

The Master Marinater

by Jack Lagan

INTRODUCTION

‘Wherever a man is,’ said the pirate Tom Gunn after three years marooned alone on Treasure Island, ‘a man can do for himself.’ The treasures on the island did not include female company: Gunn was getting excited about goats. For food, I hasten to add.

This book is about provisioning for small boats at sea and about cooking in the small galleys (kitchens) on those small boats. It also explains how to survive in a life-raft or in the same predicament as Seaman Gunn – having to ‘do for oneself’ on an island, a remote tropical coastline or in a small abode in Brixton. The content is aimed at those winch warriors, bearded bo’suns, and steely-eyed skippers who believe that leaving a can of beans out in the sun for a few hours constitutes *haute cuisine*. But passage-making doesn’t have to be penury, guys, and when you do persuade the Chief’s daughters (or the harbour-master’s sisters) to visit you on board you can impress the hell out of them with both your self-sufficiency and your culinary expertise. Then they will see cooking for *you* as a worth-while challenge.

If you don’t quite fit into the above categories, and have come to the conclusion that you are sailing through life with someone who thinks he is single-handing with a great-looking cook/bar-maid, pass *The Master Marinater* on to him when you’ve finished it; then borrow his tome on ocean navigation. Don’t expect it to be politically correct though -- books on navigation rarely are...

Not getting the eating part of sailing right can have gruesome consequences. Over a hundred years ago, when the redoubtable Captain Joshua Slocum turned up at the Gilbert Islands (I think it was), he was greeted by ‘...a canoe coming down the harbour, with three young women in it.’ Obviously the Chief’s dusky daughters.

One of the fair crew, hailing with the naïve salutation, “Talofa lee’ (‘Love to you, boss’), asked:

“Schoon come Melike?”

“Love to you,” I answered, and said, “Yes.”

“You come ’lone?”

Again I answered, “Yes.”

“I don’t believe that. You had other mans, and you eat ’em.”

Now this tale gets curiouser and curiouser. It’s a well-known fact that the Gilbert Islands were named after W S Gilbert of Gilbert & Sullivan comic opera fame... And it was Gilbert who came up with this piece of doggerel titled *The Yarn of the ‘Nancy Bell’*.

’Twas on the shores that round our coast
From Deal to Ramsgate span,
That I found alone on a piece of stone
An elderly naval man.

His hair was weedy, his beard was long,
And weedy and long was he,
And I heard this wight on the shore recite,
In a singular minor key:

“Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.”

And he shook his fists and he tore his hair,
Till I really felt afraid,
For I couldn’t help thinking the man had been drinking,
And so I simply said:

“Oh, elderly man, it’s little I know
Of the duties of men of the sea,
But I’ll eat my hand if I understand

How you can possibly be

“At once a cook, and a captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.”

Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, which
Is a trick all seamen larn,
And having got rid of a thumping quid,
He spun this painful yarn:

“ ’Twas in the good ship Nancy Bell
That we sailed to the Indian sea,
And there on a reef we come to grief,
Which has often occurred to me.

“And pretty nigh all o’ the crew was drowned
(There was seventy-seven o’ soul),
And only ten of the Nancy’s men
Said ‘Here!’ to the muster-roll.

“There was me and the cook and the captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And the bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.

“For a month we’d neither wittles nor drink,
Till a-hungry we did feel,
So we drawed a lot, and accordin’ shot
The captain for our meal.

“The next lot fell to the Nancy’s mate,
And a delicate dish he made;
Then our appetite with the midshipmite
We seven survivors stayed.

“And then we murdered the bo’sun tight,
And he much resembled pig;
Then we wittled free, did the cook and me,
On the crew of the captain’s gig.

“Then only the cook and me was left,
And the delicate question, ‘Which

Of us two goes to the kettle?’ arose
And we argued it out as sich.

“For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,
And the cook he worshipped me;
But we’d both be blowed if we’d either be stowed
In the other chap’s hold, you see.

“ ‘I’ll be eat if you dines off me,’ says Tom,
‘Yes, that,’ says I, ‘you’ll be,’--
‘I’m boiled if I die, my friend,’ quoth I,
And ‘Exactly so,’ quoth he.

