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Increasing Your Ice Fishing Odds

by Seth Legere, KTP Archery/Fishing Manager

Ice fishing is a sport that has seen many advances in the past few years. Like most sports, new space-age materials and the latest technology have allowed for high-tech devices leading to a never-before-seen edge on the sport. This, along with the increasing awareness of the importance of catch and release, has enabled anglers not only to become more efficient on the ice but also to catch more fish.

Whether you are planning to catch your limit of panfish and perch for a midwinter fish fry or are trying to win the county fishing derby with a lunker lake trout, there are many new tools at your disposal to increase your odds. First and foremost, one cannot help but look over the large selection of electronics designed for use on “hard” water. Flashers are among the most popular items used by people braving the cold. The reasoning behind this is simple: Because most flashers are comprised of LED lights and do not use liquid crystal displays, they are not affected by the extreme cold and therefore can portray clear bright images in all conditions. Additionally, flashers are designed to give up-to-date, real-time images. Unlike a conventional fish finder that you might have on your boat, there is no delay between the time in which the sonar is broken and the image is given. Many people tend to shy away from these flashers due to the perceived difficulty in reading them. However, with a basic demonstration by the staff at Kittery Trading Post, you will feel comfortable heading a field.

The next great advance in electronics would have to be the underwater viewing systems, and Aqua-Vu underwater cameras are among the best. These camera systems will allow the angler to view what is happening below the surface from 1 to 120 feet, and they will allow the user to not only witness and record the fish activity but also search for their cover, structures such as sunken wrecks, weed lines, and rock piles. Because the cameras are, for the most part, infrared, they allow for clear images even in the darkest of waters. Using one or a combination of cameras can increase your effectiveness by relaying the amount of activity that is down there as well as by adding a higher level of confidence in the spot you have picked.

The next area that has been affected by technology over the past few years is ice shelters. Today the angler can choose from a variety of prefabricated bob houses made from lightweight aluminum and durable Cordura®. These shelters are designed with portability in mind. Unlike shelters of the past, these new ones can be pulled on and off the ice with ease, oftentimes by one person. They can also be assembled in a matter of minutes, and best of all, they allow the angler to move from hot spot to hot spot on the



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turn of a dime. There are two basic models of portable shelters: pop-up and flip-over. The pop-up version often comes packed like a large briefcase, the main framing contained inside the outer fabric. To assemble, the case is opened flat on the ice and then the frame is erected. Because these shelters are lightweight and large, it is essential to anchor them to the ice. Most manufacturers of ice shelters make specialized anchors for this purpose. The second style is the flip-over version. The base of this shelter usually resembles the sled used to carry your gear on and off the ice. The main frame and fabric of this style shelter are collapsed down and carried inside or around the outer rim. When it comes time to assemble this shelter, it is as easy as picking up the three or four frame supports - one at a time - until they snap or lock into position. Once erected, these shelters extend from the back of the sled to the ice in front of the sled. Oftentimes this design includes seats for the angler to relax on while he or she jigs or awaits the next flag. Because this style shelter has no flooring, it is easy to set it over an open hole or move it from spot to spot. In addition, flip-over shelters allow for additional gear, such as augers, tip-ups, and bait buckets, to be carried within the sled.

The next big advancement in today's ice fishing methods goes hand in hand with the portable shelters. Portable heaters, run by propane, white fuel, or kerosene, have become not only more popular but also smaller in size and more efficient. With the average cost of a heating system around \$100, it is also more economical to own one. If you are going to make the best out of your fishing trip, it is important to be comfortable. With the ever-rising price of gas and bait, the last thing you want is to be chased off the ice by subzero temperatures an hour after setting the last tip-up. While using these new heaters, however, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. First and foremost, if your plans are to use a heater within your shelter, make sure there is sufficient ventilation. Secondly, make sure that your heater is turned off while unattended. Even though most portable shelters are constructed of flame-retardant materials, if one were to tip over or come in contact with your heater, it could be very dangerous and would put a damper on a good day. The Kittery Trading Post staff can help you decide what model heater best suits your needs.

The list of new products geared for the ice angler goes on and on, but with the use of the items listed above, you will not only increase your awareness of the activities below the ice but also know when it is time to move. Not only will your gear be portable and lightweight, you'll be warm as well. If you are in the market for any of the items listed above or other related products, the KTP staff would be pleased to assist you.