



CHAPTER 3

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB (equipment)

One of the best things about ice fishing is it doesn't cost a lot to get started. With just an ax, some line, a hook and some type of bait, fish can be caught through the ice. With some specialized tools an angler can get the job done easier and more efficiently.

The first task is to get to the water. This makes sense because that's where the fish are! You can chop a hole with an ax or an ice spud. Both methods work but require a lot of effort. A better method is to drill a hole through the ice using an **auger**. There are hand-powered and gas-powered augers, capable of drilling holes in a variety of sizes. Size varies from around 4 inches up to about 10 inches. Larger holes are necessary for larger fish.



Ice Fishers using a power auger, above, to drill through thick ice on Susitna Valley Lake.

(Photo ©Ken Marsh, ADFG)

No matter what type of tool is used to drill or chip the holes, you will end up with ice chips and slush in and around the hole. Use your boot to clear the ice and snow from around the hole. You will need a

skimmer to scoop out the slush floating on the surface. If this is not done, it will speed up the freezing process. Some skimmers have a small chisel attached to the handle to aid in clearing holes as they freeze. If holes aren't maintained (kept ice free) the lines will freeze to the ice and you will not know when a fish has taken your bait.



An ice fisher uses a sieve or skimmer to clear slush hole while setting up tip-up.

The next tool of choice depends on how you want to fish, what you are fishing for, and the **rules** pertaining to the lake you are fishing. Consider the following options

before deciding.

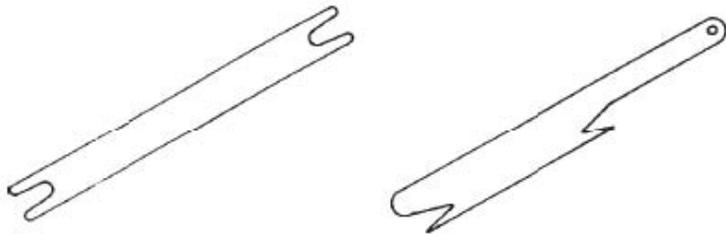
HAND LINES:

A hook tied to a line held by hand. This is the most direct contact to a fish. (Besides holding one!)



FISHING STICKS/JIGGING STICKS:

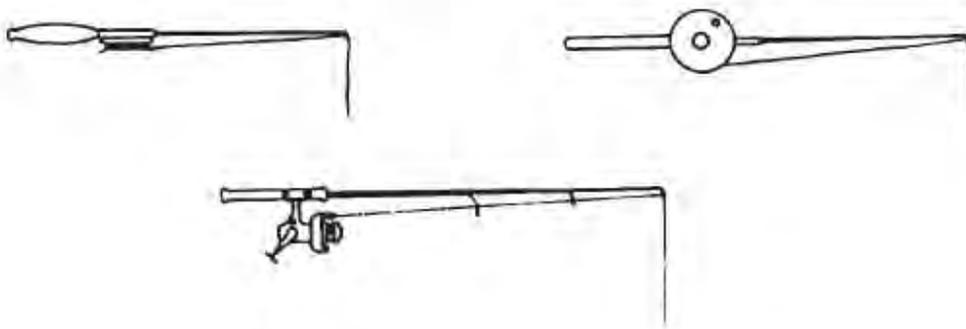
A line tied to one of several types of sticks which usually have a place to loop or wind the line.



|

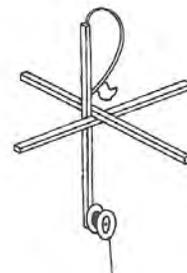
ICE FISHING RODS:

These range from plastic rods with plastic posts for winding the line to cork-handled graphite rods equipped with spinning or spin-casting reels. They come in a variety of lengths from 20 to 38 inches. Sometimes these rods are equipped with spring bobbers or spring steel extensions added to the rod tip.



TIP-UPS:

Tip-ups are sometimes made of crossed sticks that hold the reel underwater. When a fish strikes, turning the reel, a mechanism releases a spring-loaded flag to attract the angler's attention. There are many different types, though all are based on the same principles. Both tilts and tip-ups are sometimes called traps.



SET LINES:

Set lines are unattended lines that have been set, staked, anchored, or otherwise fixed. Set lines are often used under the ice in rivers. Check the sport fishing regulations to see if this is a legal type of gear in your area.

SPEAR FISHING:

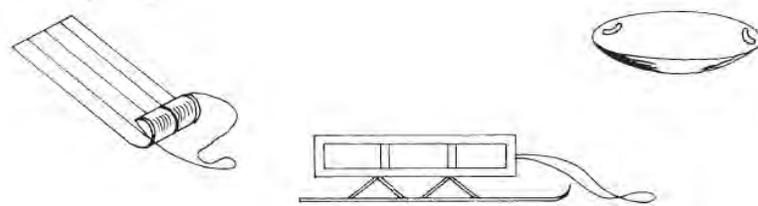
Use of a spear to take fish. Spears are often used through large holes in the ice. Check the sport fishing regulations to see if this is a legal type of gear in your area.

ACCESSORIES

Let's take a brief look at some accessories that can make your trip more enjoyable.

Because walking to the "fishing hole" is required, something is needed to help transport the tools. It is easier to drag the stuff over the ice than to carry it. A toboggan or plastic sled is a good choice.

Even a dish-shaped child's sled will work fine as long as you don't bring too much equipment. A good



project is to make your own ice fishing sled using some old skis - just don't use your big brother's new downhill skis!

Many types of containers can be used to hold gear: plastic milk crates, wooden boxes (a little heavy), and 5-gallon buckets like those used by food companies. A favorite is the bucket. Add a sturdy top or turn it over and you have a comfortable seat.



A portable ice shanty on Jewel Lake in Anchorage provides ice fishers shelter from the wind.

(Photo ©Ken Marsh, ADFG)

Ice shanties, tents, and wind cutters are just a few of the types of protective shelters used by fishermen to ward off the cold wind. Many different kinds are available for purchase and many more are homemade.

Portable depth finders, though relatively expensive, can be an invaluable tool in locating fish-holding structures like drop-offs and weed edges. The old standby, the **depth sounder**, is still the cheapest and most used device. It need be nothing more than a heavy weight that you attach to your line and lower to the bottom.

Then mark the top of your line and then bring your line up by hand. The amount of line let out indicates water depth. You can estimate the length of your line by comparing it to a known length, like your height. If it is really long then you may have to stretch it out on the ice and measure it by the length of your walking stride or bring a tape measure. Some ice fishers use portable underwater video cameras to see what sort of fish activity is happening around their baits and lures. These units can be expensive and are not necessary for success.



Portable underwater video cameras allow ice fishers to see if fish activity is occurring around their baits and lures.

(Photo ©Ken Marsh, ADFG)

Possible extension activities:

- 1) (Writing Exercise) Plan out a trip and make a list of all the equipment you will need.
- 2) (Creative Exercise) Make your own jig stick. Jig sticks can be made out something as simple as card board or wood.
- 3) (Skill Exercise) Practice estimating the length of a string and then measure the string to see how close you actually are.
- 4) (Outside Exercise) Go ice fishing and practice using ice fishing equipment.