

Camp Catering Notes

Catering for camp can be daunting and very time consuming but the results will often be the one thing that a lot of people remember about the camp.

I have written down some of my thoughts and processes that have emerged over the last 20 years that I have been involved in catering for Kesgrave and District group camps where numbers have varied from 5 to 500.

I am not trained in catering but I have attended the local District Councils basic Hygiene course, which cost about £100 and lasted for 1 day. It was useful but often needs adapting to the practicalities of camp. For instance on a survival camp you don't want to be carrying a selection of chopping boards so that you can have one for each type of food!

What to buy

Over the years I have developed a very basic spreadsheet, which I use as the basis for all camps. You can download a copy from our website. It gives some comments on portions and amounts but is not completely automated, as an element of common sense is always needed. I usually end up shopping in at least two places – a supermarket and cash & carry. Sometimes price is a consideration sometimes its quantity e.g. instant hot choc, large tins of tuna, bacon etc.

The Spreadsheet can be used to add up the totals and then if anything comes back and goes in my cupboard or on to another event that goes in the returns and gets deducted from the total cost. Its always useful too to track what gets left then you can amend the next camps shopping list.

Special Diets

I almost always cater for vegetarians and do this by either substituting vegetarian products e.g. sausages or just leaving out the meat e.g. stir fry/curry. Don't forget to add vegetarian stock cubes etc as I have been caught out like this before. More complex Food allergies such as a celiac can usually be overcome and often we ask the parents to look at the menu and then provide alternatives for things, which cannot be eaten.

Shopping

I am usually involved in large camps and the days of trailing round the supermarket with a large trolley (or 2 or 3) are long gone. Now I order online.

Experience with this is mixed. Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury all offer the service but Tesco will not always deliver to a commercial address (i.e. campsite) and Asda like to deliver to the cardholders address. Tesco have also not delivered a large order because they could not get it on their van and I had to collect on my way to camp. If you can get delivery to the site then you also run the risk that you wont get exactly what you asked for so a

handy local shop is a useful stand by. But getting the shopping delivered can dramatically reduce your transportation problems.

I have found that locally Sainsbury's are the most helpful. The Online Manager at Warren Heath asks that

1. You make sure they deliver in the postcode that you want.
2. You place your order at least 7 days in advance and you do it all in one go so you don't add another load of bits near the end that they can't process.
3. You give them a courtesy call and alert them that you will need 100 loaves etc so that they know the order is coming and then they can allow for the space on the van and the length of the delivery (On average they only allow a few minutes at each stop)
4. Then your shopping should arrive safe and sound at the required destination its well worth the delivery fee.

Other things come from Makro or any Cash & Carry where they will either register you as a member or let you in on a day pass depending on their procedures. Don't forget your local shops too where you can often get a discount especially if they are parents in the Group.

Storage

So you arrive at camp and where do you put it all?

Having had your shopping delivered you may be able to check the store into leaving you the crates and returning them later. Asda actually left theirs completely and Tesco have lent them too. Big crates with the folding lids are useful if mice/rats/squirrels are likely to be a problem. Try and sort your crates into food types e.g. breakfast, lunch etc and an odds and ends box so that you can send other people to get things and find things easily.

If you have a fridge or freezer available then your problems are over and this will alter the type of menu you can offer e.g. ice cream. But if not then the cool box will have to do. Invest in a good one and plenty of cool packs. The blue gaz ones work well and we have a large thermos one that is good too. I often try and take the food frozen so that it thaws gradually rather than trying to keep chicken etc just refrigerated. You can also minimise the problem by taking long life milk etc and tinned things like tuna rather than ham.

Cooking

Buy some good quality thick bottomed pans – the thin ones are alright for pasta and rice but if you cook spaghetti bolognese sauce it is bound to burn on the bottom.

Keeping hot

Cooking at camp is a bit like the family at home there is always someone missing at mealtime and there is no microwave to reheat things quickly. One of our best investments has been the chafer. You can cook tea early and keep it hot easily and either leaders can help themselves or it can be served to a whole camp. It also stays hot as you are serving. It also helps if your cooking space is limited e.g. a barbecue and you need to serve everyone at once. You can store the sausages and burgers or onions and then you are not waiting to feed people.

Washing up

The gas urn is another essential item to keep hot water supplied. They do take 50 minutes to boil and in very cold conditions you can struggle to get it to boil at all unless you use calor gas. Don't underestimate the effect of the dishwasher not many children are taught how to wash up these days – we are thinking of making a video!

There are probably lots of things I have missed.

Information can be downloaded at www.kesgravescouts.org.uk

If you have suggestions, questions or comments then email me at celia.m.comber@btinternet.com and eventually together perhaps we can provide a better camp catering experience!