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From tomato chips to Bolognese you can sip,

Ecologist and YouTuber Dr. Kate Grarock shares her feats and fails when it comes to preparing and dehydrating her own food ahead of her far-from-home adventures.

Be it missing the mark with the mince, Deb Instant mashed potato as every carb-base, or bearing beer cans in her backpack – in this episode of the Snowys' Camping Show, Ben and Lauren cross paths with Kate to unpack her mealtime methods on those multi-day hiking trips.

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Mentioned in this Episode:

Blogs:

[The 45th Parallel Traverse by Tanya Bottomley \(Run Like Tanya\)](#)

Podcasts:

[Ep33 – Food For Hiking](#)

Products:

[Avanti Double Wall Insulated Wine Traveller Set 3-Pk](#)

[Cobb Cutting Board](#)

[Clif Crunchy Peanut Butter Energy Bar](#)

[Hiking Packs](#)



[Mike's Beef Jerky – Original Wood Smoked](#)

[AeroPress Portable Coffee Maker](#)

[Hiking Food](#)

[Everest Sports Larapinta Trail Guide Book Third Edition](#)

[Radix Nutrition](#)

[Radix Nutrition Apple, Cinnamon & Turmeric Breakfast Performance 450](#)

[Back Country Cuisine Cooked Breakfast](#)

[Dometic 12/240-Volt Vacuum Sealer](#)

[Hiking Cutlery](#)

[Hiking Shoes](#)

Other:

[Kate Grarock – Instagram](#)

[Kate Grarock – YouTube](#)

[Kate Grarock – Website](#)

[Facebook Forum – Dehydrating Divas and Dudes](#)

Introducing Dr. Kate Grarock

In a previous episode, [Ep33 – Food for Hiking](#), Ben and Lauren detailed the most ideal foods for hiking trips, covering weight, calory content, and convenience. Here, our outdoor experts aim to flesh out the discussion, touching more on how plan, pack, and dehydrate food for multi-day trips.

To do so, they talk with ecologist and YouTuber Dr. Kate Grarock, discoverable on [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) as @kategrarock, or through her website at [Australianhiking.com](#).

Preparing Food for Multi-Day Trips

Essentially, this depends on the style of trip Kate is planning, where those solo or fast-paced often see meals taking the back seat. On the other hand, there's a little more [wine](#) and [cheese](#) involved when travelling with her partner!

On solo trips, Kate tends to simply snack on scroggin instead of a meal-like lunch. While she first recommends not to pack too much, she also notes to assess what's left in your packs after a hiking trip and therefore what can stay behind next time. On longer trails, Kate tends to hone in on the finer details of preparation – such as the contribution of her weight and height, the distance of the walk, and the calory content of her food.

Counting Calories

Ben tells Lauren and Kate about his first lengthy hike, where he just managed to scrape through with the rations of food he allocated himself. On the other hand, Kate's experience with calory counting has so far been relatively successful, beefing up enough dehydrated food for 14 days as she tackled the Larapinta Trail.

For long but lightweight hikes, it's recommended to carry small volumes of [calory-dense foods](#). Ben's example is peanut butter on small chocolate chip cookies for lunch, plus a decent meal at the end of the day. Kate also recommends freeze-dried cheese which, while



crunchy in texture like a crouton, is packed with flavour – and calories! Not quite the same as dehydrating, the freeze-dried method is a fascinating process that involves removing the moisture from the food while maintaining its shape.

Food Storage

In the pack-stack-and-store process, Kate segregates and numbers her meals by day (e.g. Lunch 1, Dinner 1, Lunch 2, etc.), stashing the food she'll consume first higher up in her pack and what she plans to eat later in the trip towards the base. Similar to Ben, Kate uses, washes, and re-uses Ziploc bags regularly as part of her food storage method. She recommends preparing food at home wherever possible (where clean surfaces are more readily available), as well as keeping its total weight to roughly 700 grams per day.

Beers: A Necessity?

We all love to crack a cold one under the canvas following a day on the trails – but Ben points out that a beer in your backpack is an extra 400 grams to bear!

