

Food is still a source for endless creativity (and misbehavior)

Food still makes headlines. Here's some of the latest news:

Looking for beer in all the wrong places?

Busch Beer announced it's "Pop Up Schop" on Twitter and YouTube that challenges fans to find this bar hidden away in a national forest somewhere in the U.S. One lucky person who finds it will get Free Busch Light for the rest of his or her life. Everyone else who gets there later will get a branded lumberjack shirt as a compensation prize. A marketing gimmick, for sure, but they promise to plant 100 trees in association with the National Forest Foundation and gather donations on their website for the conservation effort.

Rent a kitschy condo on wheels



Booking.com is giving two travelers the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stay inside their Avo-Condo for 2 days for the price of \$70 per night. The bonus is that it's parked within viewing distance of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House in Australia. We think

they really dig food-themed events as much as we do, as their previous offer was for an overnight stay in a cottage in France that was made entirely of chocolate (well, except for the beds and outside toilet, thank goodness) by master chocolatier

Jean-Luc DeCluzeau. And not to be beat, Oscar Mayer has listed it's Wiernemobile for Overnight Stays on Airbnb as a celebration of National Hot Dog Day. The 27-foot long hot dog on wheels rental is listed at \$136 per night and includes a mini fridge stocked with their famous hot dogs and condiments, a welcome package with hot dog sunglasses, fanny packs, wiener onesies and a roller grill to take home. Reservations are bound to fill up just from the Instagram selfie opps alone.



A disturbing new trend

Teens being disgusting with food and potentially poisoning innocent people. In Texas, a teen was caught licking Blue Bell ice cream from a container and putting it back in the freezer at Walmart after a viral video was posted of the incident during flu season. Luckily, the tainted ice cream was retrieved by store employees before being inadvertently sold. The case was turned over to the Juvenile Justice Department. Within days, another Texas teen was caught drinking from (and possible spitting into) a bottle of Arizona iced tea and putting it back on the grocery shelf as a social media joke. He's being held in a juvenile detention facility and will likely be charged with tampering with a consumer product, which is a felony.

Some seemingly trendy foods have had a lasting impact upon our American palate and an unexpected influence upon our culinary history. And many have a great story behind their success. According to Thrillist, here are 101 Dishes that Changed America: <https://www.thrillist.com/eat/nation/most-important-dishes-food-that-changed-america>

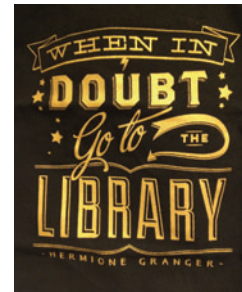


The California Bear-Chef first appeared in the *Pan-Pacific Cook Book*, 1915.



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at the
LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY



Upcoming Programs at the Central Library's Mark Taper Auditorium:

September 14, 2019

Ronald W. Tobin

"Booking the Cooks:
Literature and Gastronomy"

October 12, 2019

Andy Smith

"Pizza History: Fact and Fiction"

November 9, 2019

Seta and Alec Ekmekji

"Aleppo, Syria: Culture and Culinary History"

December 14, 2019

Sue Conley

"The California Cheese Trail: History and the Future of Cheesemaking in Our State"

January 11, 2020

Charles Perry

"Yelping the 1880s: L.A. Restaurants from Adobe Eateries to 24-Hour Gastro-Palaces"

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, October 13, 2019

Don't forget to save this Sunday for our upcoming Annual CHSC Members Party!

THE FOOD JOURNAL

Summer 2019
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Dedicated to pursuing food history and supporting culinary collections at the Los Angeles Public Library



Charles Perry
CHSC President

I Speak For Mutton

Once upon a time, Americans loved their mutton. It was a heritage from wool-producing England, where the roast joint had been a hallowed Sunday institution in middleclass families. Mutton was even a popular meat for barbecuing (a tradition that survives only in north-western Kentucky). In an early scene of *Gone With the Wind*, the one where Scarlett O'Hara is being laced up tight over her protests, the barbecue at Twelveoaks Plantation she was heading to was going to feature a whole pig and a whole sheep roasted over a fire pit.

And that was in the proverbially pork-loving South. Even there, 19th-century cookbooks such as *Kentucky Housewife* and *Housekeeping in Old Virginia* were full of recipes for leg of mutton (roasted or boiled), mutton chops, mutton stew, mutton hash and the like. Incidentally, while today's gourmets insist that lamb should be cooked medium rare, in those days it was mutton that got that treatment; lamb was supposed to be cooked well done. The reason is that mutton is to lamb as beef is to veal -- the mature meat is more flavorful and the immature meat was considered relatively insipid.

