
The Weyrhall, the Kitchens, and Meals at the Weyr

*from materials from Lynne Brigant, Joe Hill, Meg King, Ellen Million, Smitty, Ron Swartzendruber and Whitney Ware; compiled by Whitney Ware
August 2003 edition*

The Weyr community has a population of approximately 1,800 to 2,000 people. Meals for all of those weyrfolk are served in the Weyrhall, where the kitchens are kept busy night and day. The Weyrhall is often considered the social center of the Weyr, since it's where everyone goes for food and drink at any hour of the day or night.

The Weyrhall itself is a large, rectangular building with a kitchen facility adjacent to it. It is an airy chamber with a vaulted roof, with skylighting and towering windows providing as much natural light as possible. At night, glowbaskets throughout the room are opened to provide a nice, warm glow. The wide windows are all easily opened to catch the breeze coming off the sea. When the heat is at its worst, an overhead fan system with palm fans and pulleys run by spit dogs is sometimes employed, helping to provide ventilation necessary to keep the Weyrhall as comfortable as possible.

The Weyrhall is roofed with ceramic tiles; from the air, the east and west facing slopes of the Weyrhall are decorated with a background of black tile, with a broad design of the Weyr's badge, in grey and lavender with the Red Star in crimson.

General mealtimes are held between 6 am – 9 am for breakfast, 11 am – 1 pm for lunch, and 5 pm – 7 pm for dinner. A large brass bell, similar to a church bell, is hung from the top of the Weyrhall, and is rung daily to mark the start of the meal hours. This bell can be heard throughout the housing complexes of the Weyr, and as far south as the upper portions of the WeyrFarm and Feeding Grounds.

Meals at the Weyr are generally served buffet style. Diners pick up a tray, plate, utensils and move along one side of several buffet tables, helping themselves to an array of meal items; all buffet tables serve the same items. Servers can move along behind the table, replacing bowls and platters as they get emptied. Items are kept on ice; one of the regular daily chores for weyrlings, recuperating riders, or retirees is making "ice runs" to supply the Weyr with the ice it needs.

Once diners have their meals, they take their dinner trays to a table of their choice. Tables are long, picnic-style tables with benches for seating, and close to 40 can sit at each table (especially if everyone gets really cozy). Most Wings, including the weyrlings, have their own (unofficial) tables, but seating at those tables isn't required.

Beverage pitchers are provided on a pair of separate tables adjacent to each buffet table. Individual diners may select their own pitcher for use by several of themselves and several others they are seated with; servers regularly work the hall, collecting pitchers, refilling them, and returning them to the beverage tables.

Once diners have finished with a meal, they are required to take their used dishes and trays to a collecting area, scrape leftovers into garbage containers, and stack their dishes for ease of cleaning. During mealtimes, servers regularly carry items from the collection tables back into the kitchens to be cleaned, dried, and reused. At the end of each meal time, clean-up crews descend and clean each table, mop the floor, and perform all necessary sanitation duties.

The sole exception to this routine is the Weyrleaders' table. This long table, set with cushioned chairs, is located on a dais at the forefront of the room. The Weyrleaders and other ranking members of the community take their meals here (unless they choose to sit elsewhere), and are waited upon by serving staff.

The Night Hearth

A night hearth located near the kitchen doors provides hot klah, iced drinks, bread, butter, stew, fruit, and meatrolls twenty-four hours a day, to provide for riders with odd-hour patrols, watches, or errand duties.

The Kitchens

The kitchens of the Weyrhall are carefully run by the Head Cook and are staffed around the clock. It is such a large effort to feed the whole population of the Weyr that the kitchen is a hive of activity from well before dawn to long after midnight. The “kitchens” is actually a collection of necessary baking pits and storage facilities, as well as the actual kitchen portion of the Weyrhall itself.

Ideally, the kitchens should have been constructed of stone for fireproofing, but due to the extremely short period of time in which the Weyr was constructed, the primary construction material was wood, with stone hearths where necessary.

