

## Chapter 1. On the Road Again:

### Keeping Your Party Well Fed On the Road

*“Slit a chicken's throat, and skin it after inflating(i)”*

On the whole, modern life is good to us. If I get the munchies on the way home from work, I can stop at one of a dozen fast food drive-thrus, grab a latte, or even hit a vending machine filled with a variety of snacks, some of which might be actual food.

Things are a little different when you are walking (or running) in a pre-refrigeration era, or, if very lucky, travelling on the back of a beast or in a carriage. You will need to carry food with you or have places to stop and stock up. If not, you will probably starve to death long before you can rescue the prince and save the kingdom from doom. And that would be bad.

Do you remember those old video games where your character is carrying two hundred pounds of items in a backpack, including a ladder and fifty feet of rope? Traditional fantasy can sometimes read like those old video games; the heroes have unlimited food and drink conjuring bags.

Hungry? Poof! A dead rabbit appears in your pot, entrails and fur already removed.

Thirsty? Poof! A lake of safe water appears just around the bend.

If your characters are moving across vast distances, sooner or later you will need to address food and water. Running away from rampaging orc hordes takes a lot of calories.

Are your intrepid heroes sauntering down a well-travelled toll road where there is a village every ten kilometres? That's an easy distance to cover, so there will be plenty of opportunity to eat. Or, are your adventurers travelling through a rough trail in a sparsely-populated area? Are they slogging through the forest, hacking a path through the underbrush as they go? Any of these situations will greatly impact your hero's ability to perform the tasks ahead.

While reading this book, consider these questions. How will your hero carry his drinking water? What will your heroine be eating? What is your adventuring party's experience in the terrain they are exploring? Do they have any outdoor experience, as a farmer will have different knowledge from a soldier, and different again from a pampered aristocrat. Are your heroes legally allowed on the land they are occupying? With those questions in our minds, let's hit the trails.

### Backpacking through the Wilderness

Walking long distances works up an appetite. I'm a casual backpacker. I don't get to scramble the peaks like I used to, but I try to squeeze in a couple weekend jaunts into the backcountry every year. Ultra-light weight has been the theme of hiking in the last decade. Modern technology allows us to reduce the weight of what we carry. It's about time, too. My joints aren't as young as they used to be.

No matter how much lightweight titanium equipment I own, it sadly still weighs something and that weight adds up, adding stress and demand on a person's body. For a four day hike in Jasper National Park in September, I typically carry:

- Hiking boots and a pair of flip-flops
- Poles
- Pack
- Tent, sleeping bag, self-inflating sleeping pad, pillow
- 1 change of clothing, plus a face cloth, dish towel, extra underwear and socks, a sweater, PJ bottoms
- Rain gear
- Food, stove, fuel, cooking utensils
- Water bladder, water filtration system, emergency water filtration pills
- First Aid kit, compass, map, altimeter, emergency chocolate supply

That comes out to be about 27 pounds when I step on the scale fully decked out. The most I've hiked with was around 50 pounds, but I was carrying a field radio from the Korean War that was the size of a space shuttle. I've seen some people get down to 18 pounds, and others as high as 40 pounds. Put into perspective, a Roman soldier, who missed out on the "ultra-lightweight" rage, marched carrying sixty pounds of gear. Every day. For years. [\(ii\)](#)

How does all of that weight and exercise impact the hero's body? The most obvious effect is that with more weight comes a slower pace and the more tired he'll become. It's not easy to carry the gear, protect yourself from the elements, and have enough food to keep your morale and energy high, all the while ensuring you can physically keep up the pace without exhaustion setting in because you're carrying a kitchen sink on your back.

That added weight combined with the exercise greatly impacts one's nutritional needs. This is bad news when we need our hero to be in full strength to arrive at the castle to challenge his evil brother for control of the kingdom.

Over the years, I've had to filter water and share my snacks with people on the trails because they had no concept of what walking in the woods or up a mountain is actually like. These were always marked to semi-marked trails, too, where paths were already worn into the forest. Imagine cutting through brush as many heroes end up doing. They'd drop from exhaustion within days without proper food and water.

