

THE BAROSSA REPAST: THE TOURISTS' PRESENT AND FUTURE DELIGHT

Angela Huezenroeder

For at least forty years, cultural tourism in South Australia has had a symbiotic relationship with local history, and people visiting different regions have been able to take a detour to a local historical museum or visit an interpretation centre to look at displays, to push buttons and to learn about life as it used to be. Even large commercial concerns like Orlando Wines know the value of offering visitors a glimpse of the history of a place, especially when that place is Jacobs Creek. The marketers of Orlando know that evoking the past is going to enhance people's experience of drinking the wine that they sell.

Food, too, is an important part of a visitor's experience of a different place. The famous pies of a particular bakery or a celebrated little restaurant can be the main attraction for some visitors to a region, or an unexpected discovery for others. The value of food in drawing tourists has increased with the growing number of restaurants winning awards for their food and with growing interest in cuisine among diners.



Jacobs Creek Centre



Linke's Bakery



Vintner's restaurant

Combining all three elements, food, history and tourism, leads to an understanding of regional cuisine, because time needs to pass before a dish or a food becomes widely associated with a region. And with the passage of time, food develops a history. Regional food is the food of history, as perceived by visitors to the area, even if that history is relatively recent.

Now, regional cuisine is a very desirable part of tourism and the subject of a great deal of interest throughout the world. Witness the rapidly-growing Slow Food movement. This organisation, from its home base in Italy, celebrates places in many countries where ancient food practices still exist, and where food ingredients, produced in the area for centuries, have not yet been lost to the crops of modern agribusiness. More people are joining Slow Food because they are interested in food and its origins.

The ease in which we can holiday all over the world has also brought about an interest in food attached to a region. No longer is it new and exciting to fly *foie gras* from France. Often, these days, YOU fly to France to eat *foie gras*! Travelling tourists like a sense of place, reflected by the people, food and culture.

This paper will describe to you how people in the Barossa have arranged tourist events using their culinary history. It will examine the benefits arising from these events, benefits flowing to local people as well as to visitors. It will reflect briefly on issues related to linking tourism and culinary history and analyse elements of a region's material culture that can help to build an event celebrating culinary history.

In the Barossa a distinctive food culture brought by the early German-speaking and English settlers has had time to meld and develop to become a cuisine adapted to the region. From settlement in 1839 our Silesian and English forbears worked with the soil and environment to grow the foods that would survive their new climate as well as enrich and comfort them. A history like this is unique, especially since it is based on very old culinary practices and dishes that were shaped by the new environment. The dishes are still familiar today. Many of them are foods prepared using the ancient processes of fermenting, smoking, salting or drying, and all can grow near at hand. To show you what some of the traditional foods are I am going to read to you a description of the traditional Barossa table written by Jan Angas.

“For those born in the Barossa, smoked bacon, egg noodles, black pudding and metwurst are simply food. To others, be they visitors or more recent dwellers, all those goods are regional delicacies. For them, the tastes of dill cucumbers, *Streuselkuchen* and the grape pudding called *Rote Grütze* are an experience that comes with the region.” This became very obvious when in 2001 our regional food group, Food Barossa, hosted 120 food writers and chefs from all over the world for a lunch as part of Tasting Australia. Every one was welcomed with the gift of an apron and a name tag telling them which food product they were about to delve their hands into to make lunch.



Noodles



Sausages



Dills



Rote grutze

The guidance of a “local” person as well as a Barossa chef guaranteed we would all have lunch, but, it was the conversation and exchange of local knowledge and understanding about how a recipe had been shaped by mothers and Grandmothers for over 150 years, that was the real story. Family traditions were shared and people discussed how these had modified with the advent of power and refrigeration. Interest in smoke houses and wood ovens was ignited. New wood ovens are being built and indeed little commercial ones are available at the local BBQ stores. Interest in smoking and how can it be done is returning. This raised questions of how WAS it done in previous generations. Methods handed down from Grandmothers are being searched for in Mothers’ recipe books. At the Tasting Australia event, the question was continually raised: why do we do this or

that? The answer was all in our history. The day we hosted these world “foodies” the lunch table was laden with yabbies, rabbit, duck, lamb, pork sausage, black pudding, pasties, leafy greens, potato salad, cucumber salad, hand churned butter, fruits fresh and dried, cheeses, traditional honey biscuits and *Streusel* yeast cake. Everyone tasted these dishes made from local produce by local cooks. Everyone was hungry for food and knowledge.



