

**Crayfish Tales**  
by  
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## **Kinnikinick**

Debunking a myth

Among the many lakes north of Payson, AZ, is the little lake of Kinnikinick. The name alone tempted me to find out more about this little lake half way up to Flagstaff. Then a friend of mine mentioned that he had heard the lake to be full of crayfish. That immediately increased my interest in this lake with the funny name.

As the unofficial expert among Arizona crayfish catchers, I have always wanted to find out which lakes have crayfish. For years I recommended my favorite crayfish lake on the Apache reservation. Then I recommended the Rim Lake Black Canyon Lake, which quickly turned into a dud. It went from producing fantastic catches to practically nothing over two years.

And as I often receive email queries from Arizona fishermen who want to go out and try their newly purchased crayfish traps about where to go to catch crayfish, I feel obligated to know something about which lakes are good and which ones are not.

This is where Kinnikinick came in. So after a successful visit to Woods Canyon Lake, where my friend George and I hauled out over 600, we decided to see if the reputation about Kinnikinick was true. Unfortunately, this lake is

considerably further away from Payson than the Rim lakes are.

On the way up toward Flagstaff, you make a right turn on Forest Road 125 while you see the Mormon Lake on your left. This time, the Mormon Lake was practically non-existent, not unusual during drought years.

We went up FS125, knowing that it would be about nine miles before we saw the lake. Soon I was reminded that dirt roads are pretty hard on both vehicles and on the patience of drivers. I always feel guilty making my vehicle suffer on bad roads, and this was one of the worst with potholes and washboard bone rattling surfaces that made my old motor home complain audibly.

After these grueling nine miles we finally arrived at the little, maybe 50 acres, lake in a rather flat and denuded juniper and piñon studded area. A little camp ground with 18 camp sites welcomed us with a camp host who accepted our Golden Age passport for using their facilities at half price. The place was not exactly teeming with campers. Only one other couple was tempting the trout and catfish in the lake with worm baited hooks and bobbers.

George and I decided, after a quick lunch, to place our traps on a shore line that had plenty of crayfish inviting rocks. George brought his two traps, baited with cans of cat food, and I brought my trot line for ten traps. That's what I thought, at least. When ready to load the boat with my trot line crank and 200 foot line, I discovered that the trot line

crank was still resting somewhere in my garage in Payson. After some quick emergency planning, I managed to find enough ropes to tie together making what resembled a trot line with loops every 15 or 20 feet.

Without the convenience of the cranking mechanism, I managed to hook up ten traps, five Trappers and five Trappys, on the make-do trot line and we were off to the rocky shore line. We noticed at once that the water was rather murky, probably due to the recent monsoon storms that had loaded the lake with gravel and mud run off. However, crayfish probably react more by their taste sense than vision, so that should not be much of a problem. Anyway, we are about to prove, or disapprove, the rumors that Kinnikinick is a great crayfish lake.

We placed my improvised trot line traps along the rocky shore and then went to the opposite shore with George's two traps and their cat fish cans.

After that George went for a walk around the lake with his dog, and I tried to entice some trout using a cowbell lure while rowing slowly around in a rather brisk wind.

After not a single strike I gave up and returned to the launching area. As I had previously seen a camping couple fishing from the shore, I decided to try the same. With my new Zebco rod and 33 Reel and a bobber, a #6 hook and worm, I threw out the trout temptation and settled down for some action.

Strangely, within five seconds I saw some action as the bobber disappeared and started moving erratically around. I had a fish on. Maneuvering it gently, making sure the hook was set, I brought the fish toward shore. Looking around for the landing net, I discovered I had left it in the boat, fifty feet away. In spite of no landing net, the foot long trout was apparently well enough hooked to permit me to simply lift it onto shore where it flopped in vain trying to shake itself free of the hook.

So I was not skunked today after all. Quick rebaiting with a fresh worm, and out into the lake the successful set up went again. This time I had to wait two hours before I had any other action. This time it was a crayfish. A small crayfish who decided that worms are tempting enough to hang on to while I reeled in. But no more trout, or catfish, which I later learned also inhabited the lake.

By this time George and his dog were approaching from the other side of the lake. Apparently they had walked all around the lake indicating somehow that the lake was not one of the big ones. I could see at a distance that the dog really enjoyed the freedom of the off-leash walk.

Now it was time to empty the traps after about four hours in this reputedly crayfish infested lake. While trolling my cowbell earlier I had peeked into two of the traps but found only one crayfish in the two. Not a good sign and it gave me doubts about how much we were going to catch today. So we rowed out first to George's two traps and found he had a total of about ten small to medium crayfish in them.

Not a good beginning.

On the other side of the lake, we started pulling my ten trot line traps. Immediately it began to become clear that today would be no record catches. In all the ten traps, baited with both manufactured bait and whiting filets, I had maybe thirty crayfish, all small and some mediums. As usual, I was terribly disappointed, especially as I had persuaded George to come with me to this reputedly great crayfish lake. With all the trot line traps back in the boat, we even for a while discussed whether we should simply throw in the towel and call it quits. For some reason we thought that was a cowardly way to end the fishing, so we did, after all, row across the lake to another rocky shore line and placed the ten traps there for the night. As all the bait was still practically untouched, I did not re-bait.

We returned rather disappointed to our camp site and prepared our meager dinner. No campfire. Yes, we could have had a fire, the drought restrictions had been lifted, but there was not a stick of fire wood within sight.

Instead we, and the dog Beauford, enjoyed our dinner with white wine, and we had some rather animated discussions while watching a colorful display of a receding thunderstorm to the west. Soon it was time to call it quits and go to bed. This time I slept rather snug in my new 'old' motor home of vintage 1978 Toyota, pleased that the vehicle had successfully managed to take me up the steep Rim road from Payson and over the rutted 9 mile dirt road to the lake. A few rumblings and some heavy showers

during the night accented my comfort inside.

After breakfasting on Granola with blueberries while admiring the rising sun over the lake, a few strips of black clouds accented the view. Down to the launch area, bailed out the boat, liberally filled with rain water, and off we went for George's two traps and my trot line. On the way out we commented on the fine weather, the sun peeking over the few strips of clouds, while we hoped for a better morning catch.

A better morning catch? No exactly. George's traps were simply empty. And my ten traps on the trot line were not much better. Maybe another two dozen crayfish, all small to medium with maybe one or two large ones. This settled it. This lake was no great crayfish lake as some people had tried to make us believe. While George rowed us home, I grumbled about the lack of facts in people's narratives when describing how many crayfish certain lake are bestowed with. I recalled once how a young kids told me an irrigation ditch had a 'million crawdads' in it. I went over and looked at it carefully and found not a one. Some of us accept exaggerations as such, others take them for facts. You learn after a while, if you are lucky, to tell the difference. Obviously this lake was an exaggeration. To add salt to the wounds, before we were back with our meager catch, it started raining. The cloud slivers that accented the sunrise, had quickly matured into rain soakers.

But the trip had taught me some useful facts. Never go to Kinnickinick for crayfish, and don't expose your vehicle to

the horrors of nine miles of rutted pot holy road. And now, I at least, will not recommend this lake to friends who are looking for a good place to catch a meal of crustaceans.

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