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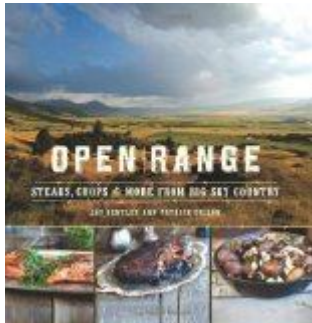
Books, Movies, and other Travel Inspirations

Eating in Big Sky Country: Montana

🕒 March 1, 2013 📁 Books, Cookbook, Destinations, Food, Montana, Travel, United States 📖 book review, campfire cooking, cookbook, cooking bison, food travel, guest post, Montana, stagecoach 👤 Brette Sember

Tasty Travel

By Brette Sember



Destination: Montana

Book: *Open Range: Steaks, Chops & More From Big Sky Country* by Jay Bentley and Patrick Dillon

Hitch up your horses, strap on your chaps, and follow the chuck wagon as you read ***Open Range: Steaks, Chops & More From Big Sky Country*** by Jay Bentley and Patrick Dillon. Montana is on my travel bucket list (and one of my favorite bloggers, Donna Hull at **My Itchy Travel Feet** has recently moved there), so I was ready to dive into this book and get a real feel for Montana.

The first thing you'll notice is that the font in the book is meant to resemble the kind you would see on Old West wanted posters, so already the book has an atmosphere of the west. Bentley is the owner of **The Mint*** in Belgrade, Montana (outside Bozeman), a classic Montana roadhouse that has its roots in the beef and wild game of the area, but has also come to focus on the fresh local ingredients of the area. In ***Open Range: Steaks, Chops, and More from Big Sky Country***, he shares his love of this beautiful country and the food that is such a big part of it.



Bitterroot Valley Montana, Photo Credit: Donna L. Hull

The food backbone of Montana is red meat and the book starts with a discussion of the history of meat in Montana, complete with photos of old hunting camps, covered wagons, and cowboys. Delicious. Montana photos are scattered throughout the rest of the book, but photo hog that I am, I would have loved to see more, more, more of the fields, streams, mountains, sky, and cabins, but I love the photos that are included, especially an old photo of a Montana chuck wagon. (NOTE: The first three photos you see here are NOT from the book. Instead, they have been contributed by Montana resident, Donna L. Hull). Although the focus is mostly on the recipes, there are wonderful pages for reading, such as the history of the chuck wagon and the first chickens in Montana.



Chuck Wagon. Photo Credit: Donna L. Hull

I love cookbooks that directly deliver you to a location through recipes and that's what happens in this book. The food reads as hearty, authentic, and real. Yes, you'll find Poacher's Deer Leg, Elk Loin with Bearnaise Sauce, Wild Goose Medallions, Roast Pheasant with Tarragon Vinegar, and Prairie Chicken and Green Chile Stew, but you'll also more accessible meat dishes like Cast-Iron Roasted Chicken, Pork Chops with Honey, Chipotles, and Lime, Rack of Lamb with Dijon Crust, Jerked Leg of Lamb, Chuck-Wagon Chili, Chicken-Fried Steak, Beef Ribs Three Ways, and Old-Fashioned Swiss Steak and Gravy. In addition to the recipes there are tips on choosing red meat.



Campfire Cooking in Montana. Photo Credit: Donna L. Hull

Although meat is the highlight of the cookbook, you'll also find some wonderful fish dishes, like Campfire Trout. You can start your meal with Polenta and Grilled Sausage or Pea Soup with Leeks. There are plenty of sides, such as Corn Macque Chou, Roasted Root Vegetables, Potato Dumplings, Teo-Pot Pinto Beans with Pork Shoulder, and Cornmeal Mush. Fun recipes for compound butters and sauces give you some extra cooking tools you can apply here or elsewhere. Desserts are also local: Flathead Cherry White-Chocolate Crème Brulee and Huckleberry Crisp are a wonderful way to end a meal.

The recipe I'll be trying is this one for bison (more and more grocers and butchers are carrying bison since it is a leaner alternative to beef).

Recipe reprinted with permission from OPEN RANGE © 2012 by Jay Bentley and Patrick Dillon Scott, Running Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group.



Montana Dutch Bison Stew, Recipe from OPEN RANGE cookbook, Photo Credit :Lynn Donaldson

Dutch-Oven Bison Stew

Today, it's not like it was in the mid-nineteenth century when the bison population ran in the millions before it was nearly wiped out. That said, between Yellowstone National Park in the south, Ted Turner's ranch holdings in the middle, and the National Bison Refuge at Moise in the northwest, together with smaller bison ranching operations in between, Montana has become a virtual bison factory. I think it's great (although many cattlemen would take serious issue with that statement). Bison meat is very high in protein, low in fat, and damn good eating, and, this simple recipe is one of the best.



