



## the CRAYFISH TALE

### **TIME TO CATCH CRAYFISH !**

When summer finally arrives and lakes warm up, I am ready to catch another bunch of crayfish to last me through the next winter. I have done this for over 35 years now, and all members of my family know the routine. Traipse up the mountains to some crayfish lake, spend at least three days there, and come home with a cooler full of these delectables.

### **FIND A LAKE OR RIVER**

Before you choose a lake for catching crayfish, make sure there are crayfish in the lake. Yes, maybe most lakes have some crayfish. But only some lakes have them in abundance. I learned that the hard way. One way to find out about what lakes or rivers have crayfish in them is to check with the folks at a sporting goods store, They usually know. Maybe the people at a Game and Fish Department know. At least they should...

Another way to find out if a lake has crayfish is what I do when confronted with a new lake. Walk along the shore and look for crayfish shells. If the lake has crayfish in it, some people, or animals, often drag up some crays to the shoreline and leave them there

### **GET SOME GOOD TRAPS**

I don't have to tell you where to go for traps. My own web site has several good ones to choose from. But

don't forget that good crayfish traps can be hand made in your own home. That's how I started my crayfish trap business. But if you don't have time or facilities to make your own, just a browse down the internet will tell you where to find them. Let Google or some other search engine look for Crayfish Traps, and you will be swamped with suggestions. Then it's just a matter of finding the good ones at the right prices, and you'll be in business.

### **GET SOME GOOD BAIT**

I used to go to my favorite grocery store and ask them for free salmon trimmings. That makes super good bait which beats the chicken pieces I used to bait with before. But then one day my friend George showed me how he caught crayfish using cat food as bait. I had for years considered myself his crayfish mentor, and he used to follow my advice. But then one day, when I was equipped with frozen tilapia filets from Walmart, he had brought fishy cat food in small flat Friskies cans. I chuckled at this flagrant disregard of what the expert, me, had taught him.

But when we emptied our traps the next morning, it was he who was the expert and I who was learning a lesson. My traps, baited with tilapia, were practically empty, while his, baited with fishy cat food, were well filled with 20-30 crays in each trap. Well, you are never too old to learn. So

now I never go crayfishing without some fishy cat food cans in the bait holder.

### **PLACE THE TRAPS**

Crayfish crawl on the bottom of waterways. They don't swim as some people think. Consequently, a trap must lie on the bottom in order to catch crayfish. Find a place in the lake or river where the crayfish have plenty of hiding places. Even crays have their predators and need protection. Rocky areas and places with plenty of hideaways is where they hang out. I usually place my traps at a depth of anywhere between five and ten feet. Deeper than that seems to be less productive.

Placing traps from a boat is best, but it can also be done from the shore. For years I used to throw out traps from the shore, but then I also lost a few when trying to drag them onto shore again. That's why I got myself a little aluminum row boat. Good investment. Then I graduated from placing single traps with floats to using a trot line for my increasing number of traps. Read about trot lines on my web site.

### **SOAKING HOW LONG?**

After many years of catching crayfish I have found that the best soaking time seems to be as many hours as the night is long. As crayfish are nocturnal, it makes sense that you may catch more during the night time. That's also when commercial fishermen set their traps. However, you can also catch them during daytime hours as I have proven many times.

Crayfish traps with escape stoppers can be left out all night long. But the Jackpot, e.g., which has a large entry for big crayfish, also lets them escape if left in a baitless trap too long. As a rule I emptied my Jackpots every four hours and caught

enormous amounts of crays each night, but lost a lot of sleep.

### **KEEPING YOUR CATCH**

Crayfish kept in a pail of water will soon die from drowning. Yes, after all the oxygen in the water has been used up by the crayfish, they will die. However, as crayfish can utilize oxygen from the air, they can stay alive surprisingly many days if just kept cool and moist. But not in water unless oxygenated with an air pump.

While camping and catching crayfish I simply collect them in coolers where they stay relatively comfortable until we break camp and return to civilization. I often set a quart container of frozen water in a corner to keep them cool. Before returning home I also rinse them off in cool water to make sure they will survive the trip. To satisfy the AZ Fish and Game authorities, I also cover them with crushed ice as an indication that they are heading for human consumption and not for another lake.

### **COOK THEM RIGHT**

De Gustibus non est Disputandum said the old Romans. I have been told. In other words, To Each His Own. So if you prefer the Cajun style of cooking and eating crayfish with plenty of spices, corn and potatoes, rather than the European/Swedish tradition of simply using salt and dill, more power to you. I have cooked them either way and have had great pleasure both ways

For detailed instructions of how to cook and eat crayfish, I suggest you take a look at my web site pages. Or to really confuse you, look for crayfish recipes on the internet. There are gads of them there. Enjoy!

Trapper Arne