

# Mountain Man Camping

## Shelters

Many different styles of lodging were used by the mountain man but most of it was quick to setup and easy to move. The replica shelters that we use today are usually made of heavy canvas, and some are even coated with a fire resistant material. These can be expensive, but there are many affordable ways to create your own authentic shelter. Here are some of the more common styles used during the mountain man era.

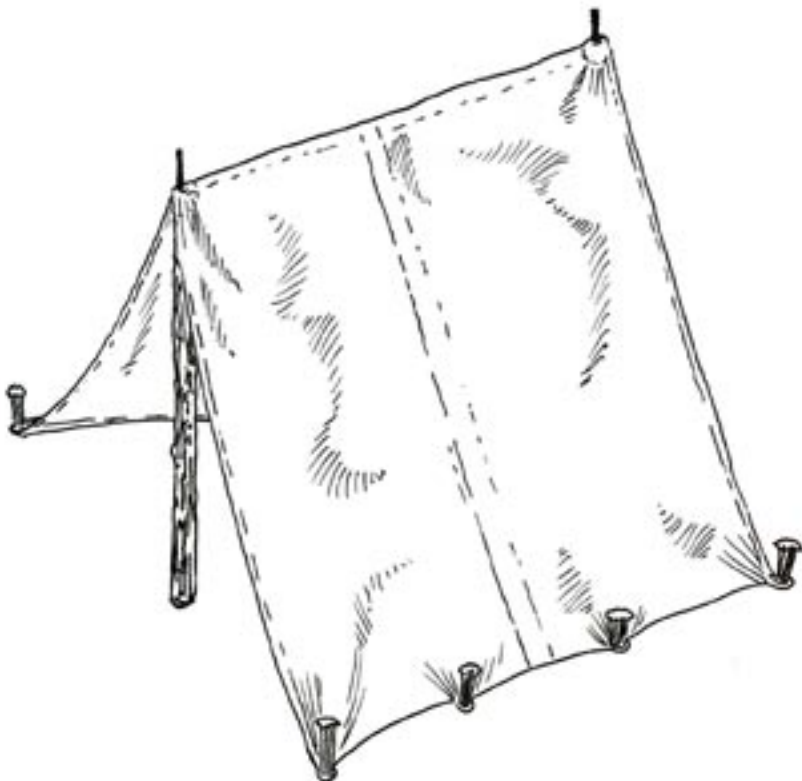
### Lean-To Shelter

This shelter can be easily created using a single large piece of canvas such as a painter's tarp or several smaller pieces stitched together.



