

The art of ice fishing

Most years Lake Erie freezes over in February and March bringing unto its slippery surface Roman Catholics and ice fishermen. By walking on water, Catholics are unsuccessfully attempting to catapult themselves into Higher company. By standing in a sub-zero wasteland, hour after hour, staring at holes in the ice, fishermen succeeding in making themselves look real, damn stupid.

Take my neighbour John for instance. John's a great guy - large and loveable, with more bad jokes than a stale box of fortune cookies - kind of like Grizzly Adams on a perennial beer buzz. But when Canada's rocket industry starts searching for a scientist, John will not be on their list of candidates. John's an ice fisherman.

He loves ice fishing. It excites him so, he believes it can provide endless enjoyment to just about any damn fool that happens by. That would be me. I am John's ice fishing partner. When Canada's rocket industry starts searching for a scientist, I won't be on their list of candidates, I'll be scraping dead minnows off the bottom of my boots or trying to slow the bleeding after removing a non-twist beer cap with my bare right hand. I am an ice fisherman.

Ice fishing for yellow perch is big here on Sunset Bay, one mile straight out from our front doors.

To be an ice fisherman you need an auger which is a five-foot long ice drill - the kind of instrument you imagine the dentist will whip out after he grins and says the words "root canal". You need a strainer to remove floating ice from the hole you'd rilled with the auger. You need hooks and spreaders, tip-ups and tiny poles, a bait bucket with a minnow net and above all - bobbers.

Bobbers are small, red and white plastic floats that clip on the top of your line, suspend your baited hook off the lake floor and most importantly when the fish bites at the bottom the bobber bobs atop your little hole in the ice. Bobbers are indispensable. Bobbers are to ice fisherman as the puck is to a hockey player, as the pulse is to a surgeon, the donut to a cop.

Which brings us to method - ice fishermen spend nine hours a day (or 90 per cent of the entire operation) standing stupefied, staring into a dark hole watching red and white bobbers not bob.

During their entire careers, plumbers spend less time looking into black holes than an ice fisherman does on a good weekend. To ease the boredom John and I have found that if you jump up and down real hard right next to the hole you can make the bobber bob, but after a while the excitement just isn't the same as a real bite.



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Which brings us to the other 10 per cent of the ice fishermen's activity calendar - drinking beer from cans with bare hands and by the ingestion of alcohol into the blood stream, reducing your corpse-like body temperature another 12 degrees.

When a fish does bite and the bobber does bob, you instinctively yank the line to set the hook then haul the line in, hand over hand until you hoist that perch out of the hole and onto the ice's surface. This I'm sure of, John and I have seen others do it many, many times.

Besides watching the bobbers not bob and the holes freeze over every 15 minutes, John and I have mastered yet another technique of ice fishing - lying to other fishermen about your catch. "We already ate them," is a tough one to swallow. "No, no...we're true sportsmen...catch and release is our game" is the best we could come up with. "We've been robbed" never worked and I don't know why and the hell I thought it would.

Some fishermen erect ice fishing huts out there, for protection. Sure. I've been in one - three holes, a kerosene heater, a food basket, lawn chairs, a battery-operated television set with the ball game blaring. These are not ice fishing huts, these are Husband Hideaways. Show me three guys whooping it up in an ice fishing hut here on Sunset Bay and I'll show you three Wainfleet wives storming around the house complaining that the garbage never gets taken out.

So ice fishing is like that - a little beer, no bites, more beer, bobbers not bobbing, rebait the hooks, "a beer? Yes, and thanks for asking" and staring into dark holes freezing your cheeks knowing you can never pull a toque down that far on your body. Talk about nothing happening at a snail's pace - it's like watching postal workers on valium. Ice fishing is a sport

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Misplaced blame

Who's to blame for this present Gulf War in the Mid East, this confrontation between the Iraqi forces of Saddam Hussein and the multi-national forces of the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy, Australia?

The 'war-mongering, world-mad, aggressive' United States alone? An awful lot of misguided Americans seem to think so, if we are to believe the comments of a few mouthy protesters on the nightly newscasts. And a lot of misguided Canadians, too. They are blaming everything on an 'insane' American government's protection of 'sacred oil rights'.

Well, if the U.S. is 'insane' in this regard, then a lot of other countries are as well. How convenient of protesters to forget Europe and Japan are WHOLLY dependent on the Arab countries for this most vital economic energy supply. How convenient also, of them to forget that in the first oil crisis of 1973, people were shooting each other in gas line-ups and advocating the U.S. go in IMMEDIATELY and occupy the oil fields. People have awful short-memories most times.