But try to convince Americans to try mutton. They're already squeamish about lamb, which was considered something American soldiers might not eat that during WWII, so it

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Nancy Zaslavsky
CHSC Vice President,
Programs

Program Notes

Our annual president's lecture kicked off 2019 with Charles Perry's January, "So You're Dining With the Persian Emperor" where we went time-traveling to ancient Iran and surrounding lands cruising through royal banquets at the Emperor's court. Charles described what formal etiquette was involved as well as dishes, condiments, sauces, and cooking techniques. February brought Joan Nathan and, "Jewish Food: In the American South and Around the World." Joan went far back in history, stating that she thought King Solomon was "the first Jewish foodie—probably because he needed enough good food to keep 700 wives and 300 concubines well fed and happy." Jim

Dodge entertained us in March with "My Life in Pastry," stories from his youth learning the ropes of running an old family hotel in New Hampshire's White Mountains and the art of hospitality, to his adult years discovering a love of pastry and pastry science, to executive pastry chef, author, and eventually Director of Specialty Programs at Bon Appetit Management Company. April brought Josh Donald of Bernal Cutlery in Oakland and San Francisco to speak on, "A Brief History of Knives: Japanese Culinary Knives and the West." He told us about the differences between ancient and new Japanese and Western knives, and his on-stage live demonstrations emphasized the necessity of sharp knives and how to keep them razor sharp at home. George Geary's lively talk in April, "History of Crazy Foods from the Boardwalk to the Midway" promenaded us through an all-American state fair's honkytonk food hall and then explained how to cook a few of the deep-fried (of course) favorites at home. June brought Josh Lurie, the well-known local L.A. food blogger to speak about, "Decoding the L.A. Restaurant Scene: 20 Years Past and Future." We learned why twenty years ahead sure looks good in our multi-ethnic metropolis.

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Events Around Los Angeles

Eco-Friendly Foraging with Culinary Alchemist Pascal Baudar
August 4, 2019, 10-1 PM URBAN OUTDOOR SKILLS
 Reptacular Ranch, Sylmar
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/eco-friendly-foraging-plants-walk-food-drinks-tickets-64278245964>

Learn about the countless plants that can be used for food, many of which can be found in your yard. We're talking mustards, lamb's-quarter, chickweed, European nettles, sorrel, chervil, fennel, horehound, figs, wild radish, nasturtium, and wood sorrel. We'll walk in the local forest, identify and discuss the culinary and medical uses of those plants. After class, we'll serve delicious snacks and drinks featuring the plants we saw during our walk.

Los Angeles Korean Festival
September 26-29, 2019
 Seoul International Park, Los Angeles
<https://www.lakoreanfestival.org/food>



Mung Bean pancakes, spicy rice cakes that encapsulates the distant taste of Korean street food, infamously indulgent Korean BBQ, crispy tornado potato sticks: all examples of novel fusion food and traditional tastes that can be found at the festival. The eye captivating, mouth watering, and fragrant extravaganza will take a hold of all of your senses.

40s on the Fantail
September 28, 2019, 5-10 PM
 USS Iowa, San Pedro
<https://www.40sonthefantail.com/>



Step aboard the historic USS Iowa Battleship and experience the 1940's complete with live music, Swing Dance Lessons, VIP Tours, Photo Ops and more. Enjoy fine vintages, craft beer and delicious bites, while raising funds for Mission 22. Dressing to the 40's is encouraged but not a requirement.

Sourdough Bread
October 17, 2019, 6:30 PM
 Benjamin Franklin Branch, Los Angeles Public Library
<https://www.lapl.org/whats-on/events/sourdough-bread-1>



Learn how to make your own sourdough starter and bread at home. This LA Made workshop—taught by food preservationist Brie Wakeland—will give an overview of terminology, ingredients, equipment, recipe techniques, and troubleshooting. A tasting of sourdough breads using various flours will also be offered.

5th Annual SoCal Vegfest
October 19-20, 2019, 11-6 PM
 OC Fair & Events Center
<https://www.socalvegfest.org/>



SoCal VegFest is an annual vegan festival with lots of free food samples, entrees/drinks to purchase, cruelty-free marketplace, speakers, food demos, celebrity chefs, social media celebs, famous musicians & DJs, comedians, yogis, games, kids area, and more!

5th Int'l Conference on Food Chemistry & Technology
November 4-6, 2019
 Four Points by Sheraton Los Angeles Int'l Airport
<https://unitedscientificgroup.com/conferences/food-chemistry-and-technology/>



Join academicians, chemists, dietitians, policy makers, engineers, and technologists for an inspiring interdisciplinary exchange at the forefront of food research. Internationally-renowned speakers will describe how their journeys have developed in response to contemporary challenges and innovations.

Pasadena Cheeseburger Week
Early January
 Pasadena, CA
www.pasadenarestaurantweek.com/restaurants



For the past few years, Pasadena has honored Lionel Sternberger's genius in being the first to put cheese to hamburger and serve it at the Rite Spot in Pasadena in 1924. Over 30 restaurants around the city offer their signature burgers, special creations and great deals. Customers can vote for their favorite in the Cheeseburger Challenge.

A Letter from the Editor

Not everything is barreling into the future at top speed. There's something to be said for good old-fashionedness and a respect for the past. The whole "credit card only" trend in restaurants hasn't taken off as well as planned and some well-known chains have had to reverse their policies. What was once thought to be an innovative business model of tomorrow has instead raised hackles with the public who express outrage at this discriminatory practice which excludes impoverished customers.



According to the FDIC, 6.5% of U.S. households, which make up about 20.5 million adults and children, don't have bank accounts to secure credit. Requiring credit card transactions in restaurants sends the message that "If you're unbanked, you're unwelcome." In fact, Philadelphia and New Jersey recently passed legislation against the cashless concept and Massachusetts has been banning this practice since 1978. Though the argument by owners that cashless policies create efficiencies for employees who would otherwise have to collect, count, record and deposit transactions and helps to reduce potential theft, it doesn't look like America is ready to comply. Controversy and pushback from both sides continues as New York considers a ban this year.

Hitting rewind is sometimes necessary and maybe even strategic. I just read that Pizza Hut marketers put forth a new logo redesign but discovered that their old logo tested better with focus groups. As a result, they've decided to revive their iconic red-roofed logo from the 1967-1999 era instead. How's that for giving a nod to "old school?"

Sharon

Sharon Tani



Why Aren't Figs Considered Vegan?

Sorry if this ruins figs for you.



Like those of dumplings and sandwiches, the definition of veganism isn't set in stone. Some practitioners eschew honey and sugars refined with animal-bone char, since both involve products derived from animals. Others avoid Italian aperitifs like Campari dyed with carminic acid, which is derived from crushed beetles. And then there are figs, which in and of themselves are obviously not animals, but are technically in part derived from them.

Botanically, figs aren't fruits; they're flowers that bloom internally, and like many flowers, they're pollinated and propagated by insects. Specifically, fig wasps, one unique species per each of the 8,000 or so species of fig.

In the last days of her life, the female fig wasp subsists solely on figs before climbing through the tiny opening of one inverted flower to lay her eggs. Having accomplished her evolutionary purpose—not to mention having ripped off her antennae and wings when she squeezed her way inside the fig's narrow entry—the wasp dies inside the fig while her babies gestate. Once hatched, the larvae wriggle free of the fig to continue the cycle of life. But the mother wasp is enzymatically digested by the fig until it becomes one with the plant that killed it and birthed her young. The whole routine is gross enough to turn some vegans off of figs completely, though of course this varies from person to person. But don't worry—those crunchy bits in a fig are seeds, not wasp limbs. At least, most of the time.

Source: Falkowitz, M. (n.d.). Why Aren't Figs Considered Vegan?
<https://www.tastecooking.com/arent-figs-considered-vegan/>

The Culinary Historians of Southern California

www.chsocal.org



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Thank you to our generous Angels, Benefactors & Patrons

The Culinary Historians of Southern California acknowledges the generosity of members who have joined or renewed at the Angel, Benefactor and Patron levels. Your gift allows our organization to enhance member services and increase our support of the culinary collections of The Central Library.

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Charles Perry, I Speak For Mutton: Continued from Page 1

wasn't rationed, the way beef was. As a result, the market was awash with lamb and even my small-town butcher regularly had Saratoga chops -- lamb chops trimmed of bone and rolled into a chunk of pure protein. Americans fear that mutton must be heavy and tallowy (well, there's something to that, so you should be scrupulous about trimming the fat) because they don't know that it tastes almost more like beef than lamb.

I lost the usual prejudice against mutton when I read that it was the traditional meat to serve with really flavorful Bordeaux, particularly from Pauillac. Those were the days when I could afford to buy a bottle of Ch. Latour, and it happened that a friend of mine was the daughter of a sheep farmer in Utah. Next time he was in town he brought a leg, we had it with the '62 and I saw the light.

Then I spent years trying to find a way to get more that didn't involve driving to Utah. Sometimes I'd drive into the Central Valley -- somewhere around Gustine, as I recall -- where a lady was raising a cross between domestic sheep and European mouflon. Once I bought a leg from here that was too big to fit into my oven.