*Montana bison, picture from OPEN RANGE, Photo Credit:
Lynn Donaldson*

You don't have to cook this dish in a Dutch oven over an open fire for it to be outstanding, and furthermore, you don't have to serve it steaming hot on tin plates, in a hunting camp pitched by the side of a rushing mountain stream, but it helps.

Serves 6 to 8

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 4 pounds bison chuck or round roast cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 large yellow onions, coarsely diced
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups beef stock (substitute 2 tablespoons good-quality beef base plus 2 cups water)
- 1 cup dark beer or porter
- 2 to 3 medium carrots cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 tablespoons thyme
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons granulated garlic
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 4 russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
- Fine salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

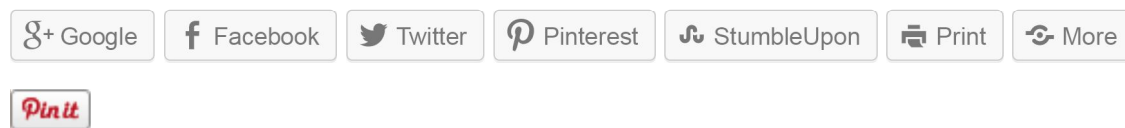
In a hot Dutch oven, heavy pot, or braising pan, heat the oil over high heat. Sear the bison on all sides and set aside. Add the onions and sauté for 5 minutes. When they turn translucent, add the flour. Stir in well and when the flour has browned a bit, add the seared meat. Pour in the beef stock and beer, stirring well to dislodge the cooked meat, flour, and onions from the bottom of the pot. Bring to a simmer and add the carrots, thyme, bay leaves, tomato paste, garlic, and allspice. Cook uncovered over low heat for 3 hours, gently stirring occasionally from the bottom, adding more liquid if necessary. When the meat is fork-tender but not falling apart, add the potatoes and

cook until they are tender, about 20 minutes. Add salt and pepper, adjusting seasoning to taste.
The gravy should be fairly thick. If it is too thick, thin with water or beef stock.
Serve in warm bowls with a bit of fresh chopped parsley for color and plenty of crusty bread and butter.

*UPDATE 2014: The Mint closed and was reopened under different ownership with a different menu. Bentley now runs The Open Range restaurant in Bozeman.

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About Brette Sember

Brette writes often about travel, food, and home arts and is the author of more than 40 books about food, law, health, family issues, business, finance and textbooks. She blogs at Putting It All on the Table and her personal web site is Brette Sember. [View all posts by Brette Sember](#) →

8 thoughts on “Eating in Big Sky Country: Montana”



March 17, 2013 at 11:38 pm

Jane
Boursaw

Mmmm... we actually have bison herds here in Traverse City. Or maybe they're buffalo. I don't know, but the family that owns them has a chain of supermarkets, so they sell the meat in the stores, and also donate it to the annual college fundraiser.



March 12, 2013 at 9:51 pm

I've been to Montana many times, mostly on biking, hiking and skiing trips. Love the

Jeanine
Barone

photos, especially the one of the Bitterroot Valley that I cycled through. And that bison stew looks healthy and yummy



March 6, 2013 at 6:36 pm

Oooo, I'll take a bowl of the chicken and green chile stew. I love cookbooks too that combine a sense of place and the food

MyKidsEatS
quid



March 4, 2013 at 5:53 pm

The bison stew looks divine!

Ron

When living in Utah, I went to this great restaurant in downtown Lehi called Porter's. If you ever visit Lehi, Utah, it's a must see!

The restaurant is an old saloon from the 1800s.

They offer bison burgers and they are wonderful! I can vouch for bison meat being delicious!

My mouth's watering just looking at that photo of the bison stew.



March 4, 2013 at 3:57 pm

Love bison meat. That stew looks all kinds of awesome.

Roxanne



March 1, 2013 at 3:58 pm

Have to say, Montana is on my bucket list too...but since I don't eat meat, I'd be a bit lost....

Sheryl





March 1, 2013 at 2:30 pm

Living Large

We love Dutch oven cooking, I'm going to give this recipe to my husband. I think my father in law would love the cookbook too.



March 1, 2013 at 12:12 pm

Pamela

I don't eat red meat but your picture got *my* mouth watering.

Of course, free-range bison makes much more environmental sense than feed lot beef. Goes to show that eating appropriately for where you are is always a good idea.

Comments are closed.