

References to Food in *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*: Isabella Bird's Response to the "Food Question"

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Introduction

This study is an examination of references to food contained within the forty-four letters which comprise *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*¹⁾ (henceforth, *Unbeaten Tracks*), the published account of Isabella Bird's journey from Tokyo to Hokkaido in 1878. Early on in her detailed account, during the period when Bird had newly arrived in Japan and was making preparations for her expedition, Bird refers to receiving the advice that the "Food Question" is of prime importance for travellers in Japan.

What Bird calls the "Food Question" can be interpreted as being the question of how a non-Japanese traveller could be expected to survive on a Japanese diet. The Westerners that Bird consults in Tokyo and Yokohama in advance of her departure assure her of the gravity of this problem, and the received wisdom is that a Western traveller would find life unbearable without taking with him sufficient dietary staples of a Western diet. Bird elects to disregard the advice of her Western acquaintances in favour of the convenience of travelling light and takes with her only a few small packages of provisions.

This study will examine Bird's experiences relating to food, dining, and meals which are mentioned in *Unbeaten Tracks*. The study will also introduce a table of the language used by Bird to describe Japanese food. Finally, there will be a discussion about whether Bird found a satisfactory answer to the "Food Question" and what her experiences indicate about the general attitude of Westerners to Japanese food in Meiji era Japan.

1. Background

Isabella Bird (1831~1904) arrived in Japan in 1878 hoping that the novelty of travel in a largely unknown country would act as a health cure for a malaise of which specific details are not provided in *Unbeaten Tracks*. Bird was forty-seven at the

time of her arrival in Japan, but she was certainly not looking for a rest cure. Born in England, Bird had previously visited Australia, Hawaii and the Colorado Rockies, and she decided to go to Japan with the intention of making an explorative journey along the routes which, at that time, were almost completely unknown to the Westerners concentrated around the main treaty ports of Yokohama and Kobe.

Unbeaten Tracks is the record Bird made of her journey from Tokyo to Hokkaido by means of these byways. The book takes the form of letters written almost daily to her sister back home in Britain and those letters record Bird's progress as she travelled with only one Japanese male servant as a constant companion, translator, and guide. Bird's letters contain detailed descriptions of the architecture, culture, daily life, scenery, and social conditions she observed in 1878, in addition to her tales of the various incidents which she encountered along the way. Although food is certainly not a preoccupation for Bird, and is customarily only mentioned by her in passing, *Unbeaten Tracks* includes enough references to food for the modern reader to develop an appreciation of the limited food which was available to her during her travels and the privations which she had to endure.

2. Analysis: Chronological Examination of Bird's Experiences Regarding Food

2-1 Early Experiences: Tokyo to Nikko

Upon arrival at Yokohama, which according to Bird 'does not improve on further acquaintance,' food is not mentioned as being an immediate problem. Bird's first three letters contain no references to food at all, and this is probably due to her spending her time with other Britons and Westerners, and either staying at their homes or in her hotel which she mentions is run by 'a Frenchman.' On the contrary, in Letter I (May 21) Bird recounts that at a meeting with the acting British consul, a Mr. Wilkinson, she was informed that,

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'legions of fleas and the miserable horses are the great drawbacks of Japanese travelling.' Bird comments that 'everybody else' had made similar comments, so it seems that, initially, at least, food was not a primary concern. Perhaps, Bird's Western acquaintances were assuming that she would take sufficient supplies of Western food to sustain her on her journey.

However, the matter of food is discussed first by Bird in Letter IV (June 7) in which she describes the process of interviewing and hiring a suitable manservant for her travels, and then proceeds to recount the additional preparations she is making for her journey. These preparations commence with the statement that, "The "Food Question" is said to be the most important one for all travellers, and it is discussed continually with startling earnestness, not alone as regards my tour'. This statement suggests that food was, in fact, a frequently discussed topic among the expatriate community. It can also be inferred that the earlier-mentioned problems regarding 'fleas' and 'horses' may have been made on the assumption that she would take her own provisions. Once her determination to explore the interior of Japan with as little baggage as possible became evident, it is natural to imagine that the "Food Question" became the main subject of concern in her conversations with other Britons in Yokohama, Kanagawa, or Tokyo.

Bird recalls that she received advice to take with her 'tinned meats and soups, claret, and a Japanese maid', but she dismisses such suggestions offhand by saying that to carry such supplies would require, 'a train of at least six pack-horses.' She was clearly determined at the planning stage of her journey to travel light and without being reliant on home comforts in the way of food. In addition, she goes on to poke gentle fun at the 'foreign ministers, professors, missionaries, merchants' who all discuss food 'with becoming gravity as a question of life and death, which by many it is supposed to be.' Bird's discourse on this matter is worth quoting in full:

"The fact is that, except in a few hotels in popular resorts which are got up for foreigners, bread, butter, milk, meat, poultry, coffee, wine, and beer, are unattainable, that fresh fish is rare, and that unless one can live on rice, tea, and eggs, with the addition now and then of some tasteless fresh vegetables, food must be taken, as the fishy and vegetable abominations known as "Japanese food" can only be swallowed and digested by a few, and that after long practice."

Following this extremely pessimistic received wisdom

relating to her prospects regarding food on her planned journey, Bird swiftly moves on to describe other advice she received concerning not being defrauded by her Japanese servant Ito and then lists the luggage which she decided it was going to be necessary to take with her. The "Food Question" is therefore left unresolved at the time of Bird writing Letter IV from Tokyo. However, in the published version of *Unbeaten Tracks* a footnote was added to the page on which the passage appears which is quoted above.