The kitchen itself at the Weyrhall is an airy chamber with sky lights and towering windows that are regularly left open for a cooling breeze. To keep the kitchens as cool as possible, an overhead fan system with palm fans and pulleys run by the spit dogs is sometimes employed, similar to the larger system in the main Weyrhall itself.

The kitchen area of the Weyrhall is considered the meal preparation/clean-up area. Within the kitchen, there is a line of a half dozen large marble-faced worktables where food is cut up and prepared. Wide travel lanes are kept free for easy movement between the different areas within the kitchen, and between the various doors, to avoid collisions (moving large plates of hot food should not be an exercise in agility!).

Large steel sink basins with piped hot and cold water is also available within the kitchen; the whole southern wall of the kitchen consists of a multiple-sink dishwashing station, where a crew of up to 12 struggle to wash and dry fast enough to keep up with the mealtime rush of dirty dishes, which are continuously brought in from the Weyrhall collection tables.

The heat-producing kitchen work, such as baking and cooking, is kept separated from the Weyrhall itself, in an open-walled, shale-roofed rectangular area (marked on the Main map as the “bakery pits” square). Located here are a brick wall of baking ovens, grilling facilities, and the pit ovens. The baking ovens are used primarily for breads and meatrolls. Most meats, fish, and cooked vegetables are grilled. And the pit ovens would be used for roasting herdbeasts such as pigs or halved cows. These pit ovens are similar to the imu ovens of Hawaii; they consist of pits, dug in a variety of sizes, which are lined with rocks. A fire is started; the herdbeast is gutted, cleaned, and onions and a variety of spices are tossed on the meat, and then the carcass is wrapped in leaves to keep in moisture. The pit oven is then covered in sand; the meat is self-basting, and cooks faster than it would roasted another way, and after the carcass is removed, the pit is easily reused.



Food Storage at the Weyr

Baskets of fruits and vegetables and bags of grain arrive daily from the WeyrFarm, to supplement what has been tithed to the Weyr. Carcasses are generally delivered already butchered and cleaned by the Feeding Grounds staff, but additional trimming and carving must be done in the kitchen.

Very little is wasted from the Weyr kitchens. Prepared food which goes uneaten goes to the night hearth, or is put to use in the next meal. Food scraps off plates are dumped into compost baskets, which are in turn taken out to the WeyrFarm for composting or to the Feeding Grounds to provide further nutrition for livestock.

Just to the south of the Weyrhall kitchen is a thick-walled stone building which is the Weyr’s icehouse. Daily deliveries of glacial ice and snow are brought here, as well as the next few days’ worth of perishable food items.



General Weyrhall Menus

One of the jobs performed by the Head Cook and Headwoman is to provide a balanced and wholesome diet for the entire population of the Weyr. Meals are rarely fancy, but always of good quality, and there is a surprising range of seasonal variation.

Breakfast: Porridge is the staple breakfast food at the Weyr. Usually two or three flavors are available; one might be more fruity and another more savory, for instance. Lots of fruit is available; whole, sliced, or as juice. Klah is brewed and served in vast quantities. Meats such as bacon or sausage are also available. Eggs and milk, on the other hand, are not produced in enough quantity to serve every day; these products are generally used in cooking and baking rather than served directly. Often, sweet rolls will be available; Cook Kendi is renowned for her sticky bun recipe.

Lunch: Lunches at the Weyr generally consist of foods that are easy to prepare, so that the cooks can concentrate on dinner. Staples are meatrolls consisting of bread, sliced meat, cheese, vegetables, and so forth. The cooks may prepare a special dish on Threadfall days, to be served to the Flight that is going to fight.

Dinner: Dinner is the main meal at the Weyr. The cooks go to great effort to provide variety; there will usually be two or more different meat dishes, a fish dish, several kinds of vegetables, rolls, etc. Wine is served to the Weyrleaders' table, and is also available to others as well, but not of the same quality.



