

A Cold, Winter Catch



Orange fingers of light from the rising winter sun stretch across the snow as I park my pickup truck by the lake. Bundled up with layer upon layer of clothing, I liken myself to a medieval knight armored to do battle. My enemy? The temperature. I remind myself that temperature has made this outing possible. A Canadian front, dipping down from the Arctic, has sent the mercury plummeting below zero in north central Pennsylvania for the past week. Weather like this adds inches of ice to already frozen ponds and lakes and that can only mean one thing...**ice-fishing season is finally here.**

Two inches of fresh, powdery snow squeak underfoot in the cold air, calm under the rising sun. The day promises to be a gem as I wrestle my sled from the back of the truck and load up my gear. Tramping to the edge of the frozen lake, I pull out a plastic pail to use as a seat and settle down to pull on a pair of ice creepers over my pack boots. **I gaze across the expanse of the lake deciding where to spend this beautiful morning.** The quiet of the day is broken only by the occasional moan and groan of the ice and a few winter birds leaving their roosts. Reaching a decision, I stand and recheck my gear. After hanging my ice spikes around my neck and checking ice thickness, I head out across the lake.

Reaching my favorite spot, I begin to unload the plastic sled. I wonder how I'll fare today... not that I need to catch something every time out. I just enjoy the experience. **I relish the peacefulness, the challenge of staying warm, and most of all, testing my skill and luck against the fish.**

I still use a hand auger to drill a hole through the ice. A little old fashioned, I know, but I enjoy the exercise and the relative quiet over the pounding of a spud bar or the whine of a power auger. I feel those tools just frighten fish away. Scooping shards of ice from the four-inch hole, I pull over my bucket seat and reach for my jigging rod. I'll start with one hole and later I will set out some tip-ups. **I lower the colorful jig through the ice, settle down and start a morning of ice fishing. . .**

Ice fishing tends to be a place of refuge for most of its faithful participants--a much needed break from our hectic day-to-day work pace. Observing a few safety precautions and making some preparations, ice fishing can be a great way for you to get out and enjoy the winter weather.

Key Places to Ice Fish in Columbia & Montour Counties:

- Briar Creek Lake
- PPL Montour Preserve
- Ricketts Glen State Park

More information can be found in the "Nature at its Best" section of this guide.

By Jon Beam