

Freeze-dried or dehydrated food



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

When we were kids, summer break from prison (some refer to as school) meant full-time outdoor fun. We went fishing and camping into the mountains whenever we could get there. Getting there involved convincing a parent to drive us up into the mountains, and come back at a later time and pick us up.

Preparing for the trip meant we had to put in a supply of food for the number of days we expected to be gone. Sure, we would catch fish and gather berries and the like so we could live off the land. We also knew that 11- and 12-year-olds require more sustenance than what nature provided.

Our grubstake consisted of whatever we could sneak from the house without getting caught. If we asked for food from a parent, they usually gave us something not suitable for camping, like canned vegetables. Vegetables were one of the reason we were leaving home to go camping in the first place.

Packing for the trip consisted of carrying all the camping gear and food we could gather and loading it into a pack. If the pack weighed too much, you simply removed unnecessary items, like canned vegetables.

Camping food has come a long way since then. A person can carry a weeks worth of food for two people in a single backpack, where back in the day it required a 20-mule team to carry enough food.

Freeze-drying food removes 98 percent of the water in foods compared to dehydration that removes about 80 percent. The extra water removal reduces weight and increases the shelf life of the food.

Food that is freeze-dried is flash frozen, and then exposed to a vacuum that causes all the water in it to vaporize. Freeze dried food has a shelf life of 20 to 30 years while dehydrated foods are limited to about five years.

The biggest difference between dehydrated foods and freeze-dried foods is their nutritional value. Generally, food that has been freeze-dried retains all of the taste, smell, texture and nutritional value it had when it was in the original form.

Dehydrated foods lose about 50 percent of their nutritional value because they are subject to heating during the drying process. These foods can also become “chewier” because the heating process cooks it over a long period of time as it dries. Freeze-dried food retains up to 97 percent of its nutritional value.

Foods that have been freeze-dried rehydrate very quickly. Most foods are usually ready for the next step in preparation after about five minutes or less. Dehydrated foods usually take 10 to 20 minutes to rehydrate, provided you use boiling water. That requires more stove or fire time and is not always convenient.



It's hard to believe this is a meal for two but backpackable food for outdoor persons has come a long way. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

There is a place for both types of processed food in the outdoor world. If you are a “do-it-yourselfer,” dehydration is something you can do at home. Most box stores sell a simple dehydration machine for under a hundred bucks. Certain things, like jerky, can be cured and dehydrated in your home oven.

Because of the limited shelf life, we limit our dehydration projects at home to light snack foods. Usually, we make fruit snacks, like bananas, apricots, and apple slices.

Occasionally we make a batch of elk or deer jerky but we usually use the oven for that.

Freeze-dried food is not something you can tackle at home. It requires specialty equipment to flash freeze the food. The food to be flashed is subjected to cryogenic temperatures or through direct contact with liquid nitrogen, which is several hundred degrees below zero. That is cold enough to freeze your fingers right off your hand. Then a commercial vacuum draws all the water vapors from the food.

When you are in the planning stages of your trip, consider the distance and the number of days you are going to be out. If the distance is short, and the duration is not long, dehydrated foods will probably work well.

Dehydrated food is heavier than freeze-dried food. If your trip is going require several days' worth of food, or the distance is great, weight is everything. Over the long haul, ounces add up to pounds and freeze-dried is noticeably lighter.

For trail snack on a tough trip, consider freeze-dried foods. Fruits, vegetables and even certain meats can be snacked on without rehydrating them. You are going to want a water bottle handy when you eat them dry but it will keep you going.

A freeze-dried prepackaged meal pouch will contain somewhere between 500 to 900 calories. You can easily burn triple that amount on a trip. Cold weather will increase your calorie burn rate. Consider

the difficulty of the trip, weight load and terrain when planning your meals. You need enough food to maintain that energy for the trip.

Having food that taste good is important. After a long day of tearing yourself up climbing trails with a heavy pack on your back, supper better be worth eating. I am not going to tell you that any “just add water” meal is going to satisfy a gourmet taste and leave you with a soft, and subtle pecan after dinner flavor. No, this stuff generally is marginal, but there is a definite flavor improvement for freeze-dried over dehydrated foods. At the end of a tough day, just about anything will taste good.

I will throw in a comment about Meals Ready To Eat (MRE), as most of you are familiar with them. They are an excellent outdoor meal, high in calorie and nutrition, and the taste is well preserved if the MRE is fresh enough. Downside to them is the weight and space they take up in your pack. If I stick three of them in my pack, there is no room for anything else.

Getting into the mountains to fish, camp, hike, and hunt was a great way for a kid to grow up. Besides saving me from a loathsome childhood affliction, known as school, I learned how to take care of myself in the backcountry and developed a survival skill set that would carry me through my entire life. For example, I learned how to make a fire anytime one was needed with a few pieces of dry wood, a handful of tinder and kindling, and box and a half of strike anywhere kitchen matches.

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Trails: More than an amenity



Outdoors

By Bill Harris

As residents of western Colorado, we enjoy the proximity of public lands managed by state and federal agencies. For the most part, those lands are open for us to visit in a respectful manner. With the COVID 19 pandemic came restrictions that made many pause for a minute and think about how important that access is.

The governor's stay-at-home order has exacerbated the normal spring time edition of cabin fever. Many are heading to local trails to get some exercise, fresh air, and sunshine. Fortunately, visiting local trails does not fly in the face of social distancing recommendations. But, the more popular trailheads are getting crowded at times, testing the limits of avoiding contact with others.

On several occasions in the last few weeks I have joined my wife, Kathy, on bike rides along the bike path that winds along the Uncompahgre River. The trail has its northern terminus near the new Colorado Outdoors development adjacent to the Justice Center. The trail passes through Cerise and Baldridge parks as it winds along the river for over five miles before reaching the Ute Indian Museum.

We can access the trail from our home using pedestrian paths and the newly-opened bike path that goes to the Montrose Recreation Center. The concrete trail goes under Townsend Avenue, eliminating a busy street crossing.

We have encountered a lot of people using the trail system. Even during weekdays, the trails are filled with people. With the schools closed and many people

not working, folks are getting outside to pass the time and get fit. Everyone was keeping their distance from other trail users, so it seems most folks are taking the pandemic seriously.

One of the local trail systems experiencing a lot of traffic is the Buzzard Gulch and Spring Canyon system. Jim Maggio and I rode the trail system recently. I was sure we would encounter a crowd at the trailhead, but when I arrived, there were only five vehicles parked. Jim was already at the trailhead when I arrived, so I quickly unloaded my bike and we hit the trail.

The trail climbed for almost four miles before we reached Dave Wood Road. It was a cool, clear morning — perfect conditions for a good workout. Just up the road, we encountered the Lower Spring Creek trailhead, then dropped into Spring Creek Canyon. The trail into the canyon is steep with tight switchbacks. Jim and I choose to walk a good chunk of it.

Once past “the qualifier,” the trail settled into some sweet singletrack that wound its way along the benches and arroyos in the canyon. We soon reached Spring Creek. Since the trails in Spring Canyon were built several years ago, crossing the creek during spring runoff was problematic, effectively cutting the trail system in half during the best season to ride the trails.

Thanks to a grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, two bridges were built and installed along Spring Creek last winter. The Montrose/Uncompahgre Trails (MUT) chapter of the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association was awarded the grant, then hired Canyon Bridges LLC to design, build and install the bridges. Finishing touches were done by MUT volunteers on the winter solstice and again this spring, so now trail users can cross the creek without fear of being washed away in a roaring torrent.

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Jim Maggio cleans the lower Spring Canyon bridge. (Bill Harris/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

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