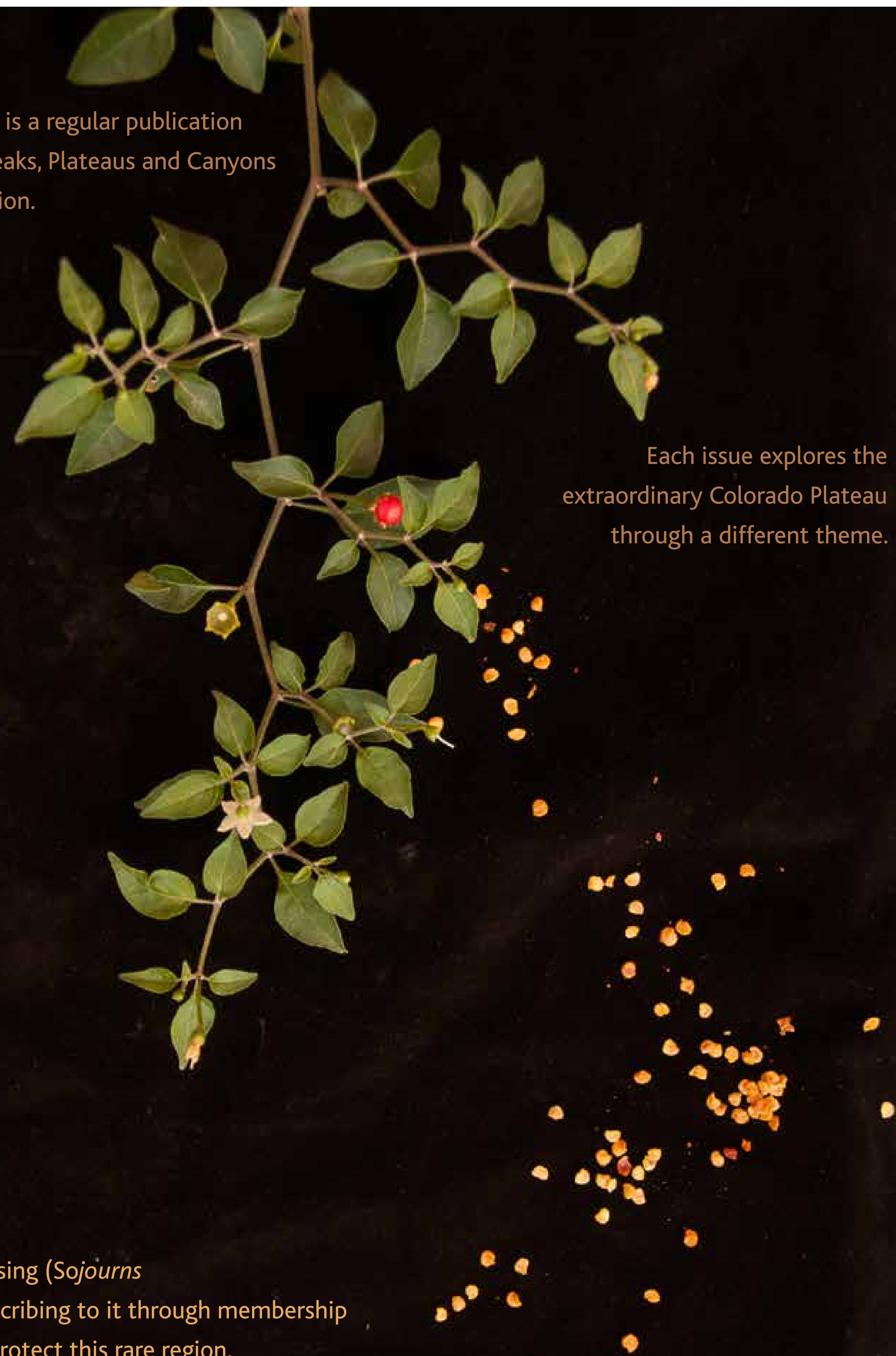


Sojourns is a regular publication of the Peaks, Plateaus and Canyons Association.

