



the
CRAYFISH TALE

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ON CRAYFISH HOT SPOTS

Last month I described how I prepared myself for our annual trek up to my favorite crayfish lake on Arizona's Apache Indian Reservation. Logically I should now tell you about the result of this annual crayfish trek up the mountains. So here it is:

It turned into quite a caravan of cars leaving my Payson home with son Peter and I leading the way pulling the boat on its trailer. I had filled the boat with all the traps I had planned to hook onto my crayfish trot line already prepared with space for five Jumbos and five Trappy XL traps. Oh, yes, one extra Jumbo trap just in case...

The caravan trekked out of Payson at 5000 foot elevation, up to the Mogollon Rim at 7000 foot elevation and then through the Ponderosa pines toward the northeast through Heber, Overgaard, and the town named after a card game, Show Low. Then through Alpine and Pinetop, through McNary and then up the winding nine miles to Hawley Lake at 8200 elevation.

In deference to trek members of 'mature' age and female requests for conveniences facilities, we headed for the rental cabin opposite the campground where for years we had

roughed it during previous years' crayfish forays. The rented cabin was once on a leased lot on the Indian Reservation until the Indians preferred not to renew the lease. Peter would rather have camped in the woods among bears and other wildlife, but democracy ruled in favor of civilized comfort.

The cabin is situated only a hop, skip and a jump from the lake shore, and soon our boat was bobbing gently in the artificial lake waiting for me to prepare the trotline with its ten Jumbos and Trappy XLs. As usual we waited until the sun was ready to sink beyond the western shore behind the lake's dam. As usual I had prepared the traps with quick clips and cans of fishy cat food which had in the past proven so successful.

As the afternoon test trap proved that the lake still had an ample supply of crayfish, we placed all the traps along the shore about 20 feet out and at a depth of around ten feet. As I hook up each trap to the prepared trot line coiling out of a 5 gallon plastic flower pot, I also puncture each bait can with four or five holes using my outdated can opener of yesteryear, the 'church key'. This time I also wanted to make sure the cans stayed in the

middle of each trap, so I attached each to a strong rubber band threaded through the trap meshes. These fishy cans are usually filled with a juicy liquid, intended to attract cats, but obviously also attracting crayfish. Soon the whole trot line was out in the water, and Peter and I were ready to return to the cabin with the rest of the family and a waiting dinner.

The next morning, long before the rest of the household members were stirring, Peter and I were out on the lake ready to pull the traps. At one end the trot line floated an inconspicuous float making it easy for us, but not others, to find it.

This time I learned what I had long theorized. Crayfish are not evenly distributed over the bottom of lakes and rivers. They are instead found here and there in 'hot spots' with long stretches in between of barely any at all. Consequently, the 150 crays we pulled up on this our first attempt were distributed in equally baited traps thus: 12-4-18-5-18-5-28-7-0-31 with one extra afternoon trap for a total of 170. A rather disappointing result. But this strengthened my theory about crayfish distribution in lakes. You have to find the hot spots.

Maybe this poor result reminded me of the time, many years ago, when my friend Kerstin had 'camped' in one of the Indian motel rooms near the boat dock at the other end of this lake. She used two of her own traps, and when preparing to pull them the following morning, brought two buckets for the catch. Making fun of her optimism, I suggested one would be more than enough

So the next morning, at the Indian boat dock, she pulled up two traps so full of crayfish that the two buckets overflowed. I was embarrassed at having had my doubts, but I never forgot the event. Nor would she let me.

So now, with a poor catch from in front of our cabin, I remembered Kerstin's great catch and suggested

we place our extra Jumbo trap down by this by now famous boat dock. The next night, in addition to another string of trot line along another stretch of the lake, we also placed one big Jumbo down by the boat dock. And, by the way, this is also where the Indians have prepared a fish cleaning station with a table, a water faucet and a big, often overflowing, barrel of trout guts, heads and tails.

Dinner at the cabin that night consisted of freshly cooked crayfish with Zatarain's crab boil to everybody's delight. Well, almost everybody's. The only thing wrong with these crays was that they had been fished too early to have my favorite crayfish roe to entice me.

Early the next morning, Peter and I were on our way through the morning mists down to that extra and single Jumbo trap down by the boat dock before we tackled the ten trap long trot line. Anticipating a good catch, I had my video camera ready as Peter rowed up to where the single Jumbo was placed about ten feet deep.

The trap slowly came up from the dark depths of Hawley Lake. And as the trap broke the surface it became clear, the old memory of Kerstin's super catch 'by the dock' was revived. The Jumbo trap was full of 70 lively crayfish all fighting for the cat food in the 50c can. We had made it! The boat dock was still as good as ever, and Peter and I were jubilant as we returned to pull the rest of the traps in the trot line.

And the second trot line proved again to us that crayfish are not evenly distributed along the bottom of lakes. 26-6-22-12-8-7-5-28-9-8 plus two afternoon traps for a total of 205 and the boat dock Jumbo of 70 for a grand total of 280. Not a record, but nothing to sneeze at.

With the good catch of 70 in one single trap at the boat dock, we decided to place the next and third and

last day's string of traps down by the boat dock before going home. Unfortunately, the Arizona monsoon just arrived and up at this elevation it always reacts with vigor. During our last day at the cabin, it rained every minute from noon to night and we sadly de-

cided that crayfish catching for our last and third day had to be scrubbed.

I was still happy being able to cook over three hundred crayfish to add to my selection of frozen dinners to delight me during the coming dark days of winter.

TRAPPER ARNE WEB SITE HACKED

After more than eight years on the Internet, it finally happened. Some jerk deciphered my pass word and got into my address list. Apparently the only damage done was some advertising sent out to my unsuspecting customers. For that I apologize and hope my new password will prevent a repeat.

Trapper Arne