But I was fighting a losing battle. These days mutton is going out of favor everywhere: England, Australia -- even Wales and New Zealand, where sheep outnumber people. The last time I had mutton it was a can of mutton hash from a Fijian import shop. There are a lot of Indians in Fiji, and mutton is a meat that both Muslims and Hindus can eat. For that matter, here in California sometimes Indian restaurants list mutton on their menus, but it's just a euphemism for goat.

How I wish we could return to our mutton.

Members Remember



Our CHSC members have a lot of great ideas, deep insights, fun memories and of course, a passion for food. Why not ask a probing question and see what they think?

What's your favorite cookbook?



Laura Sharpe: *The Spice Cookbook*. This 3.5 lb, 2" thick book contains over 1400 recipes, beautiful illustrations, quotes, and interesting facts and folklore about spices and the history of the spice trade.



Jill Walsh: My favorite is *The Santa Monica Farmers' Market Cookbook* by Amelia Salzman. The text—beautifully written—and the recipes track the seasons. She gives you invaluable tips for choosing the ripest and most desirable produce all year long. She knows the farmers, and vice-versa, and her respect and love for them is palpable. The illustrations are gorgeous.



Leslie Macchiarella: Near the top of my "favorites" heap sits *The Household Searchlight Recipe Book*, from 1931. I adore it because it's worn near through, has paper tabs for the various food sections, sports the most droplets of food and oil stains in the "Cakes, Candy and Icings" chapters and has a wonderful "Notes" section at the back containing delightful hand-written recipes, inserted recipe cards and newspaper-clipped recipes from the 1930's.

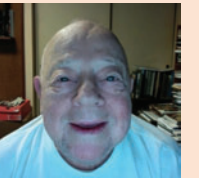
Tomm Carroll: The revised and updated 4th edition of *How to Brew: Everything You Need to Know to Brew Great Beer Every Time* by John Palmer is the go-to guide for newbie brewbies and ready-to-turn-pro homebrewers alike. Includes instructions, recipes (extract and all-grain), hopping techniques and much more. Palmer literally (co-)wrote the book on brewing water, which is why I always schedule him as a guest lecturer for my UCLA craft beer class.



Suzanne Dunaway: For years and years I have adored and used *See Rome And Eat* by Beverly Pepper, who lived in Rome during the time that food was classic, simple, cooked by cooks (not chefs!). Alas, "chefs" in Rome have gotten "creative" and "innovative"....my case rests.



Don Corbett: My favorite cookbook is *Classic Indian Cooking* by Julie Sahni. I enjoy Indian food and have travelled to India with Julie on a culinary tour.



Marianne White Davis: At our house there's a full shelf of Sunset specialty books. The volume that I reach for these days (still feeding the ravenous brood, they're young adults now) is *Kitchen Cabinet*, first published in 1955. I bought it in 1995, and the retro illustrations and recipes are reminiscent of my mother's cooking that enchants me still. We all still love BOOKS, and I find it impossible to cook out of a recipe that's the size of my palm, on my phone. My Sunset books are well-worn and spattered, annotated, and loved.

A love for food doesn't have to be just for adults. Why not share your culinary interest with the kids in your life?

Foodie Fight: A Trivia Game for Serious Food Lovers
A great game to learn about food history, historical inventions, winemaking and culinary skill. Try it out at your next party. Betcha the adults won't be smarter than a 5th grader. Less than \$12 from Walmart.com



ZHX 82pcs Food Building Blocks Set
Isn't it amazing how Legos have lasted through time? They're still popular with kids. This one isn't a Lego brand set, but these food shapes snap together with their blocks and boards just fine. Less than \$14 from Amazon.com



R2-D2 Measuring Cups by ThinkGeek
By our estimate, there are less than 10 scenes in the whole Star Wars film series featuring food (including bar drinking). But that shouldn't prevent young Jedi fans from imagining that R2-D2 was a culinary genius. Less than \$5 from GameStop.com



"What-A-Melon" Tent
Why not tempt the Gods looking down from the sky and present yourselves as bait for a giant watermelon-loving bird with this two-person tent that includes a shade awning? Be unique at the campgrounds and earn a few smiles. More than \$400 at Fieldcandy.com



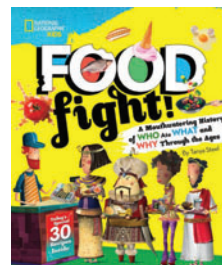
Cupcake Soap & Bubbles Factory
Food science kits are kind of hit-and-miss, but this one has earned good reviews because buyers were able to recreate objects that actually looked like the pictures on the box. Less than \$25 on Amazon.com



Bread Slippers by Firebox
Who doesn't want a pair of baguette slippers? They'll keep your feet feeling toasty! About \$26 on Firebox.com



Food Fight!: A Mouthwatering History of Who Ate What and Why Through the Ages by Tanya Steel
Share your love of food history with the kids. Cute, colorful and has credibility as a National Geographic Kids book. Less than \$18 from Barnesandnoble.com



Lunch Lady Action Figure
Silly and fun, especially for the new generations curious about and eager to experience the food fights and cafeteria cuisine of our formidable years. Can be found online, usually for more than \$200. That's a lot of tator tots to shell out for a toy, but it's considered a collectible.



