

#337: LEFSE



Leif Erikson 1, Seattle, WA—Bernice Chouery (seated), Kae Ellingsen, Janet Clancy and Janice Quam make lefse for the lodge's Heritage Day.

A traditional Norwegian flatbread, the most popular type of lefse in North America is potato-based. Mixed, rolled and cooked on a griddle, lefse is a food that adorns many tables especially during the holiday season. Despite the relatively simple process for making lefse, there are a variety of recipes and only a small portion include potatoes. Lefse is eaten with a number of different toppings – one of the most common combinations being butter, sugar and cinnamon – then rolled up or folded closed.

Lefse has been made as long as grain has been cultivated in Norway. There are many different types of lefse—both hard and soft. Hard lefse was the original traditional fare that was staple to many diets in Norway. Made of coarsely ground oat flour, rolled into thick rounds and baked crisp or hard, they appeared on the table at most meals. Since this lefse was eaten every day, it was baked in large quantities then stored for long periods of time. When it was time to eat the hard style of lefse it would be softened by dipping it in water or covering it with a damp cloth until it reached the right consistency. Another type of hard lefse was also sometimes served at

parties. Norwegians would bake this lefse twice allowing them to make elaborate designs in the second layer of batter. The patterns were made in the batter with a stick or a comb-like tool and could be quite intricate.

The soft types of lefse were usually made with fine, white flour as the base. This allowed the lefse to be baked until it was a light brown and had a soft consistency. Because of the nature of soft lefses, they were only for immediate use unless they were frozen right away. Soft lefse was a food that guests brought to parties, and could be elaborately constructed. For instance, in Rogaland the wedding lefse was buttered, folded over, buttered again and folded a second time. Then the edges were trimmed and decorated with a thick border of butter etched with a decorative design.

Today, many types of lefse are still made in Norway and North America. Brought over by immigrants, lefse tends to grace tables in North America during the holiday season and is often served beside lutefisk and meatballs. While many Norwegian-Americans prefer their lefse with sweet toppings, Norwegians will also eat their lefse with cheese, meat or fish. For example, a common potato lefse known as lompe is wrapped around hotdogs in Norway in place of a bun.

While lefse is a reminder for many of their Norwegian heritage, in 1987 one town in North America decided to share their love of lefse by making the World's Largest Lefse. At 9 feet 8 inches the record for the World's Largest Lefse still remains with Starbuck, MN.

Recipes for lefse are available through the Sons of Norway Recipe Box online at: http://www.sofn.com/norwegian_culture/recipe_index.jsp.

