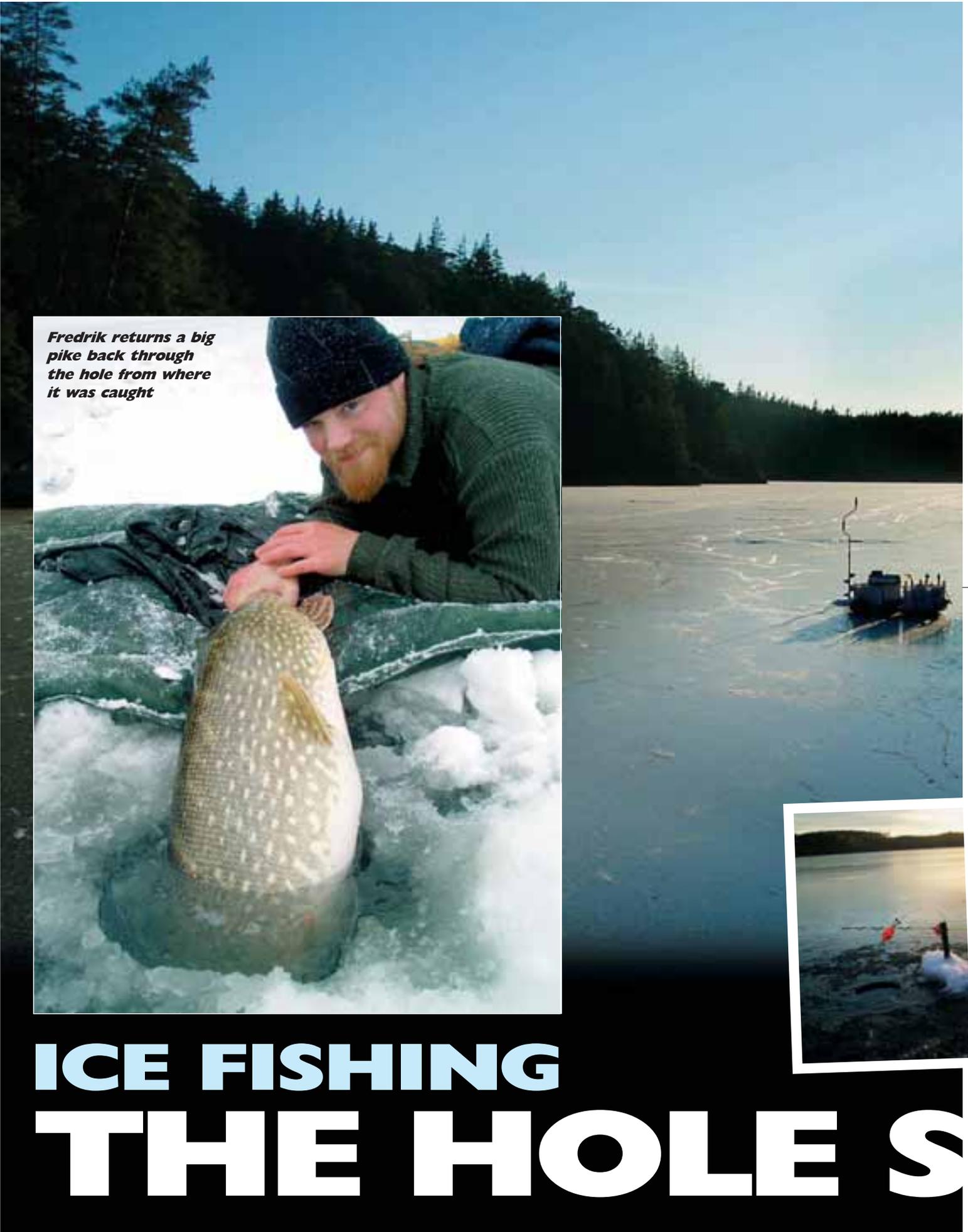
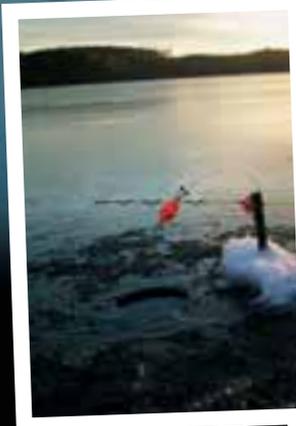