Tables full of food



Streusel yeast cake



Honey biscuits



Eating and drinking

Having had such success with the Tasting Australia function in 2001, we thought that the Barossa would be a good host to a “Slow Food” event. And so in April 2004, with the sanction of the Slow Food movement, a group of enthusiasts formed a new committee to run an event interpreting our culinary history.” We decided to divide several important elements of our food culture into separate events or journeys. Visitors could choose a day based on traditional baking and bread ovens, on products from the orchards and vegetable gardens, on products from the pig, and on that ancient and discredited art: cooking with offal. Depending on their choice, people were taken to visit some places where food production has been important since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

They included:

- Ellis’ orchards, where fruit has dried on trays in the sun since the 1920s;
- Tanunda Apex Bakery, where the wood-fired Scotch oven installed in 1924 has produced slow-risen bread ever since;
- The bread ovens and smoking chimneys on the farm built by the Sporn family in 1851. These we had to restore to working order with the expert advice of local bakers and builders in the weeks before the event, but they behaved beautifully on the day. (That’s when participants enjoyed lunch in the garden, prepared by TAFE hospitality students under the tutelage of chef Mark McNamara);
- The dining room at Seppeltsfield where in the 1890s Mrs Seppelt and her helpers fed up to 100 workmen breakfast and dinner every day during vintage (and where Maggie Beer prepared a feast of offal);
- The oldest working beehives in Australia imported from Silesia in 1844, on the farm of Mark and Gloria Rosenzweig;
- Revived vegetable gardens and orchards of early Bethany families first planted in the 1840s and

- The Hutton Vale stables, set in grazing land that produced the lamb and beef to feed the colony from the late 1840s onwards. Today's lambs are still directly descended from the 1840s ewes.



Ellis' orchards



Apex Bakery



Beehives



Hutton Vale farm

Glowing from the apparent success of that sunny April weekend, and perhaps rushing in where angels fear to tread, the Barossa Slow committee decided to stage a similar event two years later, this year, 2006. Planning proved to be a balancing feat. We needed to strike an equilibrium between providing some variation for returning visitors, so that they did not have a feeling of *déjà vue*, revising and enhancing activities that had been an obvious success, and enlarging our circle of local participants as people's interest in the events grew. The program retained the evening where visitors were welcomed into people's private houses to share their meal. (Hospitality is an integral part of the Barossa food culture.) People once again flocked to the afternoon of discussion about culinary events in the Barossa's history, entitled *Waste Not, Want Not*, followed by an informal picnic on the banks of the Para.



Grazing on the banks of the Para River



Barossa Food



Barossa Cookery Book

New chefs joined in with their interpretations, both faithful and subtly creative, of traditional Barossa dishes that they could use from my book, *Barossa Food*, and from the historic *Barossa Cookery Book*, which has been a firm part of Barossa food preparation since 1917. The program also included a harvest thanksgiving church service at the historic Gruenberg church, followed by a picnic prepared by

the parishioners. Perhaps the most ambitious move was the building of a traditional smokehouse at Hutton Vale, where visitors were given a chance to make and smoke their own sausages and thus to experience some hands-on history.

Our Barossa Slow weekend gave members of the committee much to think about when we had our *post-mortem* of the event. The successes were more wide-ranging than just a very modest financial gain. As Jan Angas, host of the events at Hutton Vale, maintained, “The standout fact from our success was the exchange achieved by working hands-on with people and making sure that when they left at the end of the day their experience had enriched them in some way. In our history the story of wood ovens and smokehouses, orchards and frugality were all key issues. To achieve the intensity we wanted, it meant the event had to be small and focused. Our local residents were also losing touch with these skills and were keen to be free to ask the questions and remind each other of the stories. Young and old all worked together. The process of locals working **before** the journeys and workshops reignited passion and interest among the community. While our visitors had a great experience, the **locals** are now asking that we continue to work the journey of past methods and experiment with smoking and baking in wood ovens between ourselves.”



