

## Enthusiasm is catching

### Ice fishing now a pursuit for all ages, both genders

By Bella English  
GLOBE STAFF

**M**EREDITH, N.H. — Nearly every winter weekend, June Sidney rises before dawn streaks this picture-postcard town on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. She fills five thermoses with coffee, assembles lunch supplies, dons her long underwear, snow pants and parka, and grabs her fishing pole. Down the road, her sister-in-law, Suzanne Taggett, is doing much the same.

It's five minutes by snowmobile or four-wheeler through the woods and onto their favorite cove, frozen now in a winter still life. There, from the middle of the pine-framed lake, the women drop their lines and wait for a bite. So what if it's a little cold? If the fish are there, so are the women. They have a couple of shacks, or bobhouses, right there on the ice, complete with propane heater for shelter and warmth.

"But we're really not inside much," says Sidney, 41. On a recent Saturday, it's downright balmy, in the high 30s. The ice is a foot and a half thick. The women have fished on the ice in 70-degree weather. They've fished in blinding blizzards. They've fished when it was 13 below and the wind was gusting like

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crazy.

"I actually got frostbitten last year," says Taggett, 43, who sits on a metal folding chair minding her pole. To Taggett, who has four sons, the appeal is obvious: "It's the quiet. There's no telephones, no TV."

From Alaska to New England, anglers who fish for salmon and bass in the summer head to the ice in the winter for lake or rainbow trout, cusk, perch, and pickerel. No longer is ice fishing merely the province of the solitary man who chops a hole with his hatchet, sits on an overturned bucket, and fishes to put food on the table. Ice fishing has become a bonafide family sport, spanning generations and the genders.

"It wasn't that long ago that it was a man's winter sport, sort of

like 'Grumpy Old Men' with Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon," says Jim Wallace, a retiree who has been ice fishing for decades. "There were quite a few stories about men and their bobhouses, some of them party central. But it has evolved into a family affair and women are catching some of the biggest fish now."

For years, Wallace has helped run Meredith's Great Rotary Fishing Derby, which last weekend attracted thousands of anglers from across New England. "Activities that the whole family can do are the exception rather than the rule, and this is a sport all members of a family can participate in and have fun," he says.

Mike Pelczar, chairman of this year's derby, began taking his 12-year-old daughter fishing when she was 7. The two of them recently built a bobhouse for their ventures; it's 5-by-6-feet and built on runners, the better to pull it out on the ice with a four-wheeler. Jenny, a sixth-grader, painted it bright yellow. "The brighter the better," says her father, "because the snowmobiles here travel at warp speed."

Betsey Donovan also served on the Derby committee. A fly-fishing fanatic, she's a newcomer to ice fishing, which she finds more challenging. "For me, it's like a Christmas present," she says. "You don't know what you'll get when the flag goes up."

Donovan is referring to "tip-ups," or devices set over an ice hole, which these days are usually drilled by a gas-powered auger. The tip-ups carry a fishing line that attaches to a flag; when tripped by a striking fish, the flap "tips" or pops up. So while manually fishing one hole, anglers can also keep an eye on a nearby hole.

On a recent Saturday, the extended Sidney-Taggett clan drill several holes in the ice — each person is allowed two by law. June's husband, Elwin, is there, along



with Suzanne's husband, Mike, and his mother and stepfather. Two of the Taggett sons are along: Chuck, 23, and Joshua, 20. Josh has brought his girlfriend Chana Stevens, who is new to ice fishing but quickly getting the hang of it.

Still, everyone cedes the ace honors to Suzanne and June: their husbands call them "The S and J School of Fishing." A couple of weeks ago they each caught fish weighing nearly 5 pounds. Both women are cancer survivors: Sidney had melanoma, and Taggett lost a leg to osteosarcoma. For them, ice fishing is relaxing and healing. The reason more women are ice fishing, Sidney believes, is that it's something they can do with their children during the long winter months.

