



The CRAYFISH TRAP

“WHO STOLE MY TRAPS?”

For almost 40 years I have placed crayfish traps in rivers and lakes. And each time I place my traps, I look around to see if anyone is watching me. I usually place ten traps at a time; that amounts to a sizeable investment. I'd hate to lose it to some unscrupulous individual with thievery in mind.

Strangely, over the years of placing hundreds of crayfish traps all over my state of Arizona I have NEVER lost a trap to thievery. I have lost traps now and then for other reasons, but never because someone stole them from me. Yet, the threat of thievery lingers in my mind every time I place traps. Why?

Placing crayfish traps in a well populated fishing lake or river, is indeed asking for trouble. To some, nowadays, thievery seems to be a way of life. They think nothing of it. If something is not tied down or locked up, they think it's there for them to steal.

After placing traps in a lake or river, you should be able to come back hours or a day later and find them. And they have to be marked so you can come back and find them. That's of course the problem. If you can find your traps, so can all sorts of minimally honest people.

At first I used to place all my traps with an individual floating marker. Usually a piece of furring strip painted with a

fluorescent red. Those I could also easily find at night by the light of a flashlight. But so could also any Tom, Dick and Harry. So I was concerned.

Then I read my mentor's dissertation on trot lines. (He calls them ground lines, but it's the same.) Trot lines have the advantage of being practically invisible, especially to dishonest elements. All the ropes or connecting lines between traps are under water, away from the eyes of inquisitive, shifty elements. (Read my web site page on the subject under 'How To Catch' with a link to a page I call 'Trot Lines'.)

But what to do if you just throw out a trap or two from the shore with a tell tale string running up from the lake, or have a few floats bobbing in the waves? For years I used that technique, yet I never lost a trap to foul fingered felons. Why?

First of all, as nightly catches tend to be bigger than daily, I place my traps in the evening, preferably after sundown and falling dusk. Then most people who frequent the lake have quit fishing and are back in camp eating their catch. If I placed the traps during the day, and that may sometimes be our only choice, I always stayed in the vicinity so I could keep an eye on the traps. Either that worked, or I was lucky.

Not so lucky was customer Bill who had just bought four Trappy crayfish traps from me. His first attempt of catching some crays for his dinner table was in a

lake that produced very little. He moved over to a creek and placed his four traps from the shore. Each trap was attached to a very visible yellow cord running up to the shore. He left them out for a nightly session.

The next morning as he got ready to empty the traps, they were gone. He was heart broken and angry and feared this was the end of his crayfish catching. After all, good traps are not cheap. But he did not just leave it at that and do nothing. He wrote the following letter to the editor of local newspapers:

...to the person or persons who saw fit to deprive me of my crawdad traps. Yes, they were stolen by some thoughtless person. I worked for the money to buy them, you didn't. It's a hobby for me and our grandchildren that also provides ... food. Last Wednesday about six in the evening I re-baited the traps and set them... About four A.M. Thursday morning I went to check them and retrieve my catch but they were not there. I was angry, but mostly disappointed in humanity that you can't leave anything lie there without someone stealing it. Luckily at four A.M. I was alone out there so I didn't offend anyone with my string of choice words for the thief. It wasn't a secret who they belonged to as I had a small wooden tag with my name and fishing license number carved into each block with one attached to each trap. If anyone has any information I would truly appreciate it. The traps (Trappy) are made in Sweden. They are black poly (plastic) with bright yellow ends which are an inverted cone. ... attached to each was 50' of bright yellow floating cord. Inside each were two metal shower curtain hangers for suspending bait and a small yellow plastic bait box.

Trapper Arne

I don't want you to get in trouble for a brief moment of indiscretion; I just want my traps back. You saw fit to take them in the middle of the night so feel free to return them in the same manner by dropping them by my house. Ask around, you'll find out where I live. I'll even teach you how to trap, prepare and eat crawdads if you'd like but you'll have to buy your own traps.

Signed, Bill

After several weeks and some tips from citizens, Bill got his traps back. They were stolen by three twelve year old boys encouraged by one misguiding adult, from whose truck the boys spotted the yellow trap ropes. The case went to court, but the judge decided to dismiss the case as the value of the stolen goods was slight, and the traps actually were returned.

At least, two of the pilfering boys had to endure the trial of admitting their crime to Bill and his wife in the presence of their mothers. Except for that shame, the boys got off scot-free.

Bill, having learned his lesson, bought some less conspicuous rope and moved his traps to another, better crayfish source. He pulled up large numbers of crayfish in his four Trappys thanks to some freebie bait consisting of cheese filled hot dogs. He hangs his bait from the middle of the trap; a productive method as he since doubled and trebled his catches. He averaged 35 to 40 crays per Trappy and has even surpassed 60 in one trap.

Let's all learn from this story of trap thievery that had a happy ending.