Each issue explores the extraordinary Colorado Plateau through a different theme.

Purchasing (*Sojourns* or subscribing to it through membership helps protect this rare region.
For more information please turn to page 48.

4

TASTING THE COLORADO PLATEAU
MICHAEL ENGELHARD

A VISUAL FEAST
IMAGES BY RAECHEL RUNNING

13

HISTORIES + RECIPES
ASSORTED FOLKS

Jeff Smedstad 22
Michael Plyler 25
Karl and Michelle Kelley 26
Carol Haralson 27
Lyman Hafen 29, 32
Dave Panu 30
Lois Ellen Frank 34
Michael Peach 38
Frank Hamilton Cushing 40
Patrick Houlihan 42

(Sojourns

TASTING THE COLORADO PLATEAU

MICHAEL ENGELHARD

"Mesa tops of thick-headed pinyon-juniper broccoli, meandering banks of lush cottonwood celery and tamarisk slaw . . . rich teeming eddies of catfish bouillabaisse and carp carpaccio . . . sage-freckled Uinta Basin custard, Book Cliffs tortillas . . . a jumbo helping of Moenkopi mud pies" and "Wingate Sandstone tarts steaming beneath a latticed cryptobiotic crust." — ELLEN MELOY

Adding a twist to the cliché of the Colorado Plateau as geological layer cake, the great, prematurely departed Ellen Meloy, in her essay collection *The Anthropology of Turquoise,* likened this region seen from the air to a giant, scrumptious smorgasbord. Far from mere whimsy, her metaphors reveal a deep hunger—one writer's craving for the landscape of her heart, her desire to plumb life with all senses.

We moderns are predominantly visual beings, underestimating or taking for granted what our taste buds know—until a head cold turns all food, and existence itself, into bland cardboard. Loss of taste uproots us, somehow. Who has not played the mind game of considering which handicap would be worse: to be blind, to be deaf, to be numb or bereft of speech? Who, on the other hand, ever imagines life without taste? We don't even have a word for that sort of condition.

Sweetness. Sourness. Saltiness. Bitterness. With only four base notes—the palate's cardinal directions, as it were—taste might appear rather impoverished; but like the ancient Chinese (and modern scientists), residents of the Southwest are wont to add a fifth flavor, the axis around which all others revolve: spiciness. Luckily, countless nuances enrich Plateau cuisine by degrees, each combining the five basic sensations in unique and often mouthwatering ways.

Flavorful names garnish the Plateau's topography, proof that pioneers shared Meloy's appetite for the land. Bitter Seep, Salt Gulch, and Brine Creek denied thirsty travelers relief. Cherry Flat, Strawberry Point, Chocolate Drops: Yum! Carcass Creek, Strychnine Wash: not so much. Start with Bean Hill, then add Beef Basin and Cheese and Raisin to make a substantial meal. For dessert there are Lemonade Springs and Big Rock Candy Mountain, which a Depression-era song popularized as landmarks in a hobo's paradise. Chase everything with postprandial Moonshine Wash, near Robbers Roost, commemorative of Prohibition.

