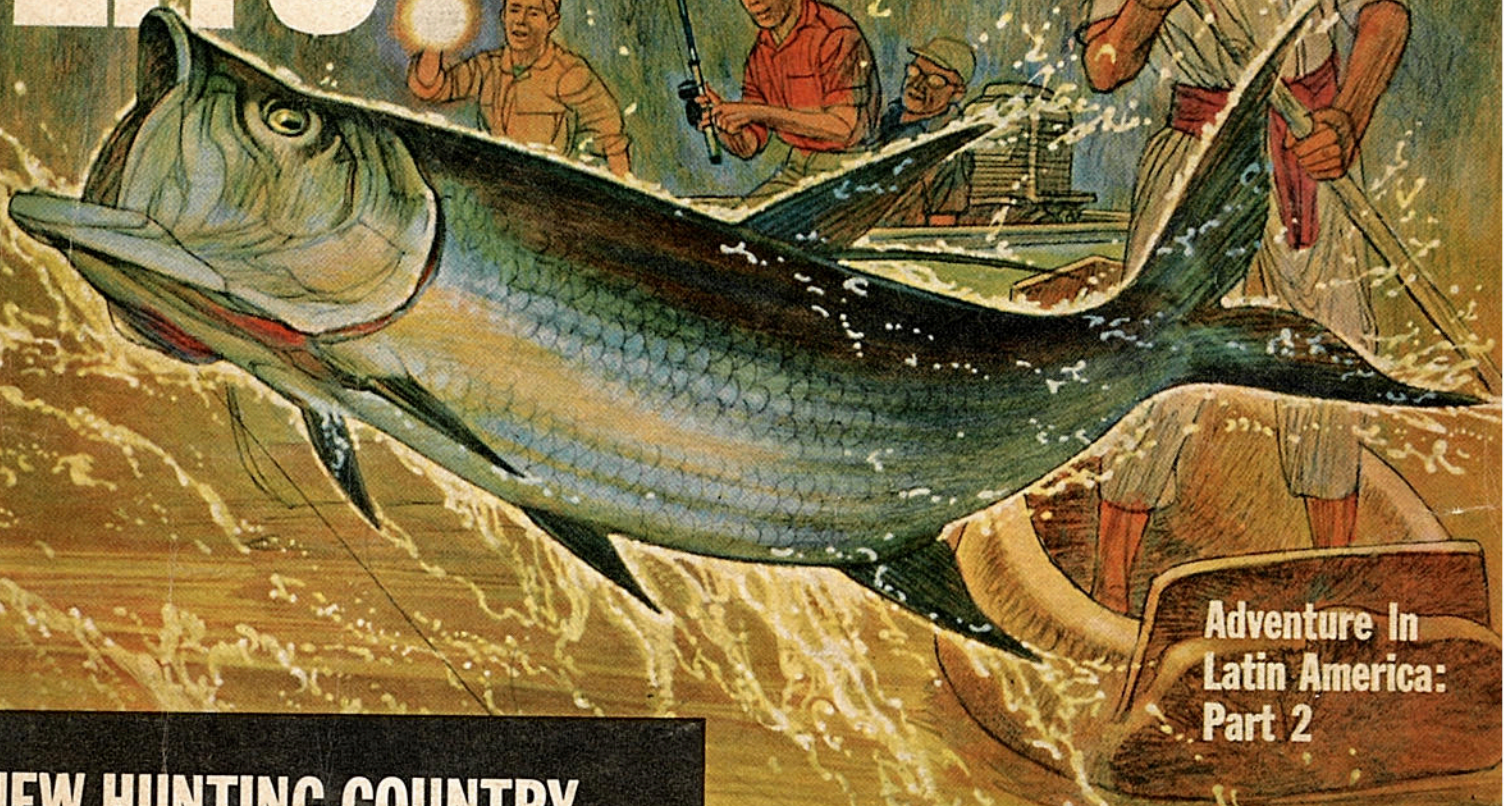


35¢ · MARCH, 1966

Outdoor Life

~~NO~~ HUNTING AND FISHING
New Deal for Sportsmen

BED FISHING FOR BASS



Adventure In
Latin America:
Part 2

NEW HUNTING COUNTRY
The Last Frontier

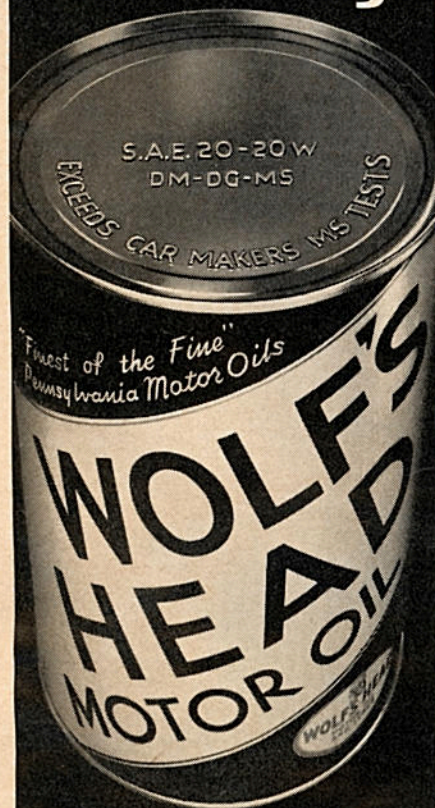
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Outdoor Life

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WILLIAM E. RAE, *Editor-in-Chief*

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Herb Brown jigging in his mechanized ice shanty

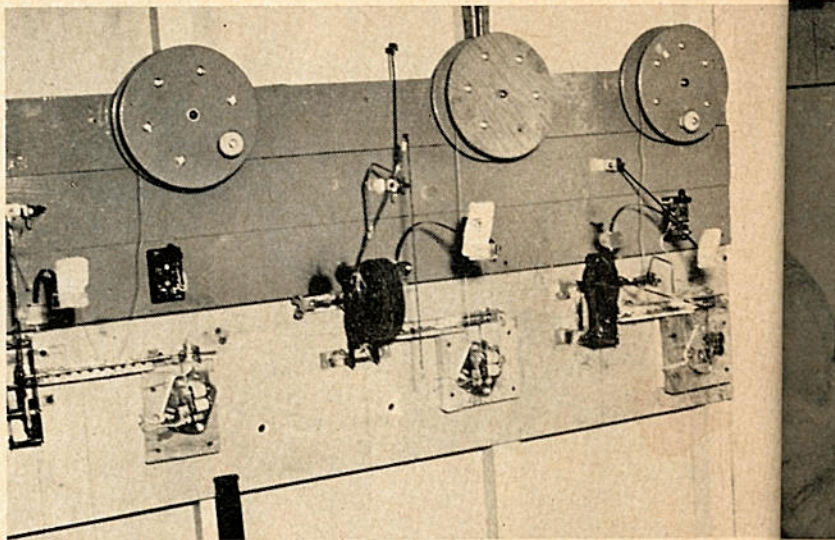
In an ice shanty on a historic New York lake, I was introduced to macaroni-loving whitefish amid a cacophony of odd noises

By TED JANES



Herb holds chum can and bag of macaroni chum

Strange Doings



View of gadgetry in shanty shows three of four electric hookers

I WAS SITTING in Herb Brown's ice-fishing shanty in the middle of Otsego Lake minding my own business when, suddenly, the flexed corset-stay tip in front of me swung lazily upward. Watching it with calm detachment, I was abruptly startled out of my lethargy—and my wits—by Herb's warning shout.

"Bite! Bite!"

Grabbing the line, I felt a hard, fleeting tug, then nothing. This was something new to me. Where I come from, which is Westfield, Massachusetts, when a fish bites, the rod tip dips sharply and there's none of this reverse English. I explained this to Herb and added, a little stiffly, that I hadn't supposed New York State fish were different from any other fish.