The footnote contains Bird's views on the "Food Question" after the completion of her explorations. Her personal experiences prompt her to refute the advice given to her by the 'foreign ministers, professors, missionaries, merchants' by stating that, except for 'Liebig's extract of meat,' a traveller in average health should not take any provisions with him and certainly not 'tinned meats, soups, claret, or any eatables or drinkables.' In light of the demanding nature of Bird's travels, the caveat that average health should be the minimum standard for considering such a journey seems to be somewhat superfluous.

Having taken a break from her preparations to visit Asakusa and describing it in great detail in Letter V, Bird returns to the "Food Question" early in Letter VI (June 10) which also marks her departure from Edo. Bird states that she has, 'only brought a small supply of Liebig's extract of meat, 4 lbs. of raisins, some chocolate, both for eating and drinking, and some brandy in case of need.'

Although the raisins and chocolate are not mentioned again, the brandy and Liebig's extract of meat come in useful when Bird stays in an Ainu village and is called upon to give medical assistance to a woman suffering from bronchitis (Letter XXXVI). Indeed, Bird uses the last of her stock of the beef extract to give a subsequent dose of beef tea to the sick woman. The brandy and beef tea have the desired effect and the woman effects a recovery.

Having embarked on her travels, Bird naturally spends most of her letters describing the people, the customs, and the scenery of Japan. In general, descriptions of the food on which she survived and descriptions of the food which she observed others eating do not form a significant presence in *Unbeaten Tracks*. Nevertheless, there are occasions when food becomes a topic in a letter and these will henceforth be identified in chronological order as Bird makes her progress towards Hokkaido.

Letter VI also contains a description of a roadside tea house and a description of what occurred when Bird and her party stopped at one. The description is general rather than

specific, with the implication that Bird encountered similar hospitality at the frequent stops she and her party made along the way. It is here that Bird first uses the Biblical quotation “broth of abominable things” to describe what her rickshaw runners habitually ate in such places. This expression has the clear implication that Bird herself did not partake of it and it would also have been effective in conjuring lurid images in the minds of her Western readers.

This early description certainly has the freshness of Bird observing tea house hospitality for the first time and it also includes specific details concerning Japanese tea. Bird states that, ‘If Japanese tea “stands” it acquires a coarse bitterness and an unwholesome astringency.’ Furthermore, Bird gives particulars about how cooked rice is stored for immediate use at any time of the day and that Japanese people pour hot tea over it to heat it up before eating. However, this description relates to what Bird observed other people doing and there is no suggestion that she tried eating *ochazuke* herself at this early point, or indeed, at any later point, in her travels.

Letter VI, which is one of the longer letters Bird wrote, also recounts the happenings during Bird’s journey from Tokyo to Nikko, and while staying in Nikko, Bird gives some details of the provisions which her servant, Ito, has been able to procure for her. She notes that rice and tea are included in the price for her lodging and the inference is that she partook of both. In addition, Bird notes that Ito is occasionally able to obtain a chicken for her to eat while trout and eggs are also apparently procurable.

2-2 Nikko to Niigata

Letter IX (June 22) relates a day trip from Nikko which ended at a *yadoya* at Nikko Yumoto Onsen. Bird was served ‘plum-flower tea’ and ‘a sweetmeat made of beans and sugar, and a lacquer bowl of frozen snow.’ Disappointingly Bird does not record her impressions regarding this sweetmeat which appears to have been a type of *yōkan*, but she does proceed to write that she also ‘made a difficult meal from a fowl of much experience.’

In her next letter (Letter X: Continued.) (June 23), Bird includes a paragraph detailing the shops to be found in Irimichi, and states that ‘many of the things (being sold) are eatables.’ According to Bird, these include dried fishes, cakes, sweetmeats, *mochi*, roots boiled in brine, and a white jelly made from beans. In this case, as before, Bird is in the position of observer rather than experimenter, providing the reader with information about life in rural Japan but without giving her verdict on the taste or the desirability of the items

for sale.

Later, in in the same letter (Letter X: Completed.), Bird makes it clear that she has no foreboding about the supposedly difficult road from Irimichi to Tajima and then on to Niigata, because, ‘I have lived for the last three days on rice, eggs, and coarse vermicelli about the thickness and colour of earth-worms.’ It therefore seems that Ito had failed to find anything that could satisfy Bird’s appetite for the standard ingredients of Western-style food. The reader is left to understand that the Japanese people around Bird are eating a more varied diet than the one which she herself mentions, but that she does not find the food available as being tempting to her. In fact, the section of Bird’s journey between Nikko and Niigata contains sporadic mention of food, but always from a negative perspective and while it cannot be said that Bird is overtly complaining, she does seem to emphasize the lack of food which is available to someone from a non-Japanese cultural background. Eggs are mentioned often.

