

# 10 Ice Fishing Essentials

Heading out for a day of ice fishing without packing a few essential accessories is like heading out on big lake with no life jacket, a leaky boat, and a motor in poor repair.

Aside from your fishing tackle, bait, snacks, drinks, and warm clothing, there are a few items that should always be stowed in your pack. As with most outdoor activities I have one simple motto that has served me well; “Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst!” Here a few things that accompany me, without fail, whenever I venture onto the ice:

**Compass:** The sun is shining, you’re only 500 meters from shore but then sometime during the day it becomes overcast and a light snow begins to fall. The shore is now a hazy outline and your perspective has changed. The wind comes up and you’re in the middle of a blizzard before you realize what’s happening. You know shore is only 500m away so you quickly pack up and head to where shore should be. Soon you’re not so sure that you’re really heading towards shore and you know that there is bad ice and open water somewhere in the other direction. What now! If you had a compass and had taken a quick bearing on the shoreline when you arrived, you could now pull out your trusty compass again and confidently follow it to shore and safety. Always take a compass.

**Hat:** Regardless of how warm the day is never leave without a warm hat that will cover your ears. You’ve heard the old saying, “If you’re feet are cold, put a hat on.” Well it’s true. Heat is lost fast through the head and protecting your head with a warm hat will allow your body to use the excess heat somewhere else.

**A Small Safety Kit:** It doesn’t have to be very big or real sophisticated. Mine contains the following items, a small first aid kit (about 2” x 4”), waterproof matches, emergency blanket, 2 emergency candles, extra knife, reflective signaling device (a small piece of stainless steel works great). Should you get lost, or have a mechanical problem with your sled or ATV, these simple items can mean the difference between life and death. Stick to small practical items because weight is a factor and you’re going to carry this with you all day, every time you go on the ice.

**Rope:** Not much. Just a small coil of small diameter nylon or polypropylene rope – something that will remain flexible in cold weather is ideal – with a small loop pre-tied at both ends. This can have many uses but most importantly it will be you’re lifeline should someone tread on thin ice.

**Ice Picks:** This simple device can save your life and it can be nothing more than a nail driven into an old piece of broom handle. You can also buy commercial versions at your favorite tackle shop. You should be able to hold them with your arms extended and a piece of cord around the back of your neck attached to each pick. Should you find yourself in the water these picks will give you the grip necessary to pull yourself back up onto solid ice.

**Self-heating Hand Warmers:** These small, inexpensive, packages are available everywhere and can mean the difference between a pleasant day on the ice or an early trip home because someone has cold feet or fingers. They are also available in a crescent shape that is

designed to fit inside the toe of your boot. A touch of frostbite is an experience you'll not soon forget. And having to leave just after you spend a half hour drilling holes because one of the kids has cold feet does nothing to enhance a pleasurable family outing.

**Change of Clothes:** The necessity for this is dictated by how close you are to help. Personally I have an old set of clothes (pants, sweater, socks, and underwear) that never leaves my pack. In the unfortunate event that you or one of your companions should get wet, dry clothes can save your life. *Keep them in a waterproof bag!* I've never had to use them, but I have loaned them to several fishing companions over the years.

**Extra Gloves and Socks:** There's nothing more uncomfortable than a wet pair of socks on a cold winter's day. The same with gloves. Always take one or two extra pair. A pair of neoprene gloves are great when you have to stick your hands into cold water to land a fish.

**Grocery Bags:** There is little point in putting on dry socks only to plunge your foot into a wet boot. A couple of plastic grocery bags take up hardly any space and can be pulled over your socks before you put your boots back on. This is a simple but effective technique that can keep you on the ice instead of heading home before your feet freeze.

**Backpack:** All of the items listed above, along with all your fishing tackle will fit easily into a small pack. You don't need anything fancy, but extra pockets always come in handy.

I've never had to use most of these things but just knowing they are there greatly enhances my comfort level. Stay safe and enjoy the great Southern Ontario outdoors this winter.