

FIGHTING FISH FOR FOOD OR EATING THE BAIT

I caught a really big bass last week, a granddaddy. I don't want to reveal too many of my secrets, but I will say that my hook was embellished with a tiny rubber maggot. This maggot came in a jar with several dozen others. They are wet, a little oily, with a smell reminiscent of salt and vinegar potato chips. If they weren't made of rubber, a person would be tempted to pop the odd one in his mouth. Doug Murphy suggested that it would be a good idea to make them taste like Cheezies, which has tremendous possibilities. If the fish liked them, the fisherman could drink beer, eat Cheezie flavored maggots, and catch fish. Put a double header Blue Jay game on the portable radio and the fisherman would catch a glimpse of heaven. Maybe the closest he'd ever get.

Speaking of maggots, ice fishermen use real ones, live ones, for bait. In Minnesota, the ice fishermen have maggot racing competitions, mute testimony to the desperation of ice fishermen for entertainment. A secret revealed to me was that to prepare a maggot for a championship race, the fisherman should gently place it between the lip and the gum for a period of a few minutes. This warm, damp environment wakes up the maggot and gets him feeling frisky, ready for a really competitive creep. A few swallows of a stimulating beverage wouldn't hurt either, I suspect.

When I was young, minnows were the bait my grandfather preferred. "Gudgeons", he called them. Us kids were forced to use the seining net, trudging through icy water, to seine up enough for a fishing trip. I once fished in a lake near Val D'Or, Quebec, as a guest of a lumber company. We used minnows there too, and at the conclusion of the trip, the guide groped into the minnow bucket, held a squirming minnow by the tail, tilted back his head, and dropped it into his mouth. He consumed several this way, apparently relishing them. My grandfather would have been livid at the waste of good bait. Our guide didn't chew, thank God. It sounds a little disgusting, but really, we eat sushi and like it.

In Barbados, while staying in the home of a friend, his houseman Austin prepared a special treat. He owned a cast net, and whirling it about his head, tossed it into the sea. It had lead weights which caused it to form a bag when it dropped through the water, the purpose of which

was to catch small fish. Minnows. Austin called them "frey". I never saw Austin clean them, I don't think he did, but when fried up in a batter they were delicious.

I enjoy using crawfish for bait when fishing for bass, though I can't find them around here. I enjoy them as bait because they crawl around the lake bottom doing all the work while the fisherman can enjoy a nap and a cooling beverage. They're awfully difficult to find during the day, but at night they creep out onto the rocks and are visible with a flashlight. After an evening at the movies, we would creep down to a small pond, strip down, and wade into the water with a net and a flashlight. The police arrived at least once a year, alerted to our suspicious acts by cautious cottagers, then left puzzled when informed of our mission. In Lake Memphramagog, in Quebec, crawfish were so numerous that we tried eating them. After all, in Louisiana, crawdads are apparently a delicacy. We boiled them up like little lobsters, cracked open the tails and devoured them. They tasted pretty good, but the effort of catching them far eclipsed the gustatory benefits. They must raise them on farms in Louisiana.

My father would send me out at night after (or during) a heavy rain to capture nightcrawlers on our lawn.

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