

Re: Eating "Naturally"

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- *From:* "TC" <tunderbar@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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George Cherry wrote:

Here's my take on what's "natural" for humankind to eat. I'm talking here about our GENOME, which was formed a long time before domesticated animals, agriculture, and supermarkets. My ancient, ancient ancestors (whose genome was very, very similar to mine) were hunter-gatherers who successfully gathered a greater deal more than they successfully hunted. It's really hard to down an ungulate with a stick or a rock, especially when the deer or antelope can run 3-4 times faster than you. So these Paleolithic guys and gals ate lots of stuff that they could pull out of the ground or off trees or pick off bushes. I channel a Paleolithic guy named Geeorgius who assures me he ate mostly veggies, fruits, nuts, and seeds. The most sophisticated food preparation thing he did was soak grains overnight in water in a hollow gourd so that he could chew and digest them. He got to eat meat about once or twice a year when he got really lucky throwing a rock at a rabbit or chasing a coyote away from an antelope it downed. I have science to back me up. The only essential vitamin or mineral found only in meat (not in plant foods) is vitamin B-12. The human body can store B-12 for many years. So if you eat meat about once every year, you're all set with respect to what you need from meat. As for milk, I agree that it's unnatural for human adults to drink it. However, my ancestors did gather eggs. BTW, there's plenty of protein in nuts, seeds, legumes, and grains. So, I'm a "near vegan", which accords well with my desire not to cause any more suffering than really necessary.

George

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/foodanddrink/>

Australian Food and Drink

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Native Australians and Early Settlers

Aboriginals' Food Sources

Before white settlement, Aboriginal people survived off the native plants and animals of the Australian environment for thousands of years. Across the many different environments of Australia, they knew how to find food and water.

Native mammals and birds such as kangaroo, wallaby and emu were regularly hunted and killed. Although animals were sometimes thrown straight onto the fire for cooking, there were a variety of preparation and cooking techniques.

Goose egg hunting by George Malibirr 1934–1998, Gurrumba Gurrumba clan, Ramingining, Ngalyindi country in Central Arnhem Land

Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia

Other foods that seem less palatable to modern urban Australians – such as witchetty grubs, lizards, snakes and moths – were greatly valued.

Bush foods such as berries, roots and nectars were a vital part of the aboriginal diet in many areas. Often these required advanced preparation techniques to neutralise toxins and to make them palatable and nutritious.

In certain coastal areas, shellfish were plentiful and easily harvested. Aboriginals also caught fish in the oceans and rivers using hooks, spears and fish traps.

Aboriginal groups would often travel from season to season; moving to where they knew various food sources would be available. One such source was the annual Bogong moth migrations to New South Wales.

The more bountiful the area a tribe lived in, the less nomadic they were forced to be. Desert dwellers may have been on the move constantly searching for food, while coastal tribes may have remained reasonably static.

Certain Aboriginal groups did more than just survive – they thrived. Some white explorers reported meeting groups of aboriginals from time to time that appeared especially healthy and well fed.

But living off the land also meant that from area-to-area and season-to-season there were also times of hardship.

Food for Australia's Early Settlers

Upon arrival in Australia, the early settlers were confronted by a landscape and range of plants and animals that were largely foreign to them. In many places, even fresh water was scarce, especially in comparison to the rain-soaked fields of Britain and Ireland.

There were some familiar animals; wild swans, ducks, geese and pigeons

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that were similar to their European cousins. The oceans and rivers were full of fish and eels that were not too dissimilar from the European varieties. But other game was foreign and challenging to their British tastes.

Some settlers were driven by curiosity or necessity to hunt and eat the native mammals. Stuffed wombat and fried echidna were on the menu in early settlements in Van Diemen's Land, as Tasmania was known in those times.

But largely, the early settlers set their hands to producing European crops and raising European herd animals for food. Over the years, they introduced European game animals such as deer and rabbits for hunting. Many of these animals thrived in their new home and have since become pests to Australian farmers and environmentalists.

Flour was a staple item of the early settler's diet. It was usually made into bread or damper (a dense, thick bread).

The available meat was usually beef, pork or mutton (the meat of adult sheep). As there was no refrigeration, it was usually salted or dried to preserve it.

