

Deluxe ice shanties can be a home away from home for anglers in winter

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By Sid Schwartz/Gazette Staff

Gary Fraser slept on the Lake Koshkonong ice Friday night.

Well, not exactly on the ice.

He spent the night in his homemade, wood-heated, electrically wired fishing trailer.

He wasn't alone.

Larry Miller and Jay Johnson of Janesville slept in their converted camper trailer about 100 yards across the ice.

They were among an estimated 3,000 anglers in the Great Koshkonong Bounty Hunt. Although the fishing derby didn't start until 6 a.m. Saturday, many got an early start in their homebuilt fishing trailers and shacks Friday afternoon.

Fraser built his 6-foot-by-12-foot fishing trailer six years ago after his old ski-mounted fishing shack fell through the ice. He and a friend winched it out of the water, but it didn't survive the fishing season.

Fraser' new trailer is twice as big and twice as fancy. Large windows provide a good view in all directions. A friend lined the interior-walls and ceiling-with galvanized sheet metal.

A generator outside provides electricity for his TV, VCR and microwave oven. A small wood stove keeps it toasty.

Fraser fishes three or four times a week.

His wife doesn't mind.

"Not as long as I get my work done around the house," he said.

She doesn't fish.

"My wife has no desire to come out on a frozen body of water, which is fine."

Little of the fishing on Koshkonong is done pole-in-hand. Instead, anglers use tip-ups. When a fish takes the bait, a flag tips up.

For night fishing, some anglers use battery-powered lights rather than flags. Others stick reflective tape onto their flags and use spotlights to watch for bites.

Watching for flags requires big windows in a fishing trailer or shack.

Miller sat in his shirt sleeves late Saturday morning cutting green peppers, onions and potatoes for breakfast. Two mallard ducks he shot in North Dakota last fall were stored on the roof of the trailer.

"That's our refrigerator," Johnson said.

The ducks would be supper after being wrapped in bacon and roasted in the trailer's oven.

The round-roof trailer was free from the relative of a friend. Miller and Johnson gutted it and installed new insulation, carpeting and cushioned benches that fold into beds. They also installed seven big, insulated windows to watch for flags.

They estimated their fishing trailer investment totals about \$1,200.

Miller and Johnson got on the ice at about 1 p.m. Friday and played cards until 3 a.m. Saturday. They had two walleyes-one of them a nice 22-incher-above the ice Saturday morning.

Their tip-ups were set as Miller cooked, but most of the attention was on the previous night's card games and the low water level of the lake. Their trailer was sitting on 18 inches of ice floating on 3 feet of water.

The lake is about a foot lower than it was five years ago, they said, when fishing was good. Fishing Friday night and Saturday was slow.

How often does Fraser get skunked and go home empty handed?

"Most of the time," he admitted.

Then why does he do it?

"It's quiet time," he said.

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