

## **The History of Coffee**

Coffee is one of the most popular beverages in the world. Millions of people enjoy at least 1 cup of coffee per day, with more than 400 billion cups consumed worldwide each year. But the popularity of coffee is a fairly recent phenomenon in the span of human history. And the story of how both the consumption and production of coffee has evolved is actually pretty interesting.

### **The Beginning**

According to legend, Kaldi, a goatherd in the Kaffa province of Ethiopia, discovered coffee around 800 A.D. He supposedly noticed his goats dancing and frolicking after eating berries from the coffee bushes. Kaldi decided to try some of the berries for himself, and soon found that he was as invigorated as his goats. While this legend of how coffee was discovered may or may not be accurate, we do know that the coffee plant is indigenous to Ethiopia.

### **Coffee Plants Branch Out**

The consumption of coffee spread from Africa to Arabia around 1000 A.D. Arabian Muslims became avid consumers of coffee, substituting it for wine, which their religion forbade them to drink. The usage of coffee steadily spread throughout the region, and by the late 1500's, was commonplace throughout Arabia, North Africa, and Turkey.

But the more the popularity of coffee increased, the more the Arabians wanted to keep for themselves the ability to produce this treasure. Though they did export coffee beans, they rendered the beans infertile by boiling them before exporting. As a result, no coffee plants were grown outside of Africa or Arabia until the 1600's.

The odds, though, were against the Arabians being able to keep such a good thing to themselves, and eventually, some viable coffee seeds were transported out of Arabia by one Baba Budan. A native of India, Baba Budan supposedly smuggled fertile coffee seeds out of Arabia by strapping them to his belly.

Europe was first exposed to coffee through a Venetian merchant in 1615, but in 1616, the Dutch became the first to grow coffee plants in Europe. The Dutch eventually established the first coffee plantation in Java (present day Indonesia) in 1696. The Java plantation was very successful, and additional plantations were soon established on nearby islands. Although a large quantity of coffee was being imported into Europe from the Dutch plantations, in Europe coffee trees were still rare and prized commodities.

The Dutch sometimes gifted favored European aristocrats with coffee plants, and the king of France, Louis XIV, was given a coffee plant in 1714. A few years later, Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu, a naval officer on leave in Paris, requested clippings from the king's tree. It happened that de Clieu was based on the Caribbean island of Martinique, which he imagined would be an excellent location in which to establish a coffee plantation.

When de Clieu's request was denied, he decided not to take no for an answer, and instead mounted a nighttime raid upon the hothouse of the Royal Botanical Garden in Paris, and made off with a clipping. But in spite of the success of the raid, de Clieu's trials had only begun.

Sailing for Martinique with his treasured clipping, de Clieu was apparently unable to conceal his precious cargo from fellow passengers. One passenger, recognizing the value of the little plant, attempted to steal it from de Clieu, breaking off a branch in the process. Though he was able to fend off the thief, de Clieu's problems were not over. The ship barely escaped being boarded by pirates, and then was nearly sunk by a ferocious storm. The wind then grew calm, the ship's sails emptied, and the progress of the ship was halted. While in the clutches of the doldrums, drinking water began to run low and had to be rationed. Determined to keep his coffee plant alive at all costs, de Clieu sacrificed half of his own daily water ration to keeping the plant healthy.

Finally reaching Martinique, de Clieu planted his coffee sprout, and protected it with an armed guard as it grew. Rewarding de Clieu's courageous efforts, the sprout survived and thrived, becoming the progenitor of some 18 million coffee plants over the next 50 years.

Descendants of de Clieu's sprouts were eventually smuggled into Latin America, sparking the establishment of the most prolific coffee producing region on earth. By 1800, Brazil was exporting enough coffee to supply most of the world, and to this day, Brazil remains the world's largest coffee producer.

### **Coffee Buzz Results in Bans**

As the use and production of coffee spread geographically, it became more deeply ingrained in the cultures that used it. In 16th century Turkey, for example, coffee was considered to be such a necessity that the divorce laws permitted a wife to divorce her husband if he failed to keep her properly supplied with coffee! Unfortunately, though, not everyone considered coffee to be such a good thing.

In 1511, the governor of Mecca, Khair Beg, decided to ban coffee. He feared that the stimulation coffee provided might embolden the enemies who opposed him. This decision turned out badly for him, however, for when the sultan heard of the ban, he ordered the governor's execution.

The Grand Vizir of the Ottoman Empire also banned coffee in 1611. Similar bans were instituted in Egypt and Ethiopia, but none of these bans were long-standing.

