider making the investment in a food dehydrator. For a very small initial investment, you'll have a great way to prepare fruits, vegetables, and even complete meals at home.

Refer to the August, 2003 issue of WT or view online at <http://www.wta.org/~wta/magazine/1035.pdf> for information about drying your own food.

You'll want to stock up on a few items that are regular contributors to grocery store dinners: dried milk, butter and cheese, and a few dried vegetables. If you don't want to get into



## OP Sak from Watchful Eye Designs

If you're making your own meals, consider buying these heavy-duty, sealable bags from Watchful Eye Designs. They hold up to boiling water and have a gusset at the base that allows the bag to stand on its own. Pre-pack all your ingredients, and cook your meal in the bag to simplify clean-up and save fuel. (\$7.49 for 4 bags of different sizes).

## Allison's top five favorite grocery store foods for the pack

### Shin Yum Spicy Ramen

Best ramen ever. Noodles have a wonderful texture, and the spicy broth hits the spot.

### Idahoan Loaded Baked Flavored Mashed Potatoes

Bring a packet along to nosh on if dinner is too small. Comes in several flavors, I like the four cheese the best. A bit of butter makes it even better.

### Jello, the beverage

A cup of hot Jello will warm you and pep you up. Trust me on this.

### Minute Rice

Add this to any meal to "stretch" it. Also available in brown rice.

### Mexicali Rose Dried Refried Black Beans

Tough to find, but hands down the best refried beans out there. Great foundation for backcountry burritos.

dehydrating yet, try the "Just Veggies" brand and Asian grocery stores for a wide variety of dried mushrooms. If you like to cook or are on a budget, this is the way to go for you.

If you want to shovel down some chow at the end of a hard day, you're probably going to be better off with something from the freeze-dried section. Check out our reviews of prepackaged foods on p. 24. Or, there's always that enduring classic: mac and cheese.

## Backcountry Food

# Hungry Hikers 2006

We salute the finest diners, burger joints and restaurants not far from the trailhead



*Fueling our hikes: Some of our favorite before- and after-hike grubbing joints include (top left, clockwise: XXX Root Beer, Issaquah, the cinnamon rolls at Anjou Bakery in Cashmere, the Sultan Bakery, the 59er Diner near Lake Wenatchee, the North Fork Brewery on the Mount Baker Highway, the Stehekin Pastry Company, the Black Diamond Bakery and Scott's Dairy Freeze, North Bend.*

### 410 Café (Buckley)

Great menu, mouth-watering pies, and yes, a senior discount.

### Anjou Bakery (Cashmere)

Pumpkin muffins, chocolate truffles, great soups and high-quality coffee make this a must-stop on the return from hikes in the Entiat.

### Big River Grill (Stevenson)

Great beer on tap, fantastic black bean chili and desserts. A bit fancy for the after-hike crowd, but the meatloaf is worth it if you can gussy yourself up a bit.

### Black Diamond Bakery (Black Diamond)

Huge breakfasts, but the standouts are the pastries and cinnamon rolls.

### Brocklesby's Greek & American Take Out (Port Angeles)

"These burgers are not for sissies" the proprietors warn. But you've just hiked

the Bailey Range Traverse, so who's going to quibble with your appetite?

### Campus U Tote-em Burgers (Ellensburg)

Burgers of all shapes and sizes, plus breaded mushrooms and an assortment of shakes and floats.

### Cinnamon Twisp Bakery (Twisp)

Oodles of yummy pastries (from éclairs to the world-renowned Cinnamon Twisp) and most of it's organic, too.

### Clay Oven (Monroe)

Satisfy your post-hike craving for Indian food at this great little restaurant with a tandoor oven, lots of traditional Indian dishes (including many vegetarian), inexpensive prices and great service.

### Cle Elum Bakery (Cle Elum)

Four words that stir the hearts of hikers everywhere: Maple bars. Apple fritters.

### Cougar Bar and Grill (Cougar)

Stop for pie and coffee on the way home from hikes at Mount St. Helens.

### Cynthia's Pony Express (Enumclaw)

Stop at Enumclaw's best eatery for breakfast (including fresh baked muffins) or dinner (steaks and carnivore fare).

### Denny's (Issaquah)

The Issaquah Denny's is a time-honored tradition with WTA's Thursday trail maintenance crew. Food's okay, and the service is first-rate.

### El Gitano (Sedro Woolley)

Every hike should end with chips, salsa and a margarita. Oh, and maybe camarones gitano (two words: bacon and shrimp) or the tacos al carbon packed with spicy beef goodness.

### Espresso Chalet (Index)

Name me one person who can hike to Lake Serene without a morning latte.

### Fat Smitty's (Hwy 101 near Discovery Bay)

Big-as-your-head-burgers plus an assortment of kitschy sculpture await at this popular Olympic Peninsula grub joint.

