THINGS WORTH KNOWING

COOKING IN FAT

Meat can be preserved up to five or six days in summer by preliminary cooking in fat, and then allowing the meat to remain in the fat in which it was cooked. The heat of cooking sterilises the meat, and the fat seals the meat safely away from bacterial infection. This method is convenient when meat requires to be kept for a short period.

DEW COLLECTION

In barren areas where there are no trees, it may be possible to collect sufficient moisture from the grass in the form of dew, to preserve life. One of the easiest ways of dew collection is to tie rags or tufts of fine grass round the ankles and walk through the herbage before the sun has risen, squeezing the moisture collected by the tufts or rags into a container. Many early explorers saved their lives by this simple expedient.

ANTS. Many of the ants require water, and if you see a steady column of small black ants climbing a tree trunk and disappearing into a hole in a crotch it is highly probable that there will be a hidden reservoir of fresh water stored away there. This can be proved by dipping a long straw or thin stick down the hole into which the ants are going. Obviously if it is wet when you draw it out there is water there. To get the water do not on any account chop into the tree. If the hole is only very small, enlarge it with your knife-point at the top. Make a mop by tying grass or rag to a stick. Dip the mop into the water and squeeze into a pannikin. Another method is to take a long hollow straw and suck the water you require from the reservoir. These natural tree reservoirs are very common in dry areas, and are often kept full by the dew which, condensing on the upper branches of the tree, trickles down into the crotch and so into the reservoir inside the tree. Water reservoirs are very common in the she-oaks (casuarinas) and many species of wattle.

MASON FLIES. These large, hornet-like creatures are a certain indicator of water. If you see a mason fly's building in an area you can be sure that you are within a few hundred yards of a soak of wet earth. Search around carefully and you will see the mason fly hover and then suddenly drop to the ground. If you examine the place where she landed you will find the soil is moist, and that she is busy rolling a tiny pellet of mud for her building. By digging down a few inches (or at most, a couple of feet) you will assuredly find a spring and clear, fresh, drinkable water.

BIRD INDICATORS

FINCHES. All the finches are grain-eaters and water-drinkers. In the dry belts you may see a colony of finches and you can be certain that you are near water, probably a hidden spring or permanent soak.

WILD PIGEONS. Wild pigeons are a reliable indicator of water. Being grain and seed eaters they spend the day out on the plains feeding, and then, with the approach of dusk, make for a waterhole, drink their fill, and fly slowly back to their nesting places.

Their manner of flight tells the experienced bushman the direction of their water supply. If they are flying low and swift they are flying to water, but if their flight is from tree to tree and slow, they are returning from drinking. Being heavy with water, they are vulnerable to birds of prey. It is obvious then that the direction of water can be discovered by observing the pigeons' manner of flight.

GRAIN EATERS. All the grain eaters and most of the ground feeders require water, so that if you see their tracks on the ground you can be reasonably certain that there is water within a few miles of your location. An exception to this are parrots and cockatoos, which are not regarded as reliable indicators of water.

The carnivores, being flesh eaters, get most of the moisture they required from the flesh of their prey, and consequently are not reliable water-drinkers. Therefore, do not regard the presence of flesh-eating birds as an indicator of water in the area, nor should you regard the water-living birds as indicators of fresh or drinkable water.

Jim Wyman, of far out Wilcannia, makes with the hillybilly music