

The Lobster Catch News



issue 1

SPECIAL EDITION

spring 2010

Welcome to our brand new newsletter - *The Lobster Catch News!*

Have you ever wondered what it is like go lobster fishing? Or maybe a Profession you have always wanted to pursue?

This Spring Special Edition is filled with informative & comical news from the local lobster fishing industry. Our lobster articles are exclusive from the local Seacoast area fishermen & are available at local businesses and newspaper 4 times a year.

If you would like to submit comments, photos, or be on our mailing list, let us know by sending us an email to:

lobstercatchnews@yohoo.com

Lobster Trap Anatomy 101

Lobster traps are a pretty complex system used to lure & catch lobsters. Each trap is made from rubber coated metal (mostly used in today's fishing industry) which consist of 3 different compartments with specific shaped nets, a bait bag, a top retrieve hatch, at least one escape vent, and tags to identify the trap with the fisherman's license number & state id.

Inside each trap these are nets called "heads" which allow the lobsters to channel into the trap lured by bait & then keep them from escaping. One of these heads is called the "entrance" or "kitchen" head located on the side of the trap named because this is where the food or bait bag is.

The bait bag is tied inside the kitchen & replaced every time the trap is emptied. The other heads are called the "middle" and the "parlor" heads.

The "middle" head is in the center of the trap and the "parlor" head is to the back of the where the lobsters await their capture from the lobster fisherman.

The escape vent is located in the "parlor" allowing all small non-legal lobsters to escape and is also a legal requirement in case the trap is lost. Each vent, minimum of one per trap but many traps have 2-3 of them, is hinged with biodegradable hog rings which allows all captured creatures to escape if the trap were lost at sea.

The color of the traps and nets may or may not have direct influence on the capture of lobsters. Some lobster fishermen say they have better luck with specific ones but in the long run it seems to be the season of fishing, abundance or not, to be the greatest influence.

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Up Close: My Lobster Fishing Story

by Shelly Britton

My story begins by an assignment of photojournalism given to me by my teacher. The subject I chose was to learn all about the lobster fishing industry. Why not? How and where do these bulging eyed shellfish come to be such a delight as a popular East coast dish anyhow? My experience spending time on a lobster boat was far beyond a boat ride around the sea, picking up dozen's of lobsters.

Sunrise On the Dock



Just before sunrise, I was at the dock excited & anxious. I was thinking, should I begin shooting right away or make my best observation and just take notes? I began with observation watching the fishermen prepare for their day at sea. They suited up in full-length bibs, and put on waterproof boots. I dressed warm, slipped on my boots and brought an extra set of clothes just in case.

The lobster boat was moored about a half a mile up the creek from the fisherman's dock, so we all jumped into a small boat called a "skiff"

and sat down on some newspaper we brought, the dew being heavy that morning. As we motored along up the creek, I took out my camera and took some pictures of the brightly colored morning sunrise as it reflected into the boats wake.

Out to Sea

Once on the fishing vessel, noticing that there was no rear tailgate on this 40-foot boat, I scoped out all the rails and handles in case of rough seas, as I did not think swimming was on the agenda this morning. The Captain and his mate prepared for launching by checking the fuel gages and all the navigational equipment. We were off! As I



braced myself, I prepared my camera equipment to capture the whole experience of bringing those lobsters aboard. It is not very easy to be steady on a lobster boat.

Bringing in the Lobsters

The Captain steered his boat carefully a long the shore and followed a charted course from his sea floor map of the trawls of traps he checks daily. Most of the trawls were 3 to 5 traps long & could also be sited by a specific shaped & colored buoy floating in the water. The Captain used a long handled hook to pull the buoy aboard & attached the rope to a pulley system inside the boat.

"It's not easy to be steady on a lobster boat"

The hydraulic pulley system, called a pot hauler, hoisted each line of traps up to the rail of the boat where the mate would lift each one of them onto the side rail of the boat. Each trap had a door on the top where the mate reached in to clean out the trap & replace the bait bag. The lobsters taken from the trap had to be given careful consideration to whether it was one for the market or not. Only certain size and non-stock type lobsters were kept. All the others were released back to the sea. I learned all about the different

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How to Measure a Legal Lobster

Every lobster taken from the trap has specific size requirements in order to be saved for market.