Pepperoni Pizza Costume for Cats
If you're going to buy a food gift for your kids or grandkids, why not treat the cat, too? A costume your cat will love (or now have another reason to resent you). About \$14 from MissMaddyMakes on Etsy.com



About five years ago, I was invited to attend a luncheon with other food loving women at Lukshon in Culver City. My friend told me she organizes monthly events at different restaurants around Los Angeles, and each meal includes a specially prepared menu and often a meet and greet with the Chef/General Manager.

Through the years I've joined this group at many wonderful LA restaurants, but I never knew how this all came about—how did two women, not in the restaurant business, organize meals at 70 different restaurants? How did they get the restaurants to create unique dishes and still be reasonably priced for the guests? Where do these women like to eat when they go out? I reached out to the founders of EatSeeGo/Foodie Lunches, Suzy Li and Angelina Shih, and asked them to tell me all about it.



A visit to Kali restaurant: (left to right) Suzy Li, Chef Kevin Meehan, Angelina Shih

EatSeeGo/Foodie Lunches started in January 2013 with a small group of friends from a local independent school. "Our initial idea was to celebrate each other's birthdays through good food. The word spread and the original group of friends invited more friends. To date, there are 100 active members."

For five years, Suzy and Angelina put together luncheons every month for 40-50 people. That's 60 consecutive get togethers!

How do Suzy and Angelina pick the menus and the chefs? "We often leave it up to the restaurant to design a menu that they feel best displays their strengths. We will make some adjustments based on what we know tends to be popular (or not popular) with our group, and occasionally make requests for a dish we had tried that really stood out. But, mostly, we give the restaurant a lot of latitude in their choices. We've also been fortunate enough to have some special lunches at places that opened privately for us. These were mostly the result of having developed some personal relationships with the chefs/restaurateurs previously, like at The Bellwether, Jar, and Gwen."

"We choose restaurants that are run by chefs we've admired before or that we randomly encounter. We always try a restaurant ourselves before arranging a lunch there. When possible, we both go, or at least one of us will have eaten there first. Then we also consider things like location, size and whether they are open for lunch."

EatSeeGo rarely repeats restaurants. "There have been 10 or less repeats in our entire history. Those restaurants included Lukshon, Kali, Spring, The District, and The Bellwether," Suzy said.

Over the years, EatSeeGo/Foodie Lunches have seen many food trends come and go around Los Angeles. "I think I've seen a lot more family style dishes than in the past, and a lot more emphasis on farm to table style food emphasizing seasonal ingredients. There's also more of a celebration of including ethnic flavors and touches to the cuisine as well," Angelina explained.



Electric Owl's burger

Our city is full of wonderful restaurants, from hole in the wall places to landmark eateries. "The reality is with LA's current vibrant food culture, there's ALWAYS another great restaurant opening that jumps onto our list. We've gotten to meet so many chefs and they've almost all been so nice, and they aren't always household names. One of the best places to meet chefs, though, is at food festivals. That's also one of the best places for us to connect with people about hosting a lunch."

They went on to explain, "In 2018, we decided to stop our monthly lunches as we had started to run out of new restaurants to visit. We wanted to also have some more flexibility in the places we went to and the format we were using. In that year we had only six lunches. Some were at more intimate places and some had unusual formats like taking a tour of Eataly in Century City."

What about the future of EatSeeGo/Foodie Lunches? There is a website (EatSeeGo.net) and Instagram account that features Food to Eat, Things to See, Places to Go. "We had been to so many great restaurants; we wanted to share the information that these were also great places to host group meals. We didn't really feel like there was really any other great resources to find that information easily in LA. We figured we had done the legwork already. In addition, we also try to focus on fun things to do in LA as that was also one of the byproducts of our constant restaurant search/exploration."



Carole Rosner is a native Angelino who enjoys cheesy comfort food, beautifully decorated desserts, secret neighborhood eateries, and easy to follow dinner recipes. Her lemon coconut squares are always a hit, the oldest cookbook she owns is from 1937, and she's a fan of competitive cooking shows.

What, Me Worry?

