

# Even the Vikings

by Henry Verden

During the Dark Ages, the Vikings were the scourge of Europe, raiding coastal villages and killing with bloodthirsty abandon. A recent discovery at an archeological dig on the western coast of Ireland has finally explained why they were so nasty. An ancient artifact, found in a sixth century Viking settlement, revealed itself to be...lutefisk.

Amazingly, it was still edible.

Lutefisk is air-dried cod called stockfish that is sawn (literally) into manageable pieces. It is soaked in fresh water for eight days, a lye solution for two days, and then fresh water again for an additional two days. After all that, lutefisk is simmered until it forms a translucent, gelatinous mass, not unlike something seen on *Fear Factor*. How to make this unappealing blob tolerable is the subject of much debate. Some drown it in butter or hot pork fat, others coat it with pepper, or cover it with a white or mustard sauce.

The earliest mention of lutefisk in literature is in sagas from the twelfth century. Snorre wrote that King Oystein built fishing shanties in Lofotan. No, I didn't make that up. Vikings caught the cod during the coldest time of the year, January through April. It was cleaned and hung on huge racks to dry. Norwegians, being slow to accept change, still catch cod at a time of year when no sane person spends much time outside in Norway. However, now they use modern equipment that shortens the drying time from many months to three weeks.

Where can I get this delicacy, you may ask. The world's largest producer of lutefisk is the Olsen Fish Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Olsen's take the worry out of serving lutefisk by doing all the soaking stuff for you. They make their lutefisk from imported Norwegian stockfish. They also sell stockfish if you want to do the whole thing yourself.

Quiz time. Who buys the most stockfish from Olsen's? You guessed it, Nigerians. Apparently there was an African famine early in the twentieth century (what a surprise) and Norway sent huge quantities of stockfish to Nigeria to help out. (There's a rumor that many in Norway didn't feel the government was sending it far enough away.)

No one knows how lutefisk became synonymous with Christmas. It may be that there was precious little else to eat sitting by a frozen fjord in the dead of winter except dried fish. Today, with a world of alternative choices, Scandinavians still insist that lutefisk at Christmas is a treat. Even with all the tradition and hype, it's apparently not enough of a treat that they want to eat it the rest of the year.

Those of us who grew up in households where lutefisk made an annual appearance know the true meaning of the term "cruel and unusual punishment." My dad would do it the old-fashioned



# feared it



way, starting with stockfish and proceeding through the whole 12-day soaking process. When Mom cooked it, the house filled with an aroma that defied description and caused the wallpaper to start peeling. When it was served, we inevitably heard those four dreaded words, "Just try a little." My parents loved it and never understood that "a little" lutefisk was "a lot" of lutefisk as far as I was concerned.

Those who love it, love it with a fierce loyalty. Then there's the rest of us. Lutefisk is like polka music. You either love it or hate it; there is no middle ground. Someday you may be confronted with a plateful of lutefisk. The best advice I can give you is to get it over with quickly. Just try a little.

## • FOR MORE • INFORMATION



Lutefisk is available in many Midwestern grocery stores around the holidays, but the rest of the year it's not the easiest thing to find. The Olsen Fish Company on the north side of Minneapolis is the world's largest producer. As proof that lots of people love lutefisk, they sell over 650,000 pounds a year. They sell stockfish for the do-it-yourself crowd and processed and ready-to-cook lutefisk for the rest of us. The lutefisk is packaged under Olsen, Viking, Kemps, and Mike's labels but you can't buy directly from Olsen, they are strictly a wholesale company. There are several websites listed on the Olsen Fish Company links page that carry their products.

Olsen Fish Company  
2115 N. Second St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55411  
Lutefisk Hotline:  
(800) 882-0212  
[www.olsenfish.com](http://www.olsenfish.com)

Wisconsin is a state that loves food. We celebrate it at every opportunity. Here are food festivals and celebrations occurring in December and January. *Happy road trip and good eating at the end of your journey!*

DECEMBER 28—JANUARY 1

## 60th Festival of Christmas and Midwinter Traditions

Folklore Village, Dodgeville, WI

(608) 924-4000

[www.folklorevillage.org](http://www.folklorevillage.org)

Celebrate the season with joy, peace, fun, enrichment, traditions, silliness and camaraderie. This annual event features seasonal celebrations from around the world, ethnic dancing, crafts, music, storytelling, culture sessions, fantastic food and an outstanding children's program! Reservations are required.



DECEMBER 8

### Finnish Independence Day

Brantwood, WI

(715) 564-2520 or 2525

[www.pricecountywi.net](http://www.pricecountywi.net)

Celebration of Finnish independence from Russia. Beef stew (Mojakka—Finnish stew) cooked in an iron kettle over an open fire outdoors; history program to follow. Door prizes; gift shop. Sponsored by the Knox Creek Heritage Center.