Each lobster is measured with a tool called the “e zwickler” and must be at least 3 inches in size but not larger than 5 inches. For a correct measurement, the “e zwickler” tool is

placed on the topside of the lobster with one end placed at the eye socket and the other end at the end of the shell or at the base of the tail. Once a reading is determined, the lobster is either returned to the sea or secured for storage in the holding tank.

Closing the Trap Door

Free Lunch!

Not all lobsters are lucky enough to have a free lunch but “Mable” and many of her friends have had the pleasure. Lucky for “Mable”, she is carrying thousands of eggs and was

returned to sea as a breeding stock lobster. All female lobsters with eggs that are removed from a lobster trap, must be “V-notched” by all fishermen, which designates them as breeding stock.



Curious Terms of the Lobster Trade...

- Skiff** A 16' aluminum or wooden boat used daily to get to and from the lobster boat.
- Pair** Two lobster traps tethered by a rope and a single buoy.
- Trawl** A line of traps, usually 8 tethered together and has two buoys.
- Pot Hauler** A variable speed pulley used to haul up pairs & trawls of lobster traps.
- V-Notching Tool** Tool used to identify female breeding stock lobsters by notching a “V” shape into the end of their tails.
- E Zwickler Tool** This tool is a 5” measuring tool used to measure legal size lobsters.
- Cull Lobsters** A lobster that only has one claw.
- Bottle Lobsters** Any size lobster with no claws.

What's on Dock...

Summer Issue...

*Favorite Lobster Dishes
Local Lobster Eating Tips*



Fall Issue...

*Growth Cycle of the Lobster
Wheredo Lobsters Winter?*



Winter Issue...

*Make your own Lobster Trap
Off-Shore Lobstering 60 Miles Out*



My Lobster Fishing Story continued from page 4

types of lobsters, what was legal to keep & how to handle them without fear of those little pinchers and large claws!

Around and around we went from buoy to buoy. Once all the traps for each trawl were emptied, market lobsters that were kept had bands put on their claws and placed in a large holding tank large enough to hold 400 pounds of lobster.

The sea bouncing & rocking me along with all the circles to each buoy began to make my stomach feel a little uneasy. With nowhere to escape, I soon discovered what seasickness was all about. Whoa... All my photos & fishing questions soon came to an abrupt halt & this experience I found to be more memorable than I bargained for.

With all my gathered information, the Captain gladly returned me to the dock and I rescheduled another trip when the seas weren't so rough.

My Second Trip Out

My second trip out on the lobster boat required some research regarding seasickness, as I didn't want to have the same experience. Did you know that 'Nausea' comes from the Greek word "naus" meaning "ship"? It's true. Seasickness is caused by a mismatch of information from your ears and eyes. Forward motion combined with up and down motion or side-to-side motion is very common in children. According to Federal health authorities this problem declines with age... for a moment I felt young again. Still looking for a solution, I came across a product that I thought I would try from the Smooth Sailing Company. It is called "Smooth Sailing" which is a ginger root based refreshing drink with no side effects. I drank "Smooth Sailing" during my second trip, pleased with the results I would highly recommend it to anyone.

Our Final Destination

My final destination with the lobsters was going to the dock at the wholesale market distributors. All the lobsters were prepared for removal in small crates for carrying & the smelly bait barrels were washed out for refilling. Once the crates are in the warehouse, the lobsters are weighed, segregated and placed in holding tanks where they await for shipping boxes to go to the retail market. I felt sorry for them, as I was just getting to know what fascinating creatures they are. During my experience on the lobster fishing boat I have learned that there are many things involved to making a profession in the lobster industry. Knowledge about the weather forecast, the navigational equipment, the operation of the lobster boat, laws and regulations and even lobster handling techniques are all very important to the survival of the lobsterman & his catch. "No lobsters, no money" the Captain says. And the next time I sit down with a group of people eating lobsters, I will be able to tell everyone all about how the lobster came to be the dish of the evening.

On-Line Resources...

www.gomoos.com

Gulf of Maine marine forecasts

www.maineharbors.com

Tide charts for New England



www.eastcoastlobster.com

Lobster game - test your skills

www.dmr.org

Dept. of Marine Resources