

and stored in large baskets for future use. Usually, the beans (pods and seeds) were ground into a coarse meal and then, by adding water, were transformed into gruel or a cake without cooking. Some cultures are said to have taken the seeds from the pods and ground them into flour called **pinole**, from which bread was actually baked.

Packrat

Wood rats are commonly called Packrats or Trade Rats because they collect various objects and bits of material to deposit in, or use in the construction of, their nests. They are especially fond of small, bright, shiny objects that they will readily confiscate.

It is a popular superstition that the Packrat is a fair businessman, who when he expropriates something, always leaves a replacement that is of equal value. In fact, while carrying one trophy, the rat may see another that is more attractive, and so puts down the first to pick up the second, since it can carry only one item at a time.

Midden

A **packrat midden** is the nest of a pack rat, a small rodent found in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Due to a number of factors, pack rat middens may preserve the materials incorporated into it up to 40,000 years. Because of this, the middens may be analyzed to reconstruct the environment around the midden when it was built, and comparisons between middens allow a record of vegetative and climate change to be built. Examinations and comparisons of pack rat middens have largely supplanted pollen records as a method of study in the regions where they are available.

Cactus Candy

Don't worry! No prickly thorns will stick your tongue if you eat cactus candy. The ingredients, including juice from the Prickly Pear cactus, are hand-mixed to create this delightful desert candy! The candy has a fruity flavor.

Sahara

The **Sahara** is the world's largest hot desert, and second largest desert after Antarctica at over 9,000,000 km² (3,500,000 mi²), almost as large as the United States. The Sahara is located in Northern Africa and is 2.5 million years old.

READER 5: Once upon a time when javelinas could whistle and pots could talk, there was a poor, hungry desert couple.

READER 4: The man and wife lived in a dusty cabana and kept one skinny collared peccary in a nearby pen.

READER 3: Now, the house was dusty because the husband and wife spent all their time trying to put food on the table. They had no time to clean.

READER 1: And the peccary was skinny because there were rarely any leftovers in the kitchen.

READER 4: One day, the wife went out to her garden to find one ear of corn and nothing else! That was when the husband decided to sell the skinny peccary. As he led the peccary to market, he thought to himself,

**HUSBAND:
(READER 2)** "Nobody will be interested in buying anything as skinny as this peccary!"

READER 5: And he was right, nobody was. Near the end of the day, however, a funny looking dwarf approached the husband and offered to trade the skinny peccary for a cooking pot made from a hollowed-out barrel cactus. The husband considered the offer, but finally answered,

**HUSBAND:
(READER 2)** "No thanks. Don't really need a cooking pot. Have nothing to cook."

READER 4: But the dwarf persisted. He argued,

READER 1/DWARF: "I may be small and ugly, but I'm certainly capable of caring for a skinny peccary! I've wanted one all my life. Want to teach it to whistle 'Happy Birthday To You'. Oh, did I mention this cactus pot can talk and its owner will be blessed with good fortune?"

READER 4: Finally, the husband traded the peccary for the cactus pot and went home.

READER 3: His wife was not pleased. She knitted her brow, wrinkled her nose, and shouted,

WIFE: "Good fortune indeed! What? From this prickly old pot?"

READER 3: She carefully took the pot to the kitchen and set it on the table. Then she took some hot stones from the fireplace and placed them in the pot. Finally she added the ear of corn and it filled the pot to the very top.

READER 2: It was then that the pot started to make strange noises. The noises grew louder and louder and louder until finally the pot cried out,

POT: "I'm a fast skippin' pot
That's what I be.
I must skip so

ALL: SET ME FREE!"

READER 1: The wife considered the situation for a moment, then replied,

WIFE: "Well, if you must, you must. Go ahead and skip!"

READER 1: The pot jumped off the kitchen table, skipped around the kitchen and right out the door. As the pot passed by, the wife grabbed the ear of corn and hung on to it tightly.

WIFE: "Wait a minute!"

READER 1: cried the wife,

WIFE: "Where are you going?"

READER 5: But it was too late. The pot had disappeared. The fast skippin' pot skipped up canyon and down wash until it skipped right into a coyote's den. A coyote mother was busy trying to stuff dried mesquite pods into a very small basket, and when she saw the pot she cried,

READER 3/COYOTE: "Oh for goodness sake, this is just the size pot I need for storing my pods. What amazing luck!"

READER 4: The pot dumped the rocks and the coyote began to fill the pot with pods. She filled the pot to the very top.

READER 2: Then again, the pot started to make strange noises. The noises grew louder and louder and louder until finally the pot cried out,

POT: "I'm a fast skippin' pot
That's what I be.
I must skip so

ALL: SET ME FREE!"

- READER 1:** The coyote considered the situation for a moment, then replied,
- READER 3/COYOTE:** "So skip! Never let it be said I stopped a pot from skipping when it was really important. Besides, my pods are now safely tucked away."
- READER 5:** The pot skipped around the den and right out the opening.
- READER 3/COYOTE:** "Stop!"
- READER 5:** cried the coyote, but it was too late. The pot had disappeared.
- READER 4:** The pot skipped down wash and up canyon right back to the dusty house where the husband and wife examined the mesquite pods. Then the wife said,
- WIFE:** "Good fortune, indeed!"
- READER 3:** She took the pods to the kitchen. The husband noticed leftover bits of pod in the bottom of the pot and decided to give the pot a quick scrub. He began to dump water into the pot and filled the pot to the very top.
- READER 2:** But again, the pot started to make strange noises. The noises grew louder, and louder, and louder until finally the pot cried out,
- POT:** "I'm a fast skippin' pot
That's what I be.
I must skip so

- ALL:** SET ME FREE!"
- READER 1:** The wife returned and, remembering what had happened last time, smiled and said,
- WIFE:** "By all means, be my guest. Skip!"
- READER 5:** The pot skipped once around the yard and was gone. It skipped up canyon and down wash until it skipped right into a barn owl's barn. The owl was busy sleeping, but he awoke and when he saw the pot he cried,
- READER 4/OWL:** "Just what I have been looking for! This is just the size pot in which to build a nest and lay some eggs"
- READER 3:** The pot dumped what was left of the water, and the barn owl quickly built a nest inside. Next she laid some eggs and filled the pot to the very top.
- READER 2:** Then the pot began to make strange noises. The noises grew louder and louder and louder until finally the pot cried out,
- POT:** "I'm a fast skippin' pot
That's what I be.
I must skip so
- ALL:** SET ME FREE!"
- READER 1:** The owl considered the situation for a moment, then replied,

READER 4/OWL: "Good idea. But you're not going anywhere without me. I'll lead the way."

READER 5: The pot skipped around the barn and right out the door. The owl flew on ahead. But the pot did not follow the owl. The confused owl saw what was happening and shouted,

READER 4/OWL: "You're going the wrong way!"

READER 3: But it was too late. The pot had disappeared. The pot skipped down wash and up canyon right back to the dusty house where it met the husband and wife in the front yard. The husband carefully lifted the nest from the pot and his wife collected the eggs in her apron. Then the wife said,

WIFE: "Good fortune, indeed! It's time for scrambled owl eggs.

READER 2: The wife went to the kitchen and scrambled the eggs. Then she and her husband sat down to a satisfying meal of eggs and pinole flour biscuits. The biscuit flour had been made from the mesquite pods.

After the meal, the husband again tried to wash the pot. He filled the pot with water to the very and the pot started to make strange noises. The noises grew louder and louder and louder until finally the pot cried out,

POT: "I'm a fast skippin' pot,
That's what I be.
I must skip so