Kate admits that at least one of the reasons she became interested in ultra-light hiking was because all that beer on her back was so heavy... and there must be a way she can still incorporate it into her load! Using the insulated plastic wrap found meal kits, Kate bundles her beer cans during transit and cools them down in a cold stream nearby her pitstop, before she cracks the top and kicks back on the rocks.

On the other hand, Ben mentions powdered beer as an option... of which Kate confirms would only be consumed for the sake of claiming to be enjoying a beer after a tackling the switchback (not for the sake of the flavour)!



Kate cools down her beer cans in a cold stream nearby, before she cracks the top and kicks back on the rocks. Credit: Kate Garrock

Favourite Food to Take on a Trip?

In addition to her homemade beef jerky, Kate admits that one of her favourite foods to enjoy on a hiking trip is Mee Goreng... often for breakfast! On this savoury note, one of her most routinely, home-prepared meals is spaghetti Bolognese... which, on the occasion she forgot to pack her cutlery, once needed to be reworked and consumed as a soup instead!

She may not be a traditional porridge-in-a-pot person, but Kate enjoys her morning coffee as much as anyone too. As well as a trusty coffee filter, Kate describes her attempt at 'cowboy coffee', a traditional camping method involving filling a pot of water with coffee grounds, bringing it to the boil, and using egg shells to assist with settling the grounds at the base. This left coffee grounds peppered across her teeth... which Ben and Lauren suggest is the real reason she solo hikes!

Dehydrating Your Own Food: Pros and Cons

Kate's initial interest in dehydrating her own food came from feeling malnourished after consuming some of the commercially available types – likely a result of a particular preservative or additive. It was in preparing for the Larapinta Trail too when Kate became more inclined to dehydrate her own food, exploring YouTube videos, Google searches, and experimenting with recipes herself. Initially, she was intimidated by the idea of eating her own product in fear of food poisoning, so made sure to allow herself enough preparation time leading up to the trip to trial and consume her food within the safety of her home.

While they're great to have, Kate notes that she didn't initially have a dehydrator. Instead, she used her oven with a wooden spoon propped in the door to help eradicate moisture – which she soon decided was nowhere near efficient enough. After some time, experience, and a \$40 dehydrator from Gumtree, she has since upgraded again.

Dehydration Fails

Just because you can dehydrate some foods, doesn't mean you should...

Kate describes an occasion where she dehydrated mincemeat, producing what she can only describe as “meat pebbles”. This was a result of failing to add breadcrumbs to the mince in the initial cooking stage, before dehydrating. The breadcrumbs give the meat mixture cause to rehydrate. In not adding breadcrumbs, Kate's mince rehydrated into what was more like hard pebbles of beef jerky. Thanks to this batch, she endured some pretty crunchy Bolognese meals!

Reconstitution

Sam, a member of the Snowys family, is an ultra-light hiker who also explores dehydration and freeze-drying methods. She notes that reconstituting food can mean initiating the process as early as lunchtime to guarantee that it's ready in time for an evening meal. On the contrary, Kate often makes a dahl which, once dry, she blends into a dust or powder. This quickens the reconstitution process, whereas leaving the dahl in lentil form has it soaking for longer. That said, the former approach means losing the nutty texture of a traditional dahl, and instead produces more of a sloppy, runny consistency.

As well as relevant Facebook forums touching on food dehydration – such as Dehydrating Divas and Dudes – Kate gathers her tips and tricks from standard trial and error. Another of her approaches is dehydrating a leftover meal to test its suitability, including whether any changes are required to achieve a more ideal result (for example, chopping meat into smaller chunks). While some meals just don't dehydrate well at all, the various components of a meal should be consistent in size and shape to enable each element to dehydrate at the same rate.

Kate's Method

While some hikers dehydrate each component of a meal separately before combining at the

rehydration stage – Kate cooks her Bolognese sauce in its entirety, including an abundance of vegetables. When it comes to eating, she either boils pasta or prepares Deb Instant mashed potato as the base and separately reconstitutes her mince pasta sauce.

