



Roving the Valley

With Friends and Neighbors

By CHARLES CONNOR

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that all that saved citizens of Nitro the other evening was a strong wind blowing upriver toward Charleston.

Had it not been for this fortuitous occurrence, even now men, women, children, cats and dogs of "Powdertown" might still be gasping for breath and painfully recovering from the ill effects of a witch's brew.

FOR THERE, gathered by the riverbank in Nitro city park, a curious collection of men met around a boiling pot which alternately pitched and rolled, hissed and steamed with its breath-taking contents.

"Brethren," said Ivan N. Hunter, who wore an old fashioned string tie at his throat, "we are hereby assembled and united in a common bond of brotherhood to pay homage to the greatest little stinker of them all, our lowly but highly-regarded ramp."

And with these words, the annual spring meeting of the Nitro chapter of the Nicholas county eaters came to order.

NOW RAMPS, it has truly been said, just ain't for weaklings. They

reek of a horrible odor which leaves the uninitiated gasping for air. At the same time, however, they are regarded by true moun-

PICTURES AT RIGHT

tain people as a downright necessity in the spring of the year, not only for blood purification but as a general tonic to physical well being.

Trout fishermen who head into the mountains of Nicholas and Webster counties each year — away from their wives and worldly cares — know well of what we write. So do hundreds of other brave souls in the valley who've dared to incur the wrath of their fellow men by munching on the great springtime delicacies which smell to high heaven.

Last year, about this time, we made the pilgrimage to Richwood, spiritual home of all Nicholas county ramp eaters and the site of a national convention which in 1940 attracted the governors of four states.

This year, however, we found our ramp eaters right at home. Anyone who has the sense of smell could have followed the aromatic trail which led to Nitro the other evening.

EACH YEAR for the past 11, these Nitro ramp eaters have been holding their spring ramp feasts by the riverbank. Five of the group are native Nicholas county boys who cut their teeth on the little stinkers and they have drawn about them a dedicated group of disciples who swear by ramps, too.

Of the five, G. C. Alderson, general manager of the Nitro Industrial Corp., is probably the patriarch. He graduated from Richwood high school in 1913 and later, it is said, followed a bunch of sheep out of the county into the Great Kanawha valley.

"He got here almost the same way I did," said Lloyd M. Chapman, Nitro's mayor from 1940 to 1944 who hails from Richwood. "I was on a big hunt one time when I came across this place all lighted up. I went in to get warm and darned if it didn't turn out to be American Viscose. They put me to work and I've been here ever since."

Such are the tales told at a ramp feast where the hearty spirit of good fellowship unites all in a common purpose to enjoy the odoriferous and powerful herbs which are peculiar to mountain regions.

THE OTHER three Nicholas county natives who established the Nitro chapter are Cabot White and Wallace Hinkle, both formerly of Richwood, and the aforementioned Mr. Hunter, a post office employee of whom it's said could not go back to Nicholas county even if he wanted.

"No sir," informed Chapman, "there's two deputy sheriffs and a



Expatriates from Nicholas county, top picture, formed the Nitro chapter of Nicholas county ramp eaters and presided last week over a considerable gathering of those who partake of this springtime delicacy. Left to right, they are Lloyd Chapman, David Hunter, G. C. Alderson, Wallace Hinkle and Ivan Hunter. In the picture at bottom left, Mr. Chapman, former mayor of Nitro, shows

how he became a husky 250-pounder by taking a big bite of the little stinkera. He uses the cornbread in his left hand as a chaser. At right, for those who are unacquainted with this mountain-grown herb, is a close-up picture of campanula rapunculus, otherwise called ramp. (All pictures by J. W. (Buddy) Anderson for the Daily Mail).

bloodhound waiting for him at the county line."

Someone, however, had to go back to Nicholas county to dig up the ramps and it fell this year the lot of Hunter, who brought back three bushels with him last weekend.

Parboiled and then seasoned in the grease of hog jowls and bacon, the delicate fare was served up with hash-browned potatoes and heaps of piping hot cornbread — a feast truly, for a king.

AND A "king" was there to enjoy it, too—Frank (King) Craig, the retired Nitro carpenter who crashed into the pages of Life magazine last year as a direct descendent of George Washington.

There were any number of others, too — Ed sheets, Putnam county's one-man navy who rode a runaway barge full of coal to the Winfield locks and dam one day before an up-coming steamboat rescued him; Ott Persinger, Norvell Cloud, Leach Raynes, Joe Osbourne, Billy Wintz, Ben Brewer, Jim Cook, Bill Hager, David Hunter, Charles White, and Al Shaeffer.

It is not known exactly what happened to these men when they returned home enriched in the rare vitamin of "PU" that evening, but there is on record the case of Cub Hefner, Carbide operator, whose wife made him sleep in the basement for three nights after he came home one year from ramp-eating in Nicholas county.

And there have been made other classic comments concerning the potent herbs, among them this one by the late W. E. R. Byrne in his book, "Tale of the Elk."

"**RAMPS,**" wrote Mr. Bryne, Charleston attorney, "are a cross between wild onions and garlic—only crosser. If a fellow eats ramps, you can smell his breath the moment he steps inside your migisterial district; and to be cooped up in a close hot room with 116 or 117 ramp eaters is much worse than death."

"The only known antidote is to eat a mess yourself — and hate

yourself for three weeks afterward . . . It is now a standing rule of the circuit court of Webster county that anyone who appears in the courtroom within 30 days after eating a mess of ramps, is guilty of contempt of court."

Such are the stories told about campanula rapunculus, otherwise called ramp. They come up in the springtime, are dug up and devoured in great quantities, and lend a prominent air of dis-

tingtion to all of those who partake.

"So prominent," Mr. Wintz says, "that usually the friends and family of the man who eats them avoid his company for several weeks."

So it indeed was fortunate that a strong wind was blowing the other evening when this curious collection of men held their annual ramp feast.

Otherwise, it could have been disastrous!

'Best Groomed'



Winner of the Dunbar Junior Learners 4-H club "good grooming" contest is Sally McCoy, who was judged neatest of all the members of the club.

The contest is part of the 4-H club national annual project which has as its slogan "Come Clean, Go Healthy." County Agent Charles Maxwell said.

Sally is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur McCoy of 1508 Kanawha Av., Dunbar.



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