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SPORTS

What to do when the fish don't bite!

By Luke Clayton

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Regular readers will remember a recent column I wrote concerning the “best” way to glean fishing information. To recap, I mentioned written fishing reports, information from online fishing sites and, calls to locals at the lake you intend to fish. I also mentioned that fishing patterns can also be altered by something as basic as a wind change. A fishing trip this past week was a good case in point! I think you will enjoy hearing about a little humorous outdoor adventure a buddy and I enjoyed!

About 11 months ago, my friend Bob Lusk, the noted private waters fishery biologist, did a survey on a very remote “fishing hole” of mine. Lusk devised a stocking and feeding program. In essence, a total of 3,000 fish were stocked; one thousand each of channel catfish, hybrid bream and bluegills. We built a little dock and I called another good friend, Karl Harman with Ultramatic Feeders and inquired about the best feeder to use to distribute the Purina Aqua Max pellets. In a matter of days after the stocking, my Sweeney feeder arrived and was distributing the Aqua Max twice daily. With plenty of the high protein feed to eat, the fish grew quickly.

Last week, I thought it time to do a little “test” fishing and see exactly how much they had grown. In about 20 minutes of tossing nightcrawlers near bottom just out from the feeder, a Phil Zimmerman and I landed 3 channel cats about 15 inches in length. We released them all but we are kindred spirits when it comes to catching and eating catfish!

Before leaving the pond, a plan had developed! We made plans for an early morning fishing trip and an ensuing mid morning brunch of crispy fried fillets the next day!

That evening, we assembled all the necessities for a fish brunch the next morning. I have a very portable propane fish cooker that serves as a mini blow torch when turned on high. It has the “uumph” to get cooking oil (lard in this situation) hot enough to properly fry fish. Into the truck, along with my little cooker when fresh new potatoes dug from the garden, green onions, corn meal, Pork N Beans, seasonings, catsup, lard, paper plates, cast iron skillet, paper towels, plastic forks, an aluminum pan to hold the fried fish/potatoes, a scoop to remove the fish from the grease, a lighter to start the fire. This was just the items necessary to do the cooking.

Also loaded was an electric fillet knife and inverter so that we could run it from the truck, a cleaning board, fresh clean water to wash the catfish fillets, etc. etc. etc. All this was incidental to our fishing tackle, which was also loaded. Trust me; it takes a great many items to accommodate a morning fishing trip and ensuing fish fry! Had we forgotten one thing, such as the fire starter or propane bottle while fishing this backwater pond, we would have been out of luck. Unlike what you see on the wilderness survivor shows, neither my buddy nor I are very handy at rubbing two sticks together to start a fire!

The appointed morning arrived and we wound our way through the muddy serpentine road that leads to our hidden catfishing hotspot. Spirits were high and rather than enjoy our usually early morning breakfast tacos in my little cooking shack, we skipped breakfast.

We wanted to be hungry around 10:00 a.m. for our fish fry!