Calorie estimates for women usually fall in the 1800-2000 calories a day, with men in the 2300-2500 range. That's for the average person, doing everyday things like working in an office and exercising a couple times a week. 2000 calories looks like this [\(iii\)](#):

- Breakfast: 1 slice toast with margarine, 4 strawberries, ½ cup yogurt
- Lunch: Peanut butter sandwich, 1 cup of mini carrots, 1 kiwi, 1 soy latte
- Dinner: 1 hamburger, 1 cup of steamed broccoli, 1 glass milk
- Snacks: 1 orange, cucumber, ½ grilled cheese sandwich

Should I pause here so that everyone can make the resolution to go on a diet? Okay. I'll wait.

Now that we're back, let's look at the calorie needs of our active heroes. After all, we want rippling abs and not gaunt ribcage.

NATO estimates the average fit male taking part in normal military operations consumes 3600 calories a day. Those engaged in combat operations consume in the range of 4900 calories.<sup>(iv)</sup> That doesn't take into account cold weather or elevation, both of which will add additional calorie needs.

Women generally consume fewer calories than men; an average woman backpacking can expect to need 2500-3000 calories a day for normal hiking, and more if it is in the winter, high elevation, or strenuous hiking<sup>(v)</sup>, such as running away from an assassination squad for weeks on end.

Travelling food needs to be light, transportable, easy-to-prepare, nutritious, and long-lasting. Many heroes of fantasy rely on foraged and fresh foods alone. We often read about our heroines snacking on bread purchased at the market four days ago (and yet it is still fresh) and picking cupfuls of berries or frying up the fish leisurely caught by her romantic interest.

These heroes would need approximately one kilogram of food a day or about 3000 calories (more if it's a busy day). So, what does that look like? You're looking at 12 slices of whole wheat bread, 5 ounces of cheese, 2 large onions, 6 carrots and about 7 ounces of beef. That's a lot of food.

So let's look at how to make sure your hero's abs of steel stay in mint condition.

### **There Is a Horde of Orcs Chasing Me. Can We Stop for Some Rabbit Stew?**

If time is of the essence, your hero will not have time to field dress a deer, locate water (unless he's following an uncontaminated stream or river), fish, or club a baby seal and make a fur coat. Yet, how many of us have read fantasy books where the heroes have done all this and still had enough time to seduce the assassin travelling with him?

My eighty-three-year old father has been hunting most of his life and he offers this advice to the hero wanting to hunt rabbits while being chased by orcs: go hungry.

I used to make rabbit snares for Dad. I was six or seven, and he showed me how to tie the wire together so that he could set the snares out in the snow. He'd check them a couple days later and bring home the frozen, dead rabbits.

Snaring rabbits and smaller creatures like squirrels and rats is difficult to do if on the run with little time to stop. It's even tougher for a stranger to an area to hunt rabbits because bunny tracts aren't easily visible in the undergrowth and fields to the untrained eye, unlike when there is snow on the ground. Rabbits have "runs", which means they take the same path to move around. It makes snaring rabbits easier in the winter; you just need to look for tracts and set the snares (or traps) in the brush where the footprints are the heaviest.

In the summer months, the net method will be useful for adventuring groups with a pet ferret (authors: this gives you full license to justify that ferret you've been dying to include in your novel. Use this knowledge with care). Cover the rabbit holes with small nets pinned down with wooden pegs. Drop your ferret into one of the holes, who will rush through the rabbit underground and cause quite a stir. The rabbits will run away from the ferrets and jump through their holes, getting tangled in the nets. The hero dispatches the rabbits quickly, usually by breaking their necks with a swift twist.

A musket-carrying heroine might have much more luck bagging a rabbit. Early-era muskets had really bad aim, but the new rifles coming out of the Napoleonic wars were significantly better. With any weapon, however, it's only as good as the person using it. That's not even considering the noise; the assassination squad chasing your group might hear the shots before the stew is fully cooked, and that would be bad.

If there are no ferrets (shame on you) and no gunpowder in your world, can your adventuring party still make rabbit stew in the forest? Perhaps you really want to write a campfire scene where the party members are eating rabbit stew. It might even be *vital* that you include a rabbit stew scene. It is very doable, and will probably be necessary if the group is travelling a long distance in a sparsely-populated area. So let's get out the pots and pans. We have work to do.

