

Crayfish Tales

by

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Catching Crayfish at Willow Springs Lakes

An experiment with fish emulsion

Crayfish Tale # 7

1357 words

My supply of frozen crayfish was running low. Only one thing to do about it, go and catch some more crayfish.

The last few days had been very warm, and the pesky winds that had bothered us for weeks, were beginning to dissipate. So I decided to make another trek up to my favorite crayfish lake up on the Mogollon Rim above Payson. As before I decided to make it a one-nighter. Arrive in the late afternoon, put out the traps in the lake. Go to the campground, pay \$10 and sleep until time for pulling up the traps in the morning.

My plans were excellent, but the execution left a bit to be desired. As soon as I arrived at the lake, I noticed that I had left behind all my night clothes, undershirts, long johns and a sweater intended to keep the night temperature from killing me. (The night before down here in Payson the temperature went down to below 40, so I expected the Rim lake to be in the 30's if not lower.)

While I was putting out the traps in the lake, I was pondering what to do about this fly in my ointment. If I stayed here on the Rim for the night I would only have a flimsy jacket to keep me warm in the sleeping bag. Would that be enough? And I would miss the head-mounted flashlight to read my book, which I also had left behind. And the drinking water. And the beer. Maybe I should simply drive home again for the night and go back up the next morning. But I don't like driving at night. Hmm. A moment of calculating the time for dropping the traps and I came to the conclusion that if I set out the traps around six PM, I would still have an hour and a half before it got dark on the Beeline Road down to Payson.

Easy decision. I would drive back for the night and sleep in my own bed and not have to pay \$10 for it. As I was leaving the boat on shore for the night, I decided to play it safe and secure it to a tree on the shore and lock it with my specially purchased lock and the cable son Peter had supplied

for the purpose. With ten traps placed in the lake in a new area, I took off after retrieving the chair I had placed in the campground as a token of my intent to stay there.

Joyce was a bit surprised as she had prepared for a hubby-less night. The dinner she had packed for me I ate at home instead, and I also enjoyed a drink before I went to bed around nine. As I planned to get up at 5 and leave before 6, I did not have the usual 7 or eight hours of sleep to squander.

Driving back up to the lake I enjoyed the lack of traffic but was irritated by the eastern sun shining straight into my eyes here and there. Bad timing. Fortunately Pavarotti and some of his taped opera arias kept me company for the 45 minutes it took to retrace my steps.

Back at the lake I almost immediately discovered another serious memory problem. I could not find the key to the lock for the boat cable. (Am I getting THAT old?) It made me as mad as finding I had left the night clothes behind the day before. But this time I knew I had to be able to get the boat out to pull the traps. I simply could not leave the traps - and the boat - where they were. To say nothing of the crayfish in the traps. But what to do with a high quality lock and a presumably thief proof wire cable intended to keep unwanted visitors out.

For a while I thought I could pry the cable off the tree with my car nut wrench. But there was no way I could even get any leverage to perform that job. And obviously I had no wire cutter. And nobody else at the lake would have wire cutters. Who goes fishing with wire cutters anyway?

Intently inspecting the cable I decided to attack it with my little fishing pliers in the tackle box. The pliers easily took off the plastic covering for the cable. But under it were dozens of wires, twisted together for strength and security. What could my little fishing pliers do to it?

Well, I started picking at it and found that if I attacked one strand at a time, I was actually able to break it. Yes, it worked, and now I only had about fifty more strands to go. Well, what other choice did I have? So I continued hacking away one strand of wire at a time, and before you knew it, about ten minutes or so, I was down to the last strand in the cable and there it was, neatly, well not quite, cut in half and the boat was finally free. I felt immediately better, prepared the boat for the excursion and off I went.

I pulled up the traps and found that it was not a bonanza but enough to keep me in crayfish for a couple of weeks. About 12 or 13 crayfish per trap was a little better than the previous time when the water was only 60F.

Now I measured it at 68F and the crayfish ought to be more active. One interesting fact I discovered was that this time I caught plenty of females, something I had missed previous times.

Going out for the traps and rowing back after pulling them, I did some fishing. This time I had better luck and pulled in three trout and had one additional one up to the boat before it tore loose and disappeared in the deep of the lake. Just as I got ready to empty the traps at the floating pier, a fellow came up to me with a bucket and asked if I'd like a few of his catch of trout. How could I reject such an offer. So now I got an additional 8 trout (more than the limit allowed) and with my own three I had a substantial catch to bring home to Joyce. To say nothing of the iced crayfish which I later found amounted to over 130.

This time I also performed a little experiment. I had set out two traps, close to each other, one with regular bait consisting of a piece of salmon. The other trap had as bait a piece of sponge that had previously been soaked in fish emulsion of the kind I use in the greenhouse. As fish emulsion is made from fish, why would this not attract crayfish? At least such was my theory.

Before I went home for the night I decided to check the test traps although they only had been in the water about an hour. The test trap with regular bait had nothing in it. But the trap with the fish emulsion-soaked sponge, had one crayfish in it. Fantastic! Statistically a tremendous difference in favor of the fish emulsion. But the data was not very valid, was it?

Leaving the test traps in for the rest of the night, I pulled them again the following morning. The test trap with regular bait had about ten crayfish in it. The fish emulsion trap had nothing! So the one crayfish I saw in the trap in the evening must have decided that fish emulsion was not for him, and disappeared. So, now with a little better statistical data I must come to the conclusion that fish emulsion is not the magic crayfish bait that I had dreamed about.

Summarizing my experiences this time at Willow Springs Lake I decided that I had been successful. But also that I had failed miserably in my memory department (sleeping clothes and key for the lock), but then, what else is new? At home I found that the crayfish were big and numerous enough for my immediate eating plans. I cooked the biggest 100 with salt and dill and after that I enjoyed a relaxing evening with my dear wife.

The end

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