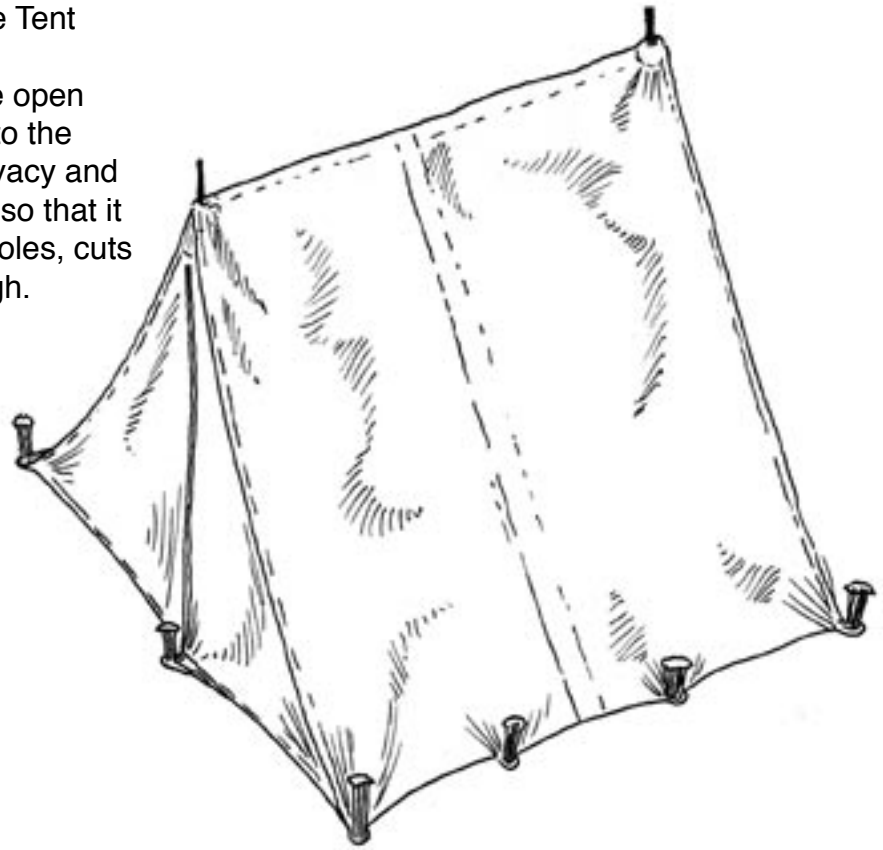
### Open A-Frame

This shelter can also be created using a single large piece of canvas, or several pieces sewn together. Cloth loops, or re-enforced holes need to be added to the edges of the canvas so that it can be staked down. A wooden pole is placed at each end, and can be stabilized by a support rope staked in front and back, or by a ridge pole running between the two upright poles.



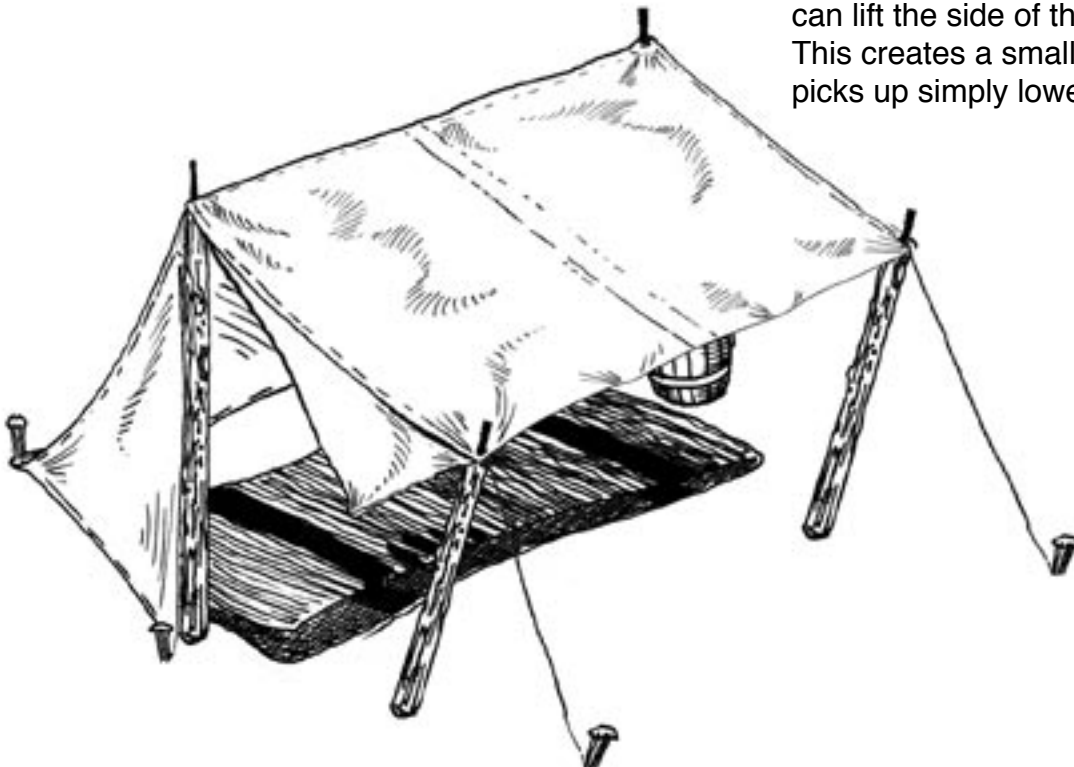
### Closed A-Frame or Wedge Tent

This shelter is very similar to the open A-frame, but it has flaps added to the front and back. It adds more privacy and warmth. Adding ties to the flaps so that it may be secured to the upright poles, cuts back on the wind blowing through.



