

CUTHA'S CHRONICLES

Anglo-Saxon Adventures

Eala! Hello!



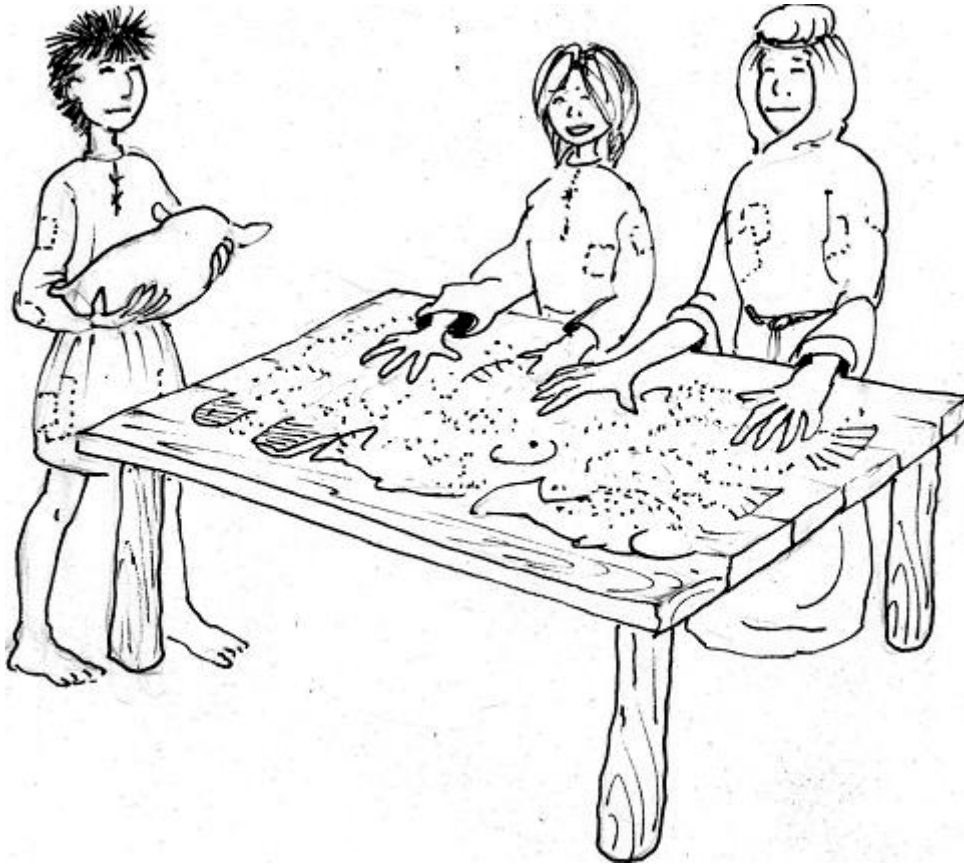
Do you like *salt*?

We use a lot of salt on the farm:

in our cooking, to make our food taste good...

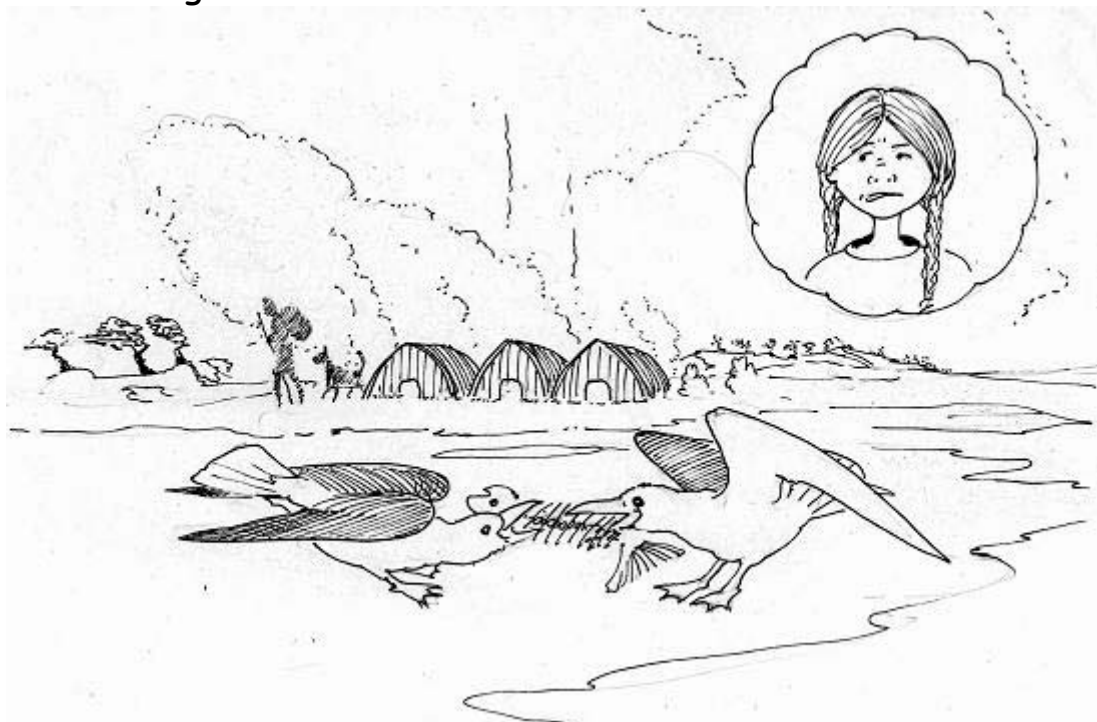
...and especially to help keep our food fresh.

