

Living on steak for a hamburger budget.

So today's entry leaves me with a problem, how do I get information on how to eat steak for hamburger prices out there without offending my vegetarian readers with pictures of big chunks of meat being cut up in all of its messy glory? Since the nature of the Blogspot is that every article goes in on top of the previous one, if I put up an entry with big pictures of meat, someone who finds that offensive will scroll onto it when reading future entries. So out of sensitivity to the needs of my readers who are not into this kind of thing I will break from the way I have seen things done and put the text of this up in the Blog window and have the complete story with all of the glorious pictures elsewhere in PDF form.

You ask me "how is this possible? Steak for hamburger prices?" so I went to my local Wegmans super-market and purchased a whole Eye of Round Roast for \$3.59 per pound. While I was there I looked and the single pound packages of 80 percent ground beef were selling for \$3.69 per pound. The small package 90 percent ground was another buck per pound and then the 95 percent was another buck.

Back to the cut in question. Wegmans sells these as "Club Pack" 3 or more pounds, other stores call it something else, basically you buy a whole cut of meat and do the slicing yourself and it is cheaper. Effectively rather than cutting the meat up into smaller pieces, they leave it in the vacuum wrap they got it from the wholesaler in and slap a label or 3 on it and put it out (how do I know this? I used to be the guy doing just that at one of the local Wegmans meat departments) Beyond price there are several advan-



tages to buying this way, the first being longer expiration dating since the meat has not been exposed to any potential contamination from the cutting room you might have a week or 3 or more as long as you keep it refrigerated below 40 degrees and unopened, (you can also watch the expiration dates on these and if they are still on the shelf the day before the sell by date most managers discount them by 20-40 percent rather than take a total loss on them, usually this happens between 8 am and noon) the second is that you can cut it exactly to your needs. Say you want to do steaks for your first night camping, but the next night is going to be an intimate night around the campfire, and you have an old fencing sword blade (or in my case a dress rapier made in India) that you have been saving to use as a barbeque spit and while everyone else is doing hot dogs you want to show off and do a beef roast, and maybe you want to do a quick beef and broccoli stir fry before heading off for the weekend, and then there is the whole question of what is for dinner on Monday. . . Perfect! One end

will be the roast, the other end will be stir fry beef and the middle will make a few meals worth of steaks. In this case I wanted to do primarily steaks with the end bits that don't make pretty steaks cut up for stirfry.

The first thing you want to do once you have your meat home is to prepare your workspace and tools. I like to have a cutting board, a tray pan with waxed paper in it to put the steaks into in preparation for vacuum packing (the vacuum machine manufacturer recommends pre-freezing the steaks before bagging) and several extra pieces of wax paper to go between the steaks, a very sharp reasonably small knife with a little curve to the edge (I do not recommend serrations for this kind of work) and a meat cutting fork. I like to wear food safety gloves, both to keep my hands clean, and to minimize the risk of food handling issues. The knife I use for this work is one of my 15th Century design knives based on the design of knife # 265 on page 103 (with missing profile details extrapolated from knife # 118 on page 92) of the Knives and Scabbards book (<http://www.amazon.com/Knives-Scabbards-Medieval-Excavations-London/dp/1843833530>) which I made from Crucible Particle

Metallurgy Steel CPM154 hardened to a Rockwell of 60 for extreme sharpness and edge holding (I sell these knives for \$150, yes I know shameless product placement, hey it's my blog) anyway you want a knife that has a small enough blade to do detail work, a bit of a curve to the edge to make for efficient slicing, a keen enough edge to cut easily and cleanly, and the blade long enough to reach all the way through the steak, and that is comfortable to work with.

I put the meat in the package on the countertop, make a single cut lengthwise through the packaging, lift the meat out through the cut, leaving the juices in the bottom of the package and place the meat on the cutting board. The package goes in the sink to drain (the package never gets placed on the cutting board to keep any contamination on the package from getting to your cutting board, I also change gloves between touching the package and touching the meat just to be safe)



Lifting the meat from the wrapper

Roasts typically have a fat layer left on them to keep them moist in the oven as they are slowly cooked, steaks typically have very little fat left on them. I typically use a dry rub on campfire roasts so I treat them like steaks. The first thing you want to decide is what you want to use the various parts for, and how to trim them. If you are doing oven roasts, keep the fat layer in place for that portion of the meat, everything else it is faster to trim before you cut than to trim the individual pieces.

