Catching The Blues

Everyone has a passion for something. There are those who can’t let a day go by without teeing off at the golf course. Avid tennis enthusiasts can’t seem to get enough of the game. Fishing fanatics are up before dawn and spend a lot of time, energy and money prowling the waters of bayous, bays and the open waters of the Gulf. The same can be said of hunters. And what about the slew of armchair quarterbacks who live for football season?

And then there’s a group who calls itself the Crabbing Crew. It goes out once every other month to Grand Chenier for the sport of, what else, crabbing. It doesn’t have any specific scientific techniques, but claims it has garnished 80-dozen crabs in a two-day outing. That’s close to a thousand crabs!

The most amazing thing is that the members catch crabs not with elaborate crab traps, but rather by the old tried-and-true method of tying a turkey neck at the end of a string.

Carol Miller, one of the members of the crew and currently its reigning queen (it selects a king and queen each year by judging on ability to clean live crabs and creative methods of cooking the catch,) reports that the group sometimes gets four or five crabs on one turkey neck at a time.

The crew is composed of 10 members who crab most of the day and into the night. They are relentless.

“We don’t keep all the crabs we catch. We are very selective. If the crabs don’t meet a certain criteria such as size and fullness, we release them back into the water,” explains Miller, a Times employee.

Miller claims she has noticed that crabs which are a little scruffy and dirty are fuller and fatter than their cleaner counterparts.

“While our outings are mainly for sport crabbing, we do enjoy seeing the wide range of wildlife...rabbits, deer, alligator and waterfowl...that teem through the marshes. And, too, we get to cook our catch. Someone always has a new idea for a recipe.”

Crabbing is the easiest, least expensive form of saltwater recreation you will find in South Louisiana. You don’t need a boat. You don’t need a camp. There’s no licensing requirement. And equipment can be as simple as a string with a turkey or chicken neck attached and a dip net to scoop up the crab after you’ve pulled him in.

The string method requires a special touch, however. Tie your poultry neck (fish heads are an alternative choice) to the end of a string and gently toss it into the waterway. When a crab grabs hold, slowly pull your line to the shore. If you are impatient, the crab will bail out and all you’ve got is a chicken neck.

Some crabbers prefer to use inexpensive nets that are available at most hardware and fishing supply stores. They are especially productive when you are fishing from a bridge or a high embankment. They can also be thrown out into the surf when you are fishing at a beach like Grand Isle or Holly Beach.

Good crabbing waters are located within a two-to-three hour drive of Lafayette. Highly recommended is the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge at Grand Chenier in Cameron Parish. Take La. Hwy. 82 to Grand Chenier and turn left on Price Lake Road. You will find a number of canals, lakes and other waterways on the refuge that are teeming with crabs.

For better or worse, there are also lots of alligators, since this is no-hunting area.

Other spots suggested by Harry Blanchet, marine biologist for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries:
- Along La. Hwy. 27 between Hackberry and Holly Beach in Cameron Parish;
- Along La. Hwy. 27 between Rutherford Beach and Gibbstown in Cameron Parish;
- Along La. Hwy. 82 in Oak Grove, just past the Kajon Food