

What's Cooking in the Troop? There's no right or wrong way to handle KP in your Troop. Three experienced Scouters sound off their own experiences.

by Michael Lee Zwiers

What's cooking in your troop? Or more precisely, who's cooking? Cooking is an ideal activity to help Scouts develop some valuable life skills throughout the patrol unit. Are you using the opportunity to their advantage?

Let me tell a story to show what I mean. While camping with our troop at a local Scout camp a few years ago, a fellow Scouter and I found ourselves in conversation with another troops' Scouter.

"You cook on Coleman stoves?" he asked as he eyed our kitchen site.

"We sure do. What do you use?"

"Fire," he stated. "We cook over a campfire. It's the only way." After he left, my colleague and I looked at each other.

"Do you think we're doing it wrong?" I asked him. "I used to cook on a fire when I was a Scout."

"So did I," he said. "Maybe we should give our guys a chance to do it."

Later that same weekend, we wandered past the Scouter's campsite. We were fortu-

nate enough to pass as they cooked lunch—or rather, as the Scouter cooked lunch.

He crouched over the campfire, frying pan in one hand and flipper in the other. Grilled cheese sandwiches sizzled away while he fried them to an expert golden brown. When they were done to perfection, he flipped them into a warming pot on the other side of the cooking grill. Meanwhile, his Scouts stood around, hands in pockets, kicking the dirt, whittling away at sticks.

"When is lunch going to be ready, Skip?" a Scout whined.

"I'm hungry," groaned another.

The Scouter greeted us cheerfully as we came up the path. "Good afternoon," he smiled. "Care for a cup of coffee?"

"How come you're doing all the work?" I asked, smiling.

"Oh, only I cook," he replied. "The fellows do the washing up."

"Lucky guys," I said, directing a smile to his restless troops.

"Yeah," one of the Scouts said with a

sour look. "And he always burns stuff on the pots so they're hard to clean!"

"You're just lazy," Scouter retorted. "It took them two hours to clean up after bacon and eggs this morning," he explained.

Needless to say, we didn't stick around for long.

"Those guys look positively miserable," my fellow Scouter said.

"No wonder they spent so long cleaning up after breakfast," I muttered. "Nobody likes cleaning up someone else's mess." But I have often seen Scouts cheerfully scrubbing badly burned pots and pans. The difference was that they had done the burning themselves!

How many times have you heard a Scouter say, "I wouldn't eat food my Scouts cooked. They burn everything." But, how are they ever going to learn to cook properly if you don't let them cook? And you don't have to be a guinea pig. Let the Scouts cook and eat on their own. Who

says you have to eat with them?

Our troop consistently has had such a large adult leadership team that we form our own patrol when we go to camp. The Scouts cook in their patrols and we in ours. We do our best to set an example of how to cook and eat at camp, and make occasional suggestions. The Scouts are allowed to learn about cooking by doing it themselves.

In patrols, the Scouts designed their menus, penned a food list, budgeted for and bought the food, and determined who would carry what into camp. Once there, they set to work preparing the food for a meal, cooking, and eating. During the clean up, it was not unusual to see a lot of contented faces over steaming wash basins and dripping drying racks.

All patrol members learned how to shop, decide which foods to cook first, and the like. Some Scouts developed a specialty, and became "the pancake maker" or "the grilled lasagna sandwich king," but every one of them had a chance to cook.

We usually try to cook something grander than basic camp fare. As a result, a few years back, the troop's quality of cooking grew to such dizzying heights that the Scouts were creating three or four course meals with entrees such as chicken cacciatore, and spaghetti bolognese. Crêpes with fresh whipped cream and recently picked raspberries were not unusual at breakfast. The focus of camp became the preparation, cooking, and cleaning up of meals. Was that such a bad thing?

I've seen troops where the Scouters plan the menu ("Who said we want to eat liver?") and others where the Scouts plan the menu but leaders buy and distribute all the food ("Why did you get instant oatmeal?"). I've been in a troop where Scouts cooked and ate with a partner, and know of another where Scouts bring and cook their own food on their own stove (What happened to B-P's patrol system?). And we all know troops where the leaders do the cooking ("When's lunch ready, Skip?").

Maybe we've all been guilty of at least one of these crimes. Why? I think it's because we don't trust our Scouts enough. But, here's a report of an experience to make you think. The scene is the Outdoor Education class in junior high, where students are planning a camping trip.

"I want to be in Mark's group," one says.

"Why?" asks the teacher.

"Because he's in Scouts and he know how to cook!"

If one of your Scouts was in that Outdoor Education classroom, would he, indeed, know how to cook?

Whether the Scouts in your troop are younger or older, prefer hikes or canoe camps, or use stoves or fires, let them cook. That doesn't mean just putting pan to heat. It means doing all the things involved in planning, preparing, cooking, consuming, and cleaning up after a meal.

