

First Ice 2012

First ice is nearly here-and that can mean only one thing...ice fishing! The first forays onto hardwater, in my eyes anyway; stirs up something deep in the soul akin to a religious experience. There is a direct correlation, as after all, we as mere mortals are indeed walking on water. Not God-just God like, as we once again gingerly place our feet onto the beautiful playing field the creator has so generously laid before us in full anticipation of what is to surely come.

Maybe a little too introspective there, but the sentiment is genuine, nonetheless. I am not alone in this passion (perhaps addiction) to the sport, as there is an ever growing legion of those who consider ice fishing not just another outdoor endeavor, but rather *the* most important of all outdoor activities. This can be witnessed in the fact that ice fishing is the only segment of the fishing industry that is actually growing and not remaining flat or trending backwards. This is truly a benefit for the ice fishing enthusiast as no matter what your level of interest, capitalism still works in America and the fishing industry has responded with an ever expanding array of shelters, tackle, clothing, electronics, and other goodies to meet anyone's needs and budget. Budget is one of the most attractive things in ice fishing as it is an inexpensive pastime. For a very modest investment, you can be outfitted as good as anyone out there. No sparkly \$70,000 boat needed here folks.

As our options in equipment escalate each year, it would be in your best interest-whether novice or veteran-to check out what is new and improved. Electronics have seen the most dramatic developments and this year is no different. There are many good companies to choose from for Flashers (fish locators) and Underwater Cameras. I am most familiar with and trust Vexilar as they started and continue the revolution to this day. The advent of their Double Vision system (flasher and camera combined in one darn handy carrying case) is the most talked about new offering this season.

The vast array of lures and jigs continues to grow, with workable micro plastic tipping options being noteworthy. Many unique designs are now donning the shelves and perhaps the most interesting is the use of Tungsten in jigs. Much denser (heavier) than lead, thus allowing us to get very tiny packages quickly back down to a hot panfish bite. These have been somewhat of a closely guarded secret and mostly imported from Europe, but are now widely available as HT Enterprises has come out with their own domestic line.

Shelters have advanced from simple windbreaks to portables that are as warm and cozy as they are simple to set up. A great example would be the new XT900 thermal shells Otter is offering on their already top flight line of portables. The ultimate evolution being wheeled houses that are no longer "permanent" as you can leave them hooked to your vehicle and literally drop em and pick em up in mere minutes; thus allowing the ultimate in portability *and* luxury. The models from Lodge www.ice-shack.com are RVIA certified and offer more standard amenities than your first apartment. They even serve double duty as toy haulers and campers in warmer months.

Our first order of business is and will always be to gain access to the fish and what was once a chore is now darn there fun with the latest generation of power augers. StrikeMaster continues to the lead the way and their new Big Volt electric is just what the doctor ordered for the aforementioned hard sided shacks.

Lots to look at and little time to do so as first ice quickly approaches...thank God.