

Diary of a Class: Food Gifts, Friendship--and a Trip to Remember

In John C. Campbell Folk School's class about food gifts there's much to learn about expanding your horizons, both culinary and geographically. Read one student's diary about a trip to remember.

By Holly D. Coleman

Get More Folk School! We're loving our John C. Campbell experiences. Here's more of what we've learned:

Green Woodturning

Tinsmithing

Fall Vegetable Gardening

As I packed my bags to head south to the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, N.C., I couldn't help but be anxious for the trip ahead of me.

I am a homebody; I love my little farm in northeastern Ohio and prefer it to the most luxurious hotel or far-flung bed-and-breakfast the world has to offer.

Traveling for anything, let alone by myself, was ordinarily out of the question.

You know all the little things you have to prepare for: Is there enough grain to get the llamas and the goats through my time away? Are the emergency vet numbers posted clearly? Will my husband recognize if something is wrong with any of the animals? Will the dog die of loneliness without me?

© Karen K. AcevedoHolly Coleman is pictured here with her Tuscan lemon cake.

Try some of the same recipes! Without the encouragement of my daughter, Hobby Farms' managing editor, I never would have made the trip to North Carolina. But I am so glad I did!

As I loaded up the truck, I tried to lay these apprehensions to rest and focus on the fun things I knew awaited me: a week full of cooking, getting to see my daughter and loads of fabulous fare!

As the miles ticked away, I could feel myself relaxing as I took in the beautiful scenery; the hills near Brasstown were very similar to the ones I had loved and played on as a child visiting family in West Virginia.

A Sunday Arrival

I arrived on Sunday, bid adieu to my sisters who had been my road-trip buddies and took a deep breath.

Anything set in a place this spectacular had to be good!

I got a room to myself (which was great as I work nights and tend to be wide awake at 4 a.m.) in a sweet little log cabin with a porch that ran along one side so we could sit and watch the sun set every evening.

When I walked from my lodging to meet my instructor, I was struck by how quaint the School's buildings were and how breathtaking the mountains were, all covered in vibrant red and yellow-leaved trees.

My instructor, Jan Miles, promised to teach me how to make "Gifts of Food" --there were be five other students in the class with me--two from Georgia, one from Tennessee and one from Massachusetts.

I also learned that there were 15 classes taking place that week covering everything from fly-fishing, stained glass creation, wood working, rug weaving, blacksmithing and music making. I wanted to see if I could get my sisters down there to take a class with me!

That night I toured the History Center, which chronicled the School from conception to present. I also checked out the craft shop as I needed a coat – I forgot how chilly it gets in the mountains when the sun goes down!

The First Day

I participated in the morning walk on Monday and it was wonderful – it was pitch dark when we ambled along, but there was something so soothing about darkness in the country.

I had breakfast in the communal dining room (forgot about good old Southern grits!) and headed off to my first day of class from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

We made ladyfinger cake, chocolate mousse in chocolate cups and chocolate leaves for decorating. I could already tell I was going to gain 10 pounds in just a week!

That evening I attended a slide presentation about fly-fishing in Alaska. I hadn't ever considered fly-fishing, but it sure looked like fun, especially because it was a catch-and-release trip.

Photos from Class

Here are more photos from the Gift of Food class at John C. Campbell Folk School, courtesy Keather Weideman.

I made a cup of tea, grabbed my flashlight and headed "home." A shower and time to read a few chapters of my book and it was time to climb into bed. As I drifted off to sleep, I wondered if my tendency to stay on the farm might be waning just a bit ...

Chocolate Overload

On Tuesday's morning walk, we explored a part of the Folk School I hadn't been to yet: the gazebo made by the framing class and raised garden beds guarded by some really cool scarecrows made by local elementary school children.

Hunt Smith, a musician who plays the mandolin and guitar, as well as sings, provided MorningSong.

