

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a black jacket and a black cap with "FRABILL" written on it, is holding a large, speckled fish. He is standing on a snowy surface, possibly a frozen lake. The background shows a cloudy sky and a distant shoreline. The text "Take Advantage on the Ice" is overlaid on the image in a large, stylized font.

# Take

# Advantage

# on the Ice

**W**ith pent-up anticipation building as we head into another hard-water fishing season, our thoughts quickly turn to the where and with what to make the most of the opportunities available to us.

We have been living in the good old days of ice fishing for the last decade or so, and it only seems to continually improve. And, as good as the fishing has been, the tools of the trade are even better.

### Toys and Tools

I can remember a time when opening up some holes to fish through was a task that left one sweating and panting on even the coldest of days. Advancements in cutting surfaces, drives and power sources make this a breeze as today's augers literally pull themselves right through the ice.

Technology has advanced to the point where electric ice-auger models are lightweight and long lasting. I would predict further improvements will leave the days of the gas-powered auger numbered.

If you're in the market for a new ice auger, don't

be scared to check out electric models. Their power and longevity might surprise you.

Heck, just think of hitting the ice without a Vexilar or an underwater camera today. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Even as old — and old school — as I am, I don't think I could go out ice fishing and feeling that naked anymore.

Also, we are just about to the point with GPS and background-mapping systems such as those offered by Navionics that leaving home without them is no longer an option. There's no need to even have a dedicated GPS unit for this, as today's smartphones that all but the crustiest of curmudgeons have on their person at all times will do just fine with an app that costs just a few bucks.

I can now jump on my Honda Rubicon, lock the differentials to spin the J-wheelz and easily plow through most anything to take either a soft-sided or hard-sided wheeled ice house directly out to pre-selected structure as indicated on the phone. Then, I simply splash some water on the ice and shoot right through to get some quick readings from my

Vexilar FL-28 to verify the structure and cover and if fish are present. If I don't see enough of what I like, I'm quickly off to the next potential spot.

Once I find a location I like, it takes only minutes to set up a soft-sided house and be out of the elements and fishing in heated comfort. Or, due to innovative designs in lightweight aluminum construction, we now even have the option of just as rapidly putting down the more luxurious option of a wheeled house.

Aluminum ice houses are naturally a high-ticket item, so some research is in order to ensure you get the most bang for your buck and a unit that fits your needs perfectly.

I have been really focused on fishing out of these lightweight houses for the last several years and have finally found a perfect combination of functionality, style and comfort in the models engineered by Firebrand. In fact, and in full disclosure, I am so impressed with them that I am willing to put my name and reputation behind them by offering them for sale myself.

*The good ol' days of ice fishing are happening right now.* **BY DENNIS FOSTER**

Even if you choose to fish traditionally and keep costs down by fishing outside, the clothing we now have makes even that option downright comfortable. With today's ice-fishing bibs and parkas, you literally can just keep your back to the wind and have at it.

Modern materials allow us to have outerwear, boots and even gloves that are light enough to allow for plenty of movement and dexterity. The days of layering up to the point of looking like the Michelin Man are long gone.

On the terminal end of things, rods, reels and line continue to improve, as well, and the industry pays considerable

attention to these items as they are the most highly consumed.

We are now fortunate enough to have several good manufacturers from which to choose. I have relied on products from HT Enterprises for years, and, as of late, their higher-end Polar Fire offerings.

Once again, do some research and find what works best for you and your budget. In reality, this proves to be nearly as fun as the fishing itself!

Plus, every time you get new goodies you have a perfect excuse to donate some of your excess or older equipment to kids or fishermen who are new to the hard-water scene.



J-wheelz, pictured here on a Honda Rubicon, are durable, foam-filled plastic wheel extensions with paddles that provide extra stability and traction. A set of four provides an extra 310 pounds worth of flotation and will fully float many stock ATVs. Photo by Dennis Foster

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## Where to Fish

Now that we have covered some of the what, we need to explore where ice anglers can play with all of the wonderful tools they have at their disposal. I'm lucky to hail from northeastern South Dakota, where I literally have hundreds of high-quality ice-fishing locations surrounding me in every direction.

