

Traditional Eating Habits of the Mi'kmaq

During Thanksgiving we often joke about how much we and our families will eat in one sitting and that we won't need to eat again for days. In Mi'kmaq tradition, this was a way of life.

The Mi'kmaq traditionally did not eat three meals a day, but rather one large meal when they were hungry. The food available was equally divided among those who were present to share. They continuously ate their meal together until all the food was gone.

In October, moose was the meal of choice. The Mi'kmaq spent their hunting efforts using deadfalls, snares and decoys this time of year, but for the moose they would make a roll of birchbark about eight inches in length. This would be used as a moose call to draw the animal closer to be within shooting range.

Since moose are so large, it was easier to eat it where it was killed rather than to carry it back to the camp. They would make a cooking vessel on the spot, using a section of tree trunk that was cut and the interior hollowed out by fire and stone gouges or huge pointed bones. When the vessel was complete, it was filled with chunks of moose meat and water. They used hot stones to help with the cooking process. Sometimes the cooking vessels were made from birchbark because, when filled with water, the vessels would not burn below the water line and could therefore be set directly on the fire.

The food being cooked was stirred usually with a long leg bone of moose, deer or caribou. Dipping was done with a ladle that was made very quickly using a single fold in a piece of birchbark and inserted in a split stick handle.

The ingenuity, resourcefulness and skill of the Mi'kmaq is admirable and impressive. The hard work and effort put into their meals by the Mi'kmaq cannot be rivaled by our grocery store purchases and stainless-steel pots. *KW*

Information taken from:

Stoddard, Natalie B. *The MicMac Indians of Nova Scotia*. Halifax: The Nova Scotia Museum, 1966. (Micmac Foods).