Nearby, Taggett has hooked a trout that nearly escapes until Josh reaches into the icy water with his bare hands and grabs it. They pull out the tape measure: It's an 18-incher, the smallest you're allowed by law to keep. But back into the hole it goes. The family keeps only the fish they'll eat.

It's an all-day event, from early morning till late afternoon. Once, the group prepared a turkey dinner — on the ice. They'd fixed the side dishes at home and re-heated them on the propane grill in the bobhouse while deep-frying a turkey outside.

Taggett's mother-in-law, Cookie Boulanger, sees her flag pop up and dashes over — as much as you can, on ice. She loves the fishing because it gives her time with her children and grandchildren: Once you're out on the ice, no one can escape. "And look at what you get. You're out here in nature, and it's almost free." She waves an arm at the whiteness that surrounds them.

It's late morning, not yet time for lunch — grilled hotdogs — but for a snack. Sidney heads into a bobhouse, where she assembles a camping stove, places it on the grill, and pops some refrigerated sweet rolls in to bake. Ten minutes later, she returns to the ice with a

batch of warm cinnamon buns drizzled with orange-flavored icing.

Later in the afternoon, as the sun slants across the frozen expanse, the two women take stock of their catch. It's been a good day: Each caught two fish with their jig rods and several others on the tip-ups — more than the guys. It's 5 p.m. They've been there since 8 that morning.

But both return home with no fish; they've released them all. Sidney likes white perch, which she did not catch. As for Taggett: "I don't eat fish. I don't like the taste of it." She makes a face.



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**Suzanne Taggett (right) and Chana Stevens with Taggett's catch in Meredith, N.H.**



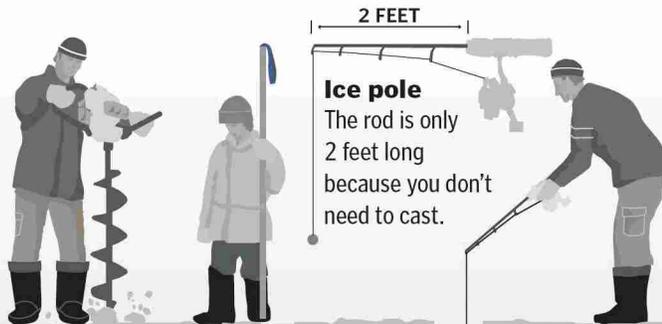
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**Cookie Boulanger (left) and June Sidney peered from their heated bobhouse on the ice.**

## Ice fishing guide

### Safety first

Water freezes unevenly. One area of ice might be thick enough to hold a car (8 to 12 inches), and another area might be too thin to even walk on. You need at least 4 inches of new clear ice to walk and ice fish on.



### Ice pole

The rod is only 2 feet long because you don't need to cast.

### Getting started

To drill a hole through the ice, fishermen use a tool called an auger. It works like a giant screw, cutting the ice with its sharp blade at the bottom.

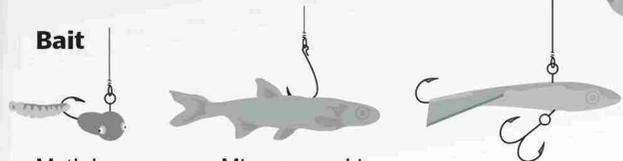
### Gimme shelter



**CABINS**, called bobhouses, are made with wooden boards or metal. They have skis or special plates on the bottom so they can be slid across ice.

**TENTS**, called portable fish houses, are light enough to pull by hand with a rope.

### Bait



Moth larvae or night crawlers on a bobber

Minnows or shiny spoons to look like minnows.

Weighted lures that look like live bait.

For small fish, use a flexible rod so you can feel them bite.

For big fish, use a stiff rod so they don't break it.

### To stay warm and dry



**HAT** Wool or fleece stops heat loss.

**MITTENS** "Choppers" are leather for a good grip and are lined for warmth.

**COAT** Avoid cotton. Wool or down keep you warm and dry.

**SOCKS** Thick, wool socks keep feet warm and dry. Carry an extra pair.

**BOOTS** Heavy, felt-lined boots help to keep feet dry.

### SOURCE:

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