Tropics, Humidity, and the Keeping Things Clean...

The Kadanzer Weyr has been rebuilt in a tropical region, where humidity is high year-around. Weather is often rainy and damp, which means the Weyr must struggle against mold. To fight moisture, the weyr staff need to mop a lot. In the Weyrhall and the kitchens, this means that tables are not allowed to butt up against walls (which provides a joint that holds flour/crud and contributes to mold). Work tables within the kitchen are topped with marble or steel, allowing staff to slosh buckets of water and cleaning solution over them daily. The floors of both the kitchen and the Weyrhall itself have floor drains to exterior French drains, allowing the cleaning staff to hot mop the facilities regularly three times a day (after each meal shift).



Kitchen Staff & Servers

The kitchens at the Weyr would not be able to function if the operation there weren't efficient and highly organized. Head Cook Farny is in charge of the kitchens during the day shift, and her second Kendi is in charge of the kitchens during the night shift.

To cook effectively for such a large number of people, work stations and order are a necessity. Everyone who works in the kitchens is given a clear task, and is expected to stay in their assigned work position. If the head cook herself is not present to oversee the operations in the kitchen, senior staff members are left in charge. The women who staff the kitchens have Turns of experience at their tasks, and can swap stations at need. For the Weyr community to remain fed, the entire team must function together as smoothly as clockwork. Despite the highly organized nature, however, the atmosphere in the kitchens is generally cheerful and relaxed. The majority of the staff have been doing this work every day for Turns, and the process itself is routine.

Work shifts in the kitchen begin well before dawn, and the shifts can number more than two dozen women. Weyrbrats and candidates are regularly scheduled for work shifts as supplementary labor, often composing the

service and clean-up teams. Much of the actual baking takes place at night, and menus are regularly planned days in advance, in order to ensure that ingredients are stocked, and that supplies are kept fresh and well-rotated.

Visitors to the kitchens (particularly weyrbrats looking to swipe a treat, or dragonriders who haven't quite outgrown suchs weyrbrat habits) are sent packing with a good-natured swat or – more often than not – drafted on the spot for an hour or so's help addressing some particularly onerous chore.



Hatching Feasts and Other Celebrations

While the Weyrhall has been constructed to hold nearly the entire population of the Weyr at one time, during Hatching Feasts and other celebrations, cramming everyone under one roof simply isn't reasonable. During Hatching Feasts, meals are still served buffet style, but trestle tables are placed around the Gather Square outside, where many weyrfolk and guests choose to sit in order to enjoy the Gather Square dancing. Weyrbrats are kept busy keeping dirty dishes flowing back to the Weyr, clean dishes flowing back out, and the buffet tables stocked. Seating is still provided in the Weyrhall, and several additional tables are set up alongside the Weyrleaders' dais, where visiting guests of rank are waited upon by freshly groomed servers.



The Kitchens, Firelizards, and other Pets

While well-behaved firelizards are allowed within the Weyrhall, the kitchens themselves is considered off-limit to the creatures, and owners whose firelizards stray will be taken to firm task by the Headwoman herself. Weyrfolk are not welcome to feed their pets in the Weyrhall off their own plates, although certainly at times this is done. Instead, since all firelizard owners must feed their animals, a large amount of meat scraps are saved daily for feeding firelizards, and are available at the kitchens. Note: much of these scraps come directly from the Feeding Grounds, where livestock are butchered, cleaned, and carved in advance of the kitchens' use. Also, there are green mating flights every day. One a herdbeast is killed and blooded by a mating female dragon, the Feeding Grounds staff will attempt to save as much of the meat as reasonable for human consumption. The rest becomes firelizard scraps – and a good many firelizards get their daily meal fresh from the Feeding Grounds itself.

The kitchens does not provide food for other types of pets. Providing for pet dogs, cats, tunnelsnakes, etc. is considered the responsibility of their owners.