Letter XI (June 24) begins with Bird declaring that ‘Comfort was left behind at Nikko!’ The letter describes Bird’s arrival at a *yadoya* in Fujihara in which she was served some food but ‘the rice was musty, and only partially cleaned, the eggs had seen better days, and the tea was musty.’ Later in the same letter, Bird and her party arrive at Takahara only for her to find that, ‘There was nothing eatable but rice and eggs.’ Later still, Bird discovers at Ikari that, ‘No food can be got here except rice and eggs.’ At this point, and for the first time, the strain of Bird’s limited diet, restricted to eggs and rice, seems to be affecting her, for immediately following this comment she goes on to add, ‘I am haunted by memories of the fowls and fish of Nikko, to say nothing of the “flesh pots” of the Legation.’ It could be argued that this stage of her journey represents the nadir for Bird’s expectations of satisfying food. Bird had now been on the road for two weeks, long enough to have passed over the euphoria of encountering something new to her at every turn of the road, but also with no experiences to lead her to expect that a delicious meal might be on offer at whatever stopping place might be coming next. Having said this, Bird refrains from wallowing in self-pity or from reflecting with regret on her decision, as discussed earlier in relation to the “Food Question”, not to follow the advice to take supplies of Western staples with her.

By Letter XII (June 30), Bird had reached Kayashima, which is described by her as, ‘a miserable village’ at which, ‘I found nothing that I could eat except black beans and boiled cucumbers.’ And yet, in this same letter, she also includes a few sentences describing how the Japanese ‘peasantry’ subsist

on 'raw or half-raw salt fish, and vegetables rendered indigestible by being coarsely pickled.' She goes on to comment that the Japanese appear to her to be rapid eaters and that any food is consumed by the Japanese in the shortest time possible. Bird does not restrain herself from being directly critical when she chooses to be so, and although in this case, regarding the rapidity with which food is eaten, she precedes 'rapidity' with the adjective 'marvellous' her disapproval of Japanese eating manners is evident.

The next mention of food in Bird's account of her journey comes in Letter XIII (June 30) written from Kurumatoge in which she is presented with 'a quantity of cakes and coarse confectionery' as a gift after having used a crochet needle to remove a fish bone stuck in the throat of a child. Bird makes no comment on the edible qualities of these gifts. However, in the next paragraph, while giving a detailed description of the house in which she is being accommodated, she mentions, 'six large dishes with food for sale – salt shell-fish, in a black liquid, dried trout impaled on sticks, sea slugs in soy, a paste made of pounded roots, and green cakes made of the slimy river *confervæ*, pressed and dried – all ill-favoured and unsavoury viands.' This description leaves a large degree of ambiguity as to whether Bird tried these dishes for herself before declaring them to be, 'ill-favoured and unsavoury' or whether her opinion is based solely on the appearance, or simply the idea, of these offerings.

Following this long series of negative references to the food she has encountered Bird finishes Letter XIII (June 30) with an addendum dated July 1 in which she tells of Ito bringing her a hen just before she was about to go to sleep. Bird tells Ito that she would eat the hen for breakfast, only to learn the following morning that the hen had escaped into the woods just as Ito was about to kill it. The news of this disappointment prompts Bird to write as follows:

"In order to understand my feelings you must have experienced what it is not to have tasted fish, flesh, or fowl, for ten days! The alternative was eggs and some of the paste which the man was treading yesterday on the mat cut into strips and boiled! It was coarse flour and buckwheat, so, you see, I have learned not to be particular!"

This heartfelt expression of her desire to eat something more suited to her own cultural tastes reveals that Bird is suffering due to the lack of familiar food. While it also re-emphasizes her recent dependence on eggs and rice, the final words, 'I have learned not to be particular' appear to indicate

that she may have been trying at least some of the local preparations on offer.

Bird was now getting closer to Niigata, and in Letter XIV (July 2) at Tsugawa, she refers to walking through the town with Ito trying to find something eatable that they would be able to take with them on their journey by boat down the river on the next day. Unfortunately, they were only able to purchase 'wafers made of white of egg and sugar, balls made of sugar and barley flour, and beans coated with sugar.' However, the letter ends with Bird recording that, 'a slice of fresh salmon has been produced, and I think I never tasted anything so delicious.' Since the route covered by Bird between Nikko and Niigata was through the mountains, and therefore exactly the type of unbeaten tracks that Bird wished to travel, it is not particularly surprising that the people who lived along those roads subsisted on what they could grow nearby; naturally this would have been in marked contrast to the wider range of foods available via trading at the treaty ports.

2-3 Niigata to Hakodate

Bird's description of Niigata itself contains no mention of food, but when she travels away from the city she notes an abundance of produce which she does not mention as having seen elsewhere. She refers to 'splendid crops of cucumbers trained like peas, melons, vegetable marrow, *Arum esculentum*, sweet potatoes, maize, tea, tiger-lilies, beans, and onions; and extensive orchards with apples and pears,' however, she makes no reference to having the opportunity to eat any of these fruits or vegetables herself. When they stop for the night at a house, Bird relates that the owner 'had no rice, so I indulged in a feast of delicious cucumbers.' Unfortunately, although the "Food Question" may have appeared to become less of a problem in the area around Niigata, Bird soon finds herself in the unbeaten tracks of the mountains once more, and at her next stopping place, Kurosawa, only states that, 'millet and buckwheat rather than rice, with the universal *daikon*, are the staples of diet.'

