

Kirkmichael Beremeal Bannock

This recipe has been invented and refined during the **mediaeval menu workshops at Cromarty Primary School** during 2016. We have adapted it a little to modern tastes – 100% beremeal (it's pronounced somewhere between bear and beer) gives a very strong flavour for modern tastes (it makes you realise why wheat bread took off instead!). Bere is a form of primitive barley, still grown on Orkney and in other parts of the Highlands today. Our Black Isle ancestors are likely to have eaten bere. It looks a bit like wheat as the grains grow all around the stem (6 rows instead of 2 for normal barley). They say it is healthier and contains less gluten.

We have substituted live yogurt for the original buttermilk. You can use baking powder plus plain flour if you prefer it to wholemeal SR. Originally, the mix is likely simply to have been left in a warm spot to let the milk ferment and create a rise within the dough. If it didn't rise, tough, you probably cooked and ate it anyway...

Ingredients

2 cups beremeal (you can buy this at Highland Wholefoods near the Harbour Road roundabout in Inverness)
1 cup plain self-raising wholemeal flour
A good pinch of salt
1 cup live yogurt
Unsalted butter to cook

Method

In a large bowl (or if you prefer less authentically sticky fingers, a food processor) mix the salt and flours thoroughly. Add the yogurt little by little – you may need less than the whole cup depending on the flours and the runniness!

The end mixture should be soft and gooey so you can pinch a ball out of it but not liquid. Put a bit of cling film over the top and put it in a warm place for at least an hour but no more than three.

Decide whether you are going to make one large bannock, a circle divided into four quarters, or individual round bannocks (we did the latter in school – you can get about 9 in a big pan). With floured hands (flour them each time you go back to the mixture) EITHER turn your bannock out on to a floured surface and shape into a circle a bit smaller the size of your girdle or pan and cut into four equal quarter pieces OR pinch a ball the size of the gap between your thumb and first finger, roll between floured palms and place on a handy plate. It will take you a few goes to get the right size.

Now drag your heavy iron girdle over your glowing peats. If you have neither, a heavy-based frying pan over a medium heat is about right. In the Middle Ages they may have spat on the hot metal to check it was ready to cook the bannock as they still do this in some parts of the world. We definitely DON'T recommend this!

We found cooking the bannock on a well-buttered surface was better than dry. (This means one side of the bannock has a crisper, more fried texture than the other.) Arrange the four thick pieces or the smaller balls one by one on the girdle and press down with a plate or a metal potato masher - if using balls to about 1.5cm thickness. They will sizzle and start to smell good. Lift one occasionally to see if it is at risk of burning, if it is, turn down the heat a bitty. When the mixture is set on the top and starting to steam, flip the bannock over and cook it until it is cooked right through (use one as a tester to time, then do the rest). Gently pressing them down again can speed up the cooking. Rebutter the pan or girdle between each batch. NB four thick bannocks will take much longer than the little ones and you may need to turn them more than once.

Serve warm. Great with broth, butter and cheese, or butter and honeycomb.

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(we'd love to share your bannock-making pictures!)**