

The Blue Crab Chronicles

The Voice of the Crabbing Community
February 2014

Crabber Spotlight: Gene Ashton aka Genecrabman



Background: A 5th generation waterman originally from Hoopers Island, MD.

Owner/Operator of Half Fast Seafood in the Outer Banks.

Gear: A custom built boat 32' x 11' with a 15" draft and a 275 hp Mercury Verado 4 stroke. Can carry 150 pots behind the console. Keeps about 1000 crab pots in the water at a time during crabbing season.

Typical Day of Crabbing: Gets up at 4 AM and loads the boat with gear and bait. Pulls about 450-500 pots a day, averages 25-30 bushels. Sells fresh crabs from his truck in the K-mart parking lot at the 6.5 mile marker in Kill Devil Hills, NC from 1-2 PM

Crab Runs: About 4-5 times a year he delivers premium crabs to MD. Meets buyers at the park and ride at exit 74 of 95 N.

Notable: Worked with Ray Weed, aka Mr. Ray III during the 2009 crabbing season. "Being a mentor and a friend to me, he has always steered me in the right direction, and helped me out with anything. His hospitality is unmatched and I feel like I am part of his family" - Ray Weed 2011



FROM THE EDITOR

Dave Hosmer



Welcome to the first issue of The Blue Crab Chronicles! If you are a member of a crabbing forum and have a passion for crabbing, you probably have some great stories to tell.

In this newsletter, crabbers will have an opportunity to share their stories and give back to the sport we all love.

If you are interested in writing an article or advertising in future issues please send me an email. All proceeds will be given back to the crabbing community.

Ravendave21009@aol.com

FUTURE EVENTS

- ▶ June 21, 2014 • The Assault on Patcong Creek • Somers Point, NJ
<http://www.assaultonpatcongreek.com>
- ▶ September 19-21, 2014 • The Wye Gathering • Easton, MD

Stupid Human Tricks- DP's Boat Launch Blunder

By Keary Eisenhart aka Dreampixels



You go to a circus for entertainment as a paying spectator, hopefully when you leave the Big-Top you are satisfied feeling you have gotten your money's worth of entertainment. Crabbing is much like a circus. There are costs associated with crabbing, also you are left to judge whether those costs were equal to the reward. There is one major difference - while at the circus, you hardly ever, if not never, get to be part of the entertainment. You are a spectator.

Crabbing offers ample opportunities for you to be both, and at no additional fees. Some days you are a windshield and some days you play the part of a bug, "SPLAT", it's that simple. Most all of us enjoy sharing our windshield days with friends and family. Equally so we also enjoy sharing those bug days of others with them also, while keeping our own splats a secret. It is impossible to keep your SPLATS a secret if there was a buddy who witnessed the event. After all, put yourself in your buddies position, he was just at the circus and wants to share his experience. So fear not, we all know about those splats.

But what about those ones to which there are no witnesses? Keeping those treasures a secret do nothing but make the rest of us feel abnormal. I propose each and everyone of us search our cranial caverns for one of those moments and share the experience in an effort to help all of us feel normal, so we don't feel like the only naked person in the room.. Let me be the first.

I arrive O-Dark-Thirty to a Bush River boat launch. It's a one lane ramp, one light illuminates it and the tide is low so there is a lot of ramp dry and out of the water. I ready the boat for launch and back it onto the ramp. I push the boat off the trailer, take tag line and secure it to a piling at the dock, jump into my truck and head to the parking lot. Plenty of parking, no one else around. Strolling back to the ramp I notice something does not appear correct about my boat. It is setting on dry ramp with only about 6 inches of the stern in the water. Immediately my brain tells me "Sum Ting Wong!"

After doing some CSI work I discover the tag line is still attached to the piling and the other end is high and dry in the parking lot. After launching the boat and tying it off I failed to see the line was looped over the trailer so I inadvertently pulled the boat back out of the water onto dry ramp while driving off to the parking lot. Lucky for me the weight of the boat on dry land was more than the tag line could handle and it tore.

I attempted to push the boat into the water but it would not budge. Oh what a fine mess this is Stanley. I wondered to myself. "How long will it be till high tide? I don't see today being an early start day." Soon I see headlights approaching the launch. I also discover there is a boat in tow. Good deal, if these guys wish to launch their boat they will need to help me get mine out of their way first. Good bunch of fellows, no smirks, no hassles, they helped me push it in and off I went. I can't help but think they must know about dem bugs.

OK, there's one of mine, lets hear some of yours. Oh fear not I have more. Oh you don't have any? Well just keep crabbing and you will. There is only two kinds of crabbers, those whom have screwed up and those whom are going to screw up.

Me, Dad, and Fingers- My First Time Crabbing

By Mike Higgins aka Crewstation

It was sometime in the late 60's, when men no younger than my father were being shipped, by the planeload, to a country most had never heard of until it started showing up every night on the six o'clock news. I didn't always think so at the time, but I was lucky to have my Dad back here in the States, always willing and ready to let me tag along on his many outdoor excursions. OK, he was not always willing. But he would usually bend once he saw the rolling pin in Mom's hand.

As far as I can remember, the day started with a shake and a whisper from Mom and Dad. It was time. I opened my eyes and couldn't understand. It was the middle of the night, for gosh sakes! What were they thinking!? Dad carried me downstairs as I fought to stay awake, while Mom plopped a lunch bag on my lap loaded with a bologna and cheese with mustard, a few chips, and a jar of cherry Kool-Aid.

We made a quick stop in town to pick up a "friend" of my Dad's. Dad said his name was Fingers. If Fingers were alive today, I'm sure he would hold the title of the oldest man on Earth, because even then, I had my doubts that he was going to make it to the car, let alone make it through a day of crabbing. His shoulders drooped forward with the weight of his 80 years, and he wore a sweater that was dried on the coat hanger he pulled it from, leaving what looked like a small teepee poking up on each shoulder. I just figured his old bones were sticking out.

I remember watching Dad tying up the bunker as we sat anchored just a short drive from one of the namesakes of Seven Bridges Road in Tuckerton. Fingers didn't help at all. He wasn't being rude, it just happens that he was miss-



ing something very important..... most of his fingers! To a 5-year-old kid, this was a horror beyond horrors – to live with no fingers, and bones sticking out of your back!

As the day wore on, and the August sun chased us under the bridge for relief, we ate lunch (at 8:00 am, how cool), we listened to the seagulls, and felt the occasional car rumble over the bridge above us. We talked, and we filled the basket with crabs. Feisty little creatures, those crabs, and though I wasn't afraid of them, I kept a close watch. After teasing my first crab, I was sure I didn't have to ask Dad how "Fingers" lost his fingers.

Not quite 50 years later, as the waters begin to warm, I find myself a very lucky man to be able to not just return the favor to my Dad, but also to pass on my love of the water to my son and daughter. Fingers may be long gone, but soon, very soon, I'll wake up Dad with a shake and a whisper, wake my own son and daughter the same way, maybe pick up a friend, and head out on the water once again. A lucky man, indeed.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WATERMAN

By Ronnie Scharwath
Aka Capt. Ron



Thursday morning, daybreak Lake Pontchartrain Louisiana. Light Northeast winds with scattered clouds, air temperature is in the low 80's, water temperature around 85*, light chop on the water.

The crabs have been biting and the expectations are high for a better than average catch. Sales are good and the prices better than last year. Boat loaded with 200 pounds of catfish heads (bait) and 24 gallons of fuel. I'm expecting to run my East line today. I'm by myself so I know I'll be putting in an eight hour day.

As I leave the launch heading NE I have a 20 minute boat ride before reaching my string of 300 traps. Slicker suit on and hook in hand I reach for the first float and wrap the rope around the pulley. Up comes the trap. Just as expected large males with a couple of number two's, 6 crab in all. Onto the sorting table they go. As the boat completes its circle the crabs are sorted by size and weight. Trap baited and ready for the water. Onward to the next trap. Before reaching the next float I drop the freshly baited trap onboard and reach for the float. Same catch. I repeat this procedure again and again heading northward down my line.

It's not long before I close the lid on my first box of crabs when I notice clouds thickening over the city of New Orleans south of me. It's August, typical weather for this time

of year. 50 more traps into the line when I notice showers over the city. Hey no problem. Did the same thing yesterday where the showers remained onshore. 50 more traps. The distant sound of thunder coming from the city. Now the city and South shore has totally disappeared. The sky was dark, lightning flashing. I'm now 8 miles in the middle of nowhere with no cover to be found, no place to hide. Can't stop gotta get these traps run.

