

Chuckwagon History (late 1800s)

A chuckwagon was originally a wagon that carried food and cooking equipment on the prairies of the United States and Canada. A chuckwagon would accompany a wagon train of settlers or a group of nomadic workers like cowboys or loggers. Charles Goodnight, a Texas rancher, invented the idea of a chuckwagon in 1866. *Chuck* was a slang term for food and chuckwagon food included easy-to-preserve items like beans and salted meats, coffee, and sourdough biscuits. Supplemental foodstuffs were also gathered while on the trail.

Important Chuckwagon Items: Dutch oven, large coffee pot, extra kettles and pots, crossbar, and fire hooks

Also included: a dishpan for mixing bread, a kettle for heating water for washing, a “wreck” or “roundup” pan for dirty dishes, and a “squirrel can” for scraps

Typical Day’s Food the Crew Ate on the Trail:

Breakfast: meat, sourdough bread, dried fruit, and coffee

Lunch/Dinner: roast beef*, boiled potatoes, beans, brown gravy, light bread or biscuits, and coffee.

Occasional Dessert: stewed dried fruit, spiced cake made without eggs or butter, dried fruit pies, or spotted pup (rice and raisins).

*Northern cowboys were more likely to get beef with their meals. Some outfits in the Southwest made do with salt pork, beans, and sourdough.



A Typical Cook's Day on a Cattle Drive:

Before sunrise:	Get up and start fixing breakfast. Wake the horse wrangler. Wake the cowboys and call them to breakfast. Wash dishes, pack the wagon and move up the trail. The cook would move ahead of the cattle because he could move faster with his team of horses.
11:00 a.m.	Make a new camp and have lunch ready by noon. Lunchtime gave the cowboys a chance to rest and the cattle time to graze.
1:00 p.m.	Pack the chuck wagon and ride toward the evening's campsite.
5:00 p.m.	Set up the night camp and prepare a dinner of beans, biscuits, and coffee to be ready about 6:30.
9:00 p.m.	Go to bed. Unlike the cowboys, the cook did not have to take a turn watching the cattle at night.

Cowboy Food Slang:

Biscuits	Hot rocks
Corned Beef	Salt hoss
Eggs	Hen fruit
Airtights	Canned goods, such as peaches or tomatoes
Beans	Prairie strawberries, whistle berries
Coffee	Brown gargle, java, Arbuckle (a popular brand of coffee during early cattle drives)
Gravy	Texas butter
Molasses	Lick, larrup (used in place of sugar)
Onions	Skunk egg