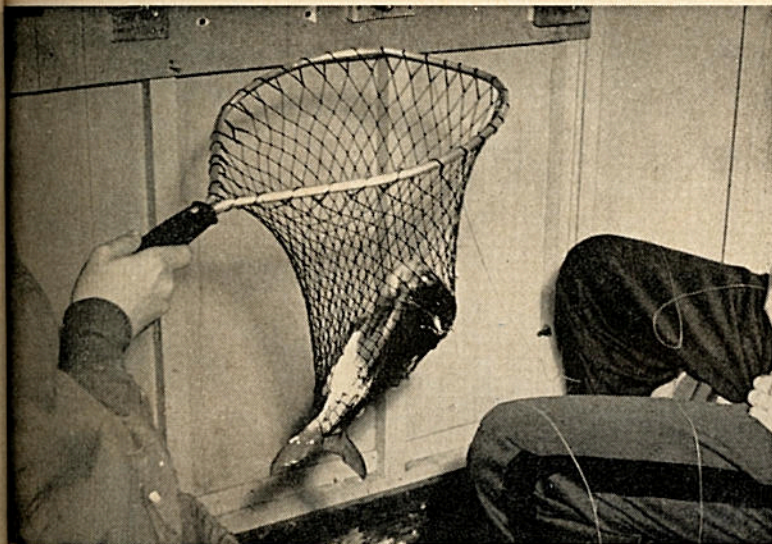
"These are," he replied quickly. "Otsego bass don't come down on a bait and run with it. Instead, they nuzzle under it and raise it up to suck it in. When you see that tip rise, set the hook fast."

As it turned out, this was only one of a number of factors that make this sport different. I should have known. Earlier, Herb had told me, "You've got to be a little crazy to do this kind of fishing." At this point, I thought he might be right.

But if so, there must be a lot of crazy people around, because every winter thousands of men, women, and children spend thousands of hours catching these fish throughout their range from northern New England west to Lake of the Woods, on the Minnesota-Canada border. Most of these fishermen don't call them Otsego bass, though. They call them whitefish.

Some of the local anglers will tell you that Otsego bass are a distinct species found only in Otsego and Piseco lakes. But, though there may be some slight variation in the fish's

on Otsego Lake



Up comes Otsego bass (lake whitefish) taken in 80 feet of water



Warden Bill Gregory displays our soft-mouthed catch

coloring, biologists of the New York State Conservation Department say they are definitely lake whitefish. If you want to get technical, they bear the generic name *Coregonus* and the specific name *clupeaformis*. It's just as well to get a little technical, too, because this serves to distinguish the whitefish from its close relative, the lake herring or cisco.

These fish have been in Otsego Lake at least since 1842, for in that year J. E. DeKay, in his book *Natural History of New York*, reported that as many as 5,000 whitefish were sometimes taken in a single seine haul from this lake. People troll for them in summer, too, or stillfish in the deep water which whitefish habitually frequent. But it's primarily a winter fishery, and there are usually over 300 shanties on the nine-mile length of Otsego Lake alone.

One of these shanties belongs to Herb Brown, who initiated me in the intricacies of this fishing. Herb is deputy sheriff of Schoharie County. He is also a veteran ice fisherman who has made several ingenious contributions to an already highly specialized sport. But I was unaware of this latter fact as I followed him across the snow-covered ice on a March day toward a cluster of half a dozen huts situated at the mouth of Hyde Bay.

"Do you catch any other kinds of fish while you're fishing for bass?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "There are perch, pickerel, black bass, pike, lake trout, and walleyes in the lake, but we're fishing right on the bottom in 80 feet of water and using special bait. A few shanty fishermen set out in shallow water for perch and pickerel, and there's some tip-up fishing, but most of us are after Otsego bass."

