



the
CRAYFISH TALE
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DIRTY CRAYFISH

Several years ago I took my family on a vacation trip to the Navajo Indian Reservation. What lured me there was a lake up in the pines on the reservation, the Wheatfields Lake, in the northeastern corner of Arizona. What tempted me most this time was the lake's trout population which was supposed to be both plentiful and feisty to catch.

That was true. My wife and I had some great fishing rowing back and forth in the lake trolling a cowbell baited with worms. That was the time when, in order to find what the trout were feeding on, I inspected the stomach of a caught fish and found it was full of surprisingly large crayfish.

And this was also the year I discovered that the lake had large crayfish to catch. And there I was with no crayfish traps to catch them. Maybe you read my story about how I made a makeshift crayfish trap from my metal mesh fish basket and actually caught more crayfish than I could eat while camping at this great lake.

The next year I came back, but this time well equipped with plenty of collapsible crayfish traps my brother had sent over from Sweden. We set out a dozen of these Jackpot crayfish traps and I was delighted when we hauled in hundreds of crayfish each overnight ses-

sion. I, who had recently rediscovered my love for crayfish, had a ball.

But there was a fly in the ointment. Some of these crayfish did not look right. They looked dirty, especially on the bottom part where all the legs are. But not only were they 'dirty', but on top of their shell I found mossy growth of algae. It almost made them slippery to handle. Strangely, in spite of all the unsightly problems of these crayfish, after cooking them they tasted just fine and I soon forgot about these 'dirty' crayfish.

Years later I ran into a similar situation in another Arizona lake. This time it was the lake that had broken all records as far as the number of crayfish I had caught in an overnight session. As I could only handle about a thousand caught crays, I had to reduce my catching efforts in favor of trying to catch some fish.

But the plenty crays in this lake were also to a high degree plenty "dirty". As the percentage of 'dirty' crayfish became rather high, close to 50%, I started analyzing what could possibly be going on. This is when I realized that the 'dirty' crays had something in common; they were all big. That reminded me that large crayfish seldom molt more than once a year, and often not even that often. Tie that thought together with the fact that crayfish usually hibernate during the winter, or at least they are

very inactive which causes water silt and debris to accumulate on their shells during inactivity. But as they start moving around in the spring, they will lose some of the dirty deposits, and if they also molt, they come out clean and nice looking compared to those who don't molt. The earlier during the season you try to catch your crays, the more likely you will run into this situation. They simply have not molted yet.

The more I considered these facts, the more they made sense. Crayfish that don't molt tend to look dirty. But there was also another factor among these crayfish from this highly populated lake. The meat in the 'dirty' crayfish was skimpy. The tail was often shrunken and lacking the robust thickness of a well fed crayfish. Even the claws were sometimes rather hollow, making the whole session

of eating these crays a disappointment. Did they not eat enough to actuate the molting? Was there enough food in the lake?

One other factor. Some of the crayfish from this lake, a rather shallow lake with little or no vegetation to be seen from the shore, had the unmistakable taste of mud. Not that I know much about eating mud, but some of these crays gave the impression of having a muddy taste. Maybe there is a reason why some people refer to crayfish as 'mudbugs'.

Adding this muddy taste to the skimpy meat and their unsightly looks made me decide that this lake will no longer be on the itinerary of my future crayfish outings. Fortunately, there are plenty of other lakes with crayfish that are much more appetizing.

COMING ON THE OCEAN BLUE

The people in charge of shipping crayfish traps across the ocean must have done something just right this year. My load of new Trappy and Trappy XL crayfish traps came in record time across the Blue and arrived after less than one month's travel from Gothenburg to Los Angeles. Consequently my garage inventory is now filled to the rim with boxes containing these productive traps, and the new season is already off to a great start keeping me busy filling orders from morning to night.

SPRUCED UP WEB SITE

You may have noticed some additions to my web site – a few new pictures and videos from my Swedish trap manufacturer. Some of these are in Swedish, but regardless of the language, the message still comes across.

Trapper Arne