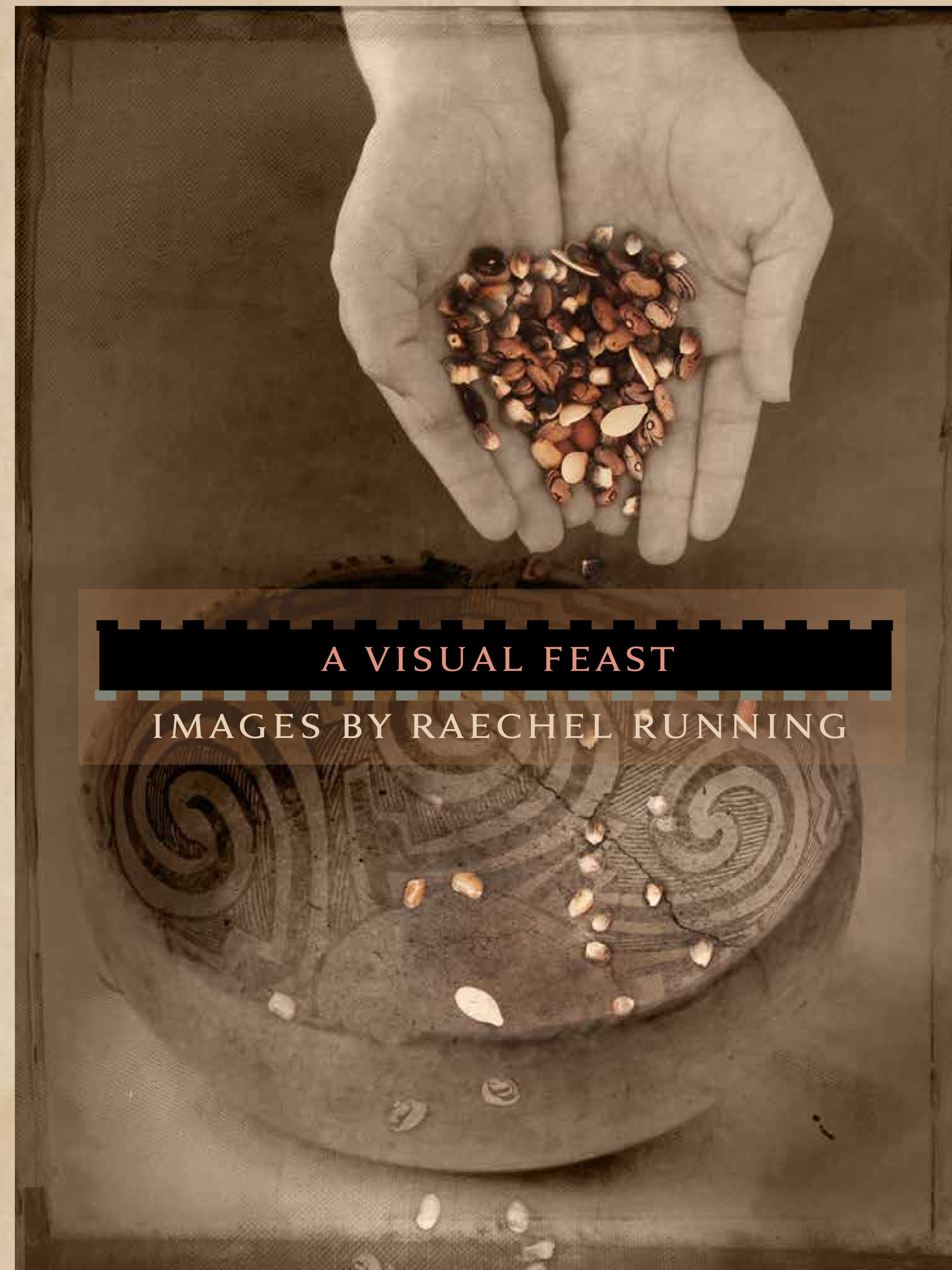
Mudflats. Photo by Michael Collier.

Corn is dried in the sun for future use by Hopi farmer Leslie Koyawena. Photo by Jerry Jacka.

paleo-diets and migrations through isotope analysis. While we grow up, our bodies accumulate chemical elements—carbon, nitrogen, strontium, oxygen—from the foods that we eat and the water we drink, which in turn carry mineral traces of the specific soils from which they sprang. These fingerprints of place stay with us throughout life and even afterward, for a while, locked in our skeletons. We hold the places that first sustained us, just as we hold our memories. We are not only what we eat but also where we eat.