SWEDE DREAMS FREDRIK PALM & EMIL HJERTBERG

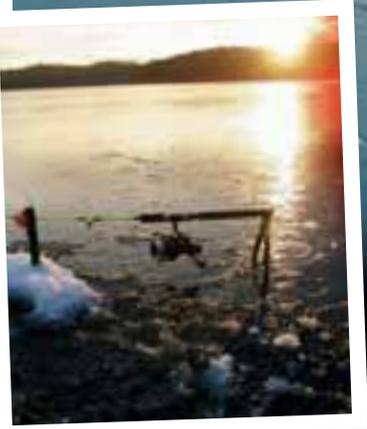
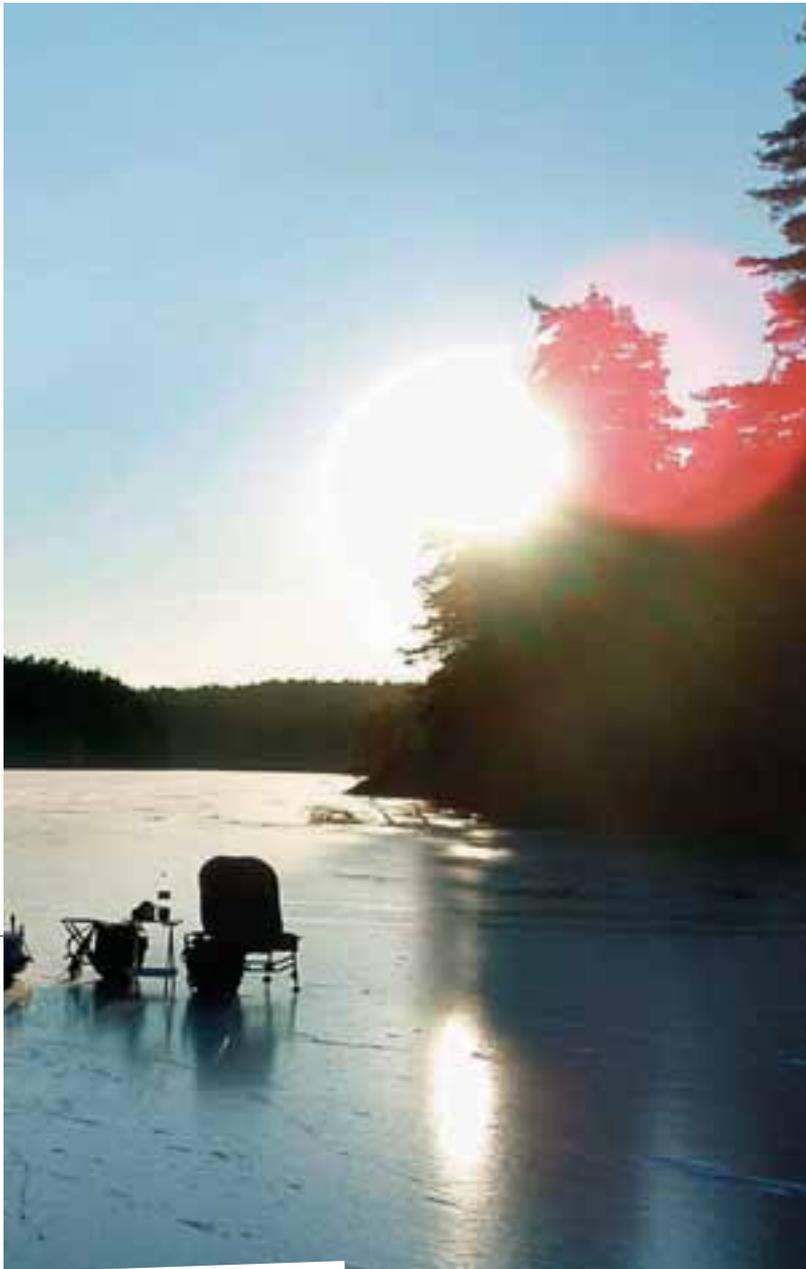


Fredrik returns a big pike back through the hole from where it was caught



ICE FISHING THE HOLE S





Main picture: Late afternoon on a cold, lonely Swedish fishery in the depths of winter
Left: The days may be short and cold, but action can be hot

FREDRIK PALM AND EMIL HJERTBERG REPORT ON THE SPECTACULAR SPORT THAT CAN BE EXPERIENCED WHEN TEMPERATURES PLUMMET AND MOST UK ANGLERS WOULD STAY AT HOME.

The idea for this article arose when reading a piece in P & P issue 114 regarding ice-fishing for pike in Canada.