As with other parts of her reporting, Bird's references to food remain sporadic during her progress through the mountains. She does, however, mention in Letter XVIII (undated) that she made a proposal to milk a cow for some fresh milk but was told that, 'they thought it "most disgusting," and that the Japanese think it "most disgusting" in foreigners to put anything "with such a strong smell and taste" into their tea!' Here is a fine example of intercultural differences regarding attitudes to food. Since Bird had made the decision

not to carry with her some Western food staples, much of *Unbeaten Tracks* is a one-sided view of a British lady's culture shock when encountering Japanese styles of living. There are, however, occasional references to how Japanese people feel about encountering Westerners for the first time. In much the same way that Bird regards with horror much Japanese food, so too, do the Japanese people think with horror of drinking milk from a cow. In the same letter, Bird states that, 'Ito dined on seven dishes of horrors', thereby once again indicating her negative view of Japanese food, although she does go on to say that, 'they brought me *sake*, tea, rice, and black beans', saying that, 'the last are very good.'

Cultivation of vegetables is mentioned again as Bird travels through the plain of Yonezawa, and in Letter XIX (July 16) when Bird reaches Yamagata, there is a rare reference to European brand products. Bird bemoans the fact that she has come across 'several' shops selling 'villainous forgeries of European eatables and drinkables'. She proceeds to state that, 'I saw two shops in Yamagata which sold champagne of the best brands, Martel's cognac, Bass' ale, Medoc, St. Julian, and Scotch whisky, at about one-fifth of their cost price – all poisonous compounds, the sale of which ought to be interdicted.' Bird's strongly critical reaction to these imitation products possibly indicates that she tried to buy them and that she is speaking from experience about their lack of quality and authenticity. She may also have been repeating the opinions of a missionary who had strong views regarding temperance.

After Yamagata, Bird stops at Shinjo which she labels a 'wretched' town where she had a 'wretched meal of sago and condensed milk.' Although there is no mention at this point where the condensed milk was obtained, it is later clearly stated as having come from a shop in Yamagata.

It is also at Shinjo that a minor crisis occurs for Bird after she is stung on her left hand by a hornet and then also bitten by a gadfly. The wounds became inflamed and her health suffered to the extent that she was prompted to consult a Japanese doctor. In her state of discomfort Bird reflects that being bitten by insects is a drawback of 'Japanese travelling in summer', but that this inconvenience is compounded by, 'the lack of such food as one can eat when one finishes a hard day's journey without appetite, in an exhausting atmosphere.' Bird demonstrates that she is feeling nostalgic for familiar food which could sustain her in her present difficulty. Bird invited the doctor to dinner after this medical consultation but, regrettably, no specific details are given, apart from the fact that she admired his dexterity at removing the flesh from a small, bony fish, and that she was greatly disturbed by his

noisiness while eating.

The next letter, Letter XX (July 21) opens with the reported fact that Bird had eaten a chicken on the previous day. Ito clearly appreciates the psychological boost that this had provided Bird, for he is quoted as saying, "You'll be able for a long day's journey to-day, as you had a chicken yesterday," and Bird herself, perhaps with a hint of sarcasm, states that 'under this chicken's marvellous influence we got away at 6.45.' Unfortunately for Bird, the next mention of food a couple of days later records 'a wretched meal of a tasteless white curd made from beans, with some condensed milk added to it.' However, on approaching the town of Yokote she hears that a bullock was killed there every Thursday. Bird makes plans to have a broiled steak for supper and to take another steak with her for another day's meal, but ends up disappointed as all the steak has been sold by the time she arrives. By the time she comes to eat that day, she comments that, 'there were no eggs, and I made a miserable meal of rice and bean curd, feeling somewhat starved, as the condensed milk I bought at Yamagata had to be thrown away.'

At Shingoji, Bird's situation is similar, 'there were no eggs, nothing but rice and cucumbers', but two days later in Letter XXI (July 23), Bird writes that, 'my three days here have been fully occupied and very pleasant. "Foreign food" – a good beef-steak, and excellent curry, cucumbers, and foreign salt and mustard, were at once obtained, and I felt my "eyes lightened" after partaking of them.' These emotions of Bird's upon her arrival at a *yadoya* on the outskirts of Kubota clearly show the effect on a traveller of obtaining appetizing food. It appears that this was Bird's first non-Japanese meal for over a month and it cannot be a coincidence that, in contrast to her more trying experiences in other places, she states that her time in Kubota had been, 'very pleasant.' It is a point worthy of speculation that, whether consciously recognized, or simply subconsciously, Bird's somewhat negative language used when describing her accommodation or the state of rural villages, may have been linked to her endurance of hardships without the comfort of familiar food.

Although Bird clearly states that 'foreign influence is hardly at all felt,' it seems that some people in Kubota (now part of Akita City) may have had some previous experience of entertaining foreign guests. After Bird made a tour of inspection of the hospital in the city she was entertained to a 'meal laid out in English style – coffee in cups with handles and saucers, and plates with spoons.' Unfortunately, Bird provides no details of what was served or eaten at this meal, but the fact that she mentioned it all gives a strong indication

of how rare such an event had been during her trip.

Bird is also able to purchase Eagle brand condensed milk in a shop in Kubota although she later suspects it to have been an imitation like the 'vile forgeries' of imported liquor she had described as being on sale at various shops she had encountered in the interior. Although the label on the condensed milk was 'all right', when she opened the product it contained 'small pellets of a brownish, dried curd, with an unpleasant taste!'

