



Looking for excitement? Try feeding your arm to a catfish

Ned Hickson

After living in the Deep South for 10 years, I occasionally feel a strong urge to return. When that happens, I just remind myself that as beautiful and historic and hospitable as the South is, it contains people who use themselves as bait for catfish that are roughly the size of an Air Stream travel trailer.

Generally speaking, these people are not intoxicated or medicated. Nor is there any evidence to support that they are the victims of mind-controlling aliens who have simply grown bored waiting for

the invasion.

No. These folks WANT to hunt catfish by sticking their bare hands into underwater burrows, knowing full well it could be the hiding place of a cottonmouth, snapping turtle or Dick Cheney.

Admittedly, the closest I've come to hand-grabbing a catfish occurred at a public golf course near Atlanta, when I waded into a water hazard to retrieve my ball and accidentally stepped on a Gar.

For those west of the Mason-Dixon line, a Gar is sort of like a barracuda, but with more attitude. To this day, none of us can agree on how big this Gar was. My guess is about 12 feet long.

And I'm pretty sure it had

the hindquarters of a bull elk clenched between its jaws. Others in our group disagree, and say what I actually stepped on was a swollen bratwurst.

Which is totally ridiculous.

I think I'd know the difference between stepping on a dangerous man-eating fish, or a relatively harmless meat by-product. Although, to be fair, I can't say for sure because my eyes were closed and I was screaming. In that moment it became clear to everyone in our group — and anyone living within a two-mile radius — that I wasn't going to be bare-handing a giant catfish (or bratwurst) anytime soon.

To fully appreciate this

aggressive style of fishing known as "noodling," you must keep a couple of things in mind. First, some catfish can weigh as much as 100 pounds. Fish biologists have documented enormous mouth radiuses, which measured by carefully extending the mouth to its largest capacity, measuring it on all sides, then comparing it to a scale reference provided by Miley Cyrus.

The other thing you have to remember is that the South's most successful "noodlers" — those who have achieved celebrity by the sheer volume of catfish they've landed with their bare hands — generally have names like "Uncle Stubby," "Button-Nosed Jim" and

"Three-Finger Jack."

These men not only offer themselves for the sake of the sport, buy vow to keep doing so, even if it becomes necessary for someone to physically insert them into a catfish lair once they've lost all their appendages.

It's this kind of dedication that inspires people like myself to at least consider taking a risk and, despite the danger, order fried catfish that might contain a missing digit from "Three-Finger Jack."

To better understand this sport, I tried contacting several "noodlers" by phone to discuss what it takes to be successful. One thing I learned right away was to make sure the person you are

calling is indeed a "noodler" before addressing them as such.

This is especially true if you accidentally transpose the number and call someone who is, at that very moment, running late for an anger management class.

I will continue to follow this story. In fact, my editor has agreed to fly me back to the Deep South for first-hand research, and I definitely plan to go.

Just as soon as he includes a return ticket.

Ned is a syndicated columnist with News Media Corporation. His book, "Humor at the Speed of Life," is available online at Port Hole Publications, Amazon Books and Barnes & Noble.

Write to him at nedhickson@icloud.com.

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IN BRIEF

Women Vets to host luncheon Friday

The Coastal Women Veterans will be having its next lunch at 11:30 a.m. on June 12 at Lovejoy's Restaurant and English Tea Room, 195 Nopal St.

All women veterans are welcome and encouraged to attend and can RSVP by calling 541-997-4403 or emailing ncoughlan@aol.com.

Summer to start with splash for kids

"Summer Splash Saturdays" for children is happening the second Saturday of each month at New Life Lutheran of Florence.

The first Summer Splash will be this Saturday, June 13, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Activities for children will include an art project, music, storytime and playtime.

Lunch will be provided. New Life Lutheran is at 21st and Spruce streets.

For more information or to sign up, contact New Life Lutheran at 541-997-8113.

The next Splash days will be Saturday, July 11, and Saturday, Aug. 8.

Free cooking class to feature picnic food

The organizers of April's annual Community Health Fair are hosting another in a series of free cooking classes for the community. The class will feature tasty meatless burgers, summer salads and desserts from heart-healthy, diabetic-friendly, and cholesterol-free recipes.

The event is Sunday, June 14, from 6 to 8 p.m., at the Florence Seventh-day Adventist Church, 4445 Highway 101.

Seating will be limited. For more information, or to preregister, contact Linda Lydick at 541-999-2052 or email lindasveggies@gmail.com.

Get support, info for prostate cancer

The next meeting of the US TOO Florence Prostate Cancer Education and Support Lunch Bunch is Tuesday, June 16, at the Kozy Kitchen Restaurant from noon to 1 p.m.

This is an excellent source of prostate cancer information with Urologist Dr. Doug Hoff and prostate cancer survivors in attendance.

Bring questions and get answers.

Call Bob Horney at 541-999-4239 for more information.

Senior driving class from AARP

The AARP Driver Safety Program will be offered Wednesday, June 17. Class is held from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Shorewood Retirement Apartments, 15th and Spruce streets.

Cost for AARP members is \$15; non-members is \$20.

To register, call LCC Florence Center at 541-997-8444.

Beekeepers to begin buzzing June 17

The Central Coast Beekeepers Association will begin holding monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of each month with the initial meeting scheduled for June 17.

The meetings will be held from 6:30 to 8 p.m., in the large meeting room in the Newport Public Library, 35 NW Nye St. in Newport.

These meetings are open to everyone, especially those interested in learning more about how to keep bees in a coastal climate.

For more information, contact Florence member Becca Fain at 541-997-3792.

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