

HOOK N' COOK

Ice Angling or Fresh Frozen Fishermen

Whether or not to weather the Winnipeg winter weather has been a problem ever since Henry Kelsey first set eyes on the prairies of western Canada. Many solve the problem by taking winter holidays in the warm climates of Hawaii and Spain. The others - the true blue, the hearty, the native son, the adventuresome, (and also those who can't afford to travel) stay in Manitoba's white, "winter wonderland".

The invention of the power toboggan, the resurgence of snowshoes and the introduction of cross country skis have shown many Manitobans that winter can be a time of discovery, as they gain a new awareness of Manitoba's unique outdoor beauty. Using this equipment, or just going for a winter walk, can be an educational as well as an invigorating experience. There is nothing so quiet as a winter day with large snowflakes dropping, or the brilliance of winter sunshine on the shimmering expanse of a remote white lake. Reading a wilderness story laid out by animal tracks in the snow, or that special contentment when enjoying hot brewed tea over a winter campfire are just some of the things which make winter in Manitoba exciting; and all can be yours with the added bonus of fresh frozen fish to take home.

Your Clothes

Clothes are not the problem to the winter fisherman they once used to be. Light downfilled nylon jackets and pants make winter travel comfortable and easy. But three potential problems are overlooked by many winter sportsmen.

The feet and hands must be kept warm and this is best done by wearing loose not tight fitting boots and mitts. Footwear depends on your type of travel and should be geared to it, but remember if that extra pair of socks makes your footwear tight it is best to do without. The best thing for the hands is still the old leather "garbage" mitts and wool liners - not overly fashionable, but very practical.

The glare of the sun off the glistening white snow makes sun glasses more of a necessity in winter than summer. Plastic framed glasses are recommended for winter use. The metal frames attract the cold and can become very uncomfortable to wear.

There is one concern above all others regarding the choice of winter wear - don't get overly warm and cause sweating as this can make even the warmest clothing cold when you start to cool off. For this reason it is strongly recommended that fishermen use two-piece winter wear - not the one-piece snowmobile suit. Punching a fishing hole in the ice is warm work and unless you're in better shape than most, it is a sure thing you will work up a sweat. Having a jacket you can remove helps eliminate this problem.





Ice Safety

When can you travel on the ice? What areas should you stay away from? How can you tell? These are all common questions for the first-time ice fisherman. To be absolutely safe, make sure to contact your local Natural Resource Office for ice conditions in the area. If you are adventure-some there are a few basic rules to follow. Ice is quite safe when it is four or more inches thick - if in doubt go out only a few feet and cut a hole in the ice. If your still not sure about the ice conditions, continue cutting holes every 20 or 30 feet as you work your way out.

The main time for concern is the early fall and late spring, just as the ice is making or breaking. In the fall as ice is making the procedure discussed is recommended. In the spring if you have any doubt, it is best to just stay off the ice.

Another area of caution is rivers which have a fast current. For example, there are several spots in the Winnipeg River that stay open all winter long and others that have only a thin layer of ice during the coldest period of the winter. So take a little extra caution when travelling unknown stretches of river particularly fast flowing rivers such as the Winnipeg and Assiniboine.

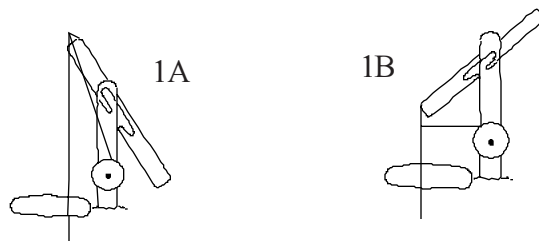
Hole Making Equipment

Making the fishing hole used to be one of the more difficult tasks. The ice chisel or needle bar was not only heavy and awkward to carry, it required quite a bit of effort and some technique to master. The present day ice augers are light, collapse down and are easy to use. Just remember two things, a sharp auger is easier to use and a sheath or cover for the blade keeps it that way. If you are new to the game and think you can just use an axe - forget it! Using an axe to make an ice fishing hole is like trying to dig a three-foot deep post hole with a garden shovel.

