



On the Water with Rick Daniels

Ice Fishing!

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has designated February 16 to 18, 2019 as its annual Free Family Fishing weekend for the winter season.

No licence is required, but conservation licence limits apply. Therefore, you must know the size if applicable, catch limits, season for the species you are keeping and the Ontario fishing zone where you are located.

Editor's Note: We're in fishing zone 15. A general guideline: In February, each person can catch and keep two of: Catfish, Crappie, Whitefish, Trout (Brown + Rainbow only), Splake, Sunfish and Perch – *except for Jack Lake*. For details, just go and troll through the regulations which can be found at www.Ontario.ca/Fishing.

Ice Fishing can be a fun experience if you follow some common sense rules. Ice over 4" is considered safe for people, over 6" for a snowmobile, 8" for a car if the ice is a uniform thickness. The ice may be 2 feet thick or more in a quiet bay but may be 2 inches thick under a bridge where there is current or even open water.

A safe policy I have adopted all my life is to stay close, but not on top of, where everyone else is fishing and stay away from areas where you see no people or snowmobilers. A cordless drill with a long, small sharp wood bit can come in pretty handy for depth checking.

For those of you less experienced, watch out for pre-existing holes, as on a run of mild weather, they don't freeze very deep. If you slip into one, a thigh high soaker will put a quick end to your expedition.

If the wind dies down and the sun comes out or vice versa, you can get pretty hot or cold so dress in layers. Remember, if you aren't using a hut, you are exposed to the elements. You can always peel off, but you can't put back on what you didn't bring. Fold up chairs, any kind of wind break and a snack makes sense.

Even if you're only a few hundred feet from shore, and the weather turns nasty, you might not be able to see the shore if you don't have a GPS, GPS app or at least a compass. You could be in deep trouble! A remote summer occupied lake may look marvelous during the day, but the shoreline may be pitch black at night.

Ice fishing can be some of the easiest kind of fishing there is. What is most important is an ice auger with sharp blades. You can be Charles Atlas (or Arnold Schwarzenegger), but if the blades are dull your auger will just spin. Now, if you're adventurous, you may be able to use a small axe to chop through an existing hole on a mild day that hasn't frozen-over too deep.

A piece of wood with enough line to fish the depth desired tipped with a small weighted, minnow tipped hook or spreader is a basic starter kit - just jig (slowly) away. You can move up to "purpose made" ice fishing rods for minimal cash outlay.

In most jurisdictions, you're allowed to ice fish with two rods. This is where the addition of a *tip up* (Google it) unit comes in handy. Again, a basic one can be had at minimal cost. You can jig with one line and let your tip up do the rest of the work.

Good Luck and Happy Fishing!

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