In class we churned out dark chocolate chip walnut meringue cookies, cracker cookies (so easy and good!), snowballs (a macaroon with—what else?—chocolate inside) and raisin cookies.

I thought I was going to lapse into a sugar coma! We took samples to the music students and the spinning class next door.

We were quite popular with the other students! Many people who were touring the school stopped in to admire our delicious creations.

After supper, I went to watch the square-, contra- and circle-dancing and even participated in one dizzying dance.

It was so much fun to watch as many of the dancers were from the area and come weekly to assist in teaching the steps to those of us who are inexperienced.

After all the good food and entertainment, it was time to go back and rest up for another (delicious) day!

Happy Halloween!

I began my day with a brisk bird-watching hike, but between the darkness and the cold (it had frosted overnight), very few birds were active.

We did see a heron fishing in the creek, though! Because of the prolonged drought this area had experienced, the water in the creek was hardly moving.

The dry weather also put a damper on camping here—they weren't permitting campfires for fear of forest fires.

Our walking trip was so lengthy that we missed MorningSong, so I ate a quick breakfast and headed off to class.

Today we made some non-chocolate desserts (thank goodness! Who knew you could get tired of chocolate?) like pumpkin cake, lemon tulle and four-layer espresso cake.

We had not sampled any of our cakes yet, but we did try the pumpkin muffins and cookies. Most were pretty good—but some are not!

Our instructor loved teaching as much as we enjoyed being taught, which made me eager to get back to the farm to make homemade goodies for the holidays!

That evening there was a drum gathering and all of us were encouraged to participate by using a tambourine or similar musical instrument that required only a sense of rhythm.

I politely declined as I had forgotten to pack my rhythm. Instead, I chose a ghost walk to celebrate Halloween.

There also was a chair caning demonstration, but being exhausted, I it so I could go back to the cabin and rest.

Friends in Town

Thursday started bright and early with the Rivercane Walk. This walk included several sculptures to honor the Cherokee Indians.

One that stood out to me was the Eagle Dancer, which was a metal sculpture that portrayed the eagle as a protector with great power.

There was also a Clan Cane Pole, which signified the seven Cherokee clans. This place is truly steeped in history.

MorningSong featured David Brose, who entertained us with ballads and local legends.

A hearty breakfast was followed by a full day of finishing the projects from the previous day. We also made fruitcake without fruit (who knew!), toffee cookies, a Tucson lemon cake and lemon bars.

We briefly forayed into Brasstown to see the gift shops and I fell in love with a lovely bird print that would look just perfect in my kitchen.

After cleaning the kitchen (which was amazing and fully equipped with loads of counter space, a fireplace big enough to walk in and outlets galore—something I wish my kitchen had more of!), my daughter Sarah Coleman and Karen Acevedo, Hobby Farms' editor in chief, arrived for a visit.

It was so nice to see familiar faces!

I took them on a tour of the gardens where Karen had worked earlier that year during the Fall Gardening class, the blacksmith shop and the gift shop. We all ate dinner and then Sarah and I sat on the porch with cups of tea and watched the activities and meadows below.

Before we headed home, we listened to a pick-up music, which was incredibly enjoyable as it brought back memories of my uncles playing their guitars in West Virginia when I was a child. How quickly time passes.

A Fond Farewell

Today we tied up all the loose ends we had left in the kitchen and got ready for the big Student Exhibit. It was so interesting to see what everyone else at the school had been working on that week.

When my sisters came to pick me up to head back to Ohio, they surprised me with the little bird print I had fallen in love with.

In addition to the plethora of recipes, I now had something else to remember my trip by; I look at that little chickadee every morning and am thankful for my family and friends—and for the John C. Campbell Folk School, which gave me back a piece of my childhood, if only for a few days.

About the Author: Holly D. Coleman is an emergency room nurse who lives on a small farm in Canfield, Ohio. She has a barn full of critters and is going to try to adapt some of her holiday recipes to make them llama-, goat-, dog- and cat-friendly.