

## **REFLECTOR OVEN COOKING - (RAY INGALLS)**

Once you try it, baking with a reflector oven soon becomes simple and a necessary part of your meal planning. If the fire hazard is high, save the baking for an evening after rain (it does rain on some canoe trips) or for the next trip.

A reflector oven can be used: at established camp sites, in your own back yard, for those of us who do not live in the city, on those hot days when you don't want the oven to heat up the whole house or, most importantly, on wilderness canoe trips. To use the reflector oven, you will require an open fire which means that, in Manitoba, reflector oven use is limited to established fire pits. The only equipment required includes: a reflector oven made of aluminum that is collapsible for easy carrying (see diagram), a metal plate or pan to bake in and a leather work glove to turn and remove your baking.

The plans for a "single pan" size reflector are provided below. They may be taken to a sheet metal shop for cutting and bending the sheet aluminum in preparation for assembly. To reduce costs, you may wish to drill and assemble the parts yourself. Short lengths of piano hinge and bent coat-hanger wire, as specified on the plans, are easily prepared at home. Make sure the flat ends of the pop-rivets are on the outside of the oven or on the top of the shelf, where shown on the plans.

Building a fire for baking with a reflector oven is not difficult. The fire should be started at the base of a perpendicular rock face that is preferably 30 cm or higher. Put an appropriate rock or two in place to form the sides for the fire pit. These rocks should be far enough apart to allow space between them for your reflector oven. With a little rearranging, one of the many existing rock fire pits found in Ontario's wilderness canoeing areas will work well. Keep the fire small and blazing, near the base of the back rock and add dry wood by laying it lengthwise against the back of the fire pit.

Select dry wood that is cut into 15 to 20 cm lengths and split into pieces of about 2 to 4 cm in diameter. Spruce, poplar, cedar, fir, ash and pine are some types of wood that should be available and will burn well.

Your cooking temperature is regulated by the amount of fire and by changing the distance between fire and oven. Once the fire is burning, check the temperature by placing your hand in front of the fire at the point where your baking will be placed. If you can just hold your hand at that point for a count of "one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four", the temperature should be 350 to 400 degrees. Place the oven so the position of your baking pan in the oven is not directly over the flames but within about 4 to 10 cm of the flame. Add wood as necessary over the next 15 to 45 minutes, depending on the required baking time. I find baking time is somewhat varied, - maybe because temperature control isn't as accurate as with your oven at home. Carry a leather work glove to turn, check and remove your baking from the oven. With preparation before leaving home and a minimum of effort you can bake your bannock, biscuits, muffins, cakes and my favourite, apple, blueberry or raspberry pies. By the time the baking is complete, darkness may have arrived. A word of caution; place your baking where someone's big foot doesn't end up in the middle.

After a day of canoeing and the evening meal is over, gathering around a small baking fire with the smell of your baking is a fine way to end the day in your wilderness paradise.