

Ice Fishing in Western Maryland

By: Angel Bolinger

Last week my co-author, Marty, hears through the DNR grapevine that ice fishing has turned on at Deep Creek Lake. For the first time in years the main body is completely frozen. Anglers have been out on the coves since about mid January. These die-hard anglers are catching everything from yellow perch to northern pike. John Mullican, a DNR biologist, told me that he is catching so many chain pickerel that they are almost a nuisance! So, after making a couple of phone calls, I make plans to head up on Friday, February 4, 2000, with fellow biologist Beth Rodgers. We were so excited for the opportunity to go ice fishing that we drove up to Deep Creek in a snowstorm!



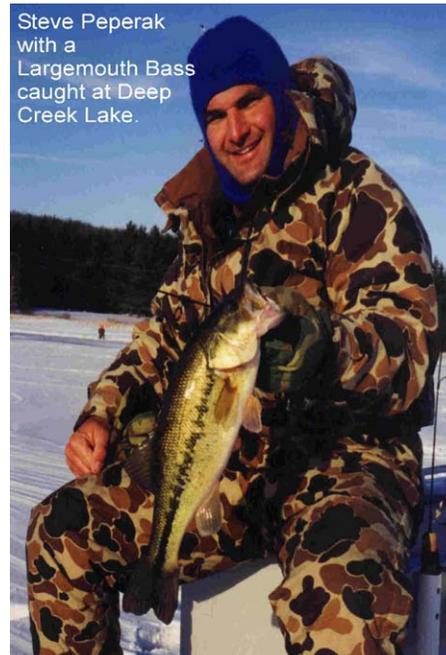
DNR biologist, Alan Klotz, showed us the ice fishing ropes. He initiated us by having us try and augur our own holes with "Old Blue". Old Blue is an augur that is 20 years dull. Well, needless to say, neither Beth nor I made much of an impact on the 8-10 inches of ice behind Whip. Lucky for us, two other anglers had purchased a brand spanking new augur just that morning which they let us borrow. I had no problem making a hole with the "New Blue" as we dubbed it. Six holes and four hours later, we had reeled in some of the biggest yellow perch this



biologist has ever seen. We used live bait, minnows or shiners, and artificial lures. Jigging just off the bottom in approximately 10 feet of water resulted in some yellow perch catches using small Rapala jigs tipped with a mealworm. I have been told that when ice fishing, stay just off the bottom if you want to catch fish. The logic behind that theory is this: water is warmest just off the bottom at this time year. Fish expend less energy by staying in the warmer water. Colder water temperatures also result in slower moving fish. So, it would also make sense to jig slowly. Beth and I used a five-second interval that worked for us.

The coves off Deep Creek have been the most productive areas although the action on the main body is consistently good as well. Dave Gordon of Grantsville, MD reported catching a 36-inch northern pike on 4- pound test at Turkey Neck. Earlier in the week Gordon said he reeled in a 17 3/4 -inch yellow perch! I will post a picture of these fish when I receive them. Another angler caught a 37-inch northern pike and a 22-inch brown trout. Those are not the only trophy -sized fish being caught at Deep Creek right now. Largemouth bass and walleye are also biting. Most anglers are catching these trophy fish using minnows, shiners, small Rapala jigs, or Swedish pimples.

Ice fishing is occurring in other areas of the State. Recreational anglers, Virgil Poe, and his friends, Chuck Bauswell and Rick Holt, fished Leonard Lake last week. Leonard Lake is one of the mill



Steve Peperak with a Largemouth Bass caught at Deep Creek Lake.

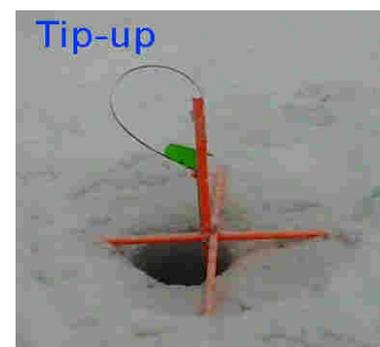
ponds located on the Eastern Shore near Salisbury. The ice was approximately 6 to 7 inches thick. They caught and released largemouth bass, chain pickerel, and bluegills. Virgil mentioned that he had caught a trophy largemouth bass that he could not even get out of the 9-inch hole in the ice. The pickerel were up to 23 inches long and at times the bluegill action was nearly nonstop. Darts with mealworms and minnows were the bait of choice.

Ice Fishing Equipment



An original ice fishing rig.

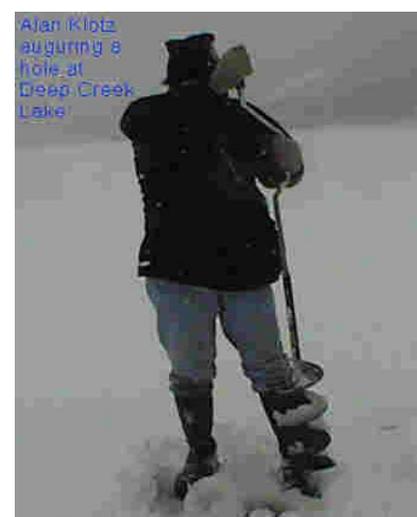
There are a variety of rigs that can be used to ice fish. Tip-ups are the traditional choice, however; short spinning rods, bait casters, or



Tip-up

original designs are also used. A helicopter pilot created the original rig pictured on the left. Blueprints for making your own design are easily found on the Internet.

In this state, a simple and relatively inexpensive hand powered augur will suffice since the ice does not get too thick. Although I must say, the sharper, the better! Gas powered augurs are typically used on lakes where the ice is a couple of feet thick. At Deep Creek Lake, there were places that would rent augurs for a nominal fee.



Alan Klotz auguring a hole at Deep Creek Lake.