In Europe, an attempt was made to convince Pope Clement VIII that coffee was of the devil and should be banned. The Pope, however, decided to sample some coffee for himself before making a decision. As it turned out, the Pope was very fond of the coffee, and instead of banning it he decided to baptize it to make it permissible for use by Christians.

And in 1674 another protest against coffee was proclaimed in London by The Women's Petition Against Coffee, which protested "the grand inconveniences accruing to their sex from the excessive use of the drying and enfeebling liquor." The men, it seems, were nowhere to be found when their wives needed them, and were instead wasting much of their time lounging in coffeehouses.

King Charles II actually banned coffeehouses, fearing them as incubators of discontent and revolution. When his ban itself created an outcry of revolutionary proportions, he promptly and prudently cancelled it after only 11 days.

For the most part, coffee is now used and accepted universally, although there are some religious groups such as Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Rastafarians that currently prohibit the consumption of coffee.

## **Coffeehouses**

As the use of coffee spread throughout the world, so did the tradition of the coffeehouse. Though the nuances of the type of coffee consumed and the associated preparation techniques varied from house to house and region to region, the core theme of people gathering to drink coffee and to socialize was universal.

The first coffeehouse opened in Mecca, and by the 13th century coffeehouses were spread throughout Arabia. Starting in Venice, coffeehouses spread throughout Europe during the 1600's.

The first English coffeehouse was opened in Oxford in 1650. Many more coffeehouses were opened in Oxford in the ensuing years, some of which still exist as functioning businesses. The coffeehouse rapidly became an integral part of English society, and provided a nurturing environment for many organizations that became known throughout the world.

One of the Oxford coffeehouses founded in the 1650's hosted a group that became known as the Oxford Coffee Club. This club was composed of some of the area's leading scientists - of whom one was Sir Robert Boyle - and their students, who would meet to discuss and debate the leading scientific issues of the time. This coffeehouse discussion group eventually evolved into the Royal Society, the United Kingdom's academy of science.

The very first London coffeehouse was opened in 1652, prompting a flurry of new coffeehouse openings that yielded around 2000 coffeehouses by 1715. One London coffeehouse, founded in 1688 by Edward Lloyd, primarily served people involved in the shipping industry. Lloyd's coffeehouse became a meeting place where merchants and shippers would meet with insurance underwriters to purchase insurance for goods being shipped. This coffeehouse custom grew into one of the world's oldest and largest insurance companies, Lloyds of London.

Coffeehouses began appearing in North America in the mid 1600's. By the late 1660's, with coffeehouses in cities all along the eastern seaboard, coffee was the most popular morning beverage in New York City, having booted out beer as the most widely consumed breakfast drink. Even so, coffee did not displace tea in popularity in America until 1773, when the Boston Tea Party made drinking tea seem unpatriotic. Ironically, the Boston Tea Party was plotted and planned in a Boston coffeehouse known as the Green Dragon.

### **Eat...**

Throughout history, coffee has been used primarily as a beverage, but coffee was used as a food item before it was consumed in liquid form. The first known use of coffee was in Africa around 800 A.D. Nomadic tribes would crush coffee berries, mix them with animal fat, and roll the mixture into balls. This procedure created a food item which was easy to carry on long journeys, and which provided much energy and sustenance when consumed. This concoction, when eaten by warriors just before engaging in battle, was thought to increase their energy, endurance, and even their aggression.

Even after coffee began to be primarily consumed as a drink, it continued to be used as a valued ingredient in the preparation of other foods. From the energy balls of the African tribes, to the U.S. civil war soldiers soaking their hardtack in coffee before frying in fat, and the coffee flavored foods that can be found in every modern supermarket, coffee has always added a distinctive flavor to food that many find delightful.

### **Drink...**

Though coffee was first used as a food, it didn't take long for the process of roasting and brewing the beans to become the predominate use of coffee. Briefly revisiting Kaldi and his dancing goats, where we left Kaldi sampling the berries for himself, the legend goes on to say that Kaldi later gave some of the coffee berries to an acquaintance who happened to be a monk.

The monk took the berries to the monastery, and showed them to the Abbot. The Abbot decided the berries were of the devil (a strangely recurring theme in coffee history!), and tossed them into a fire. Later, the rich aroma of the roasting beans apparently caused the Abbot to rethink his position, and the beans were retrieved from the fire and dumped into water, and thus, the first pot of coffee.

