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The First Sign of Spring Arrives with the Ramp

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Annual Ramp Tramp Festival at Greasy Creek April 21-23, 2005.

For over 40 years the Polk County Ramp Tramp Festival has been held atop Big Frog Mountain in Polk County, Tennessee and has become a tradition that combines a unique flavored meal, bluegrass music, family and fellowship. In past years participants would gather to hike up Big Frog Mountain, located in the Cherokee National Forest in East Tennessee. They would then spend part of the day "tramping" up the side of Big Frog Mountain to dig up ramps to cook. Today the Ramp Tramp has become an on site festival when it was moved to the 4-H Camp in the Greasy Creek Community. Almost 2000 people come to enjoy the Ramp Lunch prepared at the 4-H Camp each year, but some still enjoy "tramping" up the mountain to dig "a mess of ramps" as a symbol of the coming of spring.

A ramp is a wild plant that grows in mountainous regions in the eastern United States and is a member of the lily family. Ramps range naturally from Canada to North Georgia and west to Missouri and Minnesota. In Southern Appalachian, ramps are found in rich moist cove hardwood forests, and prefer elevations above 3500 feet. They are one of the first edible forest products to emerge after a long winter, and are only available for about two months each year. Its flat leaves grow from the ground in the spring and then die. Later, the plant has flowering stems with greenish white flowers and that's the part that's picked, cooked and eaten. Early European settlers to the Appalachian Mountains learned about ramps from the Native Americans, who used them for medicinal and culinary purposes.

Ramps are an acquired taste: the flavor has been described as similar to leeks, scallions or garlic. While people may not agree on the exact flavor, everyone agrees that partaking of ramps is a strong experience. Ramps are prepared as one would normally fix green onions. They can be cooked with Pokeweed or fried with bacon, adding eggs at the proper time. Ramps are also cooked with brown hash potatoes. These are all skillet dishes and are not for low-calories diets. Ramps can also be added to salads, put into hamburgers raw or in any other way that one could use the uncooked green onion. Ramps taste like an onion and leave a strong odor to the breath when eaten raw. At the Polk County Ramp Tramp they are cooked and served with scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, streaked meat, white beans and cornbread, all enjoyed to some of the best bluegrass music found in the region. For more information contact the Polk County Agricultural Extension Service at 423-338-4503.

Schedule of Events:

Digging the Ramps - Thursday, April 21st.

Put on your hiking boots and hike into the mountains and help start the festival by participating in the dig. This is an all day event. Meet at the Polk County Courthouse at 8:00 AM both days and lunch will be provided. Reserve your digging spot by calling the Polk County Extension Service at 423-338-4503.

Preparing the Ramps - Friday, April 22nd.

After digging the ramps volunteers will be needed to clean them in preparation for the festival meal. From 10:00 AM till 3:00 PM, volunteers will enjoy fun and fellowship while the ramps are cleaned and cornbread is prepared. This takes place at the Polk County 4-H Camp in Greasy Creek community. At 7:00 PM you can enjoy bluegrass music while you consume a bowl of white beans, cornbread and raw ramps.

The Ramp Tramp Festival - Saturday, April 23rd.

Spend the day enjoying bluegrass music and old time fellowship while enjoying a meal of fried ramps in eggs, fried potatoes, streaked meat, white beans and corn bread. 10:00 AM Flag raising ceremony by the Polk County Veterans, 10:00 AM- 2:00 PM Ramp Lunch and 12:00 noon welcome by US Forest Service Ranger and Polk County Executive, Awards for oldest, youngest, largest family, and the one traveling farthest to attend.