Harvest thanksgiving



Victoria making sausages



Committee post-mortem

We drew some other conclusions from the experience of running these events as well.

- One was that the cultural history of food does not just consist of traditional ingredients and recipes: it comprises people, their hospitality and their conversations, and these must be a continuing part of the link between food history and tourism.
- Another was that exact re-creation of history will always be impossible. As Isaiah Berlin once wrote, even if everything else can be replicated in an historical event, it will never be a faithful copy of the original because the very air through which the participants move will be different.
- However, much of the re-creation of history happens inside people's heads as they exercise their fantasies, and we can supply background information to ensure that these historical fantasies come as close as possible to the historical actuality. For this reason, at each of the events of journeys in the Barossa Slow weekends the participants were given a booklet explaining the history pertaining to

their activities, biographies of the people conducting the event, and background information about the place they were occupying.

- Keeping a relationship with the past can also help guide a region into the future with a sense of purpose rather than simply picking up on the latest trends. Consequently the Barossa Slow committee is set to run some interim sessions where local people can learn from each other how to repair their old ovens, smokehouses and other food places, or how to build and use new ones.
- A final conclusion of the committee was about the way the food was chosen, prepared and presented. At the same time that traditional foods are deeply rooted in history, they change, degree by degree. Recipes alter slightly when they are taken from place to place. Individual cooks adjust them and impress their own stamp; cooking equipment, tableware and presentation methods change from age to age; even the combination of dishes and the order of foods in a meal evolve. For this reason we gave participants the chance to compare the taste of mettwurst made using traditional methods with new, lighter varieties. (I have to admit that, to my seasoned taste buds, the mettwurst made by the traditional butchers still won the day by a mile.) Allowing variations to historic recipes also meant that one of the new chefs, William Wood, experimented by making the Rote Grutze with different local grapes, instead of red shiraz, and produced a delightfully aromatic alternative. At all times, however, the food produced related to the region, its cultural approaches and its produce. We hoped that it would thus reflect what Janet Lymburn has called the region's *culinary terroir*.



Make your own wood oven or smokehouse

Now we are looking to future events based on the culinary history of the Barossa. More and more local people have expressed interest in building on the cooking skills of the past and in exploring their present-day possibilities. We have several ideas and several more rabbits to pull out of the hat. (Baked into pies or braised with mushrooms and smokehouse bacon these rabbits will taste delicious with an old Flor Fino sherry!) But whatever tourist events we organize, we know that we have five strong base elements with which to work.

They are:

- A core repertoire of traditional dishes, many of which can be traced back to at least the sixteenth century, that are still recognized and enjoyed by local people today
- Extensive documentation of dishes, their history, methods and ingredients in the book *Barossa Food* and in *The Barossa Cookery Book*
- A continuing tradition of growing food, which is evident in the huge success of the weekly Barossa Farmers Market
- A community of people basically interested in food, whether they are from the original farming families or newcomers attracted to the district because of its food reputation. Many elderly people are also happy to share their food skills and memories with others.
- Countless historic places and artifacts connected with food from the past that are able to be used and revived. (The ash in the bread ovens at Willowsporn farm was still there from the last baking days of sixty years ago when we came to heat the ovens once more.) Many owners of old bread ovens and smokehouses around the Barossa are keen to restore and use them. We have many historic places to visit during future events.

We as members of Barossa Slow are therefore confident that the history of food can make a valuable contribution not only to tourism, but also to the life of the local community from which it emanates. May we invite you to our next Slow event based on our food culture, to be held at a date still to be decided? We can offer you not only a visit to some very historic sites and an informed understanding of our culinary history, but also some very delicious food. *Guten Appetit!*