

Dreaming of summer

Here's a camping kitchen that's ready in 2 minutes

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

CAMPING WAS CHAOS in our family until I let an engineer into the kitchen.

Micky, my photographer-engineer-husband, noted the spaghetti cooking from the camp stove, the utensils littering the landscape and the soap flakes mixed with the cornflakes.

He decided to engineer camping equipment that even I could control. The result was the compact portable kitchen shown here. It carries staple foods, cutlery, dishes and stove. The lid opens to form a countertop.

Our supply of pots, pans and cooking utensils is housed in two individually painted beer boxes, and we have a tablecloth that won't blow away.

IF YOU ARE a camper who spends long winter nights dreaming about warm summer campgrounds, this is a good cold-weather project. Travel is more than flying off to exotic destinations. It is also using your ingenuity to make the travel experience better.

We are still dusty and tired when we pull into our campsite after a long day on the road, but two minutes later my kitchen in the woods is ready for use. First, we unload two ordinary beer boxes. They were bought for pennies at our local supermarket and painted with leftover enamel paint.

On the darkest night I know that my frying pan, coffee pot and utensils are in the red box, and that my other cooking utensils are in the black box.

The second part of the set-up operation is to unfold a cotton-backed plastic tablecloth. It has ordinary elastic sewing tape sewn across the corners to hold it firmly onto a standard wooden picnic table.

While my husband lifts out the turquoise-colored wooden box that is our camp kitchen, I grab four sawed-off broom handles and insert them into the unit as legs. With a flick of the wrist, the unit is opened, the stove and storage compartments exposed, and three small countertops ready for use.

OUR CAMP kitchen was made entirely from scrap materials. The box is

3/4-inch, 5/8-inch and 3/4-inch plywood, which reduces weight but still maintains strength. The woodworking joints were reinforced with waterproof glue and nails. The front section and two top sections are hinged. When closed, they automatically lock the unit for travel.

Four holes were drilled near the four bottom corners of the kitchen. Four pieces of one inch thin-walled tubing — sawed-off section of an old shower curtain rod — were inserted into the holes and secured by heavy bolts and by old electrical conduit brackets.

Two pieces of ordinary picture chain were attached to support the front section of the unit when opened. Finally, the brass corners were added to prevent damage.

The sawed-off broom handles are carried separately in the trailer. When the unit is ready for use, they are simply inserted into the sockets.

They fall free of their own accord when the kitchen is lifted off the ground when breaking camp. These legs are not only inexpensive, they also provide firm support on any kind of terrain.

THE FINISHING touches on this kitchen are for appearance and easy cleaning. The entire unit, including legs, was painted with enamel, and the hinged countertop and floor of the storage compartment were covered with decorative self-adhesive vinyl. This makes the work surfaces as easily cleaned as a countertop at home.

These simple camping aids have made the difference between camping and chaos. Wherever we go, we have the kitchen set up before the trailer. While other campers are still searching through the clutter for the coffee pot, we have dinner on the table.

When campers wander over to ask me where I bought "that ingenious cooking unit," I wave toward Micky. I'm sure he'll have many a woman's vote for the honorary degree of "Camping Engineer, First Class."

For a copy of these plans, send a stamped, self-addressed 9x12-inch envelope to Ms. Jones at the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.



MICKY JONES

Looking forward to summer in Michigan's outdoors? Now's the time to build a portable camp kitchen.

'The minute you begin to brag about the weather in Florida, something like this happens.'

Airline left out in cold

If you're one of the throngs of northerners who swear this will be your last Michigan winter, you can take some brief solace in the freezing weather which hit Florida this week.

Weather notwithstanding, however, the travel hype for the ever-sunny south continued unabated.

As Florida citrus growers were predicting doom for the orange juice business a few days ago, Delta Air Lines was holding firm that things were peachy. In a press release sent Monday, Delta was noting what it called "stark weather contrast in the U.S. this winter."

"IN MOST AREAS of the nation north of the Florida state line," Delta's Jim Ewing wrote, "the cold fact is more and more cold."

Delta issued what it called, "a timely reminder to anyone caught in a snowdrift: winter is only starting." In contrast, however, the airline pointed to the "whole state of Florida," which, it said, "is enjoying its warmest, most beautiful blue-skies weather in a whole decade."

At the time, the National Weather Bureau was forecasting an overnight low for Tuesday-Wednesday of 24 in Tampa, 35 in Miami, 20 in Orlando and 19 in Jacksonville. The Wednesday highs forecast for those cities ranged from 45 to 63.

Ewing's release added: "People are running their

air conditioners in Ft. Myers, where, last week, the temperatures averaged in the high 80s. Beach swimming, fishing, sailing, surfing and all other warm weather activities have never been more enjoyable in the sunshine state than right now."

A call to Ewing on Wednesday at his Atlanta office found him "out for the week," according to another Delta PR man, Bill Berry.

Berry tentatively chuckled and suggested that the weather caught them by surprise. "The minute you begin to brag about the weather in Florida, something like this happens."

"This cold front may cause people to adjust their travel plans," Berry said, but, ever the PR man, he quickly added, "The vacationing traveler quickly forgives. We don't anticipate any long-term problems."

EWING'S RELEASE did suggest to "check with your meteorologist — then call Delta or your travel agent." And Berry said that's what Ewing did before he penned the overly optimistic release. According to Berry "The jet stream moved out of its normal track."

Berry offered a solution to his own problems of getting around the Atlanta area. Noting that it took him more than an hour to travel less than a mile on Tuesday because of icy roads, Berry said he just gave up and sat it out in a bar.

— Mike Arnholt

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