### Forks Café (Forks)

Breakfasts in this neck of the woods are filling and fantastic.

### 59er Diner (near Lake Wenatchee)

Burgers, fries and to-die-for shakes in a corny, 50s-kitsch diner.

### Graham's at Mount Baker (Mount Baker Hwy 542)

You'll find burgers, sandwiches, a pan-Asian assortment, steaks and a stick-to-your ribs breakfast menu.

### Gustav's (Leavenworth)

Good beer made on premises plus lots of great pub grub (try the fish and chips). Lederhosen not required.

## **Hungry Hikers 2006**

### **Inn of the White Salmon (White Salmon)**

This is a B&B, but you can pay to sample the astonishing breakfast buffet here without an overnight stay (be sure to make reservations). The little cream cheese-filled dumplings swimming in maple syrup are sinfully divine.

### **Itty Bitty Buzz (Port Angeles)**

Grab a latte and a scone on your way to Hurricane Ridge.

### **Lakeside Drive-In (Chelan)**

After returning on the Lady of the Lake from Holden and Stehekin, celebrate the return to civilization with a chicken cordon bleu sandwich and a huge order of curly fries. Great shakes, too.

### **Loafer's Old World Bakery & Coffee House (Bingen)**

A great pit-stop for coffee and scones in the Columbia Gorge.

### **Milano's (Glacier, Mount Baker Hwy 542)**

Fine Italian dining (from fettuccine alfredo to chicken parmigiano) all within easy reach of Mount Baker hiking.

### **Mountain View Cafe (Mountain Loop Hwy)**

The burgers and other cafe food are OK, but the pies are worth a stop.

### **Naches Tavern (Greenwater)**

Okay, the service here is suspect, but the food's good, the beer is cold (they have micros here, but when in Rome...), and the shakes are delicious. And where else can you roast your own hot dog in a tavern after hiking the Wonderland?

### **North Fork Brewery (Mount Baker, Hwy 542)**

This "pizzeria, beer shrine and wedding chapel" serves up tasty pizzas, delicacies such as smoked salmon salad, and plenty of beers. And you can get hitched by the on-site ordained minister.

### **Northern Espresso (stand in east Cle Elum)**

Fill 'er up on the way to the Teanaway.

### **North Bend Bar & Grill (North Bend)**

After a jaunt up Mount Si, head here for beers, good atmosphere, and the only chicken-fried steak we've discovered made with prime rib. (The kid's menu deep-fried mac & cheese triangles are pretty darn good, too.)

### **Oak Table Cafe (Sequim)**

Fuel up for your hike to Klahane Ridge with fluffy pancakes, creative scrambles, or the quiche du jour at this venerable Sequim institution.



### **Plaza Jalisco (Morton)**

The tasty, authentic Tex-Mex cuisine here hits the spot after a long backpacking trip in the Goat Rocks wilderness.

### **Ranch House BBQ (between McCleary & Olympia)**

Some of the state's most authentic and finger-licking barbecue is to be found at this joint on state route 8, about 16 miles west of Olympia.

### **Rhody's BBQ (North Bend)**

Nosh on melt-in-your mouth ribs and pulled pork sandwiches at this unassuming location in a gas station at Exit 34 off I-90 east of North Bend.

### **Rusty's Drive-in (Cashmere)**

Pure drive-in heaven.

### **Scott's Dairy Freeze (North Bend)**

Burgers, shakes and other frozen-cream goodness.

### **Snug Harbor Cafe (Sequim)**

Great fish and chips and good beers on tap at this place east of Sequim.

### **Stehekin Pastry Company (Stehekin)**

After a long trek in the North Cascades, the gooey warm cinnamon rolls and flaky pies at this legendary bakery are a welcome sight indeed.

### **Sultan Bakery (Sultan)**

Dense cakes, cobblers, and pineapple coconut haystacks (just a buck a piece!) have tempted scores of famished hikers returning from Stevens Pass. Plus, each evening, the bakery serves tasty (and huge) home-cooked dinners.

### **Three Rivers Store/Cafe (Quillayute)**

No coast hike would be complete without a fish or chicken basket and a hand-dipped malt at this friendly place.

### **Village Pizza (Roslyn)**

A good selection of pizzas, huge salads and microbrew beers—all just a stone's throw from the Salmon La Sac area.

### **Winthrop Brewing Company (Winthrop)**

Panko-breaded fish and chips and Outlaw chili (with sausage and olives) at a brew pub near the North Cascades.

### **XXX Root Beer (Issaquah)**

After a late afternoon hike at Tiger Mountain, you'll definitely need one of the burgers at this classic drive-in. Want fries and a float with that? You bet.

### **Zeke's (Goldbar)**

Pizza, burgers and delicious deep-fried objects—all conveniently located in an old locomotive along Highway 2. ♦