First things first: your party will need the essential small rodent and rabbit snaring gear:

- Wire or twine
- A sharp knife
- A club (to kill any animals still alive and caught in the snares and traps) or the guts to snap necks (and gloves to protect the hands)
- Knowledge

While your party is gathering firewood, have your heroine make and set the traps and snares. Set out as many as she can, as it greatly increases the odds of catching something. In the morning while the gruel is being prepared, check the traps. If lucky, your party might have fresh rabbit for breakfast along with their cooked oats.

**Avoid freshly-cut wood, aka "green" wood. It is difficult to catch on fire and creates billows of smoke. Instead, collect fallen wood or dry driftwood that's been washed up on shore. Unless you are planning to burn someone at the stake. In that case, use green wood. The smoke will knock them unconscious before they start to burn. It's a mercy.**

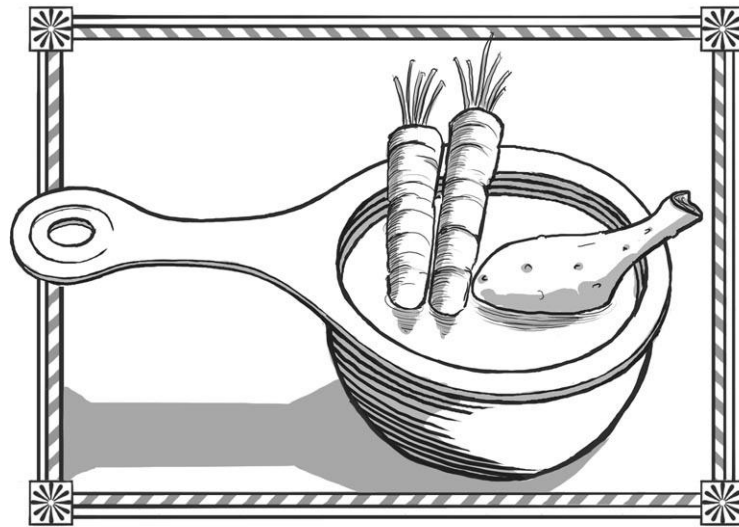
Have your party skin the rabbit away from the camp; they don't want to attract predators.

Besides, it smells. And is icky.

To cook the poor creature that your heroes have just murdered and gutted, they will need:

- At least thirty minutes of cooking time plus ten to boil the water (more if the water is from a stream and cold, or if there is a lot of water, or not a lot of fuel)
- Flour and fat to make gravy
- A heavy pot so that the meat doesn't burn
- A means of getting the pot out of the fire
- A means of scrubbing the pot (it will be charred and ashy on the outside and messy inside)
- A means of stirring the food so it doesn't stick to the bottom
- Enough firewood to sustain the fire
- Water
- Vegetables, such as carrots, turnips, and onions for taste and nutrition

A handy woodsman will be able to use quickly-carved sticks for a number of these jobs. A well-prepared hero will have a *patera* with him. A *patera* was a cup, cooking pot, and bowl all-in-one used by Roman soldiers. They were about seven inches in diameter and made of bronze. [\(vi\)](#) He'd be able to cook and eat his meal all from the same pot. A small pot like a *patera* will reduce fuel needs, water needs, and make clean up a breeze. It's so much easier to lug around than a cauldron, too.



*A Roman-style patera is a perfect cook pot for your team of adventurers.*

If your heroes prefer, rabbit can be spit roasted. Rabbit is a very lean meat, so can burn easily. Just set up a simple spit and rotate the rabbits often (so that they don't char on one side and be undercooked on the other), and tend the fire. You might find it easier to cook

over very hot coals so that you can keep the spit lower to the ground, and not use up more precious fuel.

However you cook it, make sure to crack the bones in half and suck the brown marrow out. It's quite tasty and was really the only part of rabbit I ever liked.

### **My Hero Is a Carnivore. He Needs Venison Stew!**

Ahh, venison stew. The old standby in adventure fantasy and many a historical war novel. Our heroes are in the forest. They successfully stalk a deer and kill her, and just at the fall of twilight, there is hot, bubbling venison stew in their bellies.

