



Big Papa's Country Kitchen BBQ Class Is Worth Taking (4 Videos & Plenty Of Pictures)



Classroom

I have written about BBQ before and used these introductory paragraphs that follow. As an introduction to barbecued food, I don't think it will get any better than this, especially having the permission of the author to paraphrase his original text. I hope you enjoy this introduction to grilled meats, and the documentation of the introductory class on barbecued foods that follows.

Nobody knows how grilled meats entered the food chain. Like coffee, anthropologists can only guess. The following is adapted from a posting of the history of barbecue from AmazingRibs.com, a site dedicated to all things grilled (by permission of the author).

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Ancient man probably happened upon a cooked carcass after a forest fire and liked what they tasted. In good time, it was understood that meats tasted better held over or to the side of their cooking source. Eventually it was common practice for ancient societies to "spit roast", or use meats suspended by wood racks above a heat source. This progressed to the Iron Age, where "gridirons" or the progenitors of grill "grates" were used in ancient Greece. It was eventually realized that smoked meats were an excellent method of preservation, like salting or drying.

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There have been other influences from Asia (Tandoor ovens) and Japan (Kamado urns), both ceramic cooking ovens heated by an open flame. In the middle ages spit roasting was widely used in Europe, but the explorations of the “New World” by Spain really brought barbecue to the United States. The introduction of pigs into the “New World” in addition to Native Indian migration brought barbecue, originally called barbacoa through a misunderstanding of Native Indian language by the Spaniards, into North America. Further colonization by the Spanish and Indians brought barbecue into the Gulf States and the lower Eastern Seaboard of the United States. Migration up the Mississippi River brought this technology northward. Smokehouses and pit barbecues started to proliferate, the latter becoming a popular social gathering in the middle to late 19th century.

The home barbecue cook really took off with the mass marketing of charcoal by the Kingsford Company in the early part of the 20th century. In the middle of the 20th century, portable barbecues like Hibachis and Weber kettle grills started to be mass marketed bringing portable charcoal barbecue to the home cook. Gas barbecues followed, and the rest is history! For those interested in a more complete accounting of the history of barbecue, go [Here](#).



*Dana Hillis, proprietor & instructor at Big Papas Country
Kitchen*

A companion and I recently attended an introductory class on barbecue taught by Dana Hillis (Dana), proprietor of [Big Papa's Country Kitchen](#) (BP). Dana also has a catering business and frequents many of the farmer's markets locally. The classroom was held in Dana's storage facility/garage that he had built. Dana is by trade a general contractor.

In terms of grills, there were a number of different setups. There were kettle, ceramic and barrel grills, all used for different purposes. For a more complete description, go [Here](#). Smokers were also used, and here is a bit of Information on them.

There were about twenty of us attending. Before we started to delve into the meat (and potatoes) of this BBQ class, Dana had an interesting anecdote about BBQ competitions. I had asked him whether he had won money or just recognition for his BBQ competitions. Although he told me he had been awarded over \$100,000 in prize money over the years, the following video says it all. It is more a labor of love.

We learned many basic principles of BBQ cooking. The first really started off before the beginning of the class. This was about lighting charcoal.

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Lighting the Charcoal

John Sweeney, a pit master for Michigan that was involved with Dana in BBQ, used a propane powered lawn and leaf burner to light the charcoal. When I asked him why he used the equivalent of a flamethrower to do this he answered, “it gets the job done.” There was no ambiguity there!

We made a number of foods on the BBQ, including meats, sides and desserts. One of the first things made was chicken wings, and there were cooked on a rack known as a [Chicken Flipper](#) on Meadow Creek grills. This is a rack that holds the wings, or anything else for that matter, similar to a fish basket for the grill. Later, slices of marinated pork loin were also cooked.

It was funny, John had said if you are a BBQ cook, there was no need to smoke. I think he was right!

Here was the finished product, unbelievably delicious.

Next was a stuffed butterflied pork loin, similar to a [Porchetta](#). Dana emphasized this was a very economical cut of meat, with five pounds or so going for about \$15.00. The loin is butterflied, or laid flat, and stuffed with almost anything leftover you can find in your fridge, tied shut and barbecued. Here is a time-lapse presentation.

We also learned how to put racks of ribs on a Weber rotisserie. I would never have thought of this before this class.



Smoked Rotisserie Ribs

Here was the end result, a beautiful presentation with flavor to match. The work of a true BBQ champion.

You may notice that there is a small ring of charcoal around the outer perimeter of the grill. The coals are started on one side and the adjacent coals are lit in the process, following the perimeter of the grill. This is a great way to smoke meats under low heat.

One of the highlights of the class was how to make what Dana called a “fatty”, weaved bacon stuffed with cheese, vegetables and meats.



“Fatty” creating the shell

Here is the initial weave of bacon.

The “fatty” was amazing and I can tell you that you will not find this on a commercial BBQ truck anywhere!

There were also alternative preparations of ribs, in addition to sides and desserts.

As we queued up for the fruits of Dana’s labors, we were treated to sides such as BBQ onion casserole and cole slaw with pickles, ranch dressing and siracha.

In addition to other barbecued meats, we also sampled a number of barbecued desserts made over coals in a dutch oven.

Dutch oven cooking was explained by the amount of coals needed on the top and bottom of the oven in relation to the size of the oven and the temperature needed. Really good, and simple stuff.



BBQ Pineapple Upside Down Cake

We ended up with a couple desserts. I thought the pineapple upside down cake exceptional. All from a BBQ Dutch oven.

We made many other meats and sides, but I will leave the rest for those that take this class. The cost of the class may seem a bit expensive, and is \$80.00 per person. However, it is six hours and covers a lot of ground with many types of food and barbecue scenarios.

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There is also so much food, with leftovers you could feed two people for two or three days. I can't recommend this class highly enough. It is engaging and unique and will kick your BBQ "savvy" up a notch or two.

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Dana Hillis and crew are probably some of the most informative and friendly barbecue cooks you will ever encounter. Additionally, should there be any question of Mr. Hillis's barbecue abilities, here a short display of trophies he has won.

This was a fun day out and a really entertaining and excellent class. This time of year, it may be a good Christmas present for that budding BBQ chef. There will be another [Class](#) on January 20, 2019 and it is highly recommended. It's a wrap for another post on Forks.

Big Papa's Country Kitchen

2731 2nd St. NE.

Naples, FL 34120

(239)340-8635

[Big Papa's Country Kitchen Website](#)

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Peter Horan, [Southwest Florida Forks](#), posted on [SouthFloridaReporter.com](#), Dec. 22, 2018

More food reviews on [Southwest Florida Forks](#)