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## Sleeping With the Fishes

By Emily Yoffe Courtesy of Slate Magazine @ www.slate.com

Preparing for my first ice-fishing expedition—a February trip to a frozen Minnesota lake—I read through the advice offered by the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory about the “precautionary measures” that were a “matter of life or death” when one is “working or playing on the frozen surface of a river or lake.” Since ice fishing has a faintly comic air, it was bracing to know that Defense Department researchers viewed this sport as having a potential for calamity somewhere between race-car driving and vacationing with the vice president.

But after three hours of jiggling my bait, the fish ignoring it, and the propane heater in the fish house making things so toasty my guide was stripped down to his T-shirt, the greatest danger seemed not that a fissure in the ice would swallow us, but that I would nod off and tumble, *Alice in Wonderland*-like, into the hole. Fortunately, our fish house had a bunk bed, so instead of falling into the water, I curled up on the bottom bunk and took a nap. At that moment I realized that any sport that comes with its own bed is meant for me.

My guide, Denny Ryan, had taken me to **Lyback’s Ice Fishing resort**, on the shore of Mille Lacs, a 200-square-mile lake about two hours north of Minneapolis. Denny is a 52-year-old Minnesota native, a mail carrier who has been ice fishing since he was 4 years old. (He remembers the first occasion because he stepped into the hole and had to wear his mother’s figure skate on his wet foot the rest of the day.) We drove in Denny’s van to the door of the fish house, which was located on Mille Lacs, about two miles from the shore. As his tires touched the frozen lake he advised me to unbuckle my seatbelt. “We’re not going through the ice, but my dad always said if you do, you don’t want your seatbelt on.” We heard an occasional low rumbling sound. “That’s the ice cracking,” Denny explained, before reassuring me that it was 20 inches thick. I was not comforted. I imagined becoming part of Al Gore’s global-warming slide show: a picture of Denny and me in the van at the bottom of the lake, as Gore described how Minnesota became the latest outpost of Club Med.

Before it became a sport, ice fishing was an ancient means of survival for northern people. The Wisconsin State Historical Museum, in an exhibit on Native American fishing traditions, described how after chiseling a hole in the ice, the fisherman would lie down on a bed of balsam branches to hide his reflection, and cover himself with a tepee. He would lower hand-carved decoys into the water, and when a fish approached, impale it on a spear. You can see this skill demonstrated if you rent the magnificent 1922 documentary **Nanook of the North**.

Ice fishing has since evolved (degenerated?) from balsam and tepees to brews and TVs. Compare the scenes of Nanook triumphantly pulling up fish and killing them with his teeth to the portrayal of ice fishing in *Grumpy Old Men*, with Walter Matthau sitting on an easy chair in his fishing hut, a six-pack chilling in the ice hole.

We had gotten up at 4:15 a.m. for our expedition. At dawn, before we reached the lake, we stopped at Meleens Sports Center in the town of

Onamia. All sports have their equipment and vernacular, but fishing seems to have more than its share. Fishing “jigs” are colorful lures you jiggle in the water. (If Minnesotans ever decide to become rappers, they should name themselves after brands of fishing jigs: BOOYAH Boo Bug, Techni Glo Fat Boys, Power Wiggler, Rattling Varmit.) We bought a bunch of wax worms, called “waxies,” moth larvae, \$2.09 for 30, and several scoops of large flat-head chubs, a small fish, for \$3.50 a scoop. Denny warned me he would be putting the heads of chub on hooks because, he explained, “Since the dawn of time man has used little fish to catch big fish.”

Then he said we needed to buy a bunch of Swedish Pimples and directed me to a wall of them—they are small oval metal lures. (When I got back home I tried to do some research on the origin of the term. I discovered “Swedish pimples” are also called “Swedish nipples.” Looking up Swedish pimples sent me to Web sites on fishing or acne. Looking up Swedish nipples delivered me to **I Am Curious—Yellow** territory.)

We checked in at the resort, and I picked up a copy of *Fifty Thousand Holes*, the memoir of Phyllis Lyback, the co-founder of the resort. I flipped the book open and landed on Chapter 13, the story of her husband’s near death after falling through the ice and his futile attempts to rescue himself until passing fishermen scooped him out. “The lake never seemed quite the same to him after that experience,” she wrote. Her son, Eddy, who with his wife, Cindy, now runs the place, escorted us to our house, one of 20 of theirs scattered around the lake. Before we drove off, Denny, curious about what had been the most successful method of fishing lately, asked Eddy, “What are they doing—jigging pimples with chub heads?”

Home sweet ice fishing house  
The red-painted VIP fish house was almost ridiculously luxurious, with two sets of bunk beds, a picture window, a toilet, a heater, a stove, and a dining room table. There were eight ice-fishing holes cut in the wall-to-wall carpet, each 10 inches across. Renting the deluxe house cost \$125 for the day; we could have it for the week for \$425. I loved the idea of being in my own cozy home and simply pulling dinner up through a hole in the floor. I was not sure about the carpeting, however. I could imagine if I lived there I would be constantly nagging, “How many times have I told you to get your crappie off the rug!”

