



Learn from the

By "KARLIBOODI"

THE author has lived among and hunted with the Northern Territory blacks for varying periods during which he has lived entirely off the land. Although he does not suggest that campers go entirely native, he does believe that we can adapt many of the blackfellows' ideas.

THE slim dark form of a blackfellow hunting seems to merge into any type of country through which he passes. He becomes a stunted bush in the scrub, an ant hill on the plains or a grazing kangaroo in the high grass. Whenever possible, he chooses a windy day, as wind deadens any strange sound he may make, scatters his scent and allows him to move more swiftly towards his prey—coinciding his movements to swaying bushes and grass.

He becomes an object lesson of patience as he creeps towards an animal. His feet shuffle gently forward, each bare toe wriggling to feel for twigs and ensure silent footfalls. His spear is held lying parallel with a spear-throwing stick, sometimes known as womerah or mungul. The hollowed end of the spear fits over the hooked point of the mungul.

Suddenly, within range, he stops. He leans backwards and, with apparently little effort and uncanny accuracy, shoots the spear forward, propelled by the added leverage of the spear-thrower. As the spear-head pierces the quarry, the blackfellow runs forward, clubs the animal, retrieves his spear and, hoisting the animal on his head or shoulders, returns exultantly to camp.

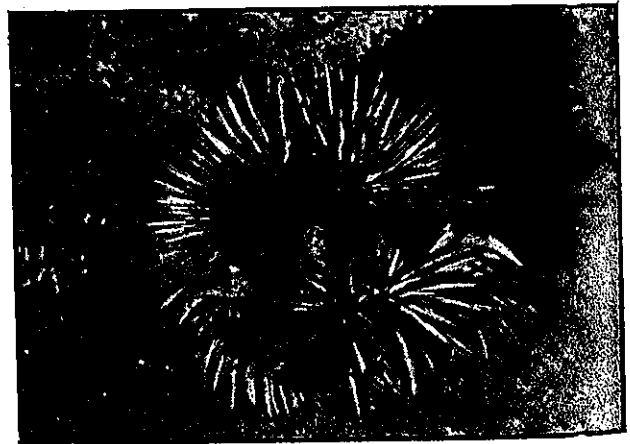
The stone age man can also adapt himself to the iron age and often hammers spear-heads from shovel blades. Some blacks acquire firearms and although, as a rule, the blackfellow is not a particularly accurate shooter, his ability to approach to within a few yards of his game makes a rifle more effective than a spear.

On his return to camp the hunter unburdens his load while the lubra prepares a fire. When the fire burns low the glowing ashes are raked aside and a hollow scooped out. Some of the hot ashes are placed at the bottom and the animal, unskinned and un-

cleaned, is placed on top. Green gum leaves are laid across the meat, then a sheet of paperbark, and the remainder of the ashes are raked across the top.

The blackfellow does not worry about cooking his meat too much and as long as the outer flesh is cooked and the innards warmed he is satisfied.

Aesthetic minds revolt at the prospect of eating half-raw animals, complete with entrails, but with a little adaptation, following the fundamentals of the



Now strictly protected, the Spiny Anteater was once considered a delicacy.

blackfellow chef, delicious sustaining meals can be prepared with the minimum of effort.

To begin, the fire should be prepared in the same manner. Birds, fish or whatever game is required to be cooked, can be simply prepared by leaving the fur, scales or feathers on the body and eviscerating (gut-

BLACKFELLOW



"Eggs are always a palatable dish." Natives usually find turtle nests by following up tracks along the beaches on spring tides.

ting) only. The animal can be washed and filled with cooked vegetables or seasoning. If these are unavailable the flavour will be in no way impaired.

The animal can then be placed in the ground and covered in the same manner as previously described. Twenty minutes should thoroughly cook a pound fish, about an hour for a duck or rabbit or two hours for a wallaby.

Cooked in its own juices, meat can be picked cleanly from the bones while the skin lifts in one or two pieces from the flesh. Feathers, hair and scales form a scorched coating, protecting the flesh from the fire.

Wonders can be worked on these dishes with the addition of an onion and a dash of tomato sauce.

The main points to remember with this style of cooking are to build the fire just large enough, not to place the animal in the fire until it has completely burned down, and ensure that the gall bladder does not burst while eviscerating.



Tail cuts of the crocodile are most sought after by Northern Territory natives. This specimen was caught on the East Alligator River.

Dampers, shellfish and crabs, yams and waterlily bulbs can be cooked in the same manner, a few minutes only being required for cooking. In the Far North, yams and waterlily bulbs form the bulk of the vege-

table diet and can be supplemented with raw waterlily seeds and various berries, including wild passion fruit and wild grape. Unfortunately there are very few berries of any food value in the Australian bush but, as a rule, berries eaten by birds and pleasant to taste are safe for human consumption.

The hearts of several palms, principally the cabbage palm, are pleasant to eat. The outer leaves are chopped away until only the sweet, white shoots near the root are left. These shoots may be boiled as cabbage or eaten raw.

Eggs are always a palatable dish. Salt water natives paddle their dugout canoes to the islands, when the seabirds nest, and return to the mainland with eggs heaped to the gunwales. Turtles are shown no mercy, being speared from canoes and their tracks followed along the beaches on the spring tides until the nests are found. Turtle eggs are good tucker.

As a real delicacy, however, crocodile eggs are hard to beat and are delicious when cooked in ashes, boiled, fried, scrambled or as omelettes. Crocodile flesh itself is a sustaining food but inclined to be rubbery.

Most animals are good to eat and, until protection laws were passed, the spiny-anteater was regarded by early settlers as a "delish dish." Settlers also placed bandicoots on par with sucking pigs and even had smoked wombat hams hanging in their kitchens.

Because the blackfellow has developed no means of clothing himself and does not erect substantial dwellings, we are prone to condemn him for showing no intelligence. But the blackfellow is a nomad—he is continually moving from place to place, following food supplies, and he would rather suffer the temporary discomfort of cold and heavy rain than the permanent discomfort of carrying clothes and camping equipment. We must remember he has no horse.

He does, however, manage to keep warmer than we imagine. He scoops a trench, preferably in sand, in a sheltered position. In this a fire is lit, allowed to burn to red embers, then covered with six inches of sand. He then covers this with paperbark and beds down.

Try this when camping in a cold climate, but take care not to burn your sleeping bag.