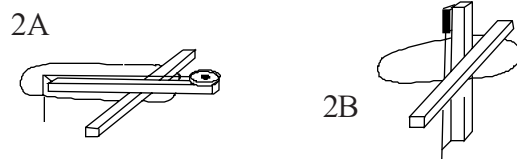
Fishing Equipment

All the expensive rods, reels, lures and large tackleboxes can be left behind by the winter angler. A simple tipup or even a twig stuck in the snow can replace the rod and many anglers use a cleat of wood for the reel. The line itself is of little consequence but have found a heavy test, 30 lb. or so, monofilament line is the best.

As most winter angling is still fishing, a pickerel rig and a small weight is all that is required. The rig is set up the same as summer and baited with the same bait - either worms or minnows or any of the exotics. Some anglers like to use marshmallows, cheese, bacon, liver, corn etcetera. The other choice is jigs and spoons. Many anglers find these work well in ice fishing. Many jigs are manipulated in much the same manner as summer fishing while the spoons are simply lifted three or four feet and let flutter down through the water.

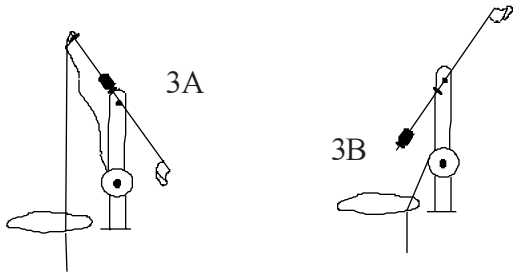


1. A slatted piece of wood slides on a dowel to signal when a fish has decided your bait looks good.

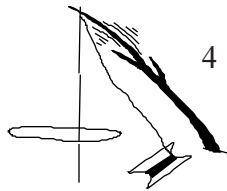


2. The second one is the simplest (we should call it the "Charlie tip-up"). The cross lies flat on the ice and lifts up when a strike occurs.





3. The next is simply a sliding weight on a piece of clothes hanger wire with line looped over the end. When the flag is up there is "action on ice".



4. And last but by far the easiest is to just tie it to a willow branch; when it moves, it is also time for you to move. The spools are just a storage space for line, they can be old plastic spools you buy your line on, or a cleat such as in #4.

Where to Fish

When someone asks where to fish? - the first response is "in the water". With ice fishing this is not such a facetious answer. Many anglers have a tendency to drill their holes too close to shore and sometimes hit bottom before they are through the ice or have only very little water to fish in. Remember at many locations ice can be three to four feet thick by the latter part of the winter.

Ice angling is generally good in and around the areas where there was good fishing during the summer. Rocky reefs and shelves, sand bottoms and along the edge of weed beds are all excellent spots.

Trout, perch, pike, whitefish, walleye and burbot are the major species taken during the winter months. All are excellent eating at this time of year as the flesh is cold and firm.

Keeping the Fish

In winter, like summer, the best way to keep fish is to keep them cold. Somehow in winter the task becomes a little easier. However, you should clean your fish immediately upon capture. Remove the gills and entrails of the fish by slitting up the belly and into the throat area. Clean out the body cavity and pack with snow - nature will take care of the remainder of the cooling process. Fish entrails can be retained in plastic bags and deposited in the garbage when you return home. A much better quality fish is achieved by this procedure, than freezing the fish whole and cleaning it prior to cooking.

Winter travel with power toboggans, skis or snowshoes will allow you to visit areas that are often inaccessible during the summer months. The opportunity to be the first onto a lake and see the peaceful expanse of clean white snow broken only by the tracks of a passing rabbit or fox is a unique pleasure, which is why you will appreciate that it is important to leave a "clean camp" on your departure. A good outdoorsman will not only clean up his own litter but that of the clod who travelled that way before. Let others in your party as well as those who are fishing the same area know about their responsibility; remember, it is your environment they are leaving in a mess.

Leave behind only your footprints, bringing home memories of a wonderful winter fishing trip and perhaps some fine supper eating. Good luck and good fishing!

