

THE NORTHERN STUDENT

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FIRST ICE A LOVE AFFAIR

Story and photos by Bob Bohland



"NO, THE DEER AND DUCK SEASONS AREN'T EVEN FINISHED," THE VOICE IN MY HEAD KEEPS TELLING ME. YET, AS I SIT HERE SORTING ICE FISHING GEAR AND PLAYING WITH DIFFERENT SETUPS, I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE A SLIGHT TWITCHING IN MY JIGGING HAND. THE LEAVES ON THE TREES HAVE NOT EVEN BEGUN TO CHANGE, BUT I SWEAR I CAN ALMOST SMELL THE ICE STARTING TO FORM. IF I CLOSE MY EYES AND CONCENTRATE REALLY HARD, THE SOUND OF THE CRACKING AND POPPING OF FIRST ICE CAN BE HEARD. YEP, I HAVE A PROBLEM. I AM OK WITH THAT. I JUST NEED TO MAKE IT A FEW MORE WEEKS....

THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE THAT FIRST FIX OF THE SEASON. DRIVING AROUND DIFFERENT LAKES FOR DAYS HOPING TO SEE THE EDGES STARTING TO LOCK UP. THEN, THE FEELING OF YOUR HEART BEATING IN YOUR THROAT AS YOU SLOWLY WORK YOUR WAY OUT ONTO IFFY ICE WITH YOUR ICE PICKS AROUND YOUR NECK AND YOUR CHISEL TAPPING AHEAD OF YOU "JUST TO CHECK". DEPENDING ON THE YEAR, THIS PERIOD OF "ICE TEASE" CAN GO ON FOR A WEEK OR MORE. IT ALL LEADS UP TO THAT GLORIOUS DAY WHEN YOU FINALLY CAN MAKE IT OUT TO A FISHABLE DEPTH, POP YOUR MARCUM IN THE HOLE, AND LOSE YOURSELF IN THE COLORS AS YOU WORK ON BRINGING THOSE FIRST FEW FISH TOP-SIDE. FIRST ICE! IT SHOULD BE A STATE-WIDE HOLIDAY IN THE NORTHERN STATES.

WHAT REALLY MAKES THAT FIRST ICE SO ENJOYABLE IS THE PEACE YOU OBTAIN OUT ON THE LAKE. IT'S TOO EARLY TO NEED A POWER AUGER, THERE ARE NO IDIOTS ON SNOWMOBILES BUZZING WITHIN FEET OF YOUR LOCATION, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO SQUEEZE IN, DOOR-TO-DOOR, OVER THIS YEAR'S HOTSPOT, LISTENING TO A BUNCH OF PEOPLE PARTYING NEXT DOOR. IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE, OR AS COMPLICATED, AS YOU WANT IT TO BE.

IF YOU WANT TO DRAG YOUR HOUSE FILLED WITH ALL SORTS OF GOODIES OUT, IT'S EASY PULLING WITH LITTLE TO NO SNOW ON THE ICE YET. OR YOU CAN SIMPLY THROW ON A PAIR OF CLEATS AND GRAB A LAZER HAND AUGER AND A FIVE GALLON BUCKET FULL OF GEAR.

IF YOU HAVE THE ITCH STARTING AROUND MID-AUGUST LIKE I DO, THEN YOU UNDERSTAND. IF YOU DON'T, WELL THEN YOU DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE MISSING; HAVE FUN HIBERNATING THROUGH THE LONG MINNESOTA WINTER. NOW, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE TO GET BACK TO REORGANIZING MY ICE FISHING TACKLE ONE MORE TIME.

ELECTRONICS IN ICE FISHING HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN THE LAST 20 YEARS. GONE ARE THE DAYS OF DRILLING A HOLE IN THE ICE AND HOPING FISH WILL BE THERE. TODAY'S SONAR UNITS HAVE GONE COMPLETELY DIGITAL. FLASHERS SUCH AS THE MARCUM LX-7 AND THE LX-9 COMBINE EASE OF USE WITH LARGE SCREENS, AND EVEN THE ABILITY TO RECORD UNDERWATER CAMERA FOOTAGE ONTO AN INTERNAL DVR TO SHARE WITH (OR TAUNT) FRIENDS LATER.