I don't mind the smell of burning food, as long as it's the Scouts doing the burning. When they get tired of eating burned food, they'll take your advice and try cooking over lower heat. Meanwhile, set an example, give them suggestions, and let them go to it.

Mixing Methods: The Patrol Method and Adult Association

by Michael F. Bowman

Every troop has a personality, and the way things are done varies according to that personality. On campouts, you'll find troops where the adult leaders are hovering over the boys hardly giving them room to breathe, while at others you'll have to kick their lawn chairs over to get their attention. In the first case you can bet these leaders will also be right there in the patrol kitchen and at the patrol table. In the latter they probably will gather in their own mess tent as the "Old Goats Patrol" and show off their cooking to any Scouts that care to look. So which is the right way or best way? In my opinion, I'm not sure that either of these methods helps the Scouts at all.

There are two methods of Scouting involved here—the *Patrol Method*, and *Adult Association*, and they aren't meant to be mutually exclusive. These methods can be used together.

The patrol method is used to allow a feeling of belonging and to allow boys to experience leadership and responsibility. To paraphrase B-P, we shouldn't do anything for the Scouts that they can do for themselves. That means the Scouts should plan their meals,

cook them, and police their kitchens. Sure, they will make mistakes and they'll sometimes suffer through the results. But these can also be great learning opportunities. When an adult leader is there to *coach* them through the process (not *run* the process), a Scout can learn from an adult role model that a setback is not a life failure. This is the adult association part.

An adult leader can help to encourage when things get tough, give helpful advice when needed, while still keeping enough distance to allow the boys to take on the chunks of leadership they can handle. The trick is to find a happy medium between simply ignoring the Scouts, and becoming too involved that they don't have the space to learn on their own.

The best advice is to remember that each Scout is different and consequently each patrol is different. Each needs varying degrees of room to learn and coaching support. You, as the adult leader, are there to give them the support they need, while restraining your enthusiasm enough to let them try out things and learn along the way.

Boy Scout Happy Hour: How Eating Together Builds Pride, Leadership

by Dave Tracewell

Having served as a Scoutmaster for over ten years, Wood Badge staff, and as a veteran of three National Jamborees, I feel confident that my experiences provide credence toward having adults eat with their patrols.

Not that I was always of the opinion that the boys should cook for me and the adults at camp... I, too have vivid memories of cold hot dogs, mayonnaise and ketchup sandwiches, and burnt pop-tarts for breakfast. But with a little training and preparation, it not only became the best way to eat at camp, but rather enjoyable and a great lesson for the Scouts as well.

It didn't happen overnight. A good Scoutmaster takes training the boys in cooking at camp very seriously, and plans entire troop meetings around cooking, clean-up, and planning good meals. A Dutch Oven cooking demonstration, a class on utensil-less cooking, or even a whole meeting devoted to cooking desserts can really get the Scouts' attention. The boys get into being able to cook "fancy" meals on a camp-out, usually at the same cost or cheaper than hamburgers and tuna fish. Ultimately, they would wind up trying to out do each other, both individually and by patrol.

In my troop, as the boys got better, the adults started "campaigning" to be invited to certain patrols. We required that all camp menus had to be approved two weeks in advance of a camp-out. The word usually got around what each patrol was planning, and it was fun watching the Assistant Scoutmasters and Patrol Dads vie for invites... of which the Senior Patrol Leader had con-

trol. This not only promoted good, healthy meals on camp-outs, but also a sense of pride and leadership among the boys when they knew what they were doing was good enough to impress their dads and adult leaders.

Think about when you invite guests to your home for lunch or dinner. You try to impress your guests, by making things a little nicer, and trying to be on time. The same concept applies when adults eat with patrols. What lessons are we teaching? We always sit together, and say grace at each meal. The adults have a chance to interact with each of the boys in a more personal setting. It also gives the boys a chance to show off, and impress adults with not only the meal, but also maybe their campsite, patrol box, camp gadgets they may have made, and with themselves. (For us, dinner—the evening meal—always required a full uniform. The boys seemed to take that to mean their camp also had to look its best!)

The idea of adults eating with the boys on camp-outs is not just a simple matter of showing up and eating what the boys cook up. It is a whole concept of teaching the Scouts how to plan and cook good food in a clean and healthy manner. It is a way to build team spirit, enthusiasm and self-respect. It becomes a learning experience for many Scouts on how to look and act at mealtime, and a reinforcement of our twelfth Scout Law when we say grace at meals. So when someone asks if I think it is important to eat with the boys, I say Yes, it is an essential part of our Scouting program that is often overlooked. We owe it to our boys to help them become better Scouts.