



the CRAYFISH TALE

CATCHING MY WINTER SUPPLY

The first crayfish trap came up with almost 50 crays in it. Again, my favorite Hawley Lake on the Apache Reservation in Arizona was performing as it had done for over 30 years.

Every time I go to this crayfish lake I wonder, will it perform again this time or not? When I took my family up to this reservation lake 40 years ago, I had no idea it also contained crayfish. I was after trout then.

But I had just found out that the Phoenix canals had crayfish, so if they had crayfish in them, why not this lake up in the 8000 foot high mountains. Just a stroll along the shore told me right away that there were crayfish in that there lake. With a stick, a string and a piece of bait, I brought home 150 crayfish and I was impressed.

Forty years later I came back, and as usual, I wondered if the lake would still produce. It did. I caught over one thousand crayfish during three days of fishing for both crayfish and trout. And I was impressed. Again.

Every lake in Arizona that I have visited has crayfish in it. Some have a few, some have many. Hawley Lake on the reservation has many. Ever since I started visiting this lake I have brought home large amounts of crayfish for my winter supply, and it never stops producing. After cooking them, I freeze them in my traditional salty and dill spiced brine.

This year would be different. Up till now my family and I had camped in the spacious campground on the south side of the lake. We put up with some of the inconveniences, like smelly outhouses. But this year we would camp in style with all facilities by renting a cabin on the north side of the lake.

But would the other side of the lake also have crayfish? We had never put a trap there before. We knew that the campground side of the lake had plenty.

So the first string of eleven traps on the trot line went in on the campground side of the lake. As usual we placed them at sundown for an overnight session. The following morning, my son Peter and I walked down from our cabin with its flush toilets and soft mattresses to our little aluminum boat and motored over to the other side.

Yes, the "other" side delivered as before. Maybe the crayfish were a little less impressive in size, very few were as big as we usually had caught on that side. But the numbers were impressive, and one of my Jumbos had 56 crays in it. In my book, that is a very respectable number.

But as we came to the end of the trot line, I realized we had lost a trap. I now realized we had missed the very first trap, the one that should have been connected to the identifying float at one end of the trot line. That bothered me. That trap was one

of my favorites, a Jumbo trap made with Trappy XL funnels and with a special easy way to open and bait with one funnel held in place with bungee cords.

We searched for the lost trap until the waves made it impossible to see anything on the bottom 5-10 feet below. We returned to the cabin and I checked the catch by recording the number caught in each trap. Although one trap was missing, I was pleased with the final count of 233 crayfish. A fly in the ointment, there were few large ones in there.

Later during the day, during our trout fishing session, we again visited the area of the lost trap, but the wave action made it impossible to see it. So we concentrated on catching trout, and Peter was the only one who had some luck with that species. Just right for a delicious lunch.

Our test trap on the cabin side of the lake showed poor result. But in the evening, we walked along the edge of the lake and scrutinized it for signs of crays. Now we saw several large ones just a few feet from the shore, and we decided that, after all, the campground side of the lake was not the only one with crayfish. We decided to place the next string of traps on the cabin side of the lake.

Good decision. We placed the trot line with its eleven traps just outside the cabin and enjoyed not having to motor all across as the night before. Our trolling motor battery showed signs of weakness, and we had to give it some rest.

A decided advantage of fishing on the "cabin" side of the lake was that fewer people fished on this side. We wanted to be able to keep an eye on where the traps were soaking, just in case...

The next morning, after a quick breakfast of low sugar Trail Mix cereal and juice, we made ready to pull another string of traps. But first wiping the morning dew from the seats

of the boat and donning life vests. As the traps now were on 'our' side of the lake, we did not need the electric motor, and soon had rowed over to where the inconspicuous float indicated the beginning of the trot line.

Our scouting efforts were correct. This side also had large amounts of crays. In addition, they were noticeably larger and there were many more females on this side. Now why would that be? We had placed the traps about ten-twenty feet off the shore and maybe at a depth of 5-10 feet. As usual, the Jumbos had the best catches, but all traps had respectable amounts in them. In total we collected about 300 crays in the eleven traps.

Leaving me to count the individual catch in each trap, Peter and his wife Tracey, took off for trout with the intent to also try to find the lost Jumbo trap. No wind so far, and the water surface was very smooth and water vision was good. Satisfied counting around 300 for the night's session, I heard shouts from the returning boat. Tracey with her eagle eye vision had immediately spotted the lost trap, maneuvered the home made grappling hook just right and made a successful recovery. The trap was full of crays! I applauded the important recovery and felt much better.

I had planned two trap tests this time. First, would glow lights in a trap attract crayfish? So one of the traps included several strings of these chemical glow lights to see what attraction that would have during the night. In another trap, I had inserted a sponge soaked with Norwegian fish oil to act as bait. No other bait in those traps. Interestingly, both traps had not a single cray in them when pulled up, so apparently neither method works.

But the fishy cat food bait worked in all other traps, and in a grand total of over one thousand crayfish during these three nightly sessions, I was

satisfied. What remained was to cook

Trapper Arne

**them and freeze them and eat them,
but that is another story.**