As most of you might know, the winter climate of northern Scandinavia also provides fishable ice cover every year. That being so, the ice-fishing tradition is very strong over here. Nowadays, serious pike anglers use short ice-fishing rods, baitrunners, unhooking mats, and different alarm/indicator systems when ice-fishing for pike. The scene is more of a combination of general ice-fishing and standard pike fishing on the bank. However, add one important aspect – it is a truly effective method for catching big pike! This article is a short introduction to modern ice-piking in Sweden, neither comprehensive nor complete, but hopefully interesting.

Sweden is a country with more than 90,000 lakes and rivers (yes, it's true!) and pike inhabit almost every water system. Pike fishing is available all around, so to speak, and in combination with Sweden's Right of Common Access, which gives every citizen access to our nation's countryside, most of these lakes are quite easy to explore. All you need is a fishing licence for your lake of interest, which is usually available at the nearest service station. All these lakes become even more accessible when ice covers form in early winter and

entire lakes can be fished without a need for boat-trailers or boat hire. No wonder the ice-fishing tradition is so strong!

Many anglers in the UK may never have come across any principle of ice-fishing, especially not ice-piking. In its simplest form, it is merely fishing with some kind of pike bait, dead or alive, through a hole drilled in the ice. However, modern ice-piking incorporates a rod and reel (in the olden days, pike were actually hand-lined) with the same kind of traces as when float fishing for pike. The rod is placed by the hole with the bait hanging on a straight line from your rod tip and the line attached to a kind of spring indicator. Think of it as float-fishing where the spring indicator acts as the float, keeping the bait at your chosen depth. When you get a bite, you strike hard and play the fish while kneeling besides the hole. When playing pike from snow-free ice, you can often see the fish through the ice long before you have a chance of landing it. This is an amazing experience, especially if you are playing a big pike, as you can follow every move through the ice and see it thrash its head as it tries to pull away. When fighting big pike you should also be prepared to put your rod tip down the hole to avoid friction between ice edges and main line. Landing is best done by hand, as you cannot

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STORY

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The drill used to make the hole in the ice



*A superb pike caught from under the ice – note how clear the ice is in this instance
Inset: A big pike caught in the dark is returned to its hole*

use a landing net for obvious reasons.

TACKLE

Ice-fishing for pike incorporates most of the gear you normally use when pike fishing on the bank (unhooking mats, weight sling, scales and camera, etc.). However, some tackle and equipment is more specialised for these specific conditions.

Rods: These are built as a compromise between reduced rod length and retained playing action. You want to be as close to the hole in the ice as possible when playing a fish. Yet, the rod must still be long enough to keep the pressure on a big and violently thrashing pike. Rods of about four feet are nowadays more or less standard in modern ice-piking and come in different test curves.

Reels: In cold conditions some reel greases freeze and mechanisms such as free-spool systems and Baitrunners don't work properly. Then you are better off using multiplier reels that actually seem to put up with the worst conditions. However, in really cold conditions you should not be fishing at all. Besides freezing your arse off, there is a huge risk of causing freeze injuries to the pike's eyes and skin. Serious and sensible pike anglers put pike welfare first, and so should you!

Line: Braided main lines are becoming very popular in predator sport fishing and certainly have many important advantages in lure fishing or jerkbaiting compared to monofilament lines. However, beware! Braid is not a good choice of main line at lower temperatures since it carries water and therefore freezes more easily. Besides, ice-fishing is done at relatively short range as you always fish over the top of your intended quarry. Thick monofilament is the best choice since the ice can be quite harmful to your main line when you are playing big pike through a 10-inch hole in the ice. Stick to large diameter monofilament and you will be fine.

Leads: We always use small inline leads. The weight of the lead is determined by fishing



*The ice-fishing set-up and indication system we use
Inset: Some of the gear required
Below: Delight as another superbly proportioned pike is caught, this time when snow covered the ice*

depth and the size of your bait fish. As the lead is only used for keeping your bait down and there are no floats that need additional weighting, you very seldom use leads over 1oz. ¼-½ oz. leads are most common.

SYSTEM

One huge difference separating ice-piking from other pike fishing techniques is the indicator system. It is of major importance that the indicator acts both as a visual and audible indicator. Normal ice-piking is done with three or four rods placed some distance apart. Such a set-up requires that, besides hearing a take, you must immediately be able to tell which rod has had a bite. So for this reason the spring-indicator is not merely an indicator, it is an indicator with bells on! Literally speaking, of course. It must also be fitted with a high-visibility ball acting as a sharp contrast to snow and ice. The main line is locked in a line clip on the spring-indicator, and

when you get a bite, the spring-indicator is released, signalling a bite that you can both hear and see.