DECEMBER 15

### Breakfast with Father Christmas, Old World Wisconsin

Eagle, WI

(262) 594-6300 or (262) 594-2798

[www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org)

Visit with Father Christmas over breakfast. Face painting, balloons and old-fashioned goodies for all children. Photos available for a nominal fee.



DECEMBER 8

### Christmas Tea at Hazelwood

Green Bay, WI

(920) 437-1840

[www.browncohistoricalsoc.org](http://www.browncohistoricalsoc.org)

Enjoy a Victorian Christmas tea party held at this 1837 Greek-revival home. Both savory and sweet courses will be served. A historical program on an interesting topic and a tour of Hazelwood are included.



DECEMBER 29

### Historic Point Basse Heritage Hollyday

Nekoosa, WI

(715) 886-4202 or (715) 423-3120

[www.historicpointbasse.com/hollydays.htm](http://www.historicpointbasse.com/hollydays.htm)

Costumed participants prepare for the holiday season at this 19th century historic Wisconsin site. Baking, old-time craft demonstrations, ornament making, caroling and sleigh rides.



DECEMBER 8—9

### Serbian Holiday Dinner

Eagle, WI

(262) 594-6300

Toll Free: (866) 944-7483

Walk the historic village all bedecked for the holidays, gift shop, lift your voice in song to the sweet sound of the pump organ at St. Peter's Church, then ring in the holidays with a sumptuous Serbian dinner, music and entertainment.



JANUARY 19

### Wade House Hearthside Dinners

Greenbush, WI

(920) 526-3271

[www.wisconsinhistory.org/wadehouse](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wadehouse)

[wadehouse@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:wadehouse@wisconsinhistory.org)

The sounds and smells of the 19th century come to life as guests participate in a special Hearthside Dinner program, living the history of the 1860s as they work together to prepare a meal in the kitchens of the Wade House stagecoach inn. Seating is limited, and advance reservations are required. View menu online. \$45 per person, but well worth it. Dinners are also scheduled in February, March, and April.

**Tell us where to go!** We don't know about all the fests out there so if you know of one you think we should include, drop us a line at [info@bountifulcupboard.com](mailto:info@bountifulcupboard.com).





**Marketplace**

**SCRAPBOOKING**



- Everything Your Creative Heart Desires -

- Classes Available—Rubber stamping and Scrapbooking.
- 1000 different patterned scrap-booking papers.
- Embellishments, ribbons, stickers (including 3-D), rub-ons, brads, punches.
- Selection of rubber stamp supplies.
- Dreamweaver stencils.
- Scrapbook Albums—various sizes & styles.

134 E. Main St.,  
Stoughton, WI 53589,  
Ph. (608) 873-7107  
[www.justforkeepsstoughton.com](http://www.justforkeepsstoughton.com)

**BICYCLES**



**- Basic Bike Repair -**

420 Enterprise Ave., Unit D  
Belleville, WI 53508 • (608) 424-6407

- Full service bike repair—parts & accessories.
- Authorized Power Wheels Service Center.
- Assembly of bikes, wagons, scooters, strollers or just about anything!

**BATH & BODY**

**SOAP BY MOM**

Great gifts, super soaps.  
Visit our new store. 10984  
N. Hillside Dr., Edgerton, WI  
53534, Ph. (608) 884-2221,  
Fax (608) 884-2215.  
[www.soapbymom.com](http://www.soapbymom.com)

**RETAIL**



**NEXT GENERATION**

Let us help you with your  
Holiday shopping for the  
Kids in your life!

- Special gifts for babies through pre-teens.
  - Entertaining and educational.
- 161 E. Main St.,  
Stoughton, WI 53589  
(608) 873-8423

Featuring new line of interactive  
Mighty World toys!



**GROCERY**

**Downtown Grocery**



...featuring local & organic items and a self-service deli with salad bar.

**607 Third Street  
Wausau, WI 54403  
715-848-9800  
[www.DowntownGrocery.com](http://www.DowntownGrocery.com)  
Open Daily!**

**KITCHEN**

**The Kitchen Gallery LLC**

Fine Kitchenware & Specialty Foods

- Swiss Diamond and All-Clad cookware.
- Shun and Wusthof Cutlery.
- Schott Zwiesel Crystal.
- Chantal bakeware.
- Unique, imported gifts and serveware.
- Specialty Foods & Unique seasonings.

Stop in and see Dane County's newest kitchen store.

Holiday Hours, 7 days/wk

1354 Williamson Street  
Madison, WI 53703  
Ofc. (608) 467-6544  
Tom Christensen



**Happy Holidays!**

We have what you need for a special holiday meal.

- Fruit and pumpkins for pie, or ready made pies
- Turkey and stuffing
- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Wisconsin cheeses
- Assorted holiday cookies
- Hot chocolate mixes
- Beef and ham roasts
- Party platters
- Local beers and wines

210 S. Main Street, Verona, WI 53593 • Phone (608) 845-6478 • Fax (608) 848-5256  
[www.millerandsonssupermarket.com](http://www.millerandsonssupermarket.com)



Shop where the customer is always first, since 1901!