My boat is a 23' Reno Skiff. Open fiberglass hull with 2' sides. It's made for Lake Pontchartrain and open water. My outboard is a 250 HP four stroke Yamaha. Empty she will do 46 MPH. It has plenty enough power for the task at hand.

That cool breeze finally reaches me. I grab my raincoat top knowing what's next. Suddenly the wind starts to gust and the rain is not far behind. That light chop is now 3 foot white caps making it hard to control the boat. It's time to ride this bad boy out. The lightning is popping around me, followed by a loud crack of thunder. It's raining so hard that the raindrops are dancing on top of the waves. The winds are blowing 20 mph plus and gusting.

No problem. The boat is made for these conditions. With the engine at idle speed and the bow headed with the wind I bebop up and down like a cork. Most recreational crabbers would and should be scared but for the commercial fishermen on Lake Pontchartrain weather conditions like this are something we just have to work through.

For me it's break time. I grab a bottle of water and a candy bar. 15 minutes go by. The worst of the weather is north of me. The wind and rain is slacking. Still rough I head back South to pick up where I have left off. The storm has passed, rain has stopped, and the winds returning to calm. Following my GPS I find my line and continue running my traps like nothing has happened.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PINCH TEST

By Richard Young aka Mr. Breeze



The new soft crab is full of water. As the shell hardens, this water remains inside. Now the growth process begins again. As the crab eats, it displaces the water with meat until there is no more room inside the shell, and it is time to shed again. Knowing this, it is obvious that the closer to the time of upcoming shed, the better the crab is for us to eat. So how do we, as har-

Every year, threads are started asking why the crabs that someone steamed are full of water and don't have much meat. The answer lies in the biology of the crab, more specifically in the growth cycle of the crab. We all know that the crab sheds his hard shell in order to grow, but the process before the shedding is important to understand why the newly molted crab is not very good for eating.

For several weeks leading up to the shed, the crab is voraciously feeding. Of course, the more it eats, the more meat there is inside. When there is no more room inside the shell, it's time for the crab to grow. When the crab sheds his shell, he is about a third larger, but the amount of meat available to fill the larger shell is the same as before the shedding process began.

vesters, know what is inside the crab before we put it in our basket? We use the "pinch test".

To accomplish the 'pinch test', hold the crab by the back fin with your dominant hand. With your other hand, carefully place your thumb above the point, about 1/2 inch away from the point, on the opposite side of the crab from your dominant hand. Now place your index finger under the crab, again, about 1/2 inch away from the point, and gently pinch the shell.

If the shell gives easily, then the crab has recently shed, it will be full of water and have very little meat. The harder the shell under the point, the further the crab is from the previous shed and, therefore, the more meat that will be inside. A premium, high quality crab will have very little, if any, give under the point. This crab will be full of meat and fat.

WHAT THE BCA MEANS TO ME

By Ron Meischker

What the BCA truly means to me has evolved over the years.

When I first found the forums at bluecrab.info in early 2008, I was amazed by the wealth of information about crabbing. Like so many people who have been crabbing since they were kids, I had a pre-conceived idea that I truly knew what I was doing and that there was little more to learn that could increase my catch and experiences on the water. Obviously, I was wrong.

After reading, interacting with other members, and trying new methods to catch the blue bugs, in no time at all, I was improving on my personal-best crabbing days every time I hit the water.



Before I found the BCA, filling a five gallon bucket with crabs was a great day. Needless to say, the volume of my catch has improved dramatically thanks to what I have learned from other members of the website.

Today, however, the BCA means so much more to me than just a compilation of crabbing information and impressive crab catches. It's a vibrant and active community that I am proud to be a part of. It's a community where I have forged several friendships with people who not only have become my close friends, but I suspect life-long friends.

This year I was lucky enough to crab with over two dozen members of the BCA family. Every trip was special to me, and each created their own distinct memories. I was able to take part in the organization of two great parties, BCA Pre-season Crabfeast and the Assault on Patcong Creek, and sit back and enjoy everyone else's hard work at the Wye Party. I'm even lucky enough to call five great BCA members my neighbors down at my home in coastal Delaware.

