

# What's For Dinner?

*Has your family ever taken a long car trip? Did you eat at restaurants or shop along the way? What if you had to pack your car with ALL the food you needed for a cross-country trip?*

Pioneers often cooked over their campfire in the evening (above).

**O**n the trail, pioneers could not stop in restaurants or grocery stores. There weren't any. The pioneers had to pack their wagons with everything they needed.

The pioneers chose their provisions (the food they brought with them) carefully. Flour was the most important item, because they ate bread every day. Salted meats such as bacon and beef jerky, beans, pickles, dried vegetables and fruits, hard coneshaped loaves of sugar, crackers, and coffee—all these were on the packing list.

Everybody carried a large supply of hardtack, or sea biscuits. Hardtack didn't taste very good, but it stayed fresh for a long time. Pioneers dipped their hardtack into coffee or milk to soften it up.

Milk was poured into a churn on the wagon each morning. As the churn bounced, the cream turned into butter.

Sometimes the pioneers shot antelope, buffalo, or small animals for fresh meat. In the summer, children picked berries



Chuck wagon,  
Texas, 1907

Left: Library of Congress. Below: © wanchai/Shutterstock/HIP.

for pies, or wild onions, dandelions, and watercress for stews. But usually they ate from their provisions.

What utensils did pioneers pack in the “cook’s box”? Most boxes held a small stove, a kettle, tin cups, spoons, bread pans, a rolling pin, and a large iron frying pan called a spider (named for the little legs it sat on).

Breakfast was early. Often children ate warm johnnycakes (first called journey-cakes—can you guess why?) and bacon. Sometimes they had rusk (dried cornbread cereal), porridge, or mush.

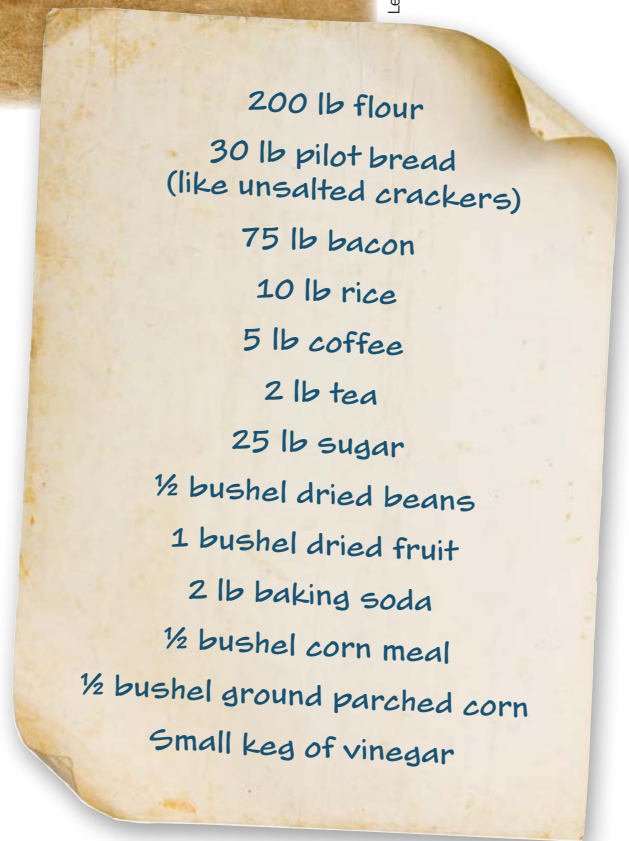
Lunch? Cold leftovers (no time for a fire), more bacon and bread, pickles, or thick layers of dried bean jelly spread onto crackers or hardtack.

Mothers cooked most evenings, so supper was hot and tasty. Some favorite foods were

- hot flour bread dipped in bacon grease and fried
- bread on a stick—dough baked on a stick that was stuck into the ground near the fire
- bean soup
- watchagot stew—dried vegetables, beans, and leftovers stirred together in a large kettle

Dessert? Pioneers loved fried fruit pies, sugar toast, and coffee cake. On special occasions, pioneers baked celebration pie (mashed beans, sugar, milk, and spices) or fried sugar doughnuts.

Next time you’re on a trip and you dig into a burger and fries at a fast-food restaurant, think about what the pioneer children ate on the trail. Anybody ready for watchagot stew?



### Food for the Journey

It was recommended each adult pack the food listed above.