In Letter XXIII (July 24), Bird is detained by heavy rain in Kubota and chooses to write in detail about the character of Ito, her servant and interpreter. As part of this portrait, she explains that, 'Ito amuses me nearly every night with stories of his unsuccessful attempts to provide me with animal food.' She describes how, 'though there are chickens in all the villages, the people won't be bribed to sell them for killing, though they would gladly part with them if they were to be kept to lay eggs.' Bird's visit to Japan came only ten years after the Meiji Restoration and, far from the major cities of the nation, and completely isolated from the intercultural interactions taking place in the treaty ports, it is not at all surprising that Bird encountered such reluctance for the local people to adjust their cultural customs to her desires. Also at Kubota, Bird gives a full description of a *matsuri* which includes a mention of the sweetmeats on sale for children but without any indication that she tried one for herself.

In Letter XXVI (July 29), written from Odate, there is a brief mention of Ito procuring an old hen for stewing, but further comment is left unrecorded. By the time that Letter XXVIII (August 2) is written from Aomori Prefecture, Bird is experiencing severe discomfort from a back strain and has time to reflect on many of the things which she has experienced without finding new distractions about which to write. At this point Bird includes a paragraph which is significant for this study. It is therefore included in full:

"From proverbial philosophy to personal privation is rather a descent, but owing to the many detentions on the journey my small stock of foreign food is exhausted, and I have been living here on rice, cucumbers, and salt salmon – so salt that, after being boiled in two waters, it produces a most distressing thirst. Even this has failed to-day, as communication with the coast has been stopped for some time, and the village is suffering under the calamity of its stock of salt-fish being completely exhausted. There are no eggs, and rice and cucumbers are very like the "light food" which the Israelites "loathed." I had an omelette one day, but it was much like

musty leather. The Italian minister said to me in Tokiyo, "No question in Japan is so solemn as that of food," and many others echoed what I thought at the time a most unworthy sentiment. I recognized its truth to-day when I opened my last resort, a box of Brand's meat lozenges, and found them a mass of mouldiness."

2-4 Food in the Ainu Village and at Other Places in Hokkaido

At Hakodate, Bird relates that she snatched a 'morsel of fish at a restaurant where "foreign food" was represented by a very dirty table-cloth', but aside from this, food is not referenced again until Letter XXXV (August 17) in which Bird rejoices at once again being in wild country. She is, however, able to procure a supper of, 'rice, eggs, and black beans.' At Yubets, Bird, 'got a good meal of fish', and, when they reached Shiraoi she finds at the *yadoya* which Ito has chosen for her, 'a steak of fresh salmon was broiling on the coals' and comments that she enjoyed her meal. As has been seen, such comments of relative satisfaction are rare in her letters.

When it is settled that Bird and Ito will go to stay in the Ainu village of Biratori, it is stated that they will have to take their own food with them, and cooking utensils too. Bird records that Ito takes with him, 'a chicken, onions, potatoes, French beans, Japanese sauce, tea, rice, a kettle, a stew-pan and a rice-pan,' while Bird restricts her provisions to, 'a cold fowl and potatoes.' Later, in Letter XXXVI (August 23), Ainu cooking is referenced and Bird describes how the Ainu chief's principal wife, 'cut wild roots, green beans, and seaweed, and shred dried fish and venison among them, adding millet, water, and some strong-smelling fish-oil, and set the whole on to stew for three hours, stirring the "mess" now and then with a wooden spoon.'

At breakfast on the following day, Bird states that for the Ainu, 'breakfast was a repetition of the previous night's supper', and although Bird writes that 'we all ate together' care should be taken with how this remark is interpreted. Later indications suggest that Bird's meaning is that she and the Ainu ate their meal at the same time but with Bird eating the food she had taken with her.

The most detailed description Bird gives of Ainu eating habits comes in Letter XXXVII (Continued.) (August 24) and is quoted in full below:

"I have before described the preparation of their food, which usually consists of a stew "of abominable things." They

eat salt and fresh fish, dried fish, seaweed, slugs, the various vegetables which grow in the wilderness of tall weeds which surrounds their villages, wild roots and berries, fresh and dried venison and bear; their carnival consisting of fresh bear's flesh and sake, seaweed, mushrooms, and anything they can get, in fact, which is not poisonous, mixing everything up together."

Although Bird uses the expression 'stew "of abominable things"' for the second time in *Unbeaten Tracks* the remainder of the passage avoids making any kind of judgment on the nature of the Ainu diet. Later, however, in Letter XXXVIII (August 27), it is revealed that the Ainu 'were distressed that I did not eat their food' and Bird says that she lived on 'tea and potatoes' after she had used all the provisions she had taken with her. The inference is that Bird did not share the food cooked by the Ainu at all but used potatoes provided by them to prepare something separately for herself to eat.

After leaving Biratori, food is barely mentioned again although Ito tries to dissuade Bird from making a trek along a disused track round Volcano Bay (Uchiura Bay) by exclaiming that they 'shall get neither rice nor eggs' if they follow that course. Despite Ito's objections, Bird has her way, and although food may have been scarce she notes that, 'We had seen some deer and many pheasants, and a successful hunter brought in a fine stag, so that I had venison steak for supper, and was much comforted.' On another occasion, a chicken, having been procured for Bird's supper was rescued from its fate when its owner returned the money paid for it saying that she could not bear to see it killed.