Meat and fish which has been pickled in salt will keep for months — or even years!.

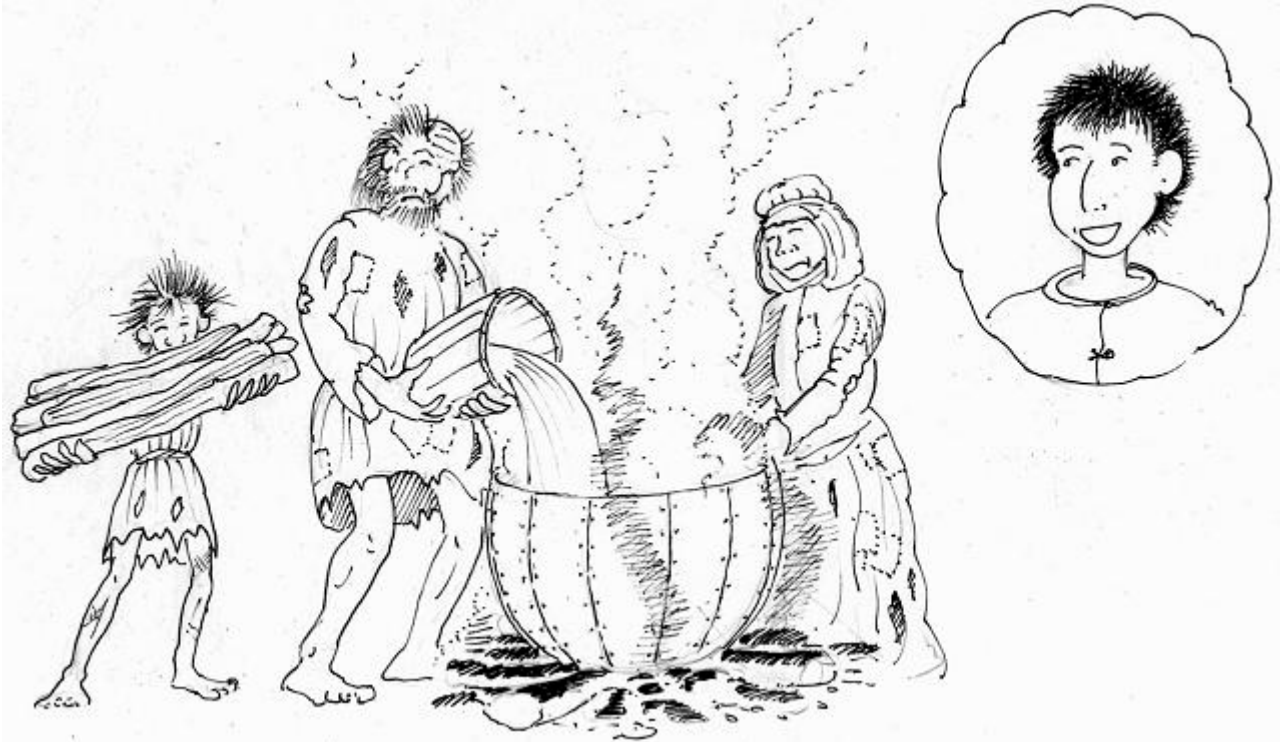


We can't make salt on the farm, though - we have to buy it from the *saltærn*.

The *saltærn* is a very smelly, dirty place. But it is a long way away, down by the sea. It belongs to our lord the Earl.



To make salt you start by boiling sea-water. It takes a lot of wood...



When the water has boiled away, there will be crystals of salt — but they will be dirty and full of sand.

They need to be washed in fresh water, and the water has to be boiled again, over and over.

Then the Earl's *Reeve* can sell us good, clean salt to use on the farm...



People in Anglo-Saxon times had no refrigerators or freezers to help keep their food fresh. This was a particular problem in the autumn, as all the farm animals which could not be fed over the coming winter would be slaughtered for their meat. In order to stop the meat from going bad it had to be preserved — and salt was the best way of doing this.

Sometimes meat would be lightly rubbed with salt, then dried, and smoked over a fire. This method of preserving food is still used today, and we call the result “jerky” or “biltongs.” You may be able to find some in your local supermarket. The meat is very tough and chewy.

Other meat would first be soaked for several days in *brine* (very salty water) then packed into barrels between layers of salt. This kept it from going bad — but meant that it was too salty to eat as it was. Salted meat would need to be soaked for some time in fresh water before it could be cooked and eaten.

Salt was made at places called *saltærns* (*ærn* means something like “factory”). Many of these were by the sea shore, but they could also be on the tidal parts of rivers or in places where there were salt springs. We know just how smelly and dirty they must have been because one famous salt-making town is still called *Droitwich* — meaning “the dirty trading place” — even today.

Because it was so desperately needed, salt was very valuable, and just anybody would not be allowed to own a *saltærn*. The *saltærns* we know about were controlled by rich and important people — the king, bishops, or noblemen like Cutha and Cyne’s earl. Everybody else would have to buy their salt from these rich people.

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