

# The Flavors of Idaho's Trailing of the Sheep Festival

BY ELISA PARHAD

Potatoes have long been the star commodity of Idaho, celebrated in potato ice cream, the Idaho Potato Museum and even a potato shaped vacation rental. But another homegrown Idaho food is hiding in its Russet-shaped shadow: Lamb.

Last October, I headed to Sun Valley to learn more about this hidden heritage at the annual Trailing of the Sheep Festival. Events began on a Thursday and culminated in 1,500 sheep trekking through Ketchum's main thoroughfare on Sunday. In between are cooking classes, lamb tastings, a farm-to-table dinner, storytelling, a Folk Life Festival, cultural performances and sheepdog trials.

I had come with the aim to taste my way through this celebration of sheep. I left with so much more than a bevy of flavors, including a new dimension to a mountain resort area largely known as a posh winter playground and legendary stomping ground for Ernest Hemingway. Little did I know that long before the skiers and literati came along, Scottish and Basque shepherds were crisscrossing these mountains along with their sheep.







My time begins with roasting a mixture of spices at a sold-out cooking class in Hailey, a charming town just south of Ketchum. Sydney Liepshutz, a private chef in Sun Valley, shows a group of us tips and tricks to create Fahsah Saltah, a Yemeni lamb-based stew topped with zhoug, a spice-laden green sauce with cilantro, parsley, peppers and garlic. We talk knife sharpening, food storage and meal planning, as well as Middle Eastern spices and how to pull the flavors from lamb bones. As the stew simmered, our class hand-patted dough into flatbreads that filled the room with a comforting, yeasty aroma.

On Thursday evening I head to the Farm-to-Fork Dinner in a beautifully remote venue cradled in between golden hills. This is a chance to celebrate community, rub elbows with the farmers and ranchers and enjoy the bounty of the land—local

pea shoots, beets, blueberries, potatoes (of course), as well as wine from Scoria Vineyards and lamb from the Peavey family's Flat Top Ranch. It is the sheep from this ranch that have summered in the mountains and will head down through the Ketchum streets to winter in southern pastures. I listen intently to the Peavey family matriarch sitting next to me as she offered tidbits of life on the ranch. A New Yorker by birth—and rancher by marriage—Diane Peavey is half the reason we are here. Stories of life on the range are her passion, told through years on a radio show, in her memoir, "Bitterbrush Country," and in the founding of the Trailing of the Sheep Festival.

I hear from her again at the Sheep Tales Gathering in Ketchum on Saturday night, along with several other females in the business. Even after stories of lambkin, targeted grazing and a ewe named Honey Sue, I wasn't lambded out yet. I met with friends for dinner a few blocks away at the classy but casual Enoteca, where a rack of lamb eased me into the evening.

More flavors run rampant throughout the town of Ketchum at the The Love of Lamb event, where local businesses showcase innovation and creativity in a wide range of lamb dishes. It's a spirited and lively evening where the whole community comes out to savor the likes of lamb empanadas, curried lamb, lamb tagine, lamb biryani and Peruvian lamb stew, among so much more.

After a week immersed in the flavors and history of sheep ranching in the West, it won't just be potatoes that come to mind when I think of the Gem State, but the delights and versatility of Idaho Lamb.

The Trailing of the Sheep Festival is an annual event held in October; learn more at [trailingofthesheep.org](http://trailingofthesheep.org). Plan your stay at [visitsunvalley.com](http://visitsunvalley.com).