Electronic alarms are not visual enough, battery time is limited in cold conditions, and they might even freeze solid and fail to indicate a bite. We all love 'em, but do not use them in snowy and icy conditions, which calls for low-tech, not high-tech!

As with all pike fishing, you cannot really know too much about the waters you choose to fish. In every lake, some features or areas produce more bites than others do. This is of course most often also weather dependent. So the best way to learn what's hot and what's not in your particular lake is being out there fishing! However, this is not the only way to enlightenment. Other valuable sources of information comes from analysing topographic maps, active feature finding, and knowing about catches made by other anglers... no information



“YOU CAN FOLLOW EVERY MOVE THROUGH THE ICE AND SEE IT THRASH”

should ever be considered superfluous or unnecessary. To find your way back to a hotspot in a small lake you might only need a few good landmarks, but on larger lakes, we use GPS-positions – a real advantage when fishing far from the shoreline.

WHEN & WHERE?

In more recent years we have adapted a more static approach to our ice fishing for big pike, only fishing big livebaits in a limited area for entire days. However, such an approach is indeed only suitable if you know where to fish. Big pike have

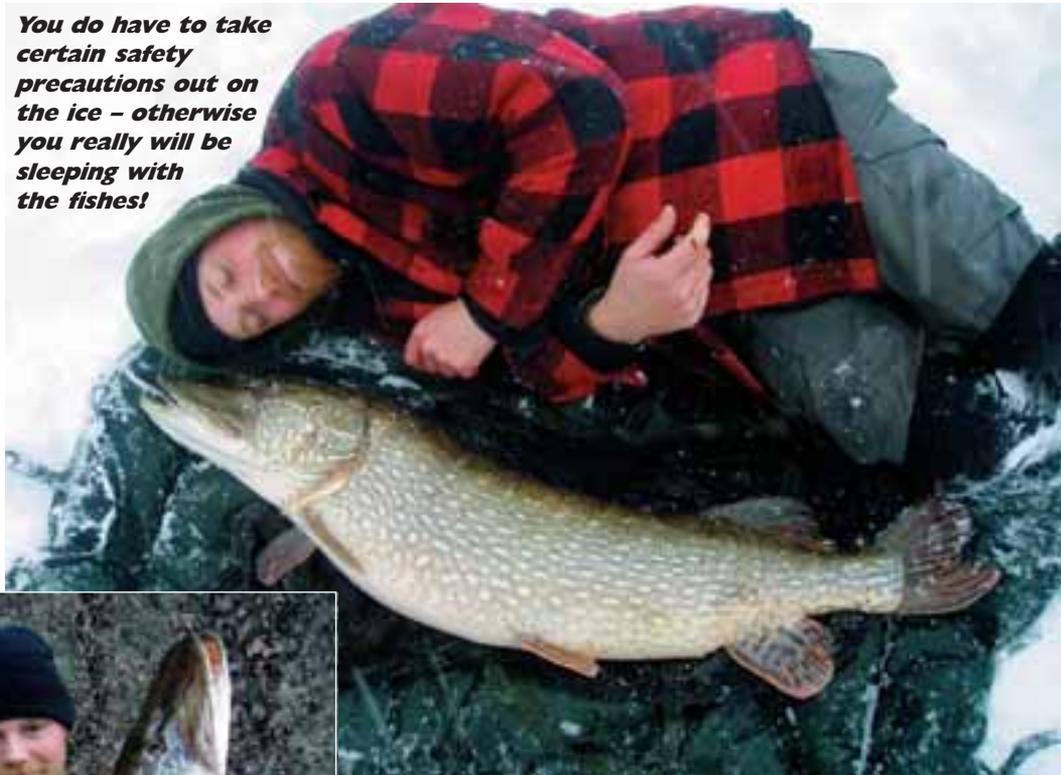


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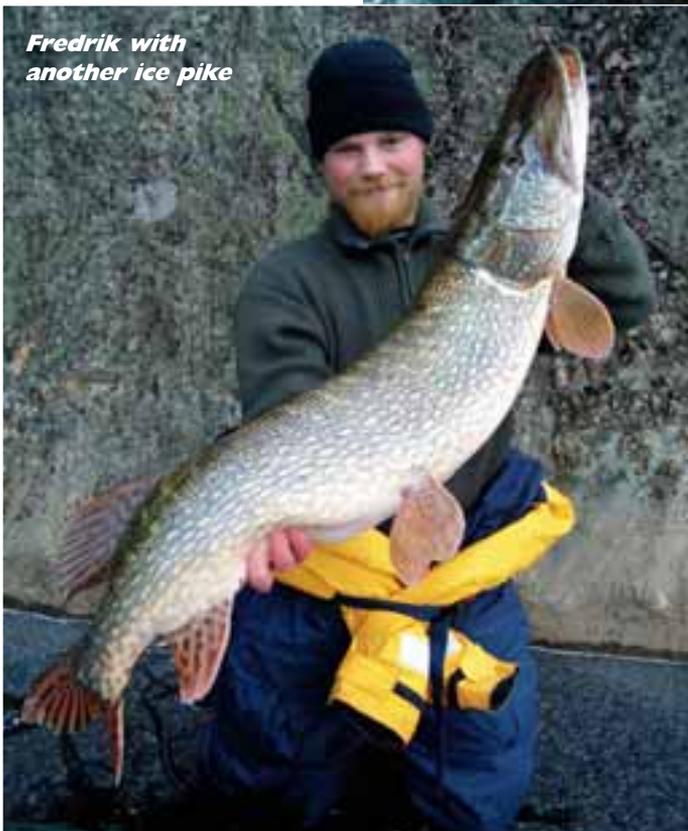
very low metabolic rate in cold water and do not need to feed very often during winter. Periods of active hunting for prey fish can be really scarce and short, but when such feeding periods do occur you better be on big pike hunting grounds. In this sense, our approach is really basic and simple; fish interesting areas where you know or think big pike will be hunting, and stay there no matter what!

In addition, we know big pike prefer big baits. The reason for using big livebaits is that we believe their activity and sheer size is more advertising for a hunting pike.

You do have to take certain safety precautions out on the ice – otherwise you really will be sleeping with the fishes!



Fredrik with another ice pike



Big baitfish are also highly selective against jack-pike attacks. There have been several occasions when we have had to make do with smaller livebaits, only to find ourselves running out of bait before midday. Of course, it can be fun to catch up to 30 smaller pike in a day, especially if you never tried ice-fishing before. Nevertheless, in due time you want to catch a really big one – we all do!

Once a thick ice sheet is formed, it usually takes months before it melts again, often growing thicker during nights.