Did you hear that Mad magazine is ceasing to create new content and will vanish from newsstands in September 2019? After 67 years as a cultural touchstone and a barrel of laughs, this satirical publication with its occasional but unique take on our food culture will move into the annals of history. For those of us who grew up with Alfred E. Neuman and were greatly influenced by this magazine, we will certainly miss the work of its writers and artists. Here's a few past samples:



Nancy Zaslavsky, Program Notes: Continued from Page 1

Here's a friendly reminder that CHSC accepts sponsorships for costs we accrue each year as a fundraising tool. Members, please consider helping with ongoing expenses besides your annual membership, such as: Newsletter printing: \$500 (2 times per year); Program videotapes for website: \$350 (8 times per year); Hospitality reception expenses: \$200 (8 times per year); and Directory (yearly) printing: \$800 (1 time per year).

To sponsor an item—or part of one, or something else—please contact Madeleine Beaumont who takes your payment with a credit card or check and helps with tax-deductible sponsorship questions, as we are a 501(c)(3) organization. Thanks so much for your ongoing generosity!



Upcoming CHSC Speakers Bureau Programs



Attend these programs at: Palisades Branch Library 861 Alma Real Drive Pacific Palisades, CA 90272



August 17, 2019 at 2 PM Carolyn Tillie "Surrealism, Cubism, Modernism, and Food"



October 19, 2019 at 2 PM Valerie Campbell "Ice Cream and Frozen Desserts from the Roman Empire to the Present Day"

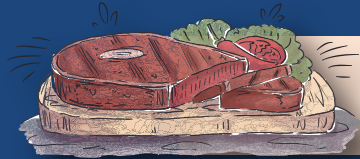


December 21, 2019 at 2 PM Richard Foss "The Strangest Cooking Methods in the World"

If you search the Internet for images of “Paleolithic hunting,” your computer likely won’t show you early *Homo* chasing hedgehogs. Instead, you will mostly find pictures of mammoths, some elephants, and a few giant rhinos. We seem to have this romantic image of our ancestors taking down only the fiercest and largest of beasts. Does this mean that big game was the best source of nutrition for *Homo erectus* or, later, for *Homo sapiens* and the Neanderthals? Not really. Man’s love affair with meat, it appears, was as much about politics and sex as it was about nutrition – if not *mostly* about politics and sex.

In most cases, hunting big game such as mammoths was not necessarily the best way to support a family. It’s true that one dead elephant is equivalent to about five hundred thousand calories, as much as 909 Big Macs. But hunting hippos, buffaloes, or other large game is highly unpredictable and dangerous. Some anthropologists argue that if hunter-gatherers, whether Paleolithic or modern, truly wanted to provide well for their wives and children, they would do better to go for small animals, even insects, and gather seeds and nuts rather than run after elephants.

Killing large game is difficult. The modern Hadza hunters of Tanzania, with their high-powered bows and poisoned arrows (technology that was unavailable to early *Homo*), fail to bring meat home on 97 out of 100 hunting days. For an hour of work, Hadza men manage to provide on average only 180 calories – that’s less than children harvest from gathering. And yet, Hadza men are not the least efficient providers. Hunters from one New Guinea tribe actually expend more calories hunting than they manage to get from their kills. They’d be better off just sleeping the whole day in the camp.



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Another clue that chasing big game is not exactly about nutrition is the timing of the hunts. If hunting big game was about providing food for your hungry family, logic would dictate that you hunt when there is little else to eat and stomachs are empty. Yet that’s often not the case – and probably wasn’t in the Paleolithic, either. Modern hunters go after large animals not in times of scarcity but in times of plenty.

What’s the point, then? Big game hunting is not really about keeping stomachs full. It’s about showing off, politics, and sex. Scoring an elusive prize signals to others that you are strong, skilled, and fearless and that you would make a powerful ally and an adversary to dread. When a hunter *did* bring home an elephant, it was a great source of nutrition, especially of the highly cherished fat. Five hundred thousand calories is a lot of food. There were no freezers back then, of course, and people didn’t always know how to preserve meat by smoking or salting it. It was better eaten fast. No one can devour an equivalent of almost a thousand Big Macs in a matter of days, but a tribe can, and so the sharing began.

And then, there is sex. The Kulina tribe of Brazil practice an unusual ritual they call “order to get meat.” Whenever the women of the tribe feel “hungry for meat,” they tell the men to go out hunting. At dawn, the women, their straight dark hair hanging loose, stride around the village going from one simple, pillared house to another, rapping at them with sticks and waking the men up. As each man rises from his hammock, the woman who has awakened him makes a promise: if he brings her meat, she will have sex with him that night. And later, after a long day of chasing animals and after a sexually charged ritual feast, she does. In this way, among the Kulina, meat is exchanged for sex.

