



The CRAYFISH TALE

CAT FOOD AS CRAYFISH BAIT?

In previous newsletters I have talked about crayfish bait. The more I learn about catching crayfish, the more I realize how important bait is. Actually, although traps are important, I believe sincerely that bait is more important. Any trap, no matter how bad it may be, will catch crayfish with the right bait in it. I have proved that on many occasions, especially during my 'formative' years as a crayfish catcher. Even my square boxy traps made with chicken wire, caught crayfish with the right bait.

But what is THE RIGHT BAIT? My mentor Bullard says that bait has to be fresh and preferably some oily fish. I agree and most of my baits during the years have been just that, fresh bait, mostly consisting of salmon or trout or other fat fish. But he also says: "None of this chicken or cat food crap which you hear about, grin."

Then I went to Black Canyon Lake. My friend George had recently come back from there with a good catch of nice crayfish. I was especially interested in this lake because, while giving me enormous catches a few years ago, it suddenly had turned sour on me with poor catches. I moved to other lakes for a while. Then George came with the good news that Black Canyon was back in business again.

So I prepared eleven traps for my trot line and followed George with

his two traps up to the lake.

Remembering that bait has to be fresh, I had bought frozen filets of tilapia and planned to bait all my traps with that. George, who had recently done well with fishy cat food cans in his traps, repeated that for his bait.

Our first soak of traps was a five hour afternoon session, placing the traps where I in previous years had such great catches. George also put his two traps in the same vicinity. I with tilapia in my traps, he with cat food in his.

Toward dusk we started pulling traps. My trot line was reeled in from our little row boat and in came the traps, baited with fresh tilapia, one after the other of the eleven traps I had placed. I had also placed Power Bait in one of my traps as well as some artificial bait for catching carp.

Out of my eleven traps filled with fresh tilapia and other bait, I caught a total of eleven crayfish. An average of one crayfish per trap. Some traps did not have a single crayfish in them. A dismal catch

Then we rowed over to the two traps George had placed in the same vicinity and at about the same depth and distance from the shore. I pulled traps while George rowed. My humiliation increased when I pulled up his first trap, baited with CAT FOOD, and found it full of around 30 crayfish. I had a total of eleven crayfish in eleven traps! Then we

rowed over to his other trap, a Trapper crayfish trap, and as my humiliation deepened, I pulled up a trap filled with at least 30 crayfish. Also baited with CAT FOOD.

I was stunned. Here I was, presumably the expert on catching crayfish, pulling my traps baited with fresh tilapia and averaging one crayfish per trap. And then George's traps baited with CAT FOOD came up averaging 30 crayfish in each! What had gone wrong?

We re-baited our traps for the night session. I repeated my baiting with fresh tilapia and George repeated his baiting with cans of Friskies cat food with white fish and tuna. As George had one can of cat food left, he donated it to me and I baited one of my traps, the Jumbo trap, with cat food instead of fresh tilapia. Now, that should become a test whether cat food really was as good as it seemed.

We camped near the lake and enjoyed a near full moon while preparing for a full night's sleep. Before the sun was up the next morning, we hiked over to where we had beached the boat, and soon we were ready to pull traps again. This time after a whole night's soaking, but in general in the same area as the day before.

George rowed and I pulled traps. First my trot line. My first trap, with tilapia filets and some Power Bait, came up with five crayfish in it. Certainly nothing to write home about. Then the other traps came up, not empty but with no catch of note. No trap had as many as ten crayfish in it, so I was rather dismayed.

Then we came to my Jumbo trap, the trap with George's graciously

donated cat food in it. It had over 40 crayfish in it! Baited with CAT FOOD!

And then George's own two traps with cat food as bait. They both had around 30 crayfish in each although they were practically in the same place as the day before when they also contained about 30 crays each. Thanks to George's donation of one can of cat food, and the fact that this time we left the traps in the lake for a whole night, the catch was almost acceptable. But the resulting catch analysis definitely proved that I had to redefine my opinion of what makes good crayfish bait.

The old rule still remains. In general, fish makes good bait. But, there is fish and then there is other fish. Tilapia is apparently not among those to be recommended; it isn't oily enough to be able to spread the scent around. The cat food George was using was Friskies Ocean White Fish and Tuna Dinner consisting of 11% protein and 4% fat. I believe the fat content is especially important, and apparently my tilapia did not have enough fat in it to spread around. Oily fish such as salmon, trout and mackerel make good bait. But so might also bacon and ham, notoriously fat. One customer wrote and told me he had made a killing in a local river using BALONEY as bait.

So next time I go cray fishing I will bring both fishy cat food and some baloney. If the baloney doesn't catch crayfish, at least I can eat it for breakfast.

So what did this event prove? That cat food is better bait than tilapia?

Trapper Arne