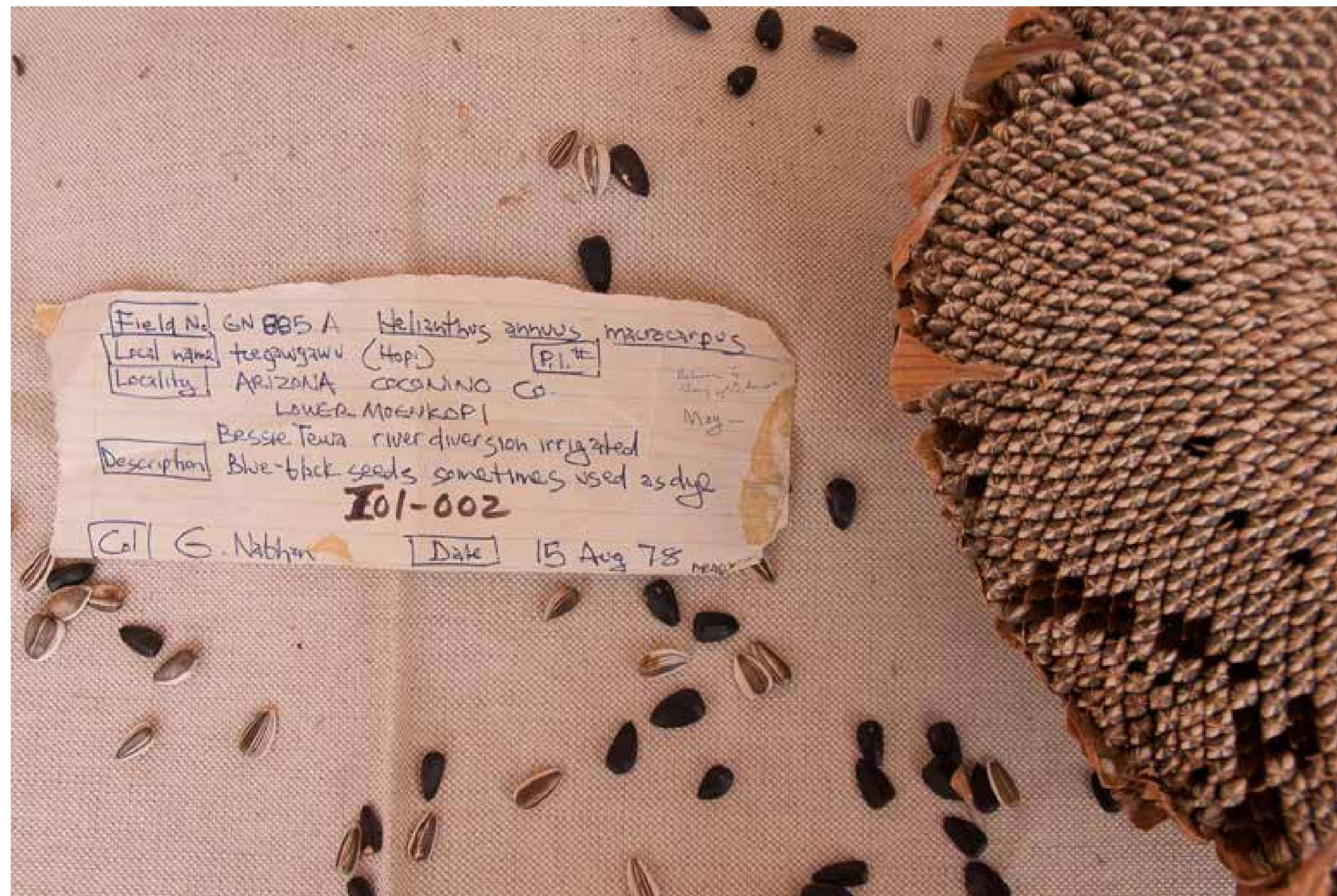
Despite its apparent barrenness, the Plateau provides healthy, vigorous fare. So—*¡Buen apetito! Tuma angwu noonova!* Dig in!