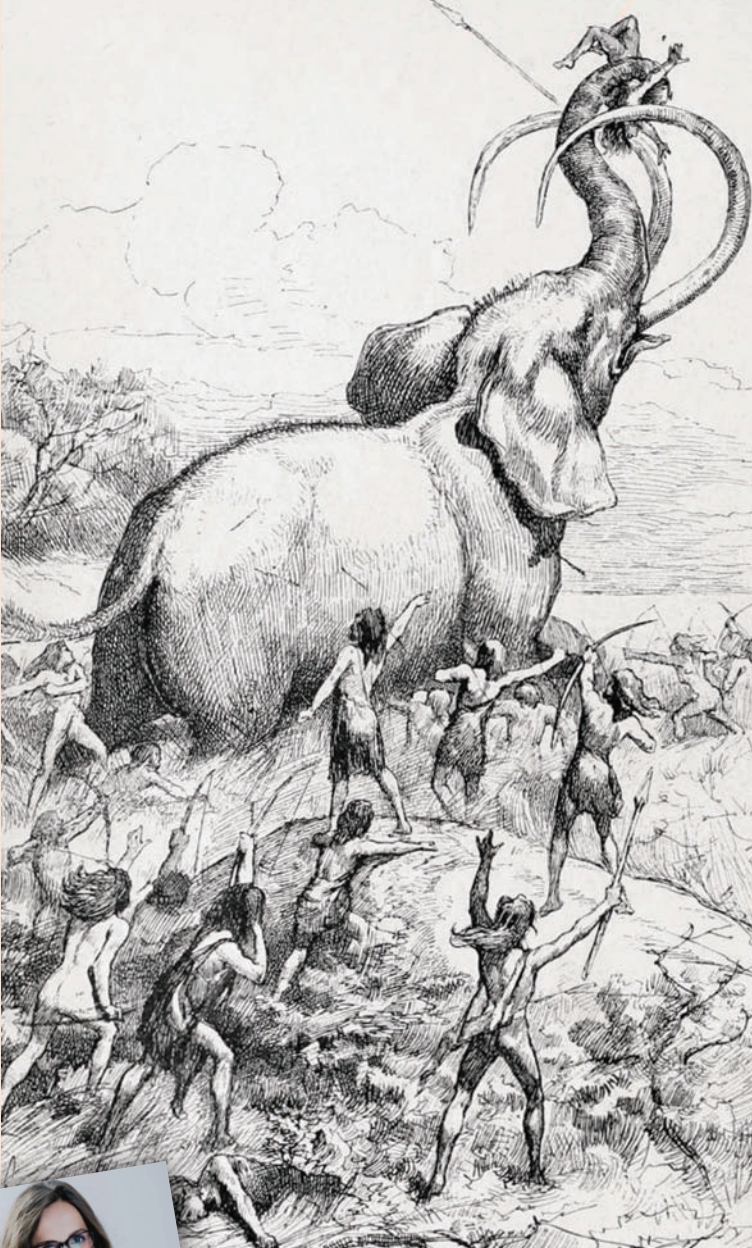
Nevertheless, according to some anthropologists, the role meat played in shaping humanity went far beyond sex and politics. In the words of anthropologist Henry T. Bunn: “Meat made us human.” Humans have impressively big brains relative to their body size. The path to our braininess began about 1.5 to 2 million years ago, when the brains of early *Homo* expanded by almost 70 percent in just a few hundred thousand years. Most paleoanthropologists agree that such dramatic increases wouldn’t have been possible without a change in diet. Brains are expensive to maintain. Although they account for as little as 2 percent of our body mass, they burn as much as 25 percent of the energy that our bodies need when resting. By comparison, the brains of other primates consume only 8 to 13 percent of the energy need to run the organism, while those of nonprimate mammals (think mice, polar bears, dogs) use as little as 3 to 5 percent. Our brains are to calories what Hummer trucks are to gasoline – true fuel guzzlers. And yet we don’t need to consume that many more calories to sustain these energy-expensive organs. How is that possible?

One widely accepted explanation is simple: something had to give, and that something was the human gut. To be able to sustain large brains without significantly raising our basal metabolic rate, we had to cut costs somewhere else. We couldn’t reduce the size of other expensive organs, such as the heart, kidneys, or liver, since that would have made the functioning of our bodies impossible. Instead, it appears that sometime in our evolutionary history, our intestines shrank to make more energy available for the growth of our brains. And that wouldn’t have been possible without a better diet.

If you are a *Homo erectus* and you’d like to meet your calorie requirements on a traditional diet of leaves, fruits, grass, and bark, you would need a large gut to digest it all. Such foods are loaded with fiber and need to be eaten in large quantities to satisfy the requirements of a human body. A fruit-eating *Homo erectus*, for example, would need to eat eleven pounds of fruit a day – the equivalent of about thirty-three medium apples. That’s a lot of food. Your gut can become smaller only if the things you eat are packed with calories and easy to

BIG BRAINS, SMALL GUTS, AND THE POLITICS OF MEAT

by Marta Zaraska



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digest. Peanut butter would have been great, if it were available in the Paleolithic. As it was, our ancestors had to find other high-quality foods to enable the shrinking of their guts and the growth of their brain. That food, more likely, was meat.

Was meat the only option? Could our ancestors have improved the quality of their diets without going for animal flesh? Some paleoanthropologists argue that meat alone was not enough to shrink hominin guts: the meat had to be sweetened with honey. Honey is quite the wonder food. It’s one of the most energy-dense substances found in nature; it has antimicrobial, antioxidant, antiviral, and anticancer properties. It helps heal wounds and lowers bad cholesterol. If the honey contains bee larvae – as is often the case in nature – it becomes a good source of protein and fat as well. And last but not least, honey is delicious. Another food that has been suggested as “the crucial one” that pushed our ancestors’ diets from low to high quality is tubers – those fleshy plant parts deep in the soil, such as potatoes, yams, and Jerusalem artichokes. But though tubers are nutritious and relatively calorie dense, the wild versions can be buried as deep as ten feet down (and so our ancestors would need quite the tools to dig them up), have extremely hard skins, and are difficult to digest.

But perhaps it’s not about which new food was added to our diet so much as how we prepared it. Richard Wrangham, Harvard University primatologist, believes that it was not *just* tubers or *just* meat that made us human but cooked tubers and cooked meat. Wrangham is known in academic circles for his theory that cooking made us human – many scientists I interviewed called him “the cooking guy.” Wrangham argues

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that cooked food is much easier to digest than raw food, which makes us gain weight faster. Since digestion is an energy-costly process – you burn more calories to get calories out of food – the faster you can do it, the more energy will be available for your body. In Wrangham’s experiments, mice fed cooked meat gained more weight than their fellow cage mates who dined on raw food only.

As for shrinking guts and growing brains of our ancestors, Wrangham believes that raw meat couldn’t have been the instigator. Just look at the dates, he told me. We know that our ancestors were butchering animals 2.5 million years ago, but their brains didn’t start to expand significantly until several hundreds of thousands of years later. That’s a long gap. On the other hand, if around the time their brains began growing, our ancestors also started to cook their food, that, according to Wrangham, would explain their changing physiques.

There is one problem with the cooking hypothesis, though: fire, or rather the lack of it. Wrangham’s critics usually point out that the earliest evidence of fire use by our ancestors dates back only to about 790,000 years ago, long after our ancestors’ brains expanded significantly. Wrangham replies that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence and sticks to his theory because, he says, there is no other explanation for how humans simultaneously acquired small guts, small teeth, and weak jaws. But no matter the disputes among scientists of whether it was cooked or raw meat that made us human, most argue one thing: it was meat.

The thinning out of our body hair over time also likely had quite a lot to do with carnivory – or hunting, to be precise. Hunting is a vigorous activity. Just think of all the running and spear throwing that need to be done. If it’s hot, as was often the case on the African savanna, being covered in thick hair puts you at risk of overheating. That is why, if our ancestors wanted to be good hunters, they needed more adapted bodies. Their hair thinned, and they became better at sweating (for example, we sweat more heavily than our cousins, the chimps – especially on our backs and chests). Once human hair got sparse, the skin got exposed to the fiery African sun. To avoid burns, it became more pigmented, turning darker and darker. And then it came time to move out of Africa: something we might not have been able to do had we not developed a taste for meat.

Would we have become human had we never developed the taste for meat? Our ancestors didn’t need meat per se to evolve from the hominins of 2.6 million years ago to *Homo sapiens* of today. Meat was not a physiological necessity. What they did need was a high-quality diet, and at the time meat was the best option they had. That’s why they got hooked on it. Maybe they could have chosen something else. Maybe they could have gone for baobab fruits, which are loaded with proteins and other nutrients. Maybe they could have invested more time in “hunting” insects. After all, chimps can meet their daily protein needs in as little as thirty minutes of termite fishing. Maybe they could have just eaten more honey, tubers, and seeds. All this would have made for a high-quality diet. But, in a way, meat was special. Only meat was both highly nutritious and dangerous to come by. Only meat came in big enough packages to encourage sharing. Only meat was basically the same across continents.

What the history of our meat eating can teach us is that our ancestors were highly adaptable. We are not meat eaters by nature so much as we are opportunists. Our ancestors changed their diets quite dramatically several times in the past. Fruits were best for them at some points in the past; meat was best at others. We should take another lesson from our Paleo (and earlier) ancestors: instead of looking for the perfect and “natural” diet from the past, start looking for one that would be best for right here and right now.