

## **I Wonder Why More People Don't Go Ice Fishing?**

by Jane A. Scott, c 1958

Picture, if you can, a day in February when the weatherman says the skies will be clear, the temperature a crisp 15 to 20 below zero, and a light snow will fall. That is the report we heard as we started out on our 4 day winter vacation – not to the sunny climes of Florida or Arizona as is the thing these days. No, we started a new trend - - vacation in the north woods! What would be the attraction to lure anyone from the warmth of their abode in the city? Well, my city slicker friends – you guessed it – ice fishing.

Of course I'll have to admit that I wasn't 100% sold on the idea at first. When I told our proposed plans to a friend, she queried—'Why don't you do something exciting like going to Chicago and taking in some shows or night life?' That did sound a bit interesting. But surely, trying to cross State and Lake Streets would hardly be the therapeutic way of getting hubby away from it all.

So one morning bright and early we started on our way. We arrived at Park Rapids, put snow tires on ol' Betsy, and proceeded to the farm of our friends, the Martins. They had so graciously made the arrangements to have the road plowed into our cabin, and had started the floor furnace the day before our arrival. We arrived at the summer abode and unloaded all the gear and groceries. It was the first time I had seen the place in the winter time, and it looked like a picture Grandma Moses could have painted. There was barely a mark on the snow. The absence of animal tracks was explained as

being due to the extreme cold of the previous weeks – the furry creatures just didn't come out of their holes.

I didn't mention that I was well-encased in my red three-dimensional underwear. You probably would agree that wasn't such a romantic Christmas present to receive from a husband, but it surely kept me warmer than some fancy nylon tricot.

Now all we had to do was find a fish house. That didn't take long since the resort owner across the lake from us, and a friend, had one all set up and ready for some eager beavers. So we drove out onto the lake to the shack. On the door was printed 31 Club, a name that will take on meaning as we go along. Of course you know that an angling house, like the 31 Club, has windows, but a spearing house is completely dark.

This shanty is about 8 x 8, made of wall board, very scientifically put together, bolted here and there so it will be easy to dismantle come February 28. And there is a floor. It is made of big planks and fits the place like a rug, instead of wall to wall carpeting. That leaves an edge around the room for the accumulation of cigarette butts, etc., and for an opening in each corner for a fishing hole.

A large fuel oil burner, a modern version of the old pot belly stove, takes up a good share of the space. A shelf at one end holds quite a collection of things – about 9 coffee cans, only 2 of which contain coffee, one some money, and the rest are empty. Playing cards - a very essential part of ice fishing, a box of matches, and old gunny

sack, and in general, a well cluttered shelf. The license for the fish house is tacked above the window, along with those of previous years.

The furnishings wouldn't be found in an ad by Mengel, but at least they are sturdy. The table is about 2 feet square and 2 feet high. Chairs are of various kinds – 2 camp stools, a box that had at one time contained the belongings of a sailor. In fact, the stamps were still on the box and I retrieved them for our Tom's collection. Another box or two – and for comfort? -- life preserver cushions to put on the boxes. Add a blackened coffee pot, 5 chipped cups that are sterilized by dipping them in the fish holes, two filthy towels, and you're ready to go.

After starting the stove we proceeded to open the fish holes. It is no mean job to chisel a hole in ice that is 20 inches thick. These holes had been made previously, but every day the new ice that has formed overnight has to be chopped. A big ladle and two beat-up buckets are used for that chore—then out the door you throw it. Once the holes are cleared you're ready to put a minnow on the hook.

The sure\_way to keep minnows is to submerge them in the minnow bucket down one of the holes, the bucket down one of the holes, the bucket tied securely with a heavy rope that is wound around a nail in the fish house. Ray was going to chop out the minnow bucket, but in so doing the chisel slipped and he chopped off the rope instead. Luckily the bucket was still held fast by the ice and with careful maneuvering plus a few well-chosen words, it was saved.

You probably think that we sat there for hours holding a fishing rod or a fish stick, as the winter varieties are called. But we didn't. The lines are all rigged up on spools – big versions of 8MM spools. They are attached to a board above the hole. The bobber is placed in the correct place on the line, then the leader, and the hook with the squirming minnow is put down to the water.

When all of the lines are fixed, you are ready ----- for fishing? No—to play 31 or hucklebuck. A sure way to have a fish bit is to be ready to win a game. The fish grabs the minnow and the movie reel spins. Quickly, the one nearest the hole lets out a little more line. Then at the strategic moment you pull hard on the line to set the hook—and if you're lucky you pull in a nice walleye. The water is crystal clear and it is fun to see the fish fooling around the bait.

Now what to do with the fish after you get the hook out of its mouth. Just slunk it over the head and toss it aside. Then back to your 31 game. If you're the winner unwritten rules are that you place 10 cents in the coffee can to help toward incidental expense—coffee, license, fuel oil, etc. Lunchtime finds you heating a can of baked beans on the stove along with the coffee. The sandwiches and cookies you brought complete this very stylish meal. If the fish aren't cooperating it's back to the game table. One day we joined another couple at 8:30 and left at 5:30. The day's catch -- 1 walleye each—and many games of hucklebuck.

A friend had asked me before we left 'What do you do with the fish after you catch them?! I guess she's never eaten a freshly caught

winter walleye - filleted, rolled in egg and crushed cornflakes, and fried a golden brown. It's better than anything you ever tasted at Fisherman's Wharf. I suppose the atmosphere of eating in front of a roaring fire makes every bite extra good.

That kind of food, supplemented by an invitation to join friends one night in eating venison steak, wild rice, and lot of extras. Plus the feeling of laziness when in the morning your husband says, 'the pancakes are ready' brings to mind the question---

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