

Trail Project Food

For the 2013 Trail Projects based out of Missoula, several changes are underway allowing the individual crews more freedom with their equipment and their meals selection. In recent years there has been more interest in customization of the menu among the crews and also now that we do not have a suitable location to properly handle food it is a good opportunity for the changes. As a result we are working to provide information and the equipment so each crew can procure their own food, alter the current menu or create one of their choice. Presently half of all the NSA trail projects nationwide, including several in our area that were formally supported from Missoula, are handling all their own food and menus.

Each crew will be provided with a current menu, purchasing quantity list and general information regarding purchasing and packing food items as has been done in previous years. This information can be used as is, modified or used as a reference in creating a unique menu.

Equipment for packing, storing and cooking food will be assigned to the crew to use and storage space will be available to keep it during the offseason. The included equipment will be the same as used in previous years such as coolers, propane cook stove and tank, mule or bear boxes but will stay with the crew from year to year.

Because this is a work in process any input, questions or concerns would be appreciated to facilitate the transition to the crews having more freedom and ownership in their project.

MISC THOUGHTS

There are several factors to be considered when purchasing food for a project, and they may vary from one type of project to another. For reference the menu supplied has been in use for recent trail projects trying to balance the following items.

Substantial meals were planned based on being suitable for a crew doing physical work.

Menus were planned with potential dietary considerations in mind as well as maintaining hearty well balanced meals.

Meals are convenient for camp cooking; suitable for the cook's workload, using standard pans and utensils, and require a minimum amount of propane (save weight and space on pack-in projects).

Plan to control weight, volume, and suitability for packing items in pack boxes, particularly for the pack-in projects carried in on pack stock.

Try to minimize packaging waste that will have to be packed out.

Select foods that are most non-perishable in camp environment.

Balance frozen food and canned food to fit available space in coolers and food boxes.

Plan on using the next day frozen items in the refrigerated cooler to provide cooling as they defrost.

Plan on not having to open frozen food cooler more than once a day, and keep it in the shade and covered. A damp mantle can do a lot to extend the frozen time.

Note: *Coolers will have to be packed in manties, they will not fit in panniers. Be sure to have this verified ahead of time.*

Bread has been one item susceptible to mold early. White and moist varieties of bread are most likely to mold and plain whole wheat the least. If possible, keep some loaves in refrigerated cooler, if space is available, for the end of the week.

Several ways have been tried with using ice for cooling. Using Dry Ice is expensive but can assist in getting the cooler temperature down initially but it doesn't last long, regular ice is still required. The ice bags at stores are not real cold (we found them to be around 20 degrees F. and some were bagged chunks rather than solid blocks, which last longer). One option that worked well was to use half gallon milk or juice jugs filled with water and frozen in home freezers (which are usually at about -10 deg. F). A word of caution when freezing jugs, leave some air space for expansion when it freezes.

The first dinner meal was usually the easiest to prepare because the kitchen was in the process of getting setup and with a pack in there was less time available. Similarly, the meals with items most difficult to store were prepared earlier in the week.

Some adjustments to the menu may need to be made to adjust to how physical the work is, age of the crew members, weather conditions.

Purchasing food and packing it for the project requires more time than may be anticipated. The dry goods can be purchased several days ahead and packed in mule boxed or bear boxes ready to go. Try to balance the weight equally and not to exceed 90 lbs. per box. Purchasing the frozen items a few days ahead and freezing them to a lower temperature in a home freezer will provide additional cooling. Refrigerated food items and the bread should be purchased and packed at the latest possible time.