As Denny moved our equipment in—bait, lures, rods, waxies, chubs, pimples, hemostats for removing hooks from fish, and an amazing underwater camera—I was feeling distinctly unNanookian. Denny dropped the camera viewfinder down the 30 feet to the bottom of the lake, and suddenly we could see on the screen the fish swimming below. Most of them were young yellow perch, but occasionally a foot-long adult would amble by. Denny pierced a chub with my hook, tore off its body, and I lowered the head into the hole.

I could not only feel the perch nipping at the head, I could watch them on what I came to think of as the Fishing Channel. Denny advised me to keep

*Sleeping continued on page 2*

## Club Calendar

December 14th ..... NUASF Social Night at Club House  
December 21st ..... NUASF Club Meeting  
January 11th ..... NUASF Social Night at Club House  
January 25th ..... NUASF Club Meeting

February 8th ..... NUASF Social Night/  
IFC Prize Meeting at Club House  
February 11th ..... NUASF Ice Fishing Contest at Clear Lake  
February 15th ..... NUASF Ice Fishing Trip to Dixon Lake  
February 22nd ..... NUASF Club Meeting


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## From the President....

By Jason Kuester

At our last Fish Club meeting we held elections. The club re-elected (Jen Kuester Treasurer), (Gary Sprenger Vice president), and (Jason Kuester President). No one stepped up to be the Secretary at or before the last meeting so we tabled it till the next meeting. If you would like to run for these position please bring it up at the next meeting, or call me at 507-381-2041 or email at jr@newulmtel.net If you have questions about the Secretary position please give me a call. Ross will help to make it a smooth transition.

ATTENTION ALL FISHERMEN: If you are interested in going on the Dixon Lake trip please sign up at the next meeting and make your \$50.00 deposit. There is 11” of ice and should be plenty by the trip...

Todd and Karen from the Dixon Lake Resort are very excited to have our club back at their resort this year. They have also donated a four person fishing trip as one of our prizes for the fishing contest we will have in February. **The date for the trip is February 15th.** I need to have conformation and your \$50.00 down payment to them after the December’s meeting. If you are interested in going along on this trip please contact me at 507-381-2041 or e-mail at jr@newulmtel.net. The total for the trip is \$140.00 per person for three nights, or \$200.00 per person food included. Todd and Karen also said there would be no charge for the angling and spearing houses this year. They have room for 24 people in their angling houses and about 25 spearing houses available. This is first come first serve, so if you need an ice house let me know. *If you are unable to attend the meeting and need to pay your \$50.00 down payment send it to Jason Kuester 56554-446th Street New Ulm, MN 56073.*

I would like to thank everyone for doing such a great job on selling their books of tickets for the ice fishing contest, and the Ice Castle Fish House. If you are interested and want more tickets contact Ken Sutherland 507-276-1534 Ross Nelson at 507-766-0765 or myself at 507-381-2041. Please turn in any unused tickets and or money at the January meeting. Thanks for all your hard work!!!

*Ice fishing season is here and many lakes are just froze over. Due to these conditions it is very hard to tell if you are walking on 2 inches of ice or 8 inches of ice. Please be careful if and when you are on the ice. Remember the golden rules of ice thickness- 4 inches walking only, 6 inches snowmobiles and four-wheelers, 12 inches or more for small cars and pickups, 16 inches for full size vehicles.*

Winter is here and what a great time to bring our friends and family to the New Ulm Area Sport Fisherman Club. We are always looking for new members to join. If you know of someone bring them along and show them how much fun we have at our club. As always, bring a friend and each of you will receive a free refreshment of your choice!

**Hope to see you at the next meeting!!**

*Sleeping continued from page 1*

the head moving. “The fluttering triggers the fish. They’re like cats playing with string.” When I saw my bobber—the piece of plastic attached to my line that floats on the surface of the water—get tugged, I should give the rod a sharp snap, impaling the fish.

Don’t worry little fella, we won’t eat you After 45 minutes of fishing, I snapped my rod in response to a tug, then felt resistance on the line. I slowly reeled in my one catch of the morning, a 4-inch yellow perch. Denny carefully unhooked it and handed the fish to me. It was silky and thrashing and after I put it back in the frigid water, it quickly circled its way down to the dark. There are rules governing the size of the fish and the number you can keep. Since we planned to eat the fish someone else caught at a restaurant that night, Denny released all of ours.

Denny put some waxies on his line and

**Page 2**

started pulling in fish after fish—then unhooking them and plunging them back in the hole. Occasionally, we saw on the screen, as the little ones congregated around our bait, a big fish would sail by, giving our lines a condescending look, as if to say, “I’m not falling for this no matter what nationality your pimple is.” The Fishing Channel was mesmerizing, but it didn’t seem quite fair, either. “Isn’t it cheating to watch the fish?” I asked him. “Yes!” he replied, but we couldn’t bring ourselves to turn the thing off.

