

History in a Box

Campfire or Bush Kitchen

Items:

- **Kerosene hurricane lamp**
- **Canvas water bag**
- **Billies, with and without a lid**
- **Campfire cooker**
- **Folding grater**
- **Enamel saucepan**
- **Enamel mug**
- **Cooking fork**

Many occupations in Australia required people to travel and camp out including drovers, shearers, and other rural workers. Camping has always been a popular way of holidaying as well. The items in this box are just a few that you would expect to find around a campfire or bush kitchen.

Kerosene hurricane lamp: Prior to the connection of electricity to homes, kerosene lamps of various styles were used. The hurricane lamp was widely used in Australia and is still available from camping shops today. This style of lamp was generally used outdoors or on verandahs and more elegant lamps were used inside the house.

The metal framework surrounding the glass helps to protect the glass from breakage, although new glass was readily available. The handle was for carrying and for hanging up in the shed, or on a tree, or hung on a nail in the backyard toilet.

Kerosene is added to the well at the bottom of the lamp and the screw cap is replaced. The wick is raised by turning the knob above the kerosene well. When the wick is visible, the glass is then raised by pressing down on the lever to the side of the wick, to enable the lamp to be lit with a match. The glass is lowered again and the wick lowered until a steady glow is achieved. If the flame burns too brightly the glass becomes covered with soot. New wicks could also be purchased.

Canvas water bag: When surveyor and explorer Sir Thomas Mitchell saw Aborigines carrying water in sacks made from animal skins, he realised that this was a much better way of carrying water than in the heavy wooden buckets that he was currently using. He had some canvas bags made and he covered them with animal fat to make them water tight. This only made the water go off, so he forgot about the fat and tried just plain canvas. He was surprised to find that not only did the canvas contain the water well once it was wet, but it also kept cool. Before the introduction of insulated plastic water bottles, it was quite common to see canvas water bags hung on the front of trucks, 4 wheel drives and other vehicles on long journeys.

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Billies: The billy is probably the most easily identified item from the bush camp. It was used to make tea, and generally had a lid to keep the soot and smoke out. If you didn't have a lid, an old bushman's trick was to put a green stick across the top of the billy and the smoke would be absorbed into the stick. Billies were usually made of tin although enamel ones were available. Sometimes people improvised and used any old tin that was available. Australian rhyming slang has immortalised the billy, with its name for children. (*Billy lids*)

Campfire Cooker: This is a simple style of frypan which probably had its origins in the plough disc (or plough share). These discs were recycled as many and varied items around the place, although they had holes in the centre, but this was seen as beneficial so that the fat could run off.

Chinese woks are also similar in design, but usually a lot deeper.

Folding grater: This is no different from the traditional kitchen grater except that it folds for easy transport.

Enamel Saucepan and mug: Enamelling was a method of preserving and protecting tin from corrosion. It was produced by melting together various elements including silica and feldspar and is applied to a prepared metal surface by either dipping or spraying. Various items used around the house from mugs to bathtubs were made of enamel ware. It was most popular in kitchen items, as the enamel could be produced in many colours and was particularly useful for camping and travelling as it was light and unbreakable. Prior to the invention of enamel, cast iron cookware was used.

Cooking fork: This simple bush fork was probably made of old fencing wire or a coat hanger. Most bush folk had to be fairly inventive and wire could be used for many different things, including billy hooks, egg whisks, clothes pegs. Damper dough could be cooked twisted around a wire. Potatoes were threaded along a wire and cooked in the hot coals of a fire. The heat runs up the wire and cooks them from the inside while the coals cook from the outside.

- **Discussion:**
- What sort of things would you take camping? (*plastic plates and cups, stainless steel cutlery and barbecue tools, porta-gas lights, battery powered lights and torches, gas stove or barbecue,(including gas cylinders) aluminium saucepans and frypans, kettle, insulated plastic water containers,...*)
- What materials are these things made of that are different from what was used in earlier times? (*plastic, aluminium, LPG, alkaline batteries...*)