



the CRAYFISH TALE

CRAYFISH TRAPS –

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

The first traps I used weren't really traps. They were simply nets used to catch crayfish that entered the circular netting where the bait was. But as a kid I got a kick out of seeing crayfish walking onto this netting, grabbing for the bait. And then, of course, hauling up the catch.

When I later on developed what I called the Dipper, I had this simple net contraption in mind. The main advantage with this plain little net lying flat on the bottom was of course that it did not take long before you could harvest your small catch. But it also meant that the bottom of the lake had to be relatively flat so that the crawling crayfish could enter the net and grab their prize. And bear in mind that crawfish crawl on the bottom of the lake. They don't swim as some people think. Now and then I get questions about whether a crayfish trap should be suspended in the water or lie on the bottom.

That reminds me of my crayfish loving friend Carl, who with his halting English called these critters crawlfish. Yes, they really crawl. They don't swim. And that is why they find it hard to get out of a well

designed trap. They have to find the exit by crawling, not swimming.

Soon I was introduced to other types of traps. The next one, for a while the only type you'd find in Swedish crayfish waters, was a beehive looking contraption with the entrance at the top and with a flat bottom. Way back in crayfish history, that was the only one used. But this type of trap was not very productive. To enter the trap, crays had to climb up on the sides to reach the steel collared entry on top to get to the bait. But once a crayfish was inside, it was there for good as the steel collar made it practically impossible to crawl out again. But as the beehive trap had a flat bottom, it often landed on top of rocks or junk that made it hard for crays to even enter the trap. A better trap was needed.

Then someone got the bright idea of making crayfish traps cylindrical. It had the advantage of having two entrances instead of just one. In addition, no matter how it landed on top of rocks and other junk, it would almost always offer a way for the crayfish to enter. A decided advantage. With the bait placed in the middle of the trap, crayfish would get the scent of the bait from either end; potentially entice twice the number to enter the trap. But the trap must not be too long, or the crays will get the scent

from the middle of the trap, where there is no entrance. Occasionally I have pulled up traps with a crayfish sitting on the trap's middle hoping to get inside to where the bait is. The scent should entice the cray to move toward the entry as much as possible.

Then someone came up with the good idea to make these cylindrical traps collapsible. Voilà the Jackpot, the trap made perfect for backpackers. That trap soon became the standard Swedish crayfish trap, and that's the one my brother sent me when I started catching crayfish in the US.

But back for a while to the beehive trap with the entrance at the top. The most common trap used commercially down in Louisiana resembles the old beehive trap. Except, to make this modern Cajun area trap more effective, there are three entrances down where the flat bottomed trap sits on the bottom. Now crayfish have a better chance of entering the trap where the bait scent is the strongest and where the crawling in is easy. Result, a much more effective crayfish trap. The only trouble with this type of trap is that it needs a smooth, flat bottom to work well.

Then came the plastics. For years, while sitting making handcrafted Trapper crayfish traps, I thought there must be a better way to make a trap. Some other trap manufacturers thought the same, and soon the plastic traps entered the market. From a manufacturing point of view, this is the perfect way to make a trap. Once you have designed your new trap and ordered the injection mold parts – very expensive! – you can start making traps for a unit price that

is much lower than the hand crafted traps.

Such a trap is the Trappy, the Cray Shack and now, the large Trappy XL traps. All these traps are made through injection molding using a plastic that is durable, eco-friendly and pliable. Many of these designs are collapsible and can be transported without taking up a lot of space. And, best of all, they catch crayfish when handled properly. I have used these traps now for several years and I am impressed. Still, there are many customers who insist on using the old, proven hand made traps. And who am I to argue the point.

Another type of crayfish trap that you'll find in supermarkets and sporting goods stores is the vinyl clad small metal cylindrical or boxy black traps. They have become popular due to their low price, but their small size limits the size of their catches. Some look like the traditional minnow trap, and you may have to enlarge the entrance to allow crayfish to enter. As most of these traps are small, their catch is also small and disappointing.

The boxy crayfish trap is a problem waiting to happen. In my innocent youth, even I fell for the temptation to make a boxy trap from poultry netting. Yes, it caught crayfish with the right bait as long as it lasted, before it got stuck on the bottom of a debris laden lake. And it is hard to make a boxy trap collapsible.

There are myriads of other designs for crayfish traps, some good, some not so good. This is a field where the human ingenuity excels and new designs make interesting splashes on the market. For crayfish, the cylindrical shape still seems to be the most effective.

TRAPPY XL IS COMING THIS MONTH!

Trapper Arne