

## Fine food in wild places

Carole Latimer, who leads adventure trips for women, raises camp cuisine to a new level.

Story by Lia Huber appeared in May 2006 Cooking Light Magazine

I'm standing in a swatch of snow that swaddles the jagged granite of Piute Pass at nearly 11,500 feet, and there's not a tree in sight. Clouds swirl just overhead and thunder rumbles off the peaks; I'm petrified by the impending lightning. Then I hear my name over the wind and see a smear of waving arms in the distance encouraging me across the barren bowl below. I steady my breath and make a mad dash towards Carole Latimer and the six other women with whom I will spend the next four days in California's remote John Muir Wilderness.

Moments like these are standard on Carole Latimer's Call of the Wild trips for women. Trips often encourage participants to test their limits, says Latimer. "Something will happen physically or mentally on the trip to push them past those boundaries." But as the ladies high-five me for facing my fears, I'm thinking about the other reason that people are drawn to Latimer's trips--she is the undisputed queen of wilderness cuisine.

Latimer was raised with an appreciation for both adventure and great food. A fifth-generation Northern Californian, she tagged along on her dad's backcountry fishing and hunting trips from the time she was a child, and helped tend the family's pear orchard and vegetable garden. "There was always a freezer full of venison, and something to be canned." She eventually made her way to Berkeley, California, but her weekends remained reserved for the wilderness. In 1978 a friend suggested that Latimer teach women how to backpack, she recalls. "I thought to myself, what's to teach?" As Call of the Wild nears its 30th birthday, it turns out there's plenty.

Call of the Wild's early trips were rustic, bare-bones affairs. But Latimer soon added gourmet meals to the mix and has since become an expert and author on the subject; her cookbook *Wilderness Cuisine: How to Prepare and Enjoy Fine Food on the Trail and in Camp* is available from Wilderness Press or Amazon.com. For Latimer, good food has always been part of the outdoor experience. "On my first trip to Piute Pass in the 1950s, my Dad made biscuits with a reflector oven not far from here," she says. And she finds the constraints of cooking on the trail inspiring. "If you're into food, it's endlessly fascinating. Your creativity can really soar when your resources are limited."

As Call of the Wild evolved, Latimer embraced the challenge of wilderness cooking and combed the ethnic markets of Berkeley to glean techniques for preserving food without refrigeration. Dehydrating is one of her secrets. Drying fresh fruits and vegetables can lighten their weight by up to 20 times and make the food safe for transport without refrigeration. She also relies on such longtime camp provisions as dried milk and powdered eggs. I am skeptical at first, thinking that dehydration would rob the food of its flavors, but I become a believer while admiring the flavorful slivers of zucchini floating in my ginger soup. We move on to a delicious beef curry and creamy cucumber salad that Latimer and her sous chef/guide, Lisa Harding, have heated in the "kitchen"--two Coleman stoves, folding tables, a hanging screen pouch for drying plates and flatware, and a bevy of boxes and coolers filled with meticulously labeled containers.

"You have the element of surprise going for you out here," she says. "People aren't expecting you to pull out a prosciutto fig pizza or a freshly baked dessert. That's what makes it fun."

**“Wilderness Cuisine”** may be purchased by contacting the following:

Wilderness Press  
1-800-443-7227

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)