If I am planning oven roasts I will just cut that portion off before I start doing steaks and set them aside (on the waxed paper) before trimming the rest. You start the trim by placing the edge of the knife on the meat where it joins the fat layer, parallel to the meat and pulling the blade in a gentle but quick slicing motion with light pressure on the blade. You want to basically skim the meat separating it from the fat using gentle slicing cuts. You can use the fork to hold the fat so you can see what you are doing if you are uncomfortable with having your hands that close to the blade. Remember that to an extremely sharp knife your fingers are just more meat and cut just as easily. You want to be aware of where the edge is at all times and never cut toward your fingers. An extremely sharp knife is actually safer than a dull one because the amount of force you need to put into cutting is almost non-existent with a sharp knife which minimizes the potential for accidents. A dull knife is dangerous because you have to push hard to get it to do anything, and that force has to go somewhere, and if something slips you are in trouble. Anyway, back to the work at hand. You want to try to trim as much of the fat as possible off, as well as any of the somewhat fibrous sheathing.



Starting to trim the fat



Good technique once the trimming cut is started



Close work around a contour: Note the pinch grip on the blade



The knife hand moved too quickly for the picture. using the tip to sever between the fat and the meat



Long gentle strokes with the knife while pulling the fat with the other hand



Detail wrk with they tip



The lighter white is the fibrous layer. Sometimes you lose a little meat getting that off. The sharper your knife the closer you can trim.



The easiest way to make sure you get great steaks is to mark out your cuts ahead of time. I didn't do that on this roast, but it is easy enough (and with this knife being approximately 1 inch from edge to spine which happens to be an ideal thickness for tenderloin steaks (Filet Mignon is best at between an inch and 1 1/4 inches) strip Steaks are best at about an inch, as are ribeyes, for the eye of round I go between a half inch and 3/4 inch. Marking is simple, start at the middle and make evenly spaced shallow parallel cuts at the thickness you want your steaks until you get to the funky shapes at the ends which will become stirfry meat, or the sections you are setting aside for roasts. I was working quickly so I just lopped off the stirfry meat at the end, cut steaks until I got to the roast



cutting off the stirfry (the end piece that won't be big enough for a steak)



Cutting steaks



section on the other end, stopped to show that, then cut a few more steaks until I got to the stirfry section on the other end.

Anyway, back to the task at hand. Once you have figured out what you are cutting, cut through the meat in long steady strokes taking advantage of the full length of the cutting edge. If your knife is properly sharpened, you should be able to cut through the whole thickness of the roast in one or two slicing motions (do not make sawing motions, if you need to saw at it your knife is not sharp) while holding the meat in place either with a slicing fork or your other hand. I prefer my hand, but I have years of practice supporting what I am cutting while keeping my hands and other parts out of the path of the edge, if you are uncertain, use a fork..

Once everything is cut I lay it out on waxed paper on a cookie sheet with waxed paper between layers (anything I am not putting straight on the barbeque or in the meat drawer) and put it in the freezer for an hour so that it keeps its shape when I bag it, and either put it in Ziplock freezer weight bags or vacuum sealer bags with what it is and when I packaged it written in sharpie, and freeze it. If you make sure any extra air is pressed out or vacuumed out and seal it well, the meat will easily keep for 6 months in the freezer.



More steaks cut and laying out on waxed paper



Steaks, a roast, and a stirfry heel



I decided to sacrifice a steak out of the roast to make a good quantity of stirfry

Cubing stirfry, this page kinda speaks for itself



The steaks and stirfry ready for freezing (the two for dinner are suspiciously absent from the picture as they are already dry rubbed and on the grill)



The final results, the fat pile on the left can be rendered for lard or tallow if you are so inclined (I am usually not) a nice pile of steaks ready for bagging, and a nice pile of stirfry meat.