Later, when Bird visits the Lebungé Ainu she has no expectation of being provided with anything to eat, but nevertheless notes that, 'they gave me rice, potatoes, and black beans boiled in equal parts of brine and syrup, which are very palatable.' The second edition of *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, published by John Murray, London, in 1911 uses 'palatable food' as the page header for this page of the book. Admittedly the page only contains the single paragraph concerned followed by an illustration of the 'Temple Gateway at Isshinden', so there were limited other options for the page header. However, it remains an extremely rare example of Bird being unambiguously complimentary about Japanese food and also of the page header focusing on food rather than travelling, the weather, or an aspect of Japanese culture.

Bird is now nearing the end of her time spent travelling in Japan and Letter XLI (September 12), after which only three shortish letters remain to conclude the published

version of her sojourn in Japan, contains the final three references to food in *Unbeaten Tracks*. First Bird mentions in passing that her *bento bako* 'contained some cold, waxy potatoes', without making further comment. Later, when she arrives at Oshamambé, a town which she describes as 'dismal', 'decayed and dissipated' she stays in a, 'dilapidated *yadoya*, where there were no black beans, and the use of eggs did not appear to be recognised.' The reader is left to imagine what Bird found to eat in the absence of these staples of her travelling diet. Bird's final mention of food appears after her arrival at Yamakushinoi where she spends the night at a 'sweet, quiet *yadoya* delightfully situated' which furthermore offered the, 'more solid pleasures of fish, eggs, and black beans.' Bird adds the additional emphasis that, 'Thus, instead of being starved and finding wretched accommodation, the week I spent on Volcano Bay has been the best fed, as it was certainly the most comfortable, week of my travels in northern Japan.' The fact of her writing this sentence gives a clear indication of how Ito's predictions for the inconveniences of her planned trip around the bay came to nothing, and also that her stay in the Ainu village at Biratori had certainly been a time of dietary privations for her.

These final comments about the level of comparative comfort that Bird enjoyed at Volcano Bay are Bird's final descriptions of how she responded to the "Food Question". She travelled back to Hakodate and then took ship for Tokyo but endured a trying voyage due to battling through a typhoon followed by fog problems. Bird arrived back at Yokohama on September 17 and remained in Japan for a further three months during which time she sailed to Kobe, from which she visited Osaka, Kyoto and Ise, although these travels do not form part of *Unbeaten Tracks*. Perhaps Bird, or her publisher, considered that these later journeys followed tracks which, to her mind, were not sufficiently unbeaten for her to include in her account of her journey to the north.

3. Bird's Use of Language to Describe Japanese Food

Section 2 of this study has outlined in detail the specific occasions on which Isabella Bird referenced food during her journey to Hokkaido via the *Unbeaten Tracks* she followed. The "Food Question" was certainly one of many difficulties for her to overcome, but her sporadic references to food suggest that it was never a preoccupation for her. With the aim of clarifying Bird's overall attitude towards Japanese food this section will analyse the language used by Bird when describing Japanese food.

Table 1: Adjectives and food in context

	Description of food	Page
1	tasteless ... vegetables	19
2	fishy and vegetable abominations	19
3	tasteless sweetmeats	29
4	"broth of abominable things"	38
5	delicious aroma and flavour (tea)	39
6	refreshing at all times (tea)	39
7	delicate almond flavour (tea)	64
8	coarse vermicelli	79
9	the rice was musty	85
10	the eggs had seen better days	85
11	the tea was musty	85
12	raw or half-raw salt fish	95
13	vegetables indigestible	95
14	coarsely pickled	95
15	ill-favoured	104
16	unsavoury viands	104
17	coarse confectionery	104
18	coarse flour and buckwheat	105
19	a slice of fresh salmon	108
20	delicious cucumbers	122
21	seven dishes of horrors	129
22	wretched meal of sago and condensed milk	139
23	wretched meal	146
24	tasteless white curd	146
25	miserable meal of rice and bean curd	148
26	a good beef-steak	156
27	an excellent curry	156
28	foreign salt and mustard	156
29	pellets of a brownish, dried curd	159
30	an unpleasant taste	159
31	a most distressing thirst (after eating salt salmon)	195
32	like musty leather (of an omelette)	195
33	a good meal of fish	221
34	a steak of fresh salmon	226
35	a stew "of abominable things"	268
36	black beans boiled in equal parts of brine and syrup, which are very palatable	311
37	waxy potatoes	314

Table 1 shows the adjectives used by Bird, either in connection with food or on occasions when Bird used language in such a way as to indicate any kind of emotion which she felt towards it. The entries in Table 1 do not account for every occasion on which food or drink are mentioned in *Unbeaten Tracks*, but they do represent the instances of Bird expressing an opinion relating to either what she was eating, or to what she observed other people eating, or when she made a personal comment on something that was being sold for human consumption.

To further clarify Bird's feelings about the food she encountered during her journey, Table 2 shows the adjectives or adjectival phrases from Table 1, given each a rating as either positive (+1) or negative (-1).

