

I Think I Can

The gastronomically curious escapade of ingesting the world's first backcountry burger

By Raymond Schmidt

IT SOUNDS LIKE the perfect wilderness getaway: the scenery is breathtaking, the weather exquisite, your brand new boots fit like a glove and you can't wait to leave the stress of rush hour. Two days later, your appetite has changed: your feet are killing, you still have two clicks to walk and horizontal sleet peppers your face like buckshot. Cold and miserable, you finally arrive at a handful of mud puddles masquerading as campsites. One thing consumes your mind, "If only I had a burger."

If only...

These two words are likely what drove Edison, Alexander Graham Bell and the Wright brothers to change the world. It's the same kind of motivation that Swiss company Katadyn is all about. Einsteins of the outdoor world, Katadyn came up with a way to compress a waterworks into the size of a Nalgene bottle, and their pocket-sized pumps solved a problem that some taxpaying municipalities can't get right. For years, Katadyn has kept "Walkerton" out of the wilderness, because someone once said, "if only" and the company accepted the challenge. Now they've outdone even themselves: introducing what might be the world's first cheeseburger in a can.

Marketed under their Trekking-Mahlzeiten label, Katadyn guarantees its cheeseburger will provide "unrestricted enjoyment in the mountains and in other extreme environments... more enjoyment, less weight to carry, and more time for doing other things."

This kind of diversification is a powerful force in industry, an accepted risk management technique that's no stranger to the outdoor equipment world. Stove makers MSR make towels, Coleman has a backpack line and Black Diamond makes a bouldering T-shirt. But a water purification company that makes cheeseburgers? Maybe Schneiders meats will unveil a line of Blu-ray players next.

Katadyn's ingenuity has helped it reach 50 per cent of the world market in portable water filters and purifiers. The company's tinned

I FLIPPED THE CONVENIENT LID OF THE CAN, REVEALING AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING AND AROMATIC SESAME SEED BUN. BUT WHERE WAS THE PATTY?

burgers take it one giant step further, well beyond the 71 per cent MP3 market share enjoyed by Apple in 2008. "We have a kind of monopoly position," the general manager of Katadyn's food production, Stephanie Dietrich, claims humbly. "Competitors," she continues, "are not there at the moment."

No matter how disparate filtered water and cheeseburgers may seem, in the end, it's all about taste. Katadyn currently sells nearly a dozen different camping dishes, and Dietrich insists she personally tests all products before they hit the market. The canned cheese-

burger? "You couldn't compare this to a McDonald's cheeseburger," she admits, "because it's in a can."

Unfortunately, MEC and IGA won't be carrying the canned Quarter Pounder any time soon. This delicacy is only available in Europe. "I get requests every day on our homepage," explains Dietrich about the demand for her product. "People are very disappointed that they can't get it in North America, but it's not FDA approved." Seeking that kind of approval, she suggests, wouldn't make selling the canned burger in North America a cost-effective venture.

I MAY BE one of the few people on the continent who owns this canned product. This Big Mac look-alike was smuggled surreptitiously past airport security and hand-delivered by my sister. She knows I like to camp. She knows I like to eat.

Pork and beans, lentils, tomatoes and Alphaggetti belong in a can. But does a cheeseburger? I flipped the convenient lid of the can, revealing an aesthetically pleasing and aromatic sesame seed bun. But where was the patty? I dug my fingers into the interface, peeling the top away to reveal the meat. The shrivelled sliver of compressed beef looked as though it had popped out of a machine shop press, while the cheese was a hardened, dark orange rectangle, rigid as a Tupperware lid.

With gnawing hunger—I had starved myself all day in antici-

pation of this moment—I tore a semicircle out of the round and chewed. There is always that silent moment before you can truthfully form an opinion on taste. The cheese snapped and crunched in my mouth; the ketchup more like rancid tomato paste. Sodium nitrate E 251 provided an eerily warm aftertaste. For a moment, I had been optimistic, even hopeful. But bite after bite revealed the truth: the most dreadful burger ever. Only liver tastes worse.

The great American burger clearly does not belong anywhere near a can. And if it absolutely has to be, maybe leave it to the Americans who invented it anyway. Or maybe I just wasn't hungry enough. In any case, I'm sure it's more useful left tin-bound as a paperweight with an expiry date. But you never know, when I pack for my next backcountry adventure, my Katadyn filter will be there to magically turn puddles into Perrier, but I might also pack another cheeseburger, just because I can. Or maybe I won't. I certainly won't forget to pack the powdered wine, though—they make that too.

"The McDonalds' cheeseburger I ate afterwards was sinful," commented Raymond Schmidt after we convinced him to give the canned burger a try. Once a BC vegetarian, the Canmore, Alberta, freelance writer/photographer would never have dreamed of eating either a decade ago. "KMC editors, just like Alberta, have a way of turning you into a carnivore."



Photo: Chris Siddall