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### Sacramento's Cookie's Drive-in Roo-Ostrich-Buffalo Trifecta

East Sacramento's Cookie's Drive-in Roo-Ostrich-Buffalo Trifecta In Australia they call them Kangatarians—people who eat kangaroo exclusively. Such a person in East Sacramento would need to know about Cookies. The East Sacramento drive-in and “institution” has gone wild and now serves ostrich, buffalo and kangaroo meat burgers.

Lean diet advocates have long touted the health benefits of game meat. Compared to its beef cousins it wins the low fat contest.

But kangaroo?

Will Americans warm to ‘Skippy’ and other game burgers? Are they soon to be in the meat sections, or will they remain a culinary oddity?

The Test

On a warm Sacramento afternoon East Sacramento News conducted a scientificish test. Three average East Sacramentans were ready to try the wild burgers.



Eileen Lynch, Tessa Stoddard and Jon Lynch-Lloyd

Each subject volunteered to taste ostrich, kangaroo and buffalo. All of the meat was humanly raised or harvested. They cringed at the inclusion of kangaroo, but gamely acquiesced.



The order

The test subjects were Jon Lynch-Lloyd, Tessa Stoddard and Eileen Lynch. They would rank the burgers according to texture and taste.

The “control group” was Pat Lynch, Eileen’s sister. She was supposed to eat the beef burger, but instead licked a soft serve. “I know the burgers are delicious,” she said. “You can’t pay me enough to eat a kangaroo.”

Finally, three generous burgers were served up. The group eyed the choices with raised eyebrows.

Each guinea pig smelled the burgers, inspected them visually and then started with the buffalo. They cocked their heads, breathed deeply and began.



Lynch prepares to bite

The trio silently nibbled the bison. Eileen Lynch grimaced and said, “I can’t think about what it looks like, when I do it’s weird.”

Next was the ostrich. Tessa Stoddard gazed at the burger, bit and swallowed a morsel. She frowned. “It looks less appetizing. It’s smoother than other meats,” she said.

Buffalo meat is processed in the same way as beef and looks very similar. But ostrich is another story. Most of the meat comes from the thigh and it’s reddish in color, even after cooking.

The roos were last. The burger warriors were most reluctant to sample the marsupial but each gingerly noshed a bite.



Kangaroo bites

“What does a kangaroo really look like?” Asked Lynch-Lloyd. He pulled out his iPhone and googled kangaroo. A giant Red Kangaroo peered from the screen.

“Okay, but where does the meat come from on it?” Lynch-Lloyd eyed the tail and paws suspiciously. The concept was difficult to digest.

What he didn’t know is that there are 48 known species of kangaroo, but only four are harvested for meat. The roos are culled from the wild or large privately owned ranges. There are no kangaroo farms, barns or pens. The meat is portioned much like beef and Australia exports the meat around the world.

The Winners and Losers

The three conferred and unanimously agreed on the ranking.

1. Buffalo
2. Kangaroo
3. Ostrich

All acknowledged the superiority of game's nutritional value, but wanted to stick to beef.

"Yeah, it's good they serve this meat, said Lynch-Lloyd. "There's such a disconnect between the food we eat and where it comes from. Wild game makes you think more about what you eat; that it's a living creature."

The buffalo was very similar to beef with a richer flavor and slightly smokier. "I could easily order a buffalo burger," said Eileen Lynch.

Pat Lynch stayed out of the fray, licking and watching.

"I would never eat game, but this cone was harvested from a wild glacier of soft serve." She smiled and popped the end of her cone into her mouth.

All three said that none of the game burgers came even close to Cookie's high quality, sizzling beef burgers.

Cookie's

American drive-ins are cultural icons and Cookie's is one of the front -runners. So why would the owners dive into the exotic meat market?



Stella Chuk and Paul Chuk on the grill

Paul and Stella Chuk have owned Cookies restaurant for 25 years. They live in the Pocket and commute to 56th and H Streets six days a week. The drive-in was named after the wife of the first owner who started the neighborhood favorite in 1956.

The Chuk kids, Joyce and Jesse, grew up behind the counter and still help out in the restaurant.

"I grew up at Cookie's. My mom even came to work when she was pregnant with me," said Joyce Chuk.

Paul still flips the burgers and Stella now works part-time time. They loved the original drive-in menu but decided to add healthier choices.

“We added ostrich first because a customer requested it. The others came later, all by customer request. They all sell very well but the best-seller is the ostrich,” Stella Chuk said.

“Our nice customers wanted more variety. Many people enjoy wild game. It took a while for the meat to take off, but now it’s popular.”

There are not many local eateries that have the Roo-Ostrich-Buffalo trifecta. If you want to walk on the wild side or just want good ‘ole American drive-in grub, Cookie’s is the place.