Table 2: Positive/negative rating of food descriptions

1	tasteless	-1
2	abominations	-1
3	tasteless	-1
4	abominable	-1
5	delicious	+1
6	refreshing	+1
7	delicate	+1
8	coarse	-1
9	musty	-1
10	seen better days	-1
11	musty	-1
12	raw or half-raw	-1
13	indigestible	-1
14	coarsely	-1
15	ill-favoured	-1
16	unsavoury	-1
17	coarse	-1
18	coarse	-1
19	fresh	+1
20	delicious	+1
21	horrors	-1
22	wretched	-1
23	wretched	-1
24	tasteless	-1
25	miserable	-1
26	good	+1
27	excellent	+1
28	foreign	+1
29	brownish	-1
30	unpleasant	-1
31	distressing	-1
32	musty	-1
33	good	+1
34	fresh	+1
35	abominable	-1
36	palatable	+1
37	waxy	-1

By tabulating Bird's use of language to describe food it becomes clear that, in a book of 328 pages, there are only 37 occasions on which an opinion is stated relating to food. Although Bird shows an interest in food, she does not let her complaints about lack of sustaining food become a major theme of her book in any way. Second, the inclusion of the page numbers on which these references appear is an indication of the sporadic nature of their appearance in the text. References to food are often grouped together as at page 85, when Bird has a dispiriting experience upon arrival at a *yadoya* at Ikari, or at page 156, at which point Bird found an oasis of home comforts at Kubota. The positive or negative rating of Bird's language shown in Table 2 provides an overview of Bird's emotions relating to the food she experienced in Japan. Out of 37 mentions, 11 can be classified as positive, while 26 can be termed as negative expressions.

The balance of Bird's emotions is therefore clearly towards the negative.

4. Discussion

As examined in the analysis section of this study, Bird makes occasional references to food throughout *Unbeaten Tracks*. Although the "Food Question" makes an early appearance in Bird's narrative, when Bird's references to food are isolated from the rest of the work, as shown in Table 1, it appears that the "Food Question" was not such a major consideration for her. Bird was already a seasoned traveller before she went to Japan and it is possible that she had experienced worse fare during her earlier expeditions. Hanley (1997)²¹ makes reference to Bird's experiences in Chicago in the 1850s to argue that, although living conditions in Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century may not have matched those in the West in some respects, there were also places in the United States and Europe at that time in which people lived in squalor. Although Hanley's argument concerns living conditions in general, rather than being specifically about food, Hanley states that at one inn in Chicago, Bird felt that 'the dining room and the handling of dishes were so unsanitary that she couldn't bear to eat much of the food served.' Having survived such experiences in the past, perhaps Bird did not consider it necessary to bring to the attentions of her sister her almost daily privations in terms of the food available in the Japanese interior.

On the other hand, although Bird never dwells on her sufferings in relation to the "Food Question" there are occasions when her true feelings show through her overall spirit of stoicism. As demonstrated in section three of this study, Bird shows a clear tendency to use negative language when describing Japanese food, and in addition, there are four clear instances of her drawing direct attention to her feelings regarding her longings for more satisfying food. These four occasions have already been discussed in section two of this study but they are relisted here.

The first occasion appears in Letter XI (June 24), two weeks after the start of her journey, when Bird states 'I am haunted by memories of the fowls and fish of Nikko, to say nothing of the "flesh pots" of the Legation'. The second occurs in Letter XIII (June 30) written at Kuramatoge between Nikko and Niigata, when she learns that the hen which was due to be killed for her had managed to escape its fate of becoming her breakfast. Bird's heartfelt reaction to this disappointment has been quoted in full in section 2, and her

exclamation that she has not 'tasted fish, flesh, or fowl, for ten days!' shows the strength of her feeling. Her final comment on the episode that, 'I have learned not to be particular!', ended with another exclamation mark, can also be interpreted as an explicit comment about her dietary privations.

The third occasion occurs in Letter XIX (July 16) when she has been struck down by fever following a hornet's sting and a gadfly's bite and bemoans the 'the lack of such food as one can eat when one finishes a hard day's journey without appetite, in an exhausting atmosphere.' Finally, from Aomori Prefecture in Letter XXVIII (August 2), the fourth occasion occurs when Bird acknowledges the truth in the statement made to her by the Italian minister at Tokyo that, "No question in Japan is so solemn as that of food," after she has exhausted the small quantity of supplies of Western food that she had taken with her.

Bird had started out on her expedition by leaving Tokyo on June 10, and three of these four occasions on which Bird's stoicism seems to fail her all occur within just over one month's time from that date. However, it is certainly not the case that Bird's situation regarding food improves after this point; rather, her time spent with the Ainu would indicate the opposite to be the case. Furthermore, it is also not the case that Bird omits any reference to food from this point onwards. Perhaps what changes is that her expectations become tempered over time so that a plain diet of rice, eggs, and later potatoes, and with the occasional chicken or piece of fish, does not become so emotionally draining on her, or so worthy of mention, as she continues to be fascinated by all that she is observing around her.

In contrast to these four instances of evident dietary despair, the other side of Bird's emotional feeling towards food is shown on the rare opportunities that she experiences when she can obtain and eat food which is truly satisfying to her tastes. One of these examples comes in Letter XIV when Bird remarks, 'I think I never tasted anything so delicious' in reference to a slice of fresh salmon. It seems likely that it has been the recent absence of other appetizing food which prompts Bird to describe this slice of salmon in such superlative terms. A later occasion comes at the end of her stay in Hokkaido when Bird reflects on her time walking round the coast of Volcano Bay and states that 'the week I spent on Volcano Bay has been the best fed, as it was certainly the most comfortable, week of my travels in northern Japan.' This comment can be interpreted in the context of it being in contrast to the plain diet she had eaten during her days spent living in the Ainu village immediately prior to this episode.

