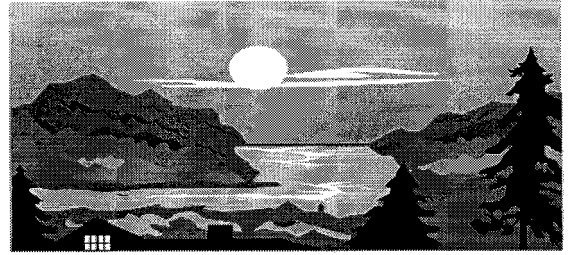


THE RIVER GOURMAND

Appetizers



by Bob Hicks

A boating trip with friends on a remote and beautiful river is one of life's grand experiences. Why end any magnificent day with a supper of tuna helper, peanut butter, or Cheese Whiz and crackers unless you have no other choice? Especially on shorter trips of two or three days, with or without ice, you can eat like a king or dine like a swine; it's up to you.

This column, which might be repeated if there is enough interest, will offer and solicit recipes and tips to help you prepare quick, simple dishes which will delight your palate after a long day on the water.

I use the word "gourmand" because "gourmet" or "epicure" imply discriminating tastes with a hint of snobbery. A gourmand is simply one who loves good food and drink and sometimes partakes of them to excess.

If you are a gourmand who plans lots of river trips, you know that fine dining doesn't always require complex recipes or lots of pots and pans; it can be as easy as finding delicious foods that need little or no preparation.

This column will focus on locating what you need in the Denver-Boulder area. Since grocery chains now carry many foods once found only in specialty markets or delicatessens, you usually can get what you need in many smaller cities and mountain towns.

Most touring kayakers pack the same cooking kit: a small stove, two or three nested pots, a plate and cup, some utensils, some water, and a little salt and pepper. With a few simple additions, that's all you need if you bring along the right stuff to eat and drink.

For many of us, a civilized dinner starts with cocktails. With ice and mixer brought in a small, soft cooler--and there are several good ones on the market--you can have whatever you want. But ice is a luxury, not a necessity. The Boulder Liquor Mart, and apparently no one else in the area, sells a brand of great powdered mixes called "Party Time" for margaritas

and other drinks. Following the directions, mix it with water in a poly bottle, put the poly bottle in a mesh bag clipped to a line, and plop that sucker in the river for half an hour. Then pour a little rum or tequila into your cup and top it off with mix. Is it good? Try it at the end of a hot day on the river, and you'll fully appreciate the little slogan on the package: "Have fun, amigos!"

The mesh bags, sold by REI in many sizes, are perfect for cooling wine. You oenophiles will know that wine experts suggest, as ideal serving temperatures, around 55 to 60° for whites and 62 to 67° for most reds, so bring your favorites, especially in spring or early summer, and let the river do the work. Allow an hour or so for the whites.

CURED AND SMOKED

About appetizers...Pringles are tasty but you can do better. Cured and smoked foods, requiring no refrigeration, were popular among 17th century sailors crossing to the New World, and you can enjoy some contemporary treats preserved the same way.

•SALMON: Vacuum-packed smoked salmon is delicious, especially with lemon juice and fresh dill.

•HAM: From Virginia and neighboring states, one still can purchase delicious hams cured for many months, like Smithfield hams and country hams (If you want to try one, contact me to learn where to order them.)

Locally, the Wild Oats groceries and a few other chains stock the Italian equivalent, prosciutto hams, the best of which is called prosciutto di Parma. Sliced paper-thin, as it should be, half a pound would serve four people as an appetizer. It is especially good with most refreshing fruits of the season like honeydew melon, canteloupe, peaches, or plums. For an extra

touch, sprinkle the fruit with a little salt or lemon juice.

Prosciutto di Parma, Smithfield hams, and most cured meats go well with shavings of reggiano parmesan cheese, one of the world's great cheeses, and a delight in its own right. It, and many fine cheeses, hold up nicely on the river for a couple of days if, like the ham, they are kept cool.

CHEESE

For my money, the Cheese Company, formerly in Belcaro and now located in Denver's Hilltop neighborhood, is the best cheese store in Colorado. Try their Parano gouda, a best buy, or the Leuerdammer Swiss. Outstanding!

CAVIAR

Another good river appetizer is caviar, best kept cool, but requiring no refrigeration till opened. Try a jar of black lumpfish caviar, sold at King Soopers and other markets for about \$8; it isn't Beluga, but is pretty tasty with some crackers and those margaritas, and it's versatile. As a topping with some sour cream or crème fraiche and chopped scallions, it makes a fine dinner omelet. Add a green salad, some fresh fruit, a baguette, and a bottle of good white wine, and there's an easy evening meal.

If you agree, and want to see any more articles like this, or if you want any of the recipes I've mentioned, or have recipes or ideas to share, please be in touch: by mail 349 S. Pennsylvania Street, Denver 80209 or fax 303-282-4542 or email bobh@idcomm.com.

Meanwhile, keep your paddles wet, and bon appetit!

editor's note: *Next time we will print the entree and dessert ideas.*