Tea was the staple drink and considered a necessity, even when other items were scarce.

Salt was highly prized for flavour and for preserving meat.

The settlers brought rum with them, and the fledgling colonies soon developed the capacity to produce it themselves. Rum was such a valued commodity that it became the key currency in the early years of settlement.

Food for Australia's Early Explorers

Australia's explorers of the early 1800s usually set off with hundreds of pounds of flour, dozens of pounds of tea and a generous amount of salt and sugar. They brought sheep or cattle for food. The oxen, and sometimes horses, had the dual role of beast of burden and food source when they were needed.

Some explorers, such as Ludwig Leichhardt, were keen to observe and learn from Aboriginal food gathering and eating habits. They interacted with Aboriginals they met and exchanged food.

According to Leichhardt's journals, members of his successful 1844–1845 expedition of 4,800 kilometres from Darling Downs in Queensland to Point Essington in Northern Western Australia owed their lives to the hunting and survival skills of its two Aboriginal guides, Charley Fisher and Harry Brown. They hunted game to supplement the group's provisions, catching animals such as flying foxes and magpie geese to add to the pot on many occasions. They gathered salt where it occurred

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naturally along riverbanks, washed in from the ocean.

By contrast other explorers, such as Edmund Kennedy and Burke and Wills preferred to kill and eat their own pack animals rather than hunt game or fish to supplement their supplies. Only when their provisions had dwindled to the point that the party was facing starvation, scurvy and dysentery did they hunt and gather food or accept the generous gifts of food presented by the friendly Aboriginals they met.

Rabbit and other Meat during the Great Depression

Motor lorry loaded with 1,760 pairs of rabbits, c1918

Image courtesy of National Library of Australia: nla.pic-an24664485

During the tough economic times of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the rabbit became a welcome commodity rather than the pest it had been to farmers. The skins could be sold for money and the meat was often the only option available to poor families. Rabbits could be caught fairly readily even in the outskirts of big cities such as Melbourne, in suburbs that are now densely populated.

In the 1990s, after years of being shunned as 'underground mutton', rabbit overcame much of its depression-time reputation as the poor person's last resort. It has been reintroduced as a respected and even fashionable gourmet food in Australian restaurants and public bars.

Whether valued exclusively for their taste or in combination with a sense of nostalgia for earlier times, other cuts of meat and offal that were once only eaten by poor people who could not afford anything else – such as ox tail, lamb shanks and kidney – have found their way onto menus in even the most expensive restaurants in Australia.

Multicultural Influences on Australian Cuisine

Early and 20th Century European immigrants such as Germans, Italians and French helped to pioneer and grow the Australian wine industry that had become so healthy by the 21st century.

Immigration to Australia since 1945 has had a major multicultural impact upon Australian culture, and in particular upon what Australians eat and drink. For example, European migrants brought with them a preference for espresso coffee. This has overtaken tea as the most popular hot beverage ordered in restaurants and cafes. Pasta dishes, another staple of many European countries, are one of the most popular choices on the menu for many Australians.

Where once the Australian diet was based strongly upon its British and Irish heritage, by the end of the 20th century, Australians were regularly enjoying Italian, Greek, Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese cuisines cooked in restaurants and homes.

Due mainly to later immigrants to the country, Australians have a growing interest in multicultural foods and drinks from across Asia,

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The Middle East, Europe and Africa

Since the late 20th century there has also been a growing awareness of cultural and religious food requirements, such as Halal and Kosher practices.

Vegetarianism (the practice of eating only vegetable food) and veganism (a strict vegetarian diet that excludes any animal product) have also gained broader acceptance in Australian society, thanks in part to the important role that vegetables and vegetable products such as tofu play in Asian, Indian and other international cuisines.

Australian Native Food and Drink in The 21st Century

A cluster of macadamia nuts growing in Northern New South Wales
Image courtesy of Australian Macadamia Society

In the late 20th and early 21st century Australian native bush tucker foods remained mainly a novelty. Game meats such as kangaroo, wallaby, emu and crocodile are available as specialty items.

Australian seafood is highly prized domestically and is a lucrative export industry.

The macadamia nut is the only highly-commercialised Australian native food crop.

TC

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