

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Bass Chowder

Growing on time for our second annual camping trip. Wanted this one to be under a tent and do some real fishing. Grandbaby would too soon be a young man and Grump wanted to clear away some of his computer games, tennis, sailing, and golfcamp routine for a few days.

AJ and I had some years ago fished Crawford and Pocomoonshine lakes way down on the Airline Road and knew they both held some fine Large Mouth Bass. So I called an old acquaintance, Lawrence Lord and daughter Paula, who very kindly gave us the use of a camp lot right on the lake. It was good to see him again and trade stories of our mutual prostate cancers and the cure problems. He pointed out some of the hot spots around Crawford after Spencer and I had figured out how to erect the tent with wind blowing a stiff northwest in our face. We rigged a tarp windbreak around a small copse of trees, shook out the cook gear and settled in for first supper of dogs and burgers. Easy to forget how hard it is to fill the stomach of a 9 year old boy. Spencer could finish off three dogs, potato salad with fixins, and still find room for a few of Mrs. Dunstan's fine Canadian donuts.

We got the fishing gear organized, target up for the BB gun, shot a few rounds till dark and settled in for some camp stories and sleepy talk. Spencer was beside himself telling how he'd never slept in a tent before and how great it was and how much fun we'd had putting it up. He adapted quickly to camping etiquette and I was pleased.

Next morning we ran boat and trailer to the launch area and got underway at less than crack of dawn. "First Day Gotchas." By 10 we were working the shallow, rock strewn coves and islands of the western shore, snagging marsh grass and old logs. Spencer's reel snapped early on so I handed him one of the three I'd brought, a Johnson "Century" closed-face spin reel, like I'd had as a kid. First cast he flipped off a long looping cast just short of a big rock.

"Where'd you learn to cast like that?"

“Watching you,” he grinned.

Give that boy extra cookies for lunch if there were any left. I thought the snacks would never last the morning. Hand was into the peanut can on a 10 minutes schedule.

We agreed this was not today's hotspot and shifted sides, played with motor speed, various lures trolling, and drifting. Finally settled on “Gitz It”, glitter soaked soft rubber crawfish lures and motor controlled drift to keep direction and slower speed. Used a combination of cast and troll as we worked with likely spots. Action started with me and a couple of likely nibbles. Then a good strike on Spencer's. He'd been hooked on bottom so often he wasn't ready for a real one. I quickly reeled in and grabbed the net.

“Don't horse him, reel slow and easy. Rod up. Give him something to work against.”

“Grump, it's running away.”

“That's okay, let him go easy now. End of his run work him back.”

Into net range. In, out, around, under the boat. This was an energy fish showing low temperature water of last three weeks rain and fog. Finally tuckered down enough to sweep the net up and into the tin boat. Nice fish. No trophy. But a start on tonight's Bass Chowder.

We'd hit the system. Drift and spurt from the shore, tease 'em and slow back. Two, three, four and some small and largers thrown back. I got in a few as Spencer maneuvered the net. It was fun and adrenaline level was high. True to form suddenly went dry. No action. We worked around a likely island with lots of rocks. Saw a good one jumping on bugs and bait fish close in. Worked the tin boat slowly in.

“Cast right at him,” I said.

“Wham.” An explosion as he nailed the crawfish. Flew out of the rocks, tail danced and tried to shake this alien from tooth-filled jaws. Tricky fight and retrieve as I tried to maneuver boat and line to clear water. Spence did a great job and we soon had the last fish for chowder. Threw him a peanut butter cup with a “this should hold you to lunch,” and we scaled back to camp for a swim, lunch and filet the bass.

That evening we were going out for White Perch and rigged with worms and bobbers. Either got the location wrong (very probable) or weren't biting. Suggested we look for a deep hole and more Large Mouth activity. Found a calm, neat spot, let fly the new Superhooker anchor and we settled back with a beer and a coke. Not for long.

“Grump, Grump, I’ve lost my bobber.”

I made a slow turn in his direction. He was right. He’d lost his bobber, except the line was still taut to his rod and going down.

“Reel, Spencer, you’ve got a good one on,” as his eyes lit up, “Easy, easy, now, work it, plenty of time.”

We’d get him to the net then he’d dart away. Calm water in that cove was taking a thrashing. Make a run. Then jump. Back towards the boat. Loon was sitting not 30 feet away just watching the action. These Largemouth Bass can be real tricky and are much the stronger fighters than our Long Pond landlock salmon.

We landed several in succession with the probably largest, a truly decent fish, deciding to finish dinner elsewhere.

Light was fading fast as I heated up the pot, ran a piece of salt pork around it for flavor, removed it, added a cup of water and the chopped onion and potatoes. Did a slow boil till done then added a can of evaporated milk, a healthy dollop of butter, and the Bass filets. We warmed a half loaf of Grandbaby Logan’s “Fiddler’s Green” bread and filled our cups with chowder. Knew Spencer was apprehensive. Didn’t get this at home. I dove in with exclamation of “wicked good” to his tentative first taste. Could tell by his eyes he didn’t know what to say or think. One bite. Then next. “Mmmm, this is okay,” then, “Wow Grump.” My trip was made. Had tears in my eyes as we drained the pot to within a cup.

Next morning Spencer had eggs and burned toast so I allowed I’d finish the chowder.

“You’re gonna have chowder for breakfast, Grump?”

“Son, I’d have this for three meals.”

After breakfast he thought if there was any more left he’d have some. Too late!

That day we explored the mud lakes up into Pocomoonshine, fished a bit with mild success. Had the lake pretty much to ourselves so we went skinny-dipping off the rocks, ate a sizable lunch, saw geese, blue heron, ducks, an eagle, and talked. Couldn’t ask for a better day.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur