

3-22-1998

Fishing is Not for Me

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Fishing is Not for Me" (1998). *On Sport and Society*. 544.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/544>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
MARCH 22, 1999

The following was first sent out about two years ago. Having been away for a week I am taking the liberty of sending out this encore presentation. Besides it is one of those pieces that evoked a great deal of comment and seems marginally seasonal.

Dick Crepeau

Having been born and raised in Minnesota and now having lived nearly thirty years in Florida, I have spent most of my life on this planet in two of the fishingest states in the Union. Florida has almost as many bass fishermen as it does ways of taking money from tourists. Minnesota is called the Land of 10,000 Lakes, although in reality there are over 100,000 lakes in my home state.

So it would seem that I should be a fisherman.

Those who know me will not be surprised that I am not. Knowing that I am always a bit off center, they would see the logic in the fact that I am not fisherman, that I don't like fishing, find it a massive bore, and am offended by the very notion that some people are avid about fishing.

Over the years I have developed a particular dislike for fly fishing, a dislike that has intensified in recent years as I have had too much contact with those who have found in fly fishing a substitute for their otherwise neglected religious impulses. Those who use fly fishing as a form of animistic ritual, who see in it some elemental act of human endeavor, drive me to distraction.

Most disturbing are those who read *A River Runs Through It* and thought they had just experienced a set of revelations of biblical proportions, and then went to the movie only to be disappointed that Charlton Heston did not play the lead in flowing robes.

What makes me think about these things is the fact that I have seen over the past few weeks several references to ice fishing--the quintessential idiotic sport of the climatologically challenged. If fishing is a form of insanity, then what of ice fishing? If I hate fishing, then what must my feelings be about ice fishing?

In fact I rather like ice fishing, although I admit it has been a good thirty-five years since I have actually been ice fishing. So I like the memory of ice fishing, or the thought of ice fishing.

I like it, I suspect, because it has almost nothing to do with fishing.

For those who have never been ice fishing or who don't have a clue how one ice fishes, some explanation is needed. You may think that ice fishing is done outdoors. It is not. You do not stand out in the middle of a snow covered lake, wind blowing to chill levels of sixty below, dig a hole, drop a line, and hope that a fish comes around before you succumb to hypothermia.

It is also not done alone. It is done in parties. The minimum number of persons in an ice fishing party, as with most parties, is four, while eight to ten is more congenial.

Most ice fishing is single gender. In my youth that meant guys, but I suspect that in our liberated and progressive society it must also mean gals. At times it could mean mixed gender, but then there were a whole new set of rules employed for that variety of ice fishing.

It is a multiple day and night activity, usually weekends, and is carried out only with an ample supply of snacks, steaks, beer and whiskey.

The venue is an ice-fishing house. Seen from the outside, these buildings look like nothing more than shacks on ice. If you have been inside you know otherwise. Inside they resemble a working-class skybox. Two or three rooms include bunk beds, fully equipped kitchens, gas grills, comfortable chairs and couches, footrests, a Franklin stove, and most importantly a card table and chairs. A hole here or there in the carpeted floor for the actual fishing activity is required to legitimate the major activities of the weekend.

For most Minnesotans of my acquaintance, many of the prototypes of whom can be seen in the academy-award nominated "Fargo," ice fishing was a way of spending the weekend with the guys. It would be a weekend of heavy drinking, poker, more heavy drinking, a great deal of talk about wimmin, always a tribute to massive male ignorance on the subject, and more drinking. Occasionally this activity was interrupted by such fishing terminology as "I think you got a bite," which would be responded to by any number of

obscene phrases or gestures; or "your hole is icing over" a phrase that elicited even greater levels of verbal improvisation.

All of which was the occasion for even more drinking of beer and whiskey, more verbal gymnastics, and in the end a level of intimacy with nature that one can have only while ice fishing in America, or when trying to write your name in the snow.

Oh, how I miss those winter sports!

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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