

CRABBING ADVENTURES AT THE CABIN by Roger Urbaniak

My first attempts at crabbing began by tossing crab pots out from my canoe. I didn't know much about where or how to catch crab but I was stubborn enough to work at it until I learned. What baits would attract crab, where to place pots, or how long to leave out the pots before I pulled them, were all mysteries. Through trial and error, we switched from pots to ring nets, fished in 50-75 feet of weedy water, fished calmer tides, added Styrofoam to our floats, used leaded line with a clip, and changed bait frequently. Crab weren't finicky about type of food as long as it was fresh, so we used everything from perch, salmon carcasses, walleye and squid. We purchased an aluminum boat, pulled our ring nets about every half hour, and then moved them if we were coming up empty to frequently. Linda and I put in a lot of effort fishing this way, but it paid off. When the crabs were plentiful, we could take our 6-crab apiece limits in less than half an hour.

Ring nets proved to have several advantages. They were easier to pull, could be checked and moved more frequently, caught even the largest crabs, and allowed for some interesting by catches. Our unusual catches included dog fish, star fish, sole, and even sea cucumbers. Ring nets allow us to take our crab quicker, but their use tends to discourage other activities. We are fully consumed with our effort. We move quickly from one location to the next, pulling and resetting out bait using just our oars, and then return to the first net to start all over again. We use four ring nets and separate them by the several yards needed to cover an area adequately. Using Styrofoam allows us to identify our set up, and keeps the float from sinking if the tide has come in.

Surface feeding fish are marked for future fishing as soon as we finish harvesting crab. Good numbers of cutthroat trout cruise the shoreline to feed plus some juvenile salmon. Keeping a spinning rod handy with a lure ready to cast can add to the excitement when the fish are working close by. Big salmon haven't bothered our lures yet, but I suspect we will find them if we persist. During low tide we may break to shuck a few oysters and dig some clams. Plentiful beds are close by. On our best days, we can limit on Dungeness, rock crab, clams, oysters, and mussel all in less than three hours.

Linda and I make a competitive sport out of catching the most crab, or at least I can remember when it still was competitive. For the last few years, it seems that I just need to tally how many she catches and notify her when we have our limit. She has developed a definite instinct for crabbing. Somehow, she locates the crab consistently and out crabs me nine out of ten times, a feat she takes great pleasure in reminding me of. For years now I have been calling it beginner's luck. Maybe soon, it will be my turn? Until then I will just enjoy eating what Linda catches. One becomes philosophical about being second.