They also have a way of twisting perspectives to suit their own mawkish purposes with regard to the inevitable death toll which will take place. Of course we sympathize with the families of those in the armed forces who might end up in a body bag, but let us not lose track of the fact that these young men and women SIGNED UP of their own free will. They must have known what the end result would be when, and if, hostilities should break out. Also that they would be responsible for the deaths on countless others on the other side. That is enough of a burden for them to carry without also being faced with non-support from their own people when they are trying to maintain world peace and stability.

Why don't these marchers, protesters and loud-mouthers go after the conscienceless sellers of armaments and chemical weapons instead? Virtually EVERY industrialized country (and that includes our beloved Canada) is to blame for the proliferation of some in one form or another, but the political excuse for hiding one's economic head in the sand is that they have provided necessary jobs. Alright, then, let them go after politicians

and private companies to provide alternatives so that we can finally rid this world of the terrifying stockpile which exists EVERYWHERE. As long as weapons of any kind abound, men will use them. As they have from the time of the club, bow and arrow, right up to the sophisticated missiles of today.

Also, if the peaceniks are going to shriek about the 'bully boys' of the U.S.



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wanting to take over everything, let them ask themselves if they would prefer to live under the inhuman dictatorial 'bullying' of monsters such as a Stalin, Hitler, or a Saddam Hussein who has no more compunction about using chemical weapons than the Germans who sold them to him in the first place. The military annexation of a weaker neighbour has always been the opening shot in an attempt to conquer the world. History is filled with such events. Let the peacenikers read some, or all, of it before they go ignorantly stampeding in front of the cameras, and forgetting to be grateful for their safe and U.S. protected geographical location.

Of course, wars are horrible and abhorrent, but is death on our streets and highways by drunken drivers, homicide incidents of robbery or revenge, or even drug-induced deaths by greedy sellers of such terribleness, any better and more acceptable?

Let us look at ourselves as individuals and see how well we get along with our neighbours, families and friends, before we start pointing fingers. If we can't get along with each other on a one-to-one basis, how can we expect a conglomeration of us called 'nations' to get along either? Again, I refer you to the history of mankind which is a sad, mad, blood-letting litany of weapons, wars, and warmongering for one insane reason or another.

When we are willing to change our basic human nature and get rid of all the greeds, wants and desires which dominate our lives, then maybe we actually will have peace in this poor, benighted world of ours. But everybody has to do their individual part and work on it on a daily basis. No good leaving it to the other person to set an example first.

We could destroy ourselves, and our world, before that happens.

The north has an image problem

The statistics are alarming. Between the two censuses in 1981 and 1986, the segment of northern Ontario's populations aged 15-24 decreased by 25,000. That's 15% of the north's young people.

At-first glance, it seems there's nothing new about young people leaving home and seeking greener pastures. I did it, my mother and father did it, and I expect my children to do the same thing. It's also not unique to northern Ontario that our young people are leaving this region and moving to urban areas to find fame and fortune. The same thing is happening in the Maritimes, northern British Columbia, and in the rural parts of the prairies.

What's alarming about northern Ontario's rate of youth migration? We've got the highest one. No other region of Canada is losing young people faster than we are. It's a distressing trend,

undermining any efforts by northerners to build a better future. Government planners have been scratching their heads for years, wondering why.

Now we know. Northern Ontario's young people have spoken. Over a thousand of them turned out at 32 public forums last year, to tell the provincial governments Northern Development Councils why so many of them were leaving the north. As well, over a thousand of them took the time to answer a lengthy questionnaire, sent out by the councils.

The results were compiled and released recently in a report called "Youth Migration: Northern Perspectives". Refreshingly, the report makes no

recommendations, and is not laden down with statistics. Instead, the report is an eloquent plea from northern Ontario young people. The report's authors, Larry Fontana from Atikokan and George Doxey from Kearney (a small village near Parry Sound) chose to put all the statistics in tables in the back of the report. In the report itself, they let the young people do the talking. The quotes are all anonymous, but nonetheless eloquent:

"The area (northern Ontario) is slow to accept change and this frustrates young, aggressive people. They have no choice but to leave."

"A major drawback to living in the north is the perception by the rest of the

country and especially Toronto that one must be some kind of loser or incompetent or rustic to live here."

"TV programs and lifestyle shows display only what urban life is - students attending large high school with theatres, swimming pools, extensive education programs, fast-food places and cinemas. If students perceive this to be the best and only way to live, then they will have a negative view of northern living altogether...Somehow, from the early years of a youngster's life, positive enrichment about northern living has to be given."

Slow to accept change? Populated by incompetents, rustics, and losers? Northern Ontario doesn't usually think about itself like that, but the young people who responded to this survey sure do. It's

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NORTHERN INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders