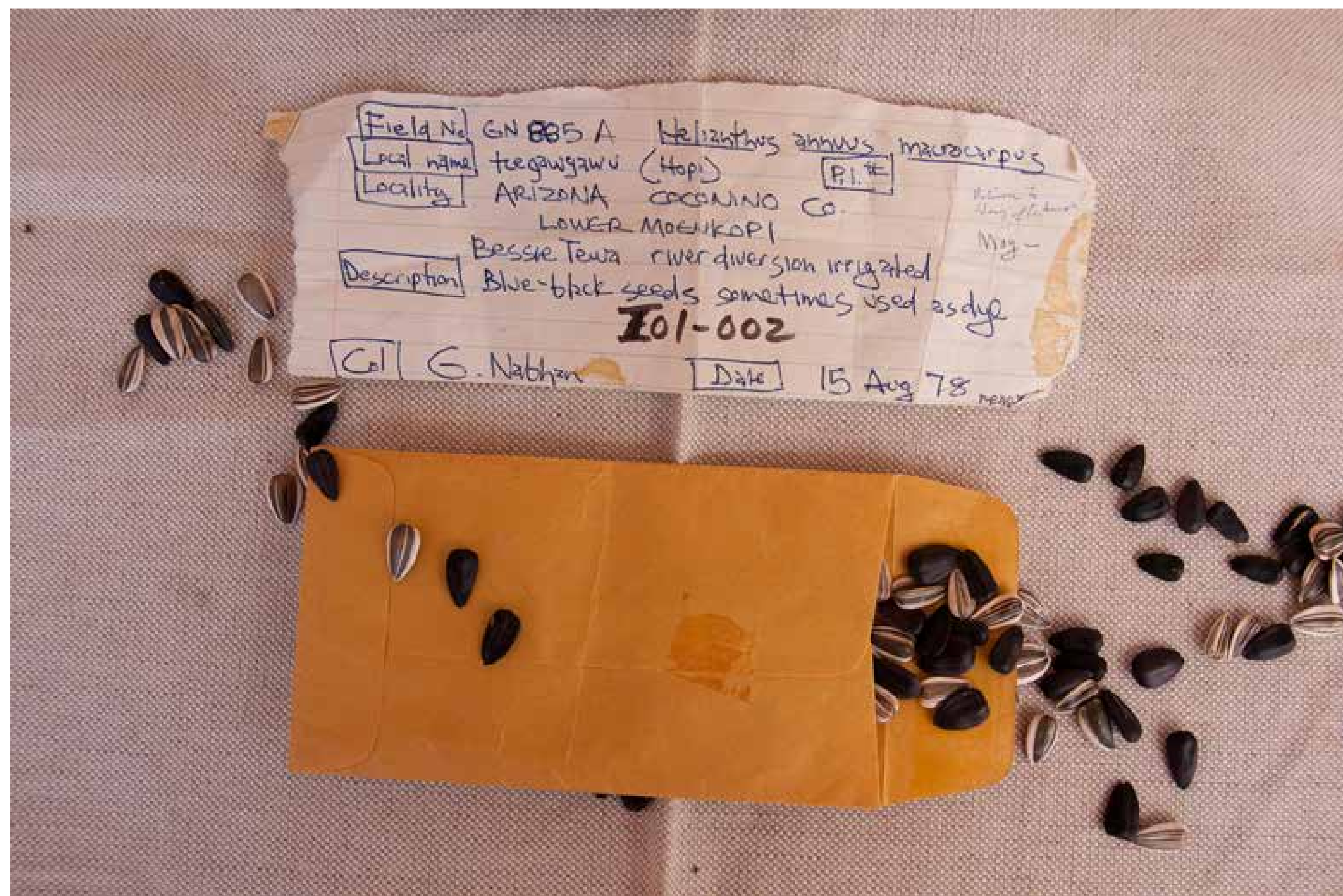
MICHAEL ENGELHARD now lives in Cordova, Alaska, where wild blueberries, fiddleheads, kelp, and smoked salmon pervade his days. He works as a backpacking guide in the Arctic, and there, it is mostly dried chili and oatmeal. Currently researching the cultural history of the polar bear, he has yet to sample the animal's meat.



A VISUAL FEAST

IMAGES BY RAECHEL RUNNING





HISTORIES AND RECIPES

FLAVOR AND CULTURE

JEFF SMEDSTAD

So I am out on my motorcycle heading to Hannagan Meadow Lodge in Alpine, Arizona, and from there to travel down the Coronado Trail in the steps of Spanish explorers. I leave Hannagan early in the morning to begin a breathtaking ride down the eastern border of Arizona, and, while moving through this rugged land, I begin to reflect on food and what it could mean or has meant to this area. I think about the intermingling of Spanish, Indian, and Mexican influences that have shaped the way that I look at food and my state. I'm visualizing a great meal to represent the region, and I think—why not start with nopales salad? That will reflect the land I am looking at and the low cactus that covers much of it. Then follow with lamb in rich red adobo. A low-fuss shank would make great campfire food and he-man eating, and carry the tradition of churro lamb of the area—or even of the wild sheep that would have been more plentiful hundreds of years ago. All mixed with the chiles of Mexico. To end with, I'll offer a slice of tequila-spiked pecan pie, representing the plentiful pecans that grow all over our state, and tequila, the spirit of Mexico. This is a dinner to evoke the Southwest both in flavor and culture—which, of course, can be one and the same when you come to think about it.

Jeff Smedstad is the chef proprieter of the Elote Cafe in Sedona, Arizona, and author of the *Elote Cafe Cookbook.*

Nopales Salad

- 2 cups nopales, shaved of all spines, rinsed, then coated with oil and grilled or broiled until cooked through and slightly browned or charred
- 2 cups or a good handful of field greens
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 1 poblano chile, roasted, peeled, seeded and diced
- 2 pickled jalapeños, sliced
- ½ cup diced red onion
- 1 cup roughly crumbled queso fresco

DRESSING

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

Cut the grilled nopales into strips and chill them. Mix the dressing in a large bowl. Add the nopales and other salad components and mix well. Makes enough for 4 to 6 salads.

Lamb Adobo. Photos by Janise Witt, courtesy of Elote Café.

Lamb Adobo

Years ago while going from market to market in central Mexico I was talking to the ladies in the fondas. As I was talking to one Doña and asking what made her adobo so delicious, she asked how I would make it. After I shared the basics of my recipe she told me I was overcomplicating the sauce and the way to make something better was often to make it simpler. I guess you could call it a lightbulb moment—from that day on I have tried to make food that was simple yet elegant using the best ingredients and giving them a chance to shine.

4 lamb shanks, seasoned with salt and pepper

ADOBO SAUCE

12 garlic cloves
4 cups orange juice
6 ancho chiles clean and stems removed
1 3-inch stick of canela [Mexican cinnamon]
2 teaspoon black pepper
2 teaspoon cumin
2 tablespoon Mexican oregano
2 bay leaves
⅛ teaspoon ground clove
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 tablespoons salt

Put the garlic in a dry saucepan large enough to accommodate all the sauce ingredients. Lightly toast the garlic over medium high heat until lightly browned all over, then add remaining ingredients and simmer until the chiles are softened. Cool slightly and puree until very smooth.

Heat another large pan medium high, add a little oil, and add the lamb shanks. Brown all over—be patient as this is the most important part of making this dish. When they are well browned and smelling irresistible, add the adobo.

Cover and bake at 325˚ for about 4 hours or until fork tender. Scrape away any extra fat on the surface of the dish with a spoon. You can refrigerate them and slowly reheat the next day for supper or serve immediately.

Tequila-spiked Pecan Pie

A little añejo tequila goes a long way towards making this pie memorable. The notes in the tequila enhance the flavors in the pie without making it seem alcoholic.

FOR THE FILLING

1 tablespoon butter
1 cup light corn syrup
½ cup brown sugar
½ cup sugar
4 whole eggs
2 egg yolks
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons añejo tequila
2 cups pecan halves

FOR THE CRUST

½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
1⅓ cups all-purpose unbleached flour
¼ pound butter, room temperature, unsalted
2 ounces ice water

In a small sauté pan, melt the butter and heat until it begins to brown. Set aside to cool slightly. Mix the rest of the filling ingredients with the butter in a large mixing bowl. Set aside and make the crust.

