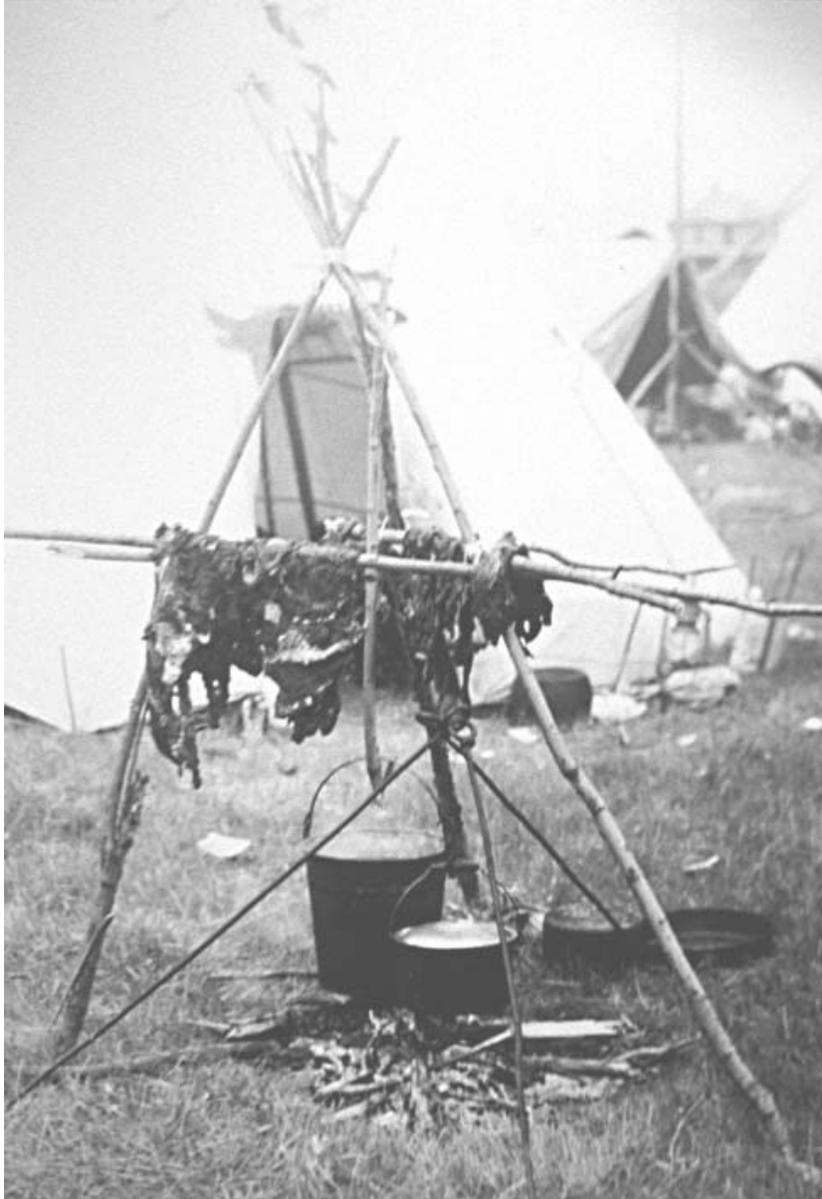


Pemmican

Pemmican is a prepared preserved meat. The name comes from the Cree word *pimîhkân*, which itself is a derivative from the word *pimî*, “fat, or grease”. Pemmican is high in protein, will last indefinitely, and is easy to carry. This was the food that allowed the voyageurs of the canoe and York Boat brigades to travel long distances without stopping to hunt. On the prairies where there was a shortage of fuel it had the advantage of using the sun to dry the meat. Pemmican because of its composition never froze solid and could be used all winter with ease. Thus, it was also the ideal food source for the winter traveler.



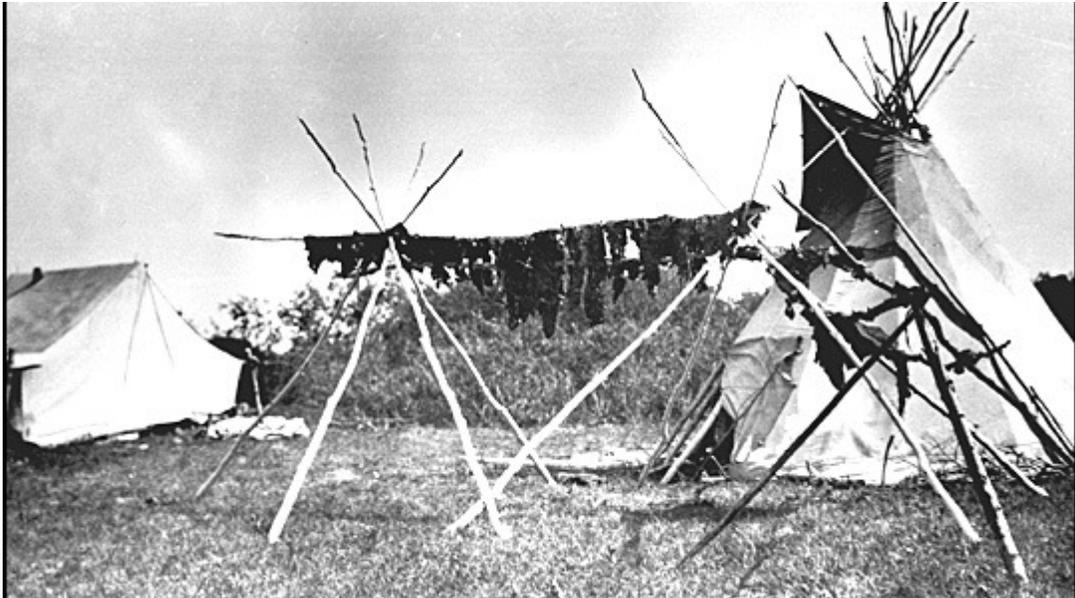
Pemmican can be made from the meat of many animals but the Metis were best known for making pemmican from buffalo meat. Metis women prepared pemmican by first cutting the meat into strips that they worked between their palms into long strips

about a quarter inch thick. These strips were then hung on rows of wooden slats supported by tripods and dried in the sun. After a few days on the frames the meat was sufficiently dried. Choice pieces were rolled up and saved as beef jerky. The rest of the meat was laid out on a hide and pounded into a powder. Melted fat was then poured over the meat and then was worked with shovels into a uniform mass. The mixture was then poured into rawhide sacks known as “Taureaux” (bulls) of pemmican. When the fat was from the udder, the sacks were known as “Taureaux fins” (fine bulls). A mixture of meat with bone marrow instead of ordinary tallow was called “Taureaux grand”. Another mixture included dried fruits such as saskatoons, pears, chokecherries or cranberries. The leaves of the peppermint plant or wild onions are sometimes added for flavour. These sacks were called “Taureaux à grains” or berry bulls. These were particularly long lasting since the acid from the berries added to the preservative quality.

Richot or *Richaud* was a form of pemmican made with oatmeal instead of berries. Raisins were important for making “nhoaa-ganak,” a dried and pounded moosemeat mixed with salt, sugar, dark raisins and chokecherries. This was then pressed into cakes and bars.



Stone hammer used to pound pemmican.



Drying meat, National Archives Canada, E.S. Curtis.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute