

# The Zen of Ice Fishing

BY KATHLEEN KALINA

An observer driving by a windswept lake, might think that those fisherman sitting on white pails dressed in thick coveralls are ridiculous to waste the best part of a Sunday freezing outside. However, every ice fisherman knows one thing, that there is a secret life of ice fishing. Some might call it "The Zen of Ice Fishing" others might say its a meditative experience. Less descriptive coinages might say its a "high communing with nature." Whatever you call it, ice fishing is unlike any other sport and only remotely relative to summer boat angling. Just about anyone can go angling in the summer from a boat or from shore.

Ice fishing may look similar, but when you examine it closely it is nothing like angling. There are different types of fisherman, the baitfish angler is the most common, for about \$30 anybody can get everything they need for the basic day of fishing. The artificial lure fisherman requires a large tacklebox full of an assortment of lures and need good casting skills. The fly fisherman however, long thought to be the aristocrat of anglers requires much more elaborate equipment and stream science knowledge. The charter boat angler, just needs to bring the price of the event and everything is done for him...including having his fish cleaned. The bowfisherman and spearer is very unique and the most aggressive of fisherman, they hunt the fish just as they bowhunt for deer. Stealth and shooting skill is imperative.

The ice fisherman, however, lives in a frozen world with all the elements bearing down on him. He may tell you that its the best time of the year to fish and he does it only for the catch. However, this only partly true. There is a secret reason for ice fishing. It is encapsulated into a 12 point meditation. It is an inner high with thought provoking healing. It is creative and empowering. It is an experience of oneness with the water.

Part of the mystique and power of ice fishing is the ability to walk on water. For those people who don't have a boat or lakeside property, its a time for ownership of the lake. They can go anywhere free and not worry about boats running into them or landowners preventing them access. The entire lake is theirs for the taking. The feeling of ownership and freedom can be overwhelming at first. Some people overdo this and constantly move around the ice. Some even drive their cars across the ice installing tip-ups over great distances only to watch them by binoculars from their cars.

But the typical ice fisherman drags his sled and gear across the snowdriven lake and either enters his shanty or sits outside on a bucket with a jig pole and a couple of tip-ups. Pulling a sled by hand is an arduous task in deep snow, so many people use a snowmobile if the distance is long. Either way, as soon as you pull away from land you have accepted the fate of the ice and weather. You are cognizant of the dangers you face as many others have fallen through and drown. It is an acceptable risk, much the same as the airline pilot

rationalizes.

The main decision is where are you going to set up camp. The dilemma is always whether you are seeking the community of ice-men/ women or isolation. Either way the commune with the lake is the main goal. When you arrive at a village of ice fishers it is possible to expect that no one will talk to you all day even if they are only a few feet away. They are in their meditation with the fish and the lake. You dig your holes, set your lines and begin your meditation time. Its starts with the questions:

1. You wonder how the fish were biting here yesterday....then you think about what you did yesterday.....your mind freefalls to various linkages of associated events. Suddenly, you are pulled back to the ice when you jig pole reacts. Then you start a different way of thinking.  
2. Your mind focuses on the bottom of the lake, you visualize the fish...."is it a perch, a crappie or a northern pike?" You determine it is a panfish. Your mind concentrates on that bluegill and snap, it hits the hook. You pull the line up and out of the water splashes the first catch of the day. Now your mind wonders to where you going to put the fish. You concede that the fish is not big enough to fillet and put it back. There is a feeling of satisfaction. The primeval hunter has counted a coup, but given the prey another chance. You have won approval by the fishworld on your choice of presentations. You are a success. This is a good feeling in a world of very little reward. Now the reward cycle starts up.

3. You wonder about whether you will get a trophy fish today. Is today the day you will remember always? Your mind floats to times in your life that you wished you had been rewarded for a good job done. You're satisfied in knowing that at least the fish appreciate the effort of the presentation.  
4. The wind changes and your mind focuses on your bodily comforts. You break open one those warm-up chemical bags and put it in your orange coveralls. Your thermos of coffee never tasted better. You appreciate warmth. Your body feels good and the air smells clean. The sun bathes your face. You are encapsulated in a thick insulated coverall that reminds you of a warm blanket. You are protected.

5. Your tip-up flag flies up. Suddenly you are on the run. Your adrenaline is pumping....your trap is sprung. Who will it be? a giant northern pike, a monster walleye...what? Your remind yourself to wait for it to turn the bait around before you set the hook. The line stops running as you pull out the tip up. Count to three, now set the hook. Whoah! its running hard.....its a whopper. "I wish I'd brought the gaff" you think. You pull, it pulls. You gain an edge and are getting it closer to the hole. You panic. "I hope the hole is big enough." The ironfaced jaw is first up the hole. Its about 15lbs you guess. Then the body starts coming and it looks much bigger than when you caught a northern off the side of the boat. Its more personal. This one is a

keeper.

6. You lift it up for all the world to see. Everyone else is looking. They confirm you have won the battle and you have the proof. You are sure you see nods and smiles from all across the lake under those orange hoods. You're in the club. You have the recognition.

7. You begin to contemplate how you could improve your equipment.....the mind floats to house and work improvements. Suddenly you have an idea about something you worked on all week at work and couldn't solve. "Maybe I should go ice fishing more often from work. I would be more productive," you chuckle.

8. The ice makes groaning sounds and cracking noises....sometimes it sounds like a hum. You wonder about the scientific principles of ice.....your mind floats to your car, a tune-up....this repair vs that repair. "maybe I should get a new car."

9. Then you seen two other ice vil-lagers running for their tip-up. You cheer them on silently. "Faster....no wait till it stops and turns the minnow around" "YES!" They too have their reward. Your mind floats to your spouse and their job and how you could improve things for them at home.  
10. Time to check all the baits. You do the rounds. The mother hen counting the chicks. The ice glares black and clear with uneven cracks. It is like a mirror into your own mind.

11. The final phase of the meditation is deciding when its over. Certain signs signal the end of the day, they include: cold feet, aching back, hungry stomach. The body always fails before the mind. You appease the body by telling it "just one more fish and we'll go."

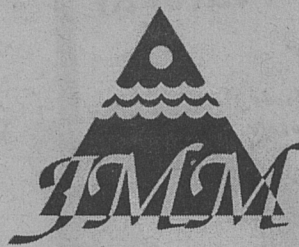
Packing up is a ritual. There is a definite order to where everything must go. If not done right, the whole trip is spoiled. The packing become an exercise in planning for the future. You wonder why your house is not as orderly. Once everything is on the sled, the ice hunter starts home with the meal. Mental notes are created about what to bring next time. The day is rehashed several times to get the key moments back again. The details of the stories are enhanced so that later you can captivate an audience. You are anxious to tell those at home how successful you are. You want them to see the way you overcame the odds, fought the adversity of weather and won. You are a hero. What a day, not everyone can be a hero for a day.

12. You plan to go once again tomorrow. The dreams of a bigger trophy fill the imagination and give hope to an otherwise uncertain life.

Fulfilling all twelve points of the Zen of ice fishing, the fisherman has accomplished an age-old hunter-gatherer state of mind where the internal ritual creates the reward. The mental ritual is even more important than the catch. If this was not so, why wouldn't the modern person just buy fish sticks at the supermarket?

*Kathleen Kalina has a M.S. in Environmental Science and Policy from the University of Wisconsin, and is completing the Fisheries Science Ph.D program at the University of Minnesota. Kathleen lives in Highgate Springs and travels nationally setting up youth aquaculture projects. For \$20 a day you can go icefishing with Kathleen in her warm ice shanty. Call 802-868-4611 for an appointment.*

## financial services



**Julie M. Miller**  
Certified Public Accountant

*Tax & Accounting Services*

Browns Trace Building  
P.O. Box 910  
Richmond, VT 05477

802-434-6466 TEL  
802-434-6465 FAX

## Elizabeth Campbell

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

15 E. Washington St. Rutland, VT 05701  
(802) 773-4030 Elizabeth@sover.net

*Serving the Vermont Community*

## Serving the Financial Needs of Gay Men and Lesbians

Sound financial planning for:

- Investments
- Estate Planning
- Retirement
- Tax Management
- Risk Protection
- Domestic Partners



**Financial Advisors**

802.872.2775 Ext. 209

© 1997 American Express Financial Corporation

**Call today for your complimentary consultation.**  
**American Express Financial Advisors Inc.**

Personal Financial Advisors  
**Chad M. Dubois**  
**Mark Bates**  
**Clara Charlebois**

## legal services

### BETH ROBINSON LANGROCK SPERRY & WOOL

ATTORNEYS AT LAW  
15 SOUTH PLEASANT STREET  
MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT  
05753

Burlington Office:  
275 College Street  
Burlington, Vermont 05402  
802-864-0217

Area Code: 802  
Telephone: 388-6356  
FAX#: 388-6149

### BLACKWOOD AND KRAYNAK P.C. ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Eileen M. Blackwood  
Pamela Kraynak

- Employment law
  - Education law
  - Wills, Relationship Contracts
  - Commercial & Residential Real Estate
  - Small Business
- 131 Main Street  
PO. Box 875  
Burlington, VT 05402  
(802) 863-2517

SUSAN M. MURRAY

LANGROCK SPERRY & WOOL  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW  
15 SOUTH PLEASANT STREET  
MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT  
05753

BURLINGTON OFFICE:  
275 COLLEGE STREET  
BURLINGTON, VERMONT 05402  
802-864-0217

AREA CODE: 802  
TELEPHONE: 388-6356  
HOME PHONE: 877-3165  
FAX #: 388-6149