Closest to me both geographically and definitely to my heart is the entire Glacial Lakes Region. I am most familiar with the northern region where the big lakes of Waubay and Bitter garner the most attention, but there are equally good opportunities on the southern edge as well, where lakes such as Thompson and Poinsett immediately come to mind.

I prefer big bodies of water with plenty of room to roam where I can head out, avoid the crowds and find my own fish. By doing so, you can put yourself into plentiful perch, quality walleyes, lots of bass and plenty of grossly overlooked northern pike. While not as notable, bluegills and crappies can be found in good numbers on a few lakes as well.

When it comes to ice fishing, I believe the proper mindset to have is finding your own fish. Yes, the crowds are easy to spot and to follow, but where is the fun — not to mention pride — in merely being a follower?

For myself, the truly enjoyable aspect of fishing is to search for, find and then figure out how to catch fish away from the crowds. With all of the electronic aids we now have, locating fish should not pose much of a problem if you are willing to put in even a modest amount of effort.

Also, there really is no excuse to step on those who have the fortitude and pride to have done just this. If anything, stop in to local bait shops, make a purchase or two (which darn sure helps loosen tongues) and inquire as to the state of the bite.

Take careful note of the structural elements, depths and possible cover of where fish are currently being caught. Then, go and find something similar away from the crowds.

You will not only have the personal satisfaction of discovering your own fish, but you will also likely have much better fishing than your more sedimentary types that are scrounging around trying to pick up what remains of leftovers of the last known bite.

If you head up to the Glacial Lakes area, a couple of good resources to call are Doug Johnson at the Sportsman's Cove in Webster, S.D., at 605-345-2468. Or, try Jan at Roy Lake Resort at 605-448-5498.

If online scouting is your thing for information on everything from fishing reports to guides and accommodations, it would be wise to check out the resources available online at [sdglaciallakes.com](http://sdglaciallakes.com) or at the Aberdeen Convention and Visitors Bureau outdoor-dedicated website, [huntfishsd.com](http://huntfishsd.com).

Another great destination is the justifiably famous fishery of Devils Lake up in North Dakota. For intel, contact McQuoid Outdoors and Lodging Guide Service on the southwestern part of the lake near the town of Minnewauken. They can be reached at 701-351-6058 or by email at [fishon@mcquoidguides.com](mailto:fishon@mcquoidguides.com)

Woodland Resort on Six Mile Bay is a full-service lakeside resort that has a number of guides and the reputation to help keep you on the fish on this vast body of water. They also happen to be a major dealer for the Warrior Boats I have come to rely on once the water liquefies. Their number is 701-662-5996.

With help from these reputable resources, you can certainly expect to find the jumbo perch that helped put Devils Lake on the map, but there is so much more to this diverse destination than perch alone.

Walleyes are the notable species now, with sizes ranging from nice eaters to behemoth specimens and

everything in between. Anticipate catching these wall-eye just about anywhere, too, from deep to shallow and with a number of different presentations.

The lake's variety just makes for a fun fishery. Due to the lake's expansion well beyond its traditional boundaries, it fishes a lot like the Glacial Lakes of South Dakota and you will find the pike just as prolific, cooperative and overlooked.

Continuing with theme of big water and exploration, expansive Lake Oahe immediately comes to mind. There is a good population of plump, eating-sized wall-eyes available that are well known for their aggressive nature. You can also expect to catch some chunky channel cats that commonly run upwards of 5 pounds and portly pike reaching up to and well beyond 20 pounds.

Another interesting option on Oahe is the trophy-sized crappies that have been steadily increasing in numbers. Once located, they readily bite and are well worth the effort in locating.

The northern reaches in the Mobridge area are the premier areas for both fishing and hospitality. There's no better example of this than the world-famous Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament held each January. New for this year will be their brand-new enclosed and heated fish cleaning facilities.

For more information on fishing in the Mobridge area, check out [mobridgeoutdoors.com](http://mobridgeoutdoors.com). For fishing reports, lodging or guide-service information, call Brent Kimnetz at 605-845-3668 or Kerry Konold at 605-762-3474.

**About the Author:** Dennis Foster is as an outdoor communicator and hunting/fishing guide. He welcomes comments and questions and can be reached at either of his websites, [eyetimepromotions.com](http://eyetimepromotions.com) or [dakotapheasantguide.com](http://dakotapheasantguide.com).

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