The experiences of Bird, travelling in 1878 provide further evidence of Westerners' inability, or reluctance, to attempt to live on a Japanese diet in Meiji era Japan. Bird was by no means not the only traveller to find Japanese food non-sustaining. In *A Diplomat in Japan* (1921)^[3] Ernest Satow recalls how his chief, Sir Harry Parkes, elected to sail around Sado Island rather than travel overland to reach their destination of the gold mines at Aikawa. Satow states that in addition to objecting to travelling in native fashion, Sir Harry wanted to avoid 'passing the night on the floor of a Japanese house in native quilts, and with nothing better than rice and fish to eat.' It is probably the case that this attitude was typical of the Westerners living in Japan in the bakumatsu years and the Meiji era.

In *Things Japanese*, published twelve years after the year of Bird's travels in 1878, Chamberlain (1890)^[4], clearly felt no hesitation in writing that, 'Japanese dishes fail to satisfy European cravings', and in *Victorians in Japan* (1987)^[5] Cortazzi draws attention to this aspect of Westerners' experience in Japan by giving the title, 'Food was a problem' to a chapter comprising extracts from memoirs about life 'in and around the treaty ports.' Cortazzi includes extracts from ten different memoirs in this chapter of which three extracts emphasise the necessity of dependence on Western food, five extracts take an unambiguously negative view of Japanese food, and only three can be interpreted as being positive.

It is therefore not surprising that Bird encounters talk of the "Food Question" almost as soon as she discusses her travel plans with acquaintances in Yokohama and Tokyo. The advice given to her has been discussed previously. It is interesting that evidence from Chamberlain in his *Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (1913, although first published in 1891)^[6] indicates that these attitudes on the part of Westerners were extremely persistent. Chamberlain wrote that 'most foreign travellers carry their own provisions,' when moving around the country. Not only is this indicative of the unchanging desire for Westerners to eat familiar foods, it can also be interpreted as showing that between Bird's journey in 1878 and 1913, there was little change in the situation regarding the availability of foreign foods away from the treaty ports.

Even someone like Satow, who seemed to discover that he had an almost instant affinity with the Japanese way of life appears to have taken time to warm up to the practice of eating nothing but Japanese food. Satow arrived in Japan in September 1862, but it was only in the spring of 1867 that he recorded living 'entirely on Japanese food.' Satow's process of

acculturation to a Japanese diet can therefore be calculated at approximately four-and-a-half years. It is therefore not surprising that Isabella Bird, having decided to 'solve' the "Food Question" by 'a modified rejection of all advice' finds that although she is able to survive, her experiences of delight relating to Japanese food are rare and isolated.

5. Conclusion

Isabella Bird's account of her journey as a solitary Western woman travelling from Tokyo to Hokkaido in 1878 is a valuable record of the living conditions in the Japanese interior in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bird was determined to make her descriptions as accurate as possible and states that, 'I write the truth as I see it.' Yokoyama (1987)^[7] provides evidence that Bird's observations were praised after publication for the impartiality with which they described Japanese living conditions.

Despite having gained this reputation for impartiality, Bird's experiences necessarily involved the clash of cultures at times. In just the same way that Bird cannot appreciate Japanese food, there are occasions when she describes how the Japanese people find aspects of her culture to be strange or objectionable. Bird's servant/interpreter, Ito, is the Japanese with whom Bird becomes most thoroughly acquainted and yet, to emphasise their cultural differences, Bird writes that, 'Our manners, eyes, and modes of eating appear simply odious to him.' The "Food Question" for Bird was just one aspect of the intercultural learning curve she was negotiating.

In the discussion section of this study it has been noted that Satow eventually switched to a Japanese diet. In addition to the fact that Satow spent a considerably longer time in Japan than did Bird, this study contends that there are two other differences between Bird and Satow that have a direct influence on Bird's experiences relating to the "Food Question". Firstly, Satow spoke Japanese whereas it seems that almost all of Bird's communication with Japanese people took place through Ito as an interpreter. Secondly, Satow spent time communicating with Japanese people while sharing food with them. Although Bird mentions eating at the same time as Japanese people, she does not talk about sharing the same food as them. Satow's willingness to take part in commensality with Japanese people, and therefore to experience the benefits to communication that such occasions presents, may account, in part, for his success at adapting to life in Japan and may also have played a part in his adopting a Japanese diet. As

Bird says of the Ainu, 'they were distressed that I did not eat their food.' Had Japanese food been less repellent to her, and had Bird found herself able to join in the sharing of food with Japanese people, her trip could have been even more enriching.

This study therefore concludes that Bird's response to the "Food Question" can ultimately be declared as having been unsatisfactory. Bird no doubt saved herself much trouble and additional expense by travelling light, but on the other hand, this study has demonstrated that, although she did not overemphasise the fact, her troubles were certainly increased by her reliance on local food. Fortunately, Bird did not allow her dietary dissatisfactions to distract her from her objective of recording what she experienced on the Unbeaten Tracks of Japan.

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概要

「日本における人跡未踏の道」で語る食生活：イザベラ・バードによる「食事問題」への対応

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イザベラ・バード(1831~1904)はイギリスの探検家で、明治11年東京を起点に日光から新潟へ抜け、日本海側から北海道に至る北日本を旅した。その旅が記したものが「日本における人跡未踏の道」という回想録である。本論文では、「日本における人跡未踏の道」を分析することで、バードの日本旅食生活を明らかにした。

キーワード：明治時代、異文化理解、食生活