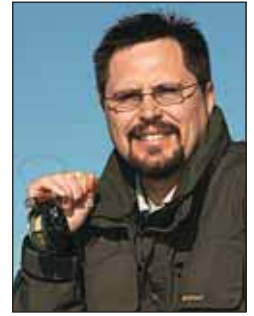


back cast

By Ron Wilson



The guy who won't open his wallet to help pay for groceries – not because he's a cheap sonofagun, of course, but because he says he can hunt all day on a soda cracker – will eat your lunch.

I've seen him do it. He'll build a Dagwood sandwich on the tailgate of your pickup guilt free, and then wipe the mustard off the blade of your hunting knife before pocketing it, thinking you'll overlook it like you did his cracker comment in the checkout line.

What a piece of work. While I don't recall his name, I remember the meats and cheeses he stacked on his sandwich. It's easy to forget idiots, but not food eaten outdoors.

A hardboiled egg cracked and peeled over the kitchen sink and dotted with pepper and Tabasco is good. But that same egg eaten on the prairie with your begging bird dogs looking on, and a brace of birds cooling in the shade, is, well, just better.

When the fall hunting season rolls around, there's as much thought that goes into the weekend's menu as where we're going to camp and hunt. This is especially true for the sharp-tailed grouse opener, which is the first official hunting trip of the season that takes us away from home for a couple nights.

If we have any venison leftover from the fall before, it will figure somewhere into the first night's menu, maybe cooked on the portable grill or thrown into a stew, stroganoff or chili, depending on our mood. If the stars align, we'll shoot a few grouse the following day and brown their breasts with mushrooms, peppers, onions and a few slices of bacon.



People can say what they want about sharp-tailed grouse not being great table fare, but I'll forever beg to differ. These prairie grouse are especially tasty eaten around a campfire within walking distance of where they danced in spring and flushed before our shotguns in fall.

No matter what we concoct over a camp stove, we're typically heavy on the spices and light on the fuss. The fewer times a person has to leave the pull of a warm campfire to chop, dice and stir after a day of chasing birds the bet-

ter. There are exceptions, however.

One of our hunting partners typically prepares an elaborate meal that involves limitless soaking, shaking, stirring and sautéing. It's mostly a mystery what's cooking, but you know, without having to filter through the ingredients spread across the picnic table, that whatever it is involves meat. The end result is that we'll eat later than typical, but the food is without fail worth the wait.

Last fall, after spending the better part of an exhausting morning helping quarter and cart a cow moose to the road, it was finally time to celebrate, to rejoice in the hunter's good fortune, to mark in our memory banks this once-in-a-lifetime North Dakota hunting opportunity. We'd dine on moose back straps, eat off the "fancy" tin plates and not the paper ones, toast with only the good stuff, and howl at the moon around the campfire in tribute to an animal that would fill our freezers for winter.

Well, it sounds good now that a person is fully rested. Instead, we ate chili dogs and napped. And both were wonderful.