After I got up from my nap at 1:15 p.m., the fish seemed like they were on a break, so we went out to talk to a couple of guys who had just driven up and drilled their own hole in the ice with an auger. (Since it was a Tuesday, the lake was almost deserted.) They were Tom and Jeremy, who lived nearby. Garrison Keillor has observed that, for men, walking onto a frozen lake, cutting a hole in the ice, and fishing is an alternative to both therapy



**Hook, Line, and Sinker**

*The Hook Line and Sinker* is published monthly by Joyce Reese graphic design for New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of respective writers and not to be construed as the opinion of the NUASF or its members. Send all correspondence and submissions to **New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen, P.O. Box 294, New Ulm, MN 56073.**

**The NUASF Board**  
President - Jason Kuester 507-381-2041; Vice-President - Gary Sprenger 507-359-9358; Secretary - Ross Nelson 507-766-0765; Treasurer - Jen Kuester 507-766-0143; Board Members: Mike Buechner 507-354-2739, Wyman Forbrook 507-420-5828, Mike Studtmann 507-995-3074.

**NUASF Monthly Meeting** November 30th, 2017 Members Present: 35+

### I. Secretary Report

A. Motion made by Dave Mecklenberg and seconded by Jim Liebl to except report as read. Passed

### II. Treasury Report

A. Balance - Motion made and seconded to except report as read. Passed unanimously

### III. Old Business

A. Membership update 155 Members w/ 22 Due

B. Area Lakes and Rivers Report.

1. Minnesota River – Boat was out
2. Northern Lakes – 7” of ice north of Hwy 200 caught lots of perch and sunnies
3. Third River – 8” of ice, catching everything – Winni: Northerns, Leech - Limit

C. Club House and Grounds Update.

1. Clean up at the clubhouse – 6 members Thanks. Lights need to be replaced by front entrance.
2. Missing a battery maintainer if anyone know about it.
3. Thanks to the club members who built the wood shed.

D. Lake Hanska Assn will be holding their meeting 12/5 if anyone is interested.

E. Sleepy Eye Sportsmen will be giving their check to us by next meeting.

### IV. Other Old Business

A. Elections : Pres: Jason Keuster – Motion by John Hunsted and seconded by Ken Sutherland, VP: Gary Sprenger – Motion by Scott S. & seconded by Joh H., Treasurer – Jen Keuster – Motion by Mike Studtmann and seconded by Scott S. – Secretary – No one stepped up for the position retry next month.

### V. New Business

A. Scholarship Update – Sending out all information to area schools. Tell all family and friends.

B. Fishing Contest – All tickets available posters will be available by Dec Meeting. Wes Ludewig stepped up to be the prize coordinator, see him if you can help.

C. Dixon Lake Club Fishing Trip – Feb 15-18th , 31 members signed up. \$50 deposit to Jason.

D. Food next meeting – POT Luck

E. December Meeting will be held Dec 21st

### VI. Other New Business

A. A) Scott Sparlin spoke to us about a fishing class thru School Dist. #88 for 16-18-year-old kids. Motion made & seconded to cover all expenses for the class. If the class develops he would need 5-6 helpers.

B. Walt’s Bait Shop gave us a great deal for prizes for our contest.

D. Wyman Forbrook present a check to the club in memory of his father Wayne. Money to be used for Kids Fishing Contest prizes.

**VII. Adjourn @ 8:30 PM**

*Sleeping continued from page 2*

and divorce, and a way to experience transcendence. “The moment you leave the shore, you are gripped by a sense of grandeur,” Keillor writes. I asked Tom and Jeremy to describe the allure of ice fishing, but they didn’t quite take Keillor’s lyrical tone. “It’s something to do,” said Tom. “Yeah, it’s something to do,” agreed Jeremy.

Then Tom told us his favorite recent ice-fishing story. On a warmish day a young father was sitting by an open hole, pulling up dinner while his 3-year-old son played nearby on the ice. The father was hitting fish after fish, and he would unhook them and toss them behind him. As each one landed, the little boy carefully picked it up, walked to the next open hole, and put it back. “Finally the guy finished, turned around, and saw he had no fish,” said Tom. “I never laughed so hard.”

Calling spirits from the vasty deep

Denny and I went back to the house, and while Denny continued to pull up a stream of perch, I went for hours without a fish. At one point I took out my cell phone and called my daughter 1,100

miles away, to see if she was doing her homework. As we talked I felt a tug on the line, hung up the phone, and pulled in my second fish. By now the sun was starting to set, and before it got dark Denny suggested we walk farther out onto the lake to take a look at an ice heave—a place where the ice has buckled upward several feet.

We set out and I was finally cold—it was about 20 degrees Fahrenheit, and as I took off my gloves to snap a few pictures, the tips of my fingers started burning. We walked about a third of a mile straight to the heave. It was a windless day with about 4 inches of snow on the ice, and all was flat and white and quiet. We stopped to take it in, just as the Ojibwe, the Indians who lived by and fished on this lake for hundreds of years, must have. I realized in all my life I had never experienced such utter, spectacular silence.

We walked back, packed up, and drove off the ice and back to Onamia. At Trophy’s Sports Bar I ordered a walleye dinner. It was delicious.

**Page 3**

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