

We can now declare it official-winter is indeed upon us! If you note a degree of enthusiasm in the statement, you are quite correct. Winter is not something to bemoan, but rather should be embraced for what it is. Simply put, just another period in the ongoing cycle of life. For myself and a growing legion of outdoor enthusiasts who refuse to give up fishing just because the water solidifies: Winter represents an additional and exciting phase in which to explore and learn.

Actually, there is no better time of year to extract the intricate secrets from some of your favorite bodies of water. No bouncing boat to control, as you are literally standing on top of the aquatic world below. Don't even need to drill holes before actually fishing, a splash of water on the ice for a transducer to read through, and you can quickly survey any piece of structure. Should you thirst for even more knowledge, pop a few holes with a lightening fast and smooth power auger such as Strikemaster's Lazer Pro, drop a camera and discern every minute detail of bottom composition, weed growth and relative health, as well as how the fish are correlating to all the variables.

It is truly amazing at just how far we have come in just the last decade or so. What today's ice angler is doing-as well as accomplishing-is not even recognizable to what your grandfather, or even father did. The real beauty of this lies in the fact that we are doing it all in comfort. The archaic stereotypical image of a lone figure literally frozen in a place-while painfully hunched over a five gallon pale amid a background of dreary grey- is an image that is quickly disappearing from the scene. And not a moment too soon. No longer is the sport for those with the sheer will power, and or, enough tugs from a bottle to endure. We are now armed with the tools to make the endeavor predictably successful, and most importantly...enjoyable.

The clothing now available, makes being outside even in subzero temps for extended periods possible. Plenty of good options to choose from to suit your personal needs and tastes. Makes doing the chores needed to access the bounty below tolerable. By the time you've popped your holes, set down a shack and placed a few ReelWeeds for added attraction, you may even find yourself sweating a bit. Good problem to have as you step inside, shed the outer layer, and get down to business.

Shelters have also taken part in the revolution, with many alternatives to choose from in both Hard and Soft models. Notice I do not say permanent, as combination ice shack/toy haulers such as those made by the Lodge, are anything but permanent. Can be set down (as well as put into transport mode), in nearly the same time frame as any soft walled portable.

These hard shells work great as a base camp from which to branch out and quickly explore new territory with smaller soft bodied shelters. Otter Outdoors has a great lineup to choose from, with my preference going to their coincidentally named Lodge model. Establish headquarters on a known evening walleye or crappie hot spot, run and gun during the day in search of panfish, then return at twilight for the evening run in style and comfort. Doesn't get much better than this.

Take a moment and check out first hand what's available at your local retailer. You may just end up stimulating not only the economy, but your interest in the sport as well.