It is possible to stalk and kill a large game animal with spears and bows. After all, our ancestors did it for millennia. However, it is important to consider the frustrations of hunting and if your party has the time and tools necessary to bag large prey.

Stalking a large animal is dangerous and difficult, especially if you are relying on arrows as opposed to modern hunting rifles. You'd have to be lucky enough to have camped in an area populated by deer, caribou, moose, and other large game animals. They aren't as plentiful as one might think. These animals also run fast. *Very fast*. A moose can run over 50 kph. If you miss, you're out of luck. Even with today's weapons, it can take avid hunters several days to catch their prey, and that's when they are going back to the same area. It will be very difficult to do in an area that your hero doesn't know anything about.

Solitary game hunting for survival in a strange land would be very difficult for an inexperienced or pampered hunter. A prince might have had experience shooting the arrow at a deer, but did he have experience finding where deer gather? Would he have experience in field dressing the deer—bleeding it properly and gutting it? There's really no point to killing the animal if he has no way to actually eat it.

Consider the amount of meat these animals provide. Smaller deer can render upwards of sixty pounds of usable meat, whereas a larger animal, like a moose, can easily yield three hundred pounds or more of meat. The meat would spoil quickly without any means to preserve it and would attract scavengers. Even if you carried it in your pack, the flies would soon be swarming around you and your pack would start to smell. It would be a huge waste of energy, life, and meat for something that will be left to mostly rot.

#### **Small(er) Game**

If big game is too impractical for your adventuring party, there is plenty more that they can snack on:

- Snakes and frogs
- Insects
- Sparrows and pigeons
- Squirrels, mice, and hedgehogs
- Bird, snake, and turtle eggs

But, sometimes, a good ol' pot of venison stew is necessary to get the romantic subplot moving along. If your party takes down a deer and makes some stew, they'll need:

- At least 2 hours to cook the meat
- Flour and fat, if you want gravy
- More fat, if you want the meat browned with a little extra flavour
- Water, enough to cook the vegetables and to make gravy
- Enough firewood to keep a fire going for at least two hours
- All the cooking needs listed for rabbit stew
- Any vegetables you want

If your party has enough time and is large, spit-roasting the deer or elk is also an option. Getting the rack set up to accommodate a large animal will be tricky, so have an expert look after that task. The party will need to take turns looking after the fire and the rotation of the animal every half hour, since it will take most of the day to roast it, but it's a mess-free way to cook a large animal for a group.

Before pulling back your bow string, though, ask if your hero is permitted to hunt. Not all trees and hedges are open for hunting. Today in Canada, hunting and foraging is strictly forbidden in provincial and national parks, except in special circumstances (i.e. Gros Morne National Park sometimes issues hunting licenses due to an exploding moose population that makes the roads very dangerous). Even picking mushrooms in a National Park can yield a maximum fine of \$5000. That rockets to \$250,000 fines and five years in prison for poaching a threatened species, such as peregrine falcons. Even taking eggs, and not killing the adults, is seen as poaching.[\(vii\)](#)

The concept of forbidden areas to hunt is not new. Hunting wild game in many European regions was forbidden except for the lord of the manor, and pretty much all of the land had such a lord. In some cases, hares and rabbits were considered game (since they were "meat"), but the fines for poaching were significantly less. Killing a deer in a protected woods was breaking the law, and the punishment could range from severe fines up to (and often including) death.[\(viii\)](#)

If you are writing an historical or a historical fantasy, it is important to investigate what constituted poaching in the time period you are writing in. Were any lands publicly available for hunting, or were they all owned and cut off from hunting?

It is also possible that a forested area could have "common rights", meaning that the area was used by everyone. For example, English farmers had common rights during Norman times. For sixty days in the autumn, farmers turned their pigs out into the forests and fields to fatten up on acorns. Your heroes will need to be extra careful that they don't bag some poor farmer's pig. A local magistrate might see that as "house-breaking" and that charge often comes with a noose around the hero's neck. Tread with extreme caution.

## **Fishing**

Your party decides that rabbit catching is too difficult in the height of summer, and hunting deer sounds too much like work. What's left for them to eat? Human beings have been fishing since we figured out how to make a spear, so why can't your adventurers?