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Interview with Ed Hicks et al,
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Barbecued Fish

A custom long prevalent among the full blood Cherokees was to visit the banks of the streams in the summer season and capture large numbers of fish which were slowly roasted or barbecued over fires kindled beneath the shade of the nearby trees.

In order to procure the fish the roots of the buckeye shrub were bruised and beaten into a great mass of pulp and in shallow places above long and deep stretches of water the pounded buckeye was "planted" and weighted down with heavy stones. The water below was in consequence vitiated and soon numbers of fish arose to the surface, not dead but stupefied from the effects of the buckeye. The men and boys and sometimes the women and girls, then entered the water and engaged in picking up the fish. In the deeper water men in boats used spears or gigs and tossed the larger fish into their canoes or boats but the fish which were too small to be used

were allowed to float downstream and upon reaching the pure waters soon recovered and swam away.

When enough fish had been procured everybody went to the shady spots and engaged in cleaning the fish, after which the barbecuing began and the barbecued fishes were delicious. Other eatables were provided, but corn bread, made from fresh Indian corn meal and cooked after the Indian manner, and fish were the principal articles consumed, except that strong black coffee, the favorite Cherokee Indian beverage, was provided and drank in abundant quantities. After the feast the women sat down and talked together and the men did likewise, smoking their pipes in great enjoyment.

There have been no fish barbecues in many years, the fish and game laws prohibiting the adulteration of the streams with buckeyes or other deleterious substances. But in the interval before the laws protected the streams, great damage was done the fish population by men who exploded dynamite in the rivers and creeks.

In one locality near the Illinois River lived two young men who were owners of two very useful dogs and these dogs assisted in bringing fish to the shore when barbecues were

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had. Whimpering in delight the dogs would plunge into the water time after time, seize fish of considerable size in their teeth and swim to the gravel bar, lay down their burdens and soon take to the water again.

Besides the roots of the buckeye, the plant known as "devil's shoe string" was sometimes used for the purpose of making "drunk" the fish, but the buckeye was more greatly favored.

The Illinois, the Barren Fork, Caney, and some of the smaller streams in remote sections of the hill country, were the scenes of fish barbecues during many years while the Cherokee Government was in existence.