

TECHNIQUE COULD SAVE YOU AFTER FALLING THROUGH ICE 01/02/01

In my last column I delved into some of the problems and possible consequences of working or traveling on ice-covered bodies of water. These are processes that always have been and will continue to be, a part of most Adirondackers lives.

It has been a part of mine for as long as I can remember. I learned early in life of the dangers inherent with falling through same and how to avoid them and how best to react should I or others become a victim.

Eskimos have over 30 classifications and words to describe snow and the various types they had to work with. The same is true of those who have to deal with ice as an integral part of their lives. They have learned how to recognize and deal with the many variances present on all bodies of water at any given time. It is a subject that one can only become well informed on by years of experience and by paying careful attention to the advice of others.

In no other field is the rule "safety First" so appropriate. Never take chances unless you have to. Above all, as in the case of all emergencies, do not panic.

Nielan Barker told me of a classic case of panic he and two others experienced on Nicks Lake. They were taking the shortest path of least resistance in dragging a deer across the ice. They went through and could only crawl out by lying flat and spreading their weight out over a wide surface. One of the three was a real foot who nearly caused the demise of all three.

As soon as they got a short distance from the edge he would get to his feet and start running, which caused him to break back through. He did this several times in spite of the urging of the other two that he crawl far enough away to get back on thicker ice. They eventually got out, but with no thanks to that dummy.

Always try to spread your weight out over as wide a surface as possible when traveling or trying to rescue someone who has fallen through. Skis and snowshoes help do this, but one should only have his or her toes stuck loosely through the bindings. If you do go through you want to be able to kick them off.

I have carried a long rope in my vehicle for years for possible use to save

someone in just a situation.

I took a risk crossing Dead Creek Flow on Cranberry Lake one time to save a two-mile walk. I cut a long, thin dead spruce, limbed it and carried it by the middle with my toes stuck lightly in my snowshoes. I would not repeat that today.

When I was camped back in the woods for days alone, I took very few chances. The worst I ever experienced was getting wet to the waist from a fall through the ice. To this day I carry a waterproof match case, candles and a piece of felt paper for starting a quick fire. Accidents do happen and when you're way back in the by yourself you have to be prepared.

My worst, although not life-threatening, was most humiliating. I was trapping in late March on the outlet to Beaverdam Pond which runs into Limekiln Creek. I leaned out over the open water to get a better look at some beaver-peeled sticks on the bottom. A dead Alder I was holding behind me for support broke, and I went in the creek head first. The humiliating part was that friend Bill Chesebro witnessed it. A quick fire remedied the situation and nothing was hurt but my pride.

Children especially should be monitored closely and cautioned about the dangers of ice. Some grownups it does no good to caution.

I was rabbit hunting with some friends and had left the man's wife on watch near a rabbit runaway. I pointed out a small frozen-over stream nearby and cautioned her to stay off it. I had not left her very long when I heard plaintive calls for help coming from her direction. I found her standing waist deep in the water. It was the end of the hunt and of a full bottle of Harvey's Bristol Cream.