



the
CRAYFISH TALE
www.trapperarne.com

THE ANNUAL CRAYFISH TREK

Thirty-five years ago I started an annual routine which includes catching lots of crayfish in some of my favorite crayfish lakes. This year is no different, and here I am ready to start up the mountains again to my favorite lake on the Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona.

On my website – trapperarne.com – you'll find some rules for making this a successful crayfish outing. Here are some thoughts on the subject, following my web site rules:

FIND A CRAYFISH LAKE

First, find yourself a crayfish lake. Yes, this is important, because all lakes don't have crayfish. Sure, it seems that in Arizona every lake I have visited has some crayfish in it. But don't forget also that while some lakes have plenty of crays, some other lakes have just a few. And then, some lakes have none. And why would there be that difference between the lakes? Most likely, the answer lies in the consistency of the water's chemical make-up. Crayfish prefer a certain pH-value and if it doesn't measure up to their expectations, they will not thrive. For that reason, some lakes have plenty of crays, some not. Then, of course, the nutrients in the water are important. Crayfish like to eat, who doesn't, and lakes with plenty of vegetation are much

more likely to have a good supply of crayfish. And crayfish eat both vegetarian material as well as other critters who make the lake their home. I have found that crayfish both eat trout and are eaten by trout. So that is some kind of symbiotic existence – much to my delight.

FIND YOURSELF A TRAP

Once you have found a crayfish lake, find yourself a crayfish trap. And this rule is probably easier than the first. Many stores, including Wal-Mart, are full of crayfish traps – of sorts. They usually stock the little minnow traps which can easily be modified to also catch crayfish. But these traps are, as said, small. Go to places that specialize in offering crayfish traps, and there are many on the internet, including, of course, Trapper Arne, Bullard and a few other ones. And most of these traps are the kind you can use in lakes that are deeper than the Cajun rice fields in Louisiana. These traps, with their tops sticking out of the shallow water, are fine down south, but up in deeper and natural lakes, you need traps that go deeper and catch bigger – and in my opinion – better tasting crayfish.

Personally I have evolved into a cray catcher that usually brings more than ten traps to go on my trot line. This evolved from my early days when all my traps were individually placed in a lake

with their floating markers telling me, and every Tom Dick and Harry, where they were located. To make them really visible, especially at night without a moon, I had painted them with a fluorescent red paint that stood out in the flash light while rowing from trap to trap in the dark.

Now I have developed a fine trot line system that makes it all much easier to handle, and, in addition, much safer from people whose opinions about property rights are much to be desired.

FIND SOME GOOD BAIT

The most important single factor when it comes to catching crayfish, is the bait. With good bait, any trap catches crays. Some bait attracts crayfish better than others. Some bait only seems to attract crayfish catchers. Some years ago I decided to try Tilapia fish as bait. After all, it was FISH, which is supposed to be the bait of crayfish choice. But my friend George soon proved me wrong as I with my Tilapia did not even come close to what he caught with fishy cat food in cans. Most anything that is oily and fishy will attract crayfish, so there is a whole field of choices anywhere from hot dogs to bacon, or even the proverbial 'stealthily shot neighbor's cat' which I have, so far not tried.

FIND A GOOD RECIPE

Trapper Arne

To argue about taste is a lost cause. We all have our preferred way of preparing crayfish. Cajuns in the South do it their way with peppery spices and a handful of corn, potatoes and sometimes some hot dogs. The recipe I prefer is the one my mother taught me – surprise surprise – so I go with the simple recipe of salty water (1/2 cup of salt per gallon of water) and if I have some dill weed handy I add that to really make me happy as a cat in cat nip. But then one day I ran into a young man who prepared his crayfish by simply boiling them in plain water with no salt. Not to be recommended by me. But, *de gustibus non est disputandum*.

EAT THE CRAYFISH

Here again we all differ radically and usually stay with how our mothers taught us to enjoy crayfish. My cultural background frowns upon eating crayfish southern style dumped on newspapers on a table for all to grab as best they can. I was brought up with the more formal setting of serving crayfish on platters surrounded with silverware, beer filled steins and maybe some frosty schnapps glasses to ad zest to the fest. And I never heard Cajuns enjoy singing drinking songs while eating crayfish, but that's the way I was brought up to do.

So let's all enjoy our crayfish no matter how differently our mothers taught us.