‘Says he,’ Dear James, to murder me
Were a foolish thing to do,
For don’t you see that you can’t cook me,
While I can--and will--cook you!’

“So he boils the water, and takes the salt
And the pepper in portions true
(Which he never forgot), and some chopped shalot,
And some sage and parsley too.

“ ‘Come here,’ says he, with a proper pride,
Which his smiling features tell,
‘ ’Twill soothing be if I let you see,
How extremely nice you’ll smell.’

“And he stirred it round and round and round,
And he sniffed at the foaming froth;
When I ups with his heels, and smothers his squeals
In the scum of the boiling broth.

“And I eat that cook in a week or less,
And--as I eating be
The last of his chops, why, I almost drops,
For a wessel in sight I see!

--- o ---

“And I never grin, and I never smile,
And I never larf nor play,
But I sit and croak, and a single joke
I have--which is to say:

“Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig!”

For more on the cooking and consumption of your mate, check out the chapter on Survival.

The Recipes

This is not a book about *cordon bleu* cookery. The recipes included are based on ingredients that might be available from on-board provisions. Cookery writers and celebrity chefs can safely assume that their readers and viewers will be able to get hold of just about any required produce. Indeed, if you are pottering around a populated coast then there is a fair chance that you will be able to obtain all of the ingredients suggested in their various recipes. But I do not make any assumptions about availability.

What I have also tried to do is keep the meals easy to cook but interesting; basic regarding ingredients and at the same time neither bland nor boring. Where a key ingredient may not be readily available an alternative is suggested. The key to this approach is recognition of the simple fact that herbs, spices, canned food and staples keep well, whereas most fresh ingredients – such as poultry, meat and fish -- do not. That's why you eat them fresh.

So the message is this: buy as many of the former as you can afford and stow; buy fresh ingredients to match your likely rate of consumption and the longevity of the food. Nothing is worse than over-stocking an item because it was there in the store only to find that you have to throw much of it away because you can't eat it without making your toes curl up.

Most of the meals can be cooked on one or two stove burners and/or a grill/broiler. Many blokes are intimidated by ovens; at least you can see

what is going on in a pan. Also, how can you impress your guest with something that she can't see? She might even jump to the conclusion that you faked it and are merely heating up a ready-to-cook concoction. Pushpit barbecues heated by charcoal or, more commonly, propane gas have become popular, especially in hotter climates. Accordingly, I have included some recipes for the barbecue.

I do not apologise for leaving the measures somewhat vague. Measures are only critical in hindsight – after you have got it wrong. Where there are risks associated with adding too much or too little of something, I have tried to remember to point that out.

Vegetarians

I prefer my protein so fresh it is still bleeding a little, so there is little in this book for vegetarians (apart from a lot to make them grimace and a lot to make them feel superior). However, I can recommend *Voyaging on a Small Budget* by Annie Hill (Waterline Books, London, 1993) for all kinds of reasons. The book is packed with practical, common-sense advice for wannabe live-aboards, but Annie and Pete Hill are vegetarians -- so all the provisioning and cooking advice is geared toward folk who eat the plants they talk to. (Incidentally, the Hills cruise on a 37ft Jay R Benford-designed junk-rigged schooner called *Badger*. The book contains some of the most cogent and convincing arguments in favour of this rig for long-haul cruising. So read it even if you are not a vegetarian.)

The Tips

The book is full of handy hints like these:

- Get good at a limited range of meals that you really like. You know you have cracked it when you don't need to have the book

open on the work surface.

- Don't use guests as guinea pigs. Cook the meals that you cook best and look good in preparation. Leave the experimentation to the master cabin (or hammock).
- Clean as you go! This is the best way to avoid poisoning your visitor. Your seduction strategy is sure to fail if your guest has her head in the head.
- Various checklists for equipment and provisioning are included in the appendices. If you want to download these lists and print them, I'll upload them to jack-lagan.com.

Go to the one of the recipes chapters if you want to try something edible right now. Who said you had to read *Sex and the Galley Slave* first?