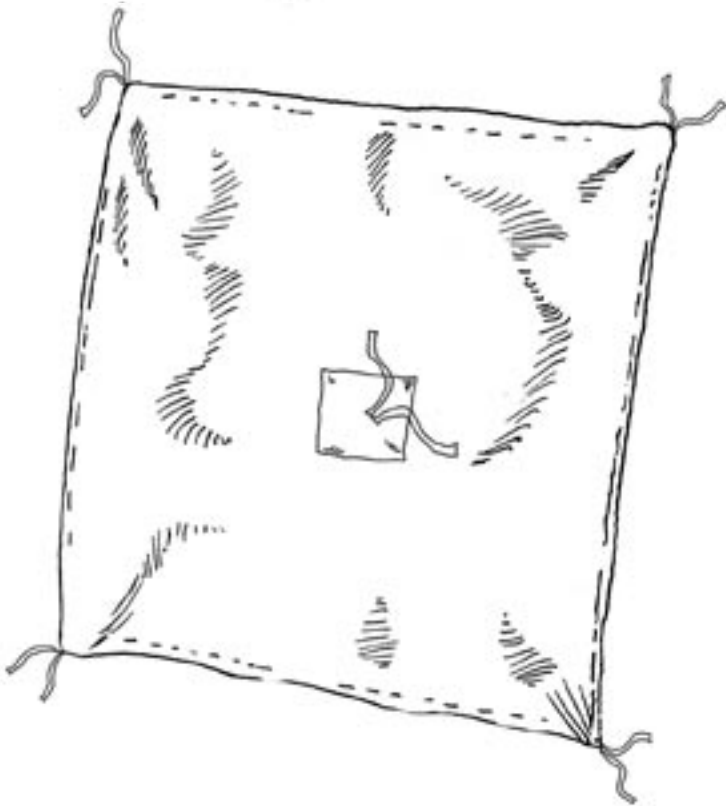
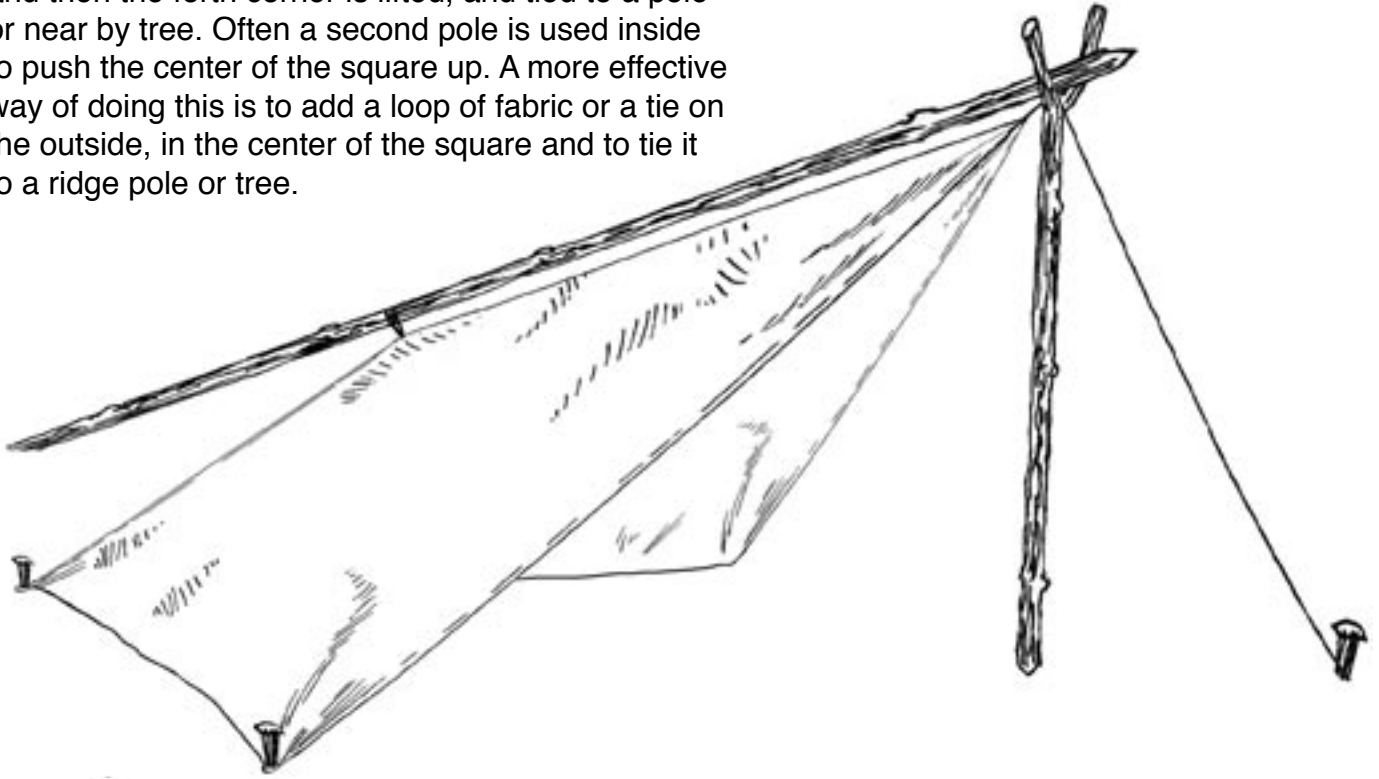
### Converted A-Frame

For warmer evenings, two additional poles can lift the side of the closed A-frame up. This creates a small awning. If the wind picks up simply lower the side again.



## Plow Point Wedge

This shelter is made from a single square piece of canvas. The canvas is staked out on three corners and then the fourth corner is lifted, and tied to a pole or near by tree. Often a second pole is used inside to push the center of the square up. A more effective way of doing this is to add a loop of fabric or a tie on the outside, in the center of the square and to tie it to a ridge pole or tree.



This shelter is also known as a diamond shelter. It can be configured in several ways depending on how many poles you wish to use, or where there are near by trees to attach it to. It can also be made into a simple Lean-To, or an Open A-Frame. The primary features of a diamond shelter are its square shape, ability to be tied or staked on all four corners, and a tie directly in the center of the square. You can purchase versions of this shelter with ties all along the four edges, which make it more versatile. It is a rather inexpensive shelter to buy pre-made, but can also be made easily out of a piece of a painter's tarp, or any heavy canvas.

Spread out view of a Diamond Shelter

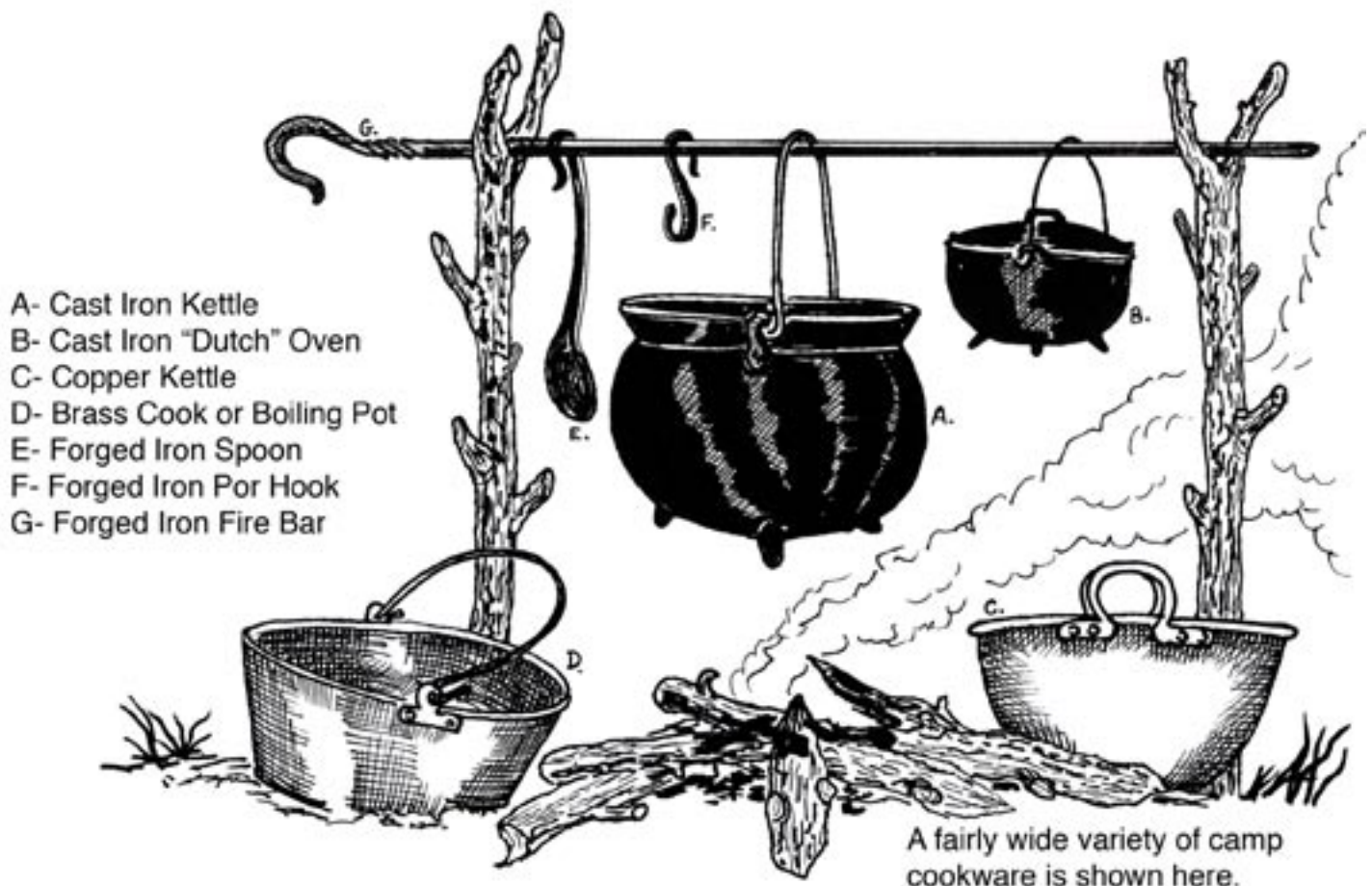
## Cooking

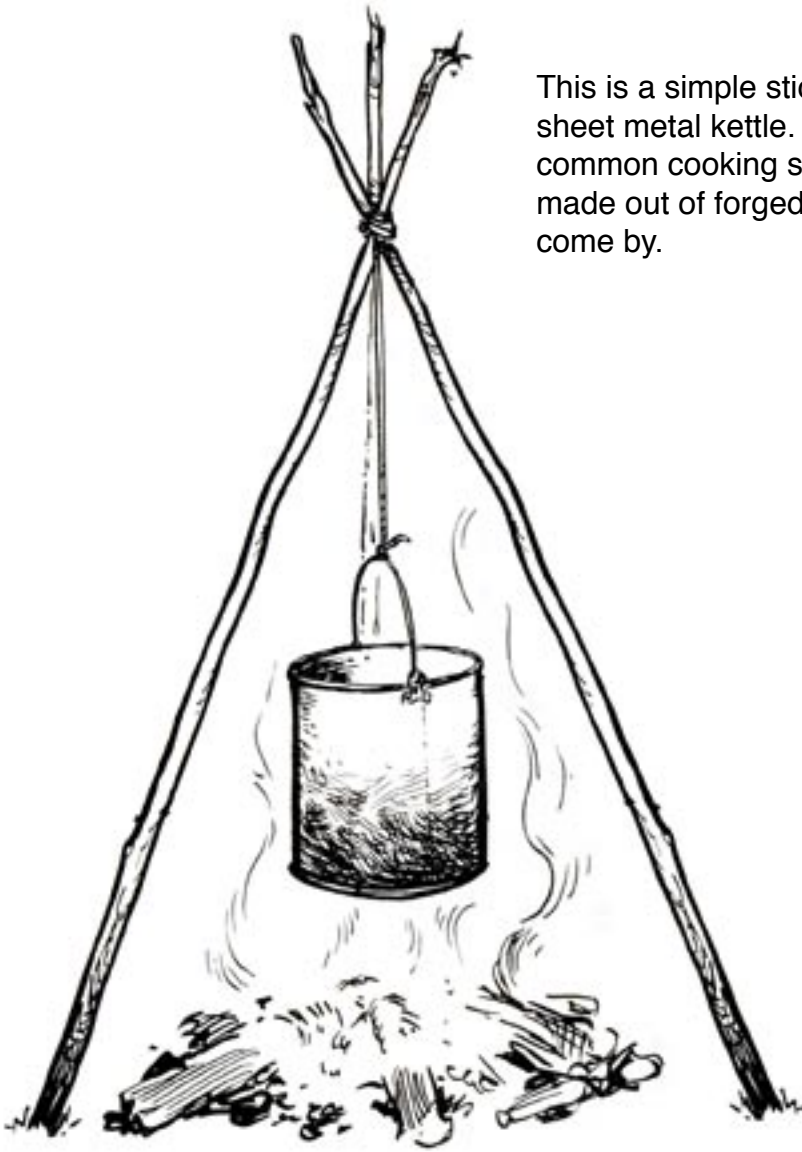
Food and water were number one priorities for a frontiersman. Skills necessary to find nourishment were essential for anyone venturing beyond settled lands. Fur traders and trappers mostly ate meat. When necessary, they could subsist on vegetable material-digging tuberous roots and eating ripe berries like a bear. They didn't consider themselves well-fed. Meat was obtained mostly by hunting, but also as a by-product of trapping. Boiled or roasted beaver tail was considered a delicacy. Most meat, however, came from hunting large game animals such as bison, elk, antelope and deer. Small game was less important because the amount of meat obtained seldom justified the effort.

While the frontiersman's staple diet was fresh meat, other food was eaten. Dried beans, dried corn, flour and salt pork were supplies carried along with condiments such as salt, pepper and sugar.

Corn was often boiled to make chowder. Flour and cornmeal were used to create biscuits, johnnycakes and hard breads like bannock. Baking soda was used as a leavening agent, although some breads were unleavened. Sourdough, a culture of live yeast, also was carried as a leavening agent. These breads were usually made in a frying pan.

The simplest way to prepare food for a rendezvous today, is to actually cook it at home and simply re-heat it over an open fire. It is common for re-enactors to actually have coolers cleverly disguised in a wood box or covered in canvas.



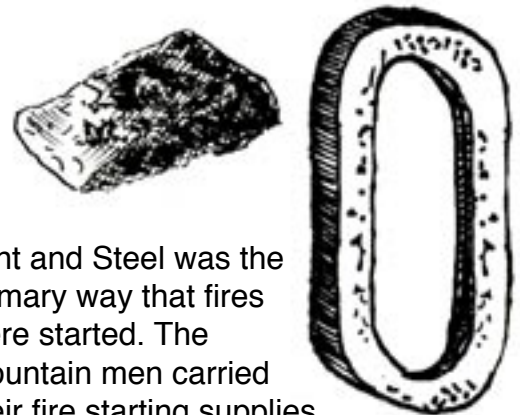


This is a simple stick tripod holding up a can-shaped sheet metal kettle. This was the most simple, and most common cooking set up. Cooking tripods were also made out of forged iron, but were heavy and harder to come by.



Sheet Metal Kettle

Stoneware crocks were commonly used to hold all kinds of liquids. They came in a large variety of shapes and sizes up to several gallons. The mountain men would typically use the smaller jugs because they were easier to transport.



Flint and Steel was the primary way that fires were started. The mountain men carried their fire starting supplies in a pouch known as a strik-a-light pouch. These came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and were normally connected to the belt and hung on the waist.

## **Preservation of food**

If meat was not eaten immediately, it had to be preserved. The abundance of game varied and fresh meat was not always available. Meat to be stored was preserved in several ways: drying, smoking or salting.

Meat sun-dried in long strips was called jerky. The strips, 1/4 - to 1/2 -inch thick by about 1 inch wide and up to several feet long, were hung from a wooden rack in a sunny place. After several days, they were leather dry and ready for storage. Sometimes drying meat was sprinkled with pepper to discourage insects. For added flavor, jerky was made by drying meat over smoky coals.

Berries and roots were also sun-dried. In addition to preserving food, drying reduced the amount of water in the food and made it easier to pack and carry. A high-energy food, called pemmican, was made from jerky, fat and dried berries. It was made by melting fat and stirring into it shredded jerky and dried berries such as chokecherries, currants or blueberries. When the fat cooled and hardened, it was cut into bars and wrapped in rawhide. Ounce for ounce, pemmican is still one of the most high-energy food sources available.

Smoking consisted of drying meat in the heat of a smoky fire. Green hardwood such as hickory, placed on a bed of coals, provided the smoke. Fish to be smoked were split and hung on wooden racks above the fire. Smoking not only retarded spoilage, it also added flavor. The modern backyard smoker comes from this primitive technique; however, with modern-day smoking, the intent is not to dry the meat. The process, therefore, is carried out in an enclosure that reduces moisture loss.

Sometimes meat was packed in salt or a brine solution to preserve it. Large expeditions carried barrels of salted pork. The process of salt-curing is still used today.