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## Eat like a king, under the stars

By Heller Stanton

The following review is by a reader who was given a cookbook from the Times. The included recipes were selected and prepared by the reader.

First, I need to confess that I did not test these recipes while camping. Bad, I know, but we haven't mastered camping with the 1-year old yet, so to go out just for a cookbook review was more than I was prepared for. I did, however, use the camp stove and barbecue set up next to the Thomas the Tank Engine tent in the back yard. Good enough for me!

Robin Donovan wrote this book for my family -- car-campers who are sick of subsisting on hot dogs and pasta for the entirety of the trip. She includes recipes for all three meals of the day, and has some great recipes for flavored butters and marinades. Most of the recipes use perishables and I was very interested in the concept of two coolers (remember, we are car-campers), one for the beginning of the trip and one for the end (sealed in duct tape and only opened to replenish ice). Recipes such as Bananas Foster French Toast, Mojo Chicken, Maple Mustard Pork Chops and Magic Layer Pie piqued my interest. But I settled on Halibut With Fennel and Olives, Coconut Couscous and Baked Chocolate Bananas. All were very good, and the chocolate bananas were a hit with my boys.

The recipes seem to be a mix of camp stove and open fire-pit cooking. But I have to say that when we go camping, we almost exclusively use the camp stove. My husband and I once returned to camp after a hike in Lava Beds National Monument to see a big mule deer licking the grill. Said deer is now lovingly called "the Mad Licker," but he prejudiced me against the fire pit.

After reading the book, I realize the key to a good food experience in the wild is aluminum foil -- it seems almost anything can be placed over an open fire if wrapped securely in foil. And it helps when sanitary phobias stop one from using the grill to its full potential!

Keeping with the sanitation aspect, the best part of the book is the advice about food safety and camping. My husband is keenly aware of food-borne illnesses, so the chapter titled "Play It Safe: Storing, Transporting, and Preparing Food Safely" is what makes this book a keeper! This chapter includes sections about storing food in a cooler, packing the cooler the right way and, most interesting, determining safe storage times for perishables. Who wants to have a memorable camping trip turn into a memorable case of campylobacter or salmonella?

Actually, the real solution to food success while camping is planning. You must plan for every meal--otherwise how would you know to pack the dried porcini mushrooms, or the Asian chile paste, or the light coconut milk? The recipes are easy (folding aluminum foil is not that hard) and the ones we have done have been very tasty. The best part is that with every recipe, the author also includes "Make It at Home" directions. The book is small (easily fitting into any camp bag), and has great tips. It doesn't have any photos, but that doesn't really matter in a book like this. It is definitely coming with us once we get up the nerve to camp again.

Want to be a critic? We'll give you a new cookbook in exchange for a review. Write Nicholas Boer at [nboer@cctimes.com](mailto:nboer@cctimes.com).

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### MAKE IT AT HOME

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Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Prepare the olive mixture as directed. Place the fennel slices in the bottom of an oiled baking dish large enough to hold the fish fillets in a single layer. Place the fish fillets on top of the fennel slices, then top with the olive mixture, dividing it equally among the fillets. Pour the wine over the fish. Cover the dish with foil and bake 12-15 minutes, until the fish is cooked through. Serve immediately.

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### HALIBUT WITH FENNEL AND OLIVES

Serves 4

Fresh fennel balances the strong salty flavor of the olives and keeps the fish moist while it cooks. Use only the bulb of the fennel, discarding the leafy tops.

2 tablespoons olive oil

- <sup>a</sup> cup chopped pitted kalamata olives
- 2 tablespoons drained bottled capers
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon crumbled dried thyme
- 1/4-1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

Olive oil or nonstick cooking spray

1 medium fennel bulb, very thinly sliced

4 6-ounce halibut fillets

1/4 cup white wine

1. Mix the olive oil, chopped olives, capers, garlic, thyme and red pepper flakes (if using) in a small bowl or saucepan until well-combined.
2. Prepare 4 squares of aluminum foil by spraying with olive oil or cooking spray. Place several slices of the fennel in the center of each foil square, and top with a halibut fillet. Spoon one-quarter of the olive mixture over each fish fillet, and fold up the sides of the foil squares. Drizzle one-quarter (1 tablespoon) of the wine over each fillet and seal the foil packets, leaving room for heat and steam to circulate inside.
3. Grill over high heat, 15-20 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish, until cooked through. Serve immediately.

Per serving: 340 calories, 36 g protein, 7 g carbohydrates, 17 g fat, 55 mg cholesterol, 530 mg sodium, 2 g fiber. Calories from fat: 44 percent.

-- Times analysis

## COCONUT COUSCOUS

Serves 4

Cooking couscous in coconut milk instead of water gives it an exotic twist.

1 14-ounce can light coconut milk (or use 2 parts regular coconut milk diluted with 1 part water)

1 cup couscous

1 teaspoon salt

- Bring the coconut milk to a boil on the camp stove in a saucepan with a lid. Remove from heat and immediately stir in the couscous and salt. Cover and let stand 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork and serve.

Per serving: 300 calories, 7 g protein, 35 g carbohydrates, 15 g fat, 0 cholesterol, 600 mg sodium, 3 g fiber. Calories from fat: 47 percent.

-- Times analysis

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Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Prepare as directed, baking the foil-wrapped bananas, 10 to 15 minutes, until the fruit is hot and soft and the chocolate is melted. Serve with a scoop of coconut ice cream.

## BAKED CHOCOLATE BANANAS

Serves 1 or more

S'mores are the ultimate camping dessert, but if you need a break from all that gooey marshmallow, this is a great alternative.

FOR EACH SERVING:

1 banana

1 tablespoon semisweet chocolate chips

1 tablespoon shredded sweetened coconut (optional)

- With the banana still in its peel, make an incision lengthwise through the length of the peel and the fruit, leaving the underside of the peel intact. Pull the sides of the banana apart and sprinkle chocolate chips inside. Wrap in aluminum foil and bake over high heat, 10 to 15 minutes, until the fruit is hot and soft and the chocolate is melted. Remove and discard the foil, and sprinkle the coconut over the top, if desired. Serve hot.

Per serving: 180 calories, 2 g protein, 36 g carbohydrates, 5 g fat, 0 cholesterol, 15 mg sodium, g fiber. Calories from fat: 25 percent.

-- Times analysis

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- BOOK: "Campfire Cuisine: Gourmet Recipes for the Great Outdoors" (\$15.95, Quirk Books, 192 pages)
- AUTHOR: Robin Donovan is a local gal (she lives in San Francisco) whose love of nature led her to design camping recipes. Her articles appear regularly in magazines and newspapers. Visit her at [www.GourmetsGoneWild.com](http://www.GourmetsGoneWild.com).
- REVIEWER: Heller Stanton is a high school English teacher, wildlife educator and part-time writer/editor who lives in Pleasant Hill with her husband and two little boys.