This means that harsh and cold conditions are not the everyday scenario when ice-fishing; in fact, it is quite uncommon. You should also realise that it is only advisable to ice-fish for pike when you are sure that weather conditions allow your catch to be returned safely. Nevertheless, fish handling can always be further improved. Be sure to have the correct equipment in place, and you can effectively minimize the time pike spend above water. Hand landed pike can be unhooked in the water, and mat, sack, and sling can be

soaked in advance. If you keep this discipline, you will have enough time to take some really nice photos as well!

YOUR OWN SAFETY

Ice-fishing can be a wonderful experience in a spectacular landscape, especially in springtime with a warming sun in your face. However, weather, and certainly ice conditions, can change very rapidly. If you are not used to fishing from the ice, you should always be prepared for the worst, and never go fishing on your own! Take no chances, as falling through the ice can be a terrifying experience, not to mention lethal... Be sure to pack ice safety gear including a long rope so that friends can pull you out of the water if needed. Proper

clothing, food and hot drinks are also essential for safe and enjoyable ice-fishing.

I hope that this article has given you some preliminary insights into the world of modern ice-piking. As with all fishing techniques there are loads of technicalities to discuss, ranging from trace materials, hook sizes and indicator adjustments to broader aspects as which type of lake to fish during certain conditions, or how to catch and keep good livebaits.

However, the essence of ice-fishing for pike is the feeling of fishing on top of an icy glass window through which you get a glance of – or sometimes even direct contact with – the watery world below your feet. I sincerely hope some of you get to experience it!

RIGHT OF COMMON ACCESS

The Swedish right of public access is not a law, nor is it an absolute right. It may rather be regarded as an opportunity, one that makes it possible for everyone to enjoy the countryside. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity that requires responsibility, consideration and good judgement.

The right of public access can be concisely expressed in the phrase “Do not disturb, and do not destroy”. Rules describing the kinds of consideration that must be shown are incorporated into Sweden’s environmental law, and apply to everyone who exercises the right of public access.

Read more from the homepage of Swedish Environmental Protection Agency <http://www.naturvardsverket.se>.

www.totalcoarsefishing.com