Put the salt, sugar, and flour in a large bowl and mix. Work in the butter with your hands until the mix resembles sand, then add the water and mix just until a dough forms. Set aside at room temp for a bit to let rest. Roll out the dough on a floured surface into a big enough piece to line a pie pan. (I like to fold it into quarters before transfer-ing it to the pan, then unfold.) Lightly press into the pan and trim the edges. I like to leave a little hanging over for a rustic look. Let the pan rest for a bit in the fridge as this will help with shrinkage.

Line the bottom of the pan with the pecans and pour the filling over them. Bake at 350˚ for 45 minutes. When done, it will be browned and a little puffed up from the eggs. Let cool and refrigerate before serving so the filling will hold its shape when you serve the pie.

COLORADO'S WINE COUNTRY

MICHAEL PLYLER

enology = The science that deals with making wine.
viticuluture = Latin *vitis* meaning "wine." Cultivation of grapes, especially for wine.

Wine snobs aren't likely to put Colorado in the same sentence with Napa, Bordeaux, Barolo, and Priorat, but the state now has over 100 wineries, and in 2004 a Colorado Riesling beat out producers from all over the world to be crowned the world's best.

Colorado's wine industry goes back more than a century to 1890. At that time Governor George Crawford planted sixty acres of vines near Palisade in west-central Colorado. Today much of the Colorado wine industry still centers around Palisade and the western slope of the Rocky Mountains on the eastern part of the Colorado Plateau. In 1916 due to Prohibition, the Colorado grape industry all but disappeared, and peaches thrived. Fifty years later the wine growers returned and the fledgling wine industry expanded. In 1990 the state legislature passed the Colorado Wine Industry Development Act forming the Colorado Wine Industry Development Board and it would appear the Colorado wine industry is now here to stay. So much so, that the state Department of Agriculture now has a full-time viticulturist and enologist on staff.

Quite a few varietals are being grown in Colorado. Bordeaux is represented by Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Semillon. Burgundy's Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are here. Rhone weighs in with Syrah, Viognier, Cinsault, and Mourvedre. Spain and Italy's signature grapes, Tempranillo and Sangiovese, are also present.

Particular challenges face those vintners who want to make a go of it in Colorado. The scale of the industry in Colorado is quite small. A test site in Washington state might be larger than the whole acreage in Colorado under vine. Colorado producers are fortunate to produce a few thousand cases of a particular vintage or type instead of the tens of thousands churned out in many producing regions. The other real problem is cold. Vinifera, the main source of wine and table grapes, are very susceptible to early and late freezes and also mid-winter cold. Colorado offers all three.

On Colorado's western slope, at the northern edge of the Colorado Plateau, hot summer days dictate that the grapes cannot thrive without irrigation. The water that irrigates Colorado's vines comes from the Colorado River and its tributary, the Gunnison.

While the vinifera of the western slope rely on waters from the Plateau, there is a small fraction of Colorado's wine industry rooted in its soil. Near Cortez, gateway to Mesa Verde National Park approximately twenty miles from Utah's border, Guy Drew Vineyards grows Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah at elevations ranging between 5,000 and 7,000 feet. Mr. Drew also cultivates Riesling at an elevation of 6,800 feet. All of these vineyards inhabit soil once utilized by Ancestral Puebloans to grow their beans, squash, and corn. So the next time you visit Colorado National Monument and want to reward yourself with a nice meal after a day of hiking, go into Grand Junction and have a robust glass of Cabernet or Syrah to accompany your Colorado elk steak or free range lamb.

Photo by Michael Plyler.

NEW NATIVE AMERICAN FOOD

LOIS ELLEN FRANK

Food represents the region where it is prepared, and also the identity of those who prepare it. Chefs play an important role in defining the cuisines of their regions. In the Southwest that cuisine has a history closely tied to the people and the land. The landscape is a virtual foodscape filled with edible plants and local *terroir.* I personally know each farm I buy food from and the farmers who grow and harvest it. However, I am not solely a "locavore." The Native American cultures of the region I cook in have always had extensive trade routes and traded for foods with other tribes outside their local radius.

We know this through oral traditions and indigenous knowledge been passed down from generation to generation, today called traditional ecological knowledge, but we also now know it through western science. In 2009, for example, Drs. Patricia Crown and W. Jeffrey Hurst at the University of New Mexico used an analysis of ceramics from Pueblo Bonito, the largest site in northwest New Mexico's Chaco Canyon, to document for the first time the presence of theobromine. This marker for *Theobroma cacao,* or chocolate, indicated that cacao was consumed in the American Southwest around 1000 to 1125, further proof of millennia-old and highly extensive trade routes. Thus, chocolate was in Chaco Canyon a thousand years ago. People from what is now Mexico walked it here to trade for ingredients with tribes of the Southwest. Extensive research on trade routes has allowed me to construct menus that include many of the important foods traded throughout this rich and diverse culinary history.

Plants play an important role in my dishes. Many are what people today would call vegan, although I prefer the term "plant-based" as it is more aligned with Native American cuisine. Plants made up almost 90 percent of the ancestral diet before the Spanish entered the region. Foods included the well-known "three sisters"—corn, beans, and squash—as well as chiles, tomatoes, and other plants. When meat was available it was revered and typically eaten in small amounts as each successful hunt had to feed the entire community.

I like to begin my meals with a soup or stew using plants. One of my favorites is a tri-color hominy (also known in Spanish as *posole*) corn harvest stew. I use locally processed white, blue, and red hominy corn and cook it slowly until it splits open, then add vegetables, which may include zucchini squash, yellow summer squash, fresh tomatoes, onions, and garlic. I season it with azafran (also called Native American saffron or Mexican saffron), which comes from the stamen of the safflower as opposed to the crocus flower, the source for Spanish saffron. It is a comforting, savory dish rich in history and a delicious starter to any meal.

Hominy, above, and chokecherries, facing page. Photos by Lois Ellen Frank, Ph.D.

Following this course might be a farmer's market salad featuring local cultivated and wild greens with New Mexico red chile, spicy pecans, amaranth micro greens, heirloom tomatoes, and other seasonal vegetables. My favorite salad dressing is made using fresh herbs infused with a locally produced raspberry jam vinaigrette available at the farmer's market.

For the entrée course, I would prepare a bison-stuffed New Mexico green chile seasoned with onions, garlic, tomatoes, and fresh tarragon from the garden. Tarragon is a species of perennial herb in the family *Asteraceae.* The sub-species *Artemisia dracunculus var. sativa* is cultivated for use of the leaves as an aromatic culinary herb. It is very close to a wild variety that grows throughout the Southwest. I serve this stuffed chile with a garden tomato sauce and herb-roasted fingerling potatoes grown locally.

For my final course—dessert—I like to marry together the pine nut, used for millennia by the Pueblo people of this region, with dark chocolate. This weaves together an important local nut (the pine nut has almost 2000 calories per pound and almost every amino acid known to sustain human life) with the chocolate that was brought into this region via trade routes. I make these two ingredients into a flourless torte and serve it with a syrup made from hand-harvested prickly pear cactus fruit, a chokecherry syrup, and a peach sauce (peaches were brought into this region by the Spanish and now are an important crop to many of the southwestern tribes).

My guests will leave having eaten their way through a history of the Southwest and will be satisfied and fulfilled by ancestral foods that have been part of this landscape for thousands of years and that honor the age-old creative interchange between people.

LOIS ELLEN FRANK, PH.D. is a Native American Kiowa chef and the proprietor of Red Mesa Cuisine catering company in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is an advocate of local foods and a member of the Farm to Restaurant program highlighting seasonal organic foods grown locally.