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the
CRAYFISH TALE
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EATING A CRAYFISH

People in different parts of the world are basically the same. But take a look at their habits of eating food, even the same foods, and you'll see dramatic differences. That also goes for how people eat crayfish. Of course I noticed that as soon as I came to the USA and started savoring the local crayfish. Let's take a look at the different ways to devour this delicious crustacean in the USA compared to some other countries.

HOW MUCH OF A CRAYFISH CAN YOU EAT?

The simplest answer to that question is, ALL.

What? You can eat all of a crayfish? Even the shell? Yes, believe it or not, you can eat all of a crayfish, even the shell and I will tell you how. However, I do make some exceptions to the rule that you CAN eat all of a crayfish. Yes, of course you CAN eat all of it,

but should you? There are only two parts of a crayfish I never eat. The first is the stomach. The second is the sand vein. But all the rest can, and maybe should, be eaten, yes even the shell. Here is how and why.

It is not difficult to convince people about not eating the stomach of a crayfish. It simply tastes sour and spoils the rest of the crayfish eating. But how do you find the stomach?

To most Americans, who only eat the tail of a crayfish, this is never a problem. You simply get rid of the stomach as you discard the main shell, the carapace, of the crayfish. When you break away the main shell from the rest of the crayfish, the stomach disappears under the carapace, and that's that.

For those of us who savor the deposit on the inside of the carapace, the so called crayfish butter, it is important to know what is the stomach and

what is not. As seen from the outside of the main shell, and somewhere under where you see the eyes of the crayfish, lies the stomach. It is a lump of dark material about the size of your little fingernail and usually stays under the shell even when you scratch around it in search of the crayfish butter. If you are careful, you will eat the butter and leave the stomach alone. I once made a mistake and ate the stomach and I'll never do it again.

The sand vein is a different case. While enjoying, in Phoenix of all places, a Cajun crawfish boil, I noticed that most people have no idea of what the sand vein is, what its function is and how to avoid eating it. As soon as I sat down with a group of devoted crayfish eaters of a mixture of southerners and northerners, I found that most of them gladly ate the sand vein and thought nothing of it. They even survived in good shape, it seems.

So what IS the sand vein. As we all well know, all critters have a method of disposing of undigested remains of what we eat. The same goes for crayfish. After digestion in the crayfish stomach, the residue, the poop, goes down the sand vein which is located in the crayfish tail. As all the crayfish

is cooked for several minutes before being eaten, the contents of the gut, the sand vein, is probably pretty well disinfected and rather tasteless and harmless. But the idea of eating the crayfish poop disillusions me. So I always get rid of it as part of the process of eating the rest of the cray, especially the tail. I simply scrape off the little sliver of meat on top of the tail, and lift out the sand vein and enjoy the rest. Simple and efficient.

One day a friend, who had recently learned enjoying eating crayfish, asked me what you should do with the stuff that usually sticks out from the base of the tail and looks like, well, crap.

To start with, it is not 'crap'. It is actually a very nutritious as well as delectable part of the crayfish anatomy, mostly part of the liver of the cray. It Contains lots of valuable fatty acids with all its Omega 3's.

So, when you pull the tail away from the body of the crayfish, enjoy the 'stuff' that sticks out from the tail with one big slurp. Sometimes it gets stuck in the rest of the cray, mostly under the shell, where you can retrieve it by lightly chewing on the gills between which the liver resides. All good stuff and

tasty too. And don't forget the claws!

But I said you could eat ALL of the crayfish. Even the shells?

Yes, the shell too. In some cases, the crayfish appears just like the soft shell crab, with all shell soft and munchable and delicious. Except maybe for the stomach and the sand vein.

But let's talk about ordinary hard shelled crayfish. Those shells can also be eaten. After you have eaten your portion of crayfish, leaving the shells lined up neatly or not on your plate, these shells can be treated to make some very interesting and tasty foods.

Here is what a Swedish cookbook says about the shells:

Don't throw away the shells! If we discard the crayfish shells, only about 20% of the total weight of the crayfish is left to eat. So, definitely don't throw away the shells. That way you can actually use all of the crayfish with the exception of the stomach and the sand vein. And if the cray has been purged, you can forget about the sand vein too.

You can easily make a delicious stock or 'crayfish butter' of the remaining parts. It may

become an excellent base for a fish soup not to mention some outstanding gravy. Just dry the shells in the oven and then keep them in the freeze in a plastic bag.

Here is one recipe called CRAYFISH BUTTER.

Ingredients:

Shells from 20 crayfish

2 to 3 ozs of butter

- 1 Roast the crayfish shells at about 400 F for 30 minutes.
- 2 Grind the roasted crayfish shells in a mortar. Add the butter and grind until well mixed.
- 3 Put the butter and shells in a pan and heat it while stirring.
- 4 Add water to cover the shells.
- 5 Let it cook for a while on low heat until the red butter floats up.
- 6 Let it cool until all butter has floated to the top and gelled
- 7 Carefully remove the butter which is now ready to use.
- 8 The brine can be strained and used to dilute gravies and soups.
- 9 Keep the butter frozen.

And with that I wish you all a

MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR

Greetings.

Trapper Arne

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