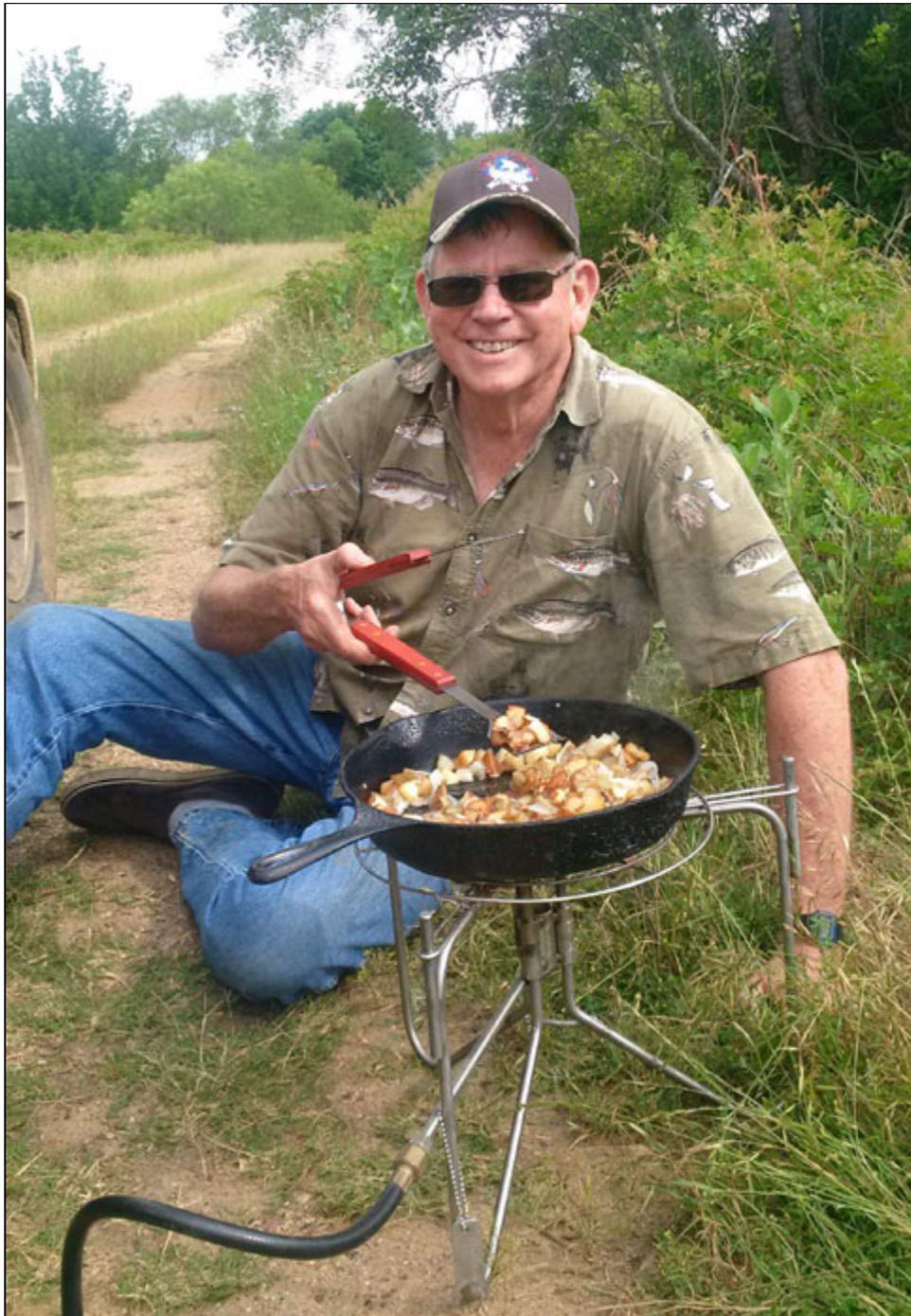
Into the exact spots where we caught catfish the day before, we cast our nightcrawlers and waited for a bite and waited and.... waited. The catfish obviously had lockjaw. We noted the wind direction had shifted to the east and I thought about that fishing report column I wrote the week before! After fifteen minutes without a bite, we were beginning to worry. After an hour, we began to wonder just how tasty our "fish fry" would be without the fresh fillets!

We knew the hybrid bluegills were "eating" size and decided to rig up with bream hooks and floaters. If we couldn't eat fresh catfish, why not clean and scale some big bream and fry them whole? Sounded good and bream are always easy to catch! Right!!! After watching our "corks" for about 15 minutes and observing only a couple of occasional half hearted bites, we began to understand the sad fact that this was to be a fishless brunch!

I gave up first and began setting up the cooker, in a few minutes, Phil joined me. We had plenty of potatoes, fresh green onions out of Phil's garden and plenty of lard. We learned from the Chipewyan Native Americans up in Saskatchewan last summer that lard, when heated properly, is best for frying fish.

Phil and I might not always catch fish but we ARE pretty good camp cooks! We cubed the new potatoes and just before they were done, threw in a couple big hands full of chopped onions.

Think goodness we had a lot of potatoes! New potatoes with onions and Pork N Beans make for a pretty tasty brunch when the tips you learned from your fishing report doesn't work out!



Luke is busy frying new potatoes and onions; it's what you do when the fishing is slow and there are no fresh fish fillets! *photo by Phil Zimmerman*

Listen to "Outdoors with Luke Clayton and Friends" on radio stations from Nebraska to Texas on weekends or anytime online at www.catfishradio.com

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