Nobody really knows who first roasted and brewed coffee beans, but the process was probably discovered in Arabia around 1000 A.D. From that time and location the practice spread rapidly, and brewing coffee from the roasted beans soon became the predominant use of coffee.

### **...And be Healthy**

Coffee has long been thought to offer many medicinal qualities. In fact, in regions where coffee was fairly new, it was often considered to be of more value as a medicine than as a refreshing drink. The Persian scholar Avicenna wrote that coffee “fortifies the members, cleans the skin, dries up the humidities that are under it and gives an excellent smell to all the body.” His opinion of the medicinal value of coffee was widely shared as the use of coffee spread throughout the world.

Even as coffee became more appreciated as a beverage than as a medicine, it retained many ardent boosters who insisted that coffee would cure anything from the common cold to cancer. And they may have been on to something, for modern science has revealed that coffee is extremely rich in antioxidants, specifically polyphenols, which may have a repressive effect upon many diseases, including cancer.

### **Many Brews From Which to Choose**

A cup of coffee is available in a myriad of different tastes and textures, and this has been true for almost as long as coffee has been brewed. As the popularity of coffee spread geographically, new techniques of brewing coffee were developed. Some brews became popular worldwide, while others remained restricted to a specific region.

The Turkish method of crushing the beans and then boiling them in water was one of the earliest brewing techniques, and coffee prepared in this manner is still popular today. The first Espresso machine, created in 1822 in France, eventually gave rise to a number of Espresso-based drinks such as Cappuccinos and Lattes.

Another means of developing different flavored coffees is through the use of blending. There are a number of different strains of coffee plants, each with its own unique flavor compounds. Blending different strains together in varying ratios is done to create a coffee with its own distinct characteristics of flavor and aroma. One of the oldest of coffee blends is Mocha-Java, which was a blend of coffees from Java and from Yemen, shipped through the port of Mocha. The Mocha-Java blend has remained popular to this day.

In 1901, one of the most radical new methods of preparing coffee occurred with the invention of instant coffee. Chemist Satori Kato, the inventor of instant coffee, introduced it to the public at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, and received a patent for it in 1903. Though not extensively marketed until 1938 when the Nestle Company introduced freeze-dried Nescafe, instant coffee became a hit with consumers.

### **Buzz Kill**

In the early 1900's, a batch of coffee beans that were being shipped from Nicaragua to

Germany accidentally became soaked with seawater. When the soggy beans arrived at coffee merchant Ludwig Roselius' warehouse, his first inclination was to just discard them. But instead, they experimented with the beans and found that they were very low in caffeine. The exposure to salt water had left the coffee beans with a salty taste, but had also removed most of the caffeine.

This discovery prompted Roselius and his assistant, Karl Wimmer, to develop a commercially viable process for the production of decaffeinated coffee. They eventually developed a decaffeinating process that utilized steam and the chemicals benzene and methylene chloride, and in 1906 were awarded a patent for this process. Roselius marketed his decaffeinated coffee under several brand names, the most famous and successful of which was Sanka (a derivative of the French words meaning "without caffeine").

In the years since the Roselius process was patented, there have been a number of alternate methods developed for producing decaffeinated coffee. Today, the Roselius process is no longer used due to concerns about the chemicals involved, particularly benzene.

Soon, it may be possible to produce decaffeinated coffee without using any of the decaffeinating processes, and without losing any of the natural flavors. In 2004, Brazilian researchers successfully bred the first coffee plants that were not only capable of producing naturally decaffeinated coffee beans, but were also suitable for commercial cultivation. If all goes as hoped, much of the world's decaffeinated coffee may soon be produced from the offspring of these plants, rather than from the decaffeinating processes currently in use.

Regardless of how it is created, decaffeinated coffee is very popular with consumers. Recently, decaffeinated coffee has accounted for 10% of worldwide coffee sales. Obviously, many people love their coffee for reasons other than the caffeine buzz.

### **Thank The Goats!**

Coffee, or at least the use of it, really has not been around all that long. But as the production and consumption of coffee has spread geographically, it has become deeply ingrained in the fabric of cultures around the world. It has, in fact, become an integral part of the daily routine for much of the world's population.

And though we don't really know specifically who first discovered coffee, or exactly when that happened, or whether dancing goats were involved, it doesn't really matter. All of the world can be grateful that it did happen - coffee drinkers and non-coffee drinkers alike.

After all, can you imagine a world in which nobody gets their morning coffee? It wouldn't be pretty!