I am grateful that the BCA has helped me return to my roots of crabbing being a truly social activity, where company of good friends and the memories created on a trip are far more important to me than the number or quality of the crabs. Though I won't kid you: Filling the baskets helps add to the fun.

MY FAVORITE PLACE TO CRAB- PATCONG CREEK, NJ

By Tom Dati aka MagnumTRex

Patcong Creek is a wide and long creek that empties into the Great Egg Harbor Bay in New Jersey. The crabs there are typical for New Jersey in size, but the quantities seldom disappoint. The depths can be erratic, going from very shallow to well over 20 feet deep in spots, making a depth finder almost a must, especially for those running traps

I've been crabbing for many years, moving from a regular boat renter on Dividing Creek to owning my own boat. Back in 2005 I came across the BlueCrab.Info web site and really started to hone my skills, becoming the crabber I am today.

About five years ago, I met a really good guy named Ron, who has since become a very close friend. He told me of a creek I knew nothing about that was his regular spot, "The Patcong" and gave me several tips on how to be successful there. It has since become my favorite creek to crab and I've spent many spring, summer and fall days there either on my boat, the "Tomcat III" or on Ron's pontoon "Bushelled Out".

The crabs tend to stay very shallow in the warmer months as well. I have filled many bushels there as early as March and as late as November. The crabs generally stay in pretty good mass that follows the salt line as it moves up the creek.

A typical morning on the Patcong will have me showing up at the ramp or meeting Ron at his slip just before



dawn. Running topless traps, baited with chicken necks is my preferred method of crabbing although, I occasionally stop and hand line for a change of pace. Traps are baited on the way to the spot that the crabs are thought to be hanging around and once there, the crabbing begins.

The Patcong for some unknown reason does not draw a lot of bugs and, if you're out there early enough, you can usually get off the water before the pleasure boaters and jet skiers come out. The scenery never disappoints, from the brilliant sun rises to the birds and marshes. Even on windy days the sheltered nature of the Patcong keeps it calm and easily navigable.

The Patcong has pretty good access to it from either the Hamilton Avenue ramp in Linwood, or the Kennedy Park ramp in Somers Point. Both places require a permit to use the ramps that can be obtained from the respective town. If getting a permit, make sure to get it early as the price goes up if you wait until the season is almost here.

How to Boil Your Blue Crabs

By Bob Elliott aka 54bobby



By Russ La Rosa aka CRAB SHACK

This recipe might send shivers down some of you crab steamer's backs, but I've found it to be my favorite as it actually puts more flavor in the meat rather than on the shell.

It is a little more time consuming and depending on your tastes, can cost a little more than steaming too.

This will be my most comprehensive boil but can be adjusted up or down depending on your individual tastes. You can use some or all of the ingredients regulating the heat desired. You can also dust your crabs lightly after cooking with your favorite steaming spice if desired.

I usually cook my catch in 1/3 bushel increments as I have no outdoor cooking facilities. If cooking more than one batch, you should

add more spice on the second run and never cook more than the two batches as the water gets kind of funky if used a third time.

My pot is a 16 qt stainless steel with a heavy bottom which I fill 2/3 with cold tap water. If not done already, ice down your catch while preparing your boil. This will keep the claws and fins from falling off when the crabs hit the water.

Add to the water

- 1 cup cayenne pepper
- 2 bottles of your favorite beer
- 1 cup mombaso pepper
- 5 bay leaves
- 1/2 cup dry mustard
- 1 bunch fresh thyme
- 1 cup kosher or sea salt
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 cup old bay
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar

Bring water and spices to a boil and let simmer for at least 15 minutes. Add iced down crabs to boil making sure that all crabs are under water.

Return to boil and cook for 10 minutes.

Turn off heat and let stand in pot for 10 to 30 minutes. (the longer they sit, the hotter the crabs will be).

RIP KEVIN BELCHER AKA CRABMAN1969
7-11-63 to 12-11-13

"The guy put crabs in the boat when others around us were scratching their heads wondering how he did it"
Tom Hughes aka Fishingtom