A member of the Snowys Web Team has also used Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), a meat substitute made with soy flour and high in both fibre and protein. While its taste is for a particular palette, he has used it in meals typically involving hamburger patties or mince, and claims that with enough added flavour it can contribute to a punchy, plant-based, pitstop meal on the mountain top.

In terms of water usage, cous cous is a more efficient choice than pasta. Kate tends to not take pasta on a hiking trip due to both the volume of water and time required to cook, instead opting for Deb Instant mashed potato as her carb-base for virtually all meals.

Flavour

In dehydrating her meals, Kate hasn't found the essence of her food to be affected as much as possibly its texture. If anything, the dehydration process has her food exploding with a more intense, full-bodied flavour. Kate's favourite, flavour-bomb snack is what she calls 'tomato wagon wheels': thickly sliced tomato, dehydrated. The method produces a version of the fruit that's much like a chip, with a much more intense, concentrated tomato hit. In reconstituting food, Kate confirms she's yet to notice any obvious lacking of flavour... though admits this could either be because she serves her meals on a bed of flavourful Deb Instant mashed potato, or eats too hungrily after a long, grueling day on the gradient!

A planner, Kate will spend the months leading up to long trips away cooking and dehydrating meals, planning routes, and mapping her journey. That said, dehydrating tomatoes overnight for wagon wheels is long enough, and she admits to nowadays simply resorting to branded dehydrated food. While most freeze-dried foods are sufficient after long day tackling the tracks, a recommended brand is Radix Nutrition, producing meals ranging from savoury dinners to nutty, breakfast style meals. Lauren is more inclined towards quick oats with dehydrated milk – but if we're talking breakfast food, Back Country also make a freeze-dried cooked breakfast (best served with a blindfold)!

6-Month Plan

Ahead of a hiking trip, Kate often begins preparing six months out, including dehydrating her food. She notes that another benefit to dehydrating food is how long it lasts, only starting to smell close to the end of its life after roughly a year in the freezer. Food that is yet to be eaten or reconstituted is frozen, and Kate also recommends removing the fat from any meat used in cooking. This is what tends to become rancid over time, more so than any other element of a dehydrated meal.

When it comes to eliminating as much moisture as possible, Lauren's approach is to save the moisture sachets, or desiccant bags, and store them in a jar (the food-based ones, Ben... not those found in new t-shirts)! On this note, Ben queries how Kate navigates the inevitable moisture of a freezer... to which Kate admits she isn't entirely sure that freezing dehydrated food is the best approach! That said, she first uses a vacuum sealer to suck the air from the food packets as an additional precautionary step.



As well as her usual dahl, spaghetti Bolognese, jerky, and tomato wagon wheels, Kate also dehydrates bags of frozen vegetables like those found in supermarkets. While they shrink to a small size, they don't tend to rehydrate well and are instead chewy to eat like the veggie pieces found in powdered soups on supermarket shelves. Ben also suggests Asian grocers for ingredients like dehydrated mushrooms, perfect for sauces.

Kate's spaghetti Bolognese can be reheated and cooked instantaneously at the point of mealtime, owed to the breadcrumbs rehydrating well. Tanya Bottomley, a writer for the Snowys Blog, uses resealable, silicon Ziplock bags to reconstitute meals, first removing all meals from their sachets and transferring them into small Ziploc bags in which to carry out the reconstitution process. With so many methods for those magic mealtimes on the mountaintop – Kate overall confirms that it's a great idea to attempt to dehydrate your own food.

Food Fails?

Aside from forgetting her cutlery (which consequently had her drinking liquid dinners), Kate admits her most significant 'food fail' was producing the meat pebbles previously mentioned in the episode. Nonetheless, she hasn't experienced many issues that have stopped a trip in its tracks (well, aside from the time her mate literally forgot her hiking shoes)!

What's on the Horizon for Kate?

With a newborn daughter, Kate foresees some more family-orientated hiking trips. Although, with ultra-light hiking a greater challenge with children involved, these adventures will likely be of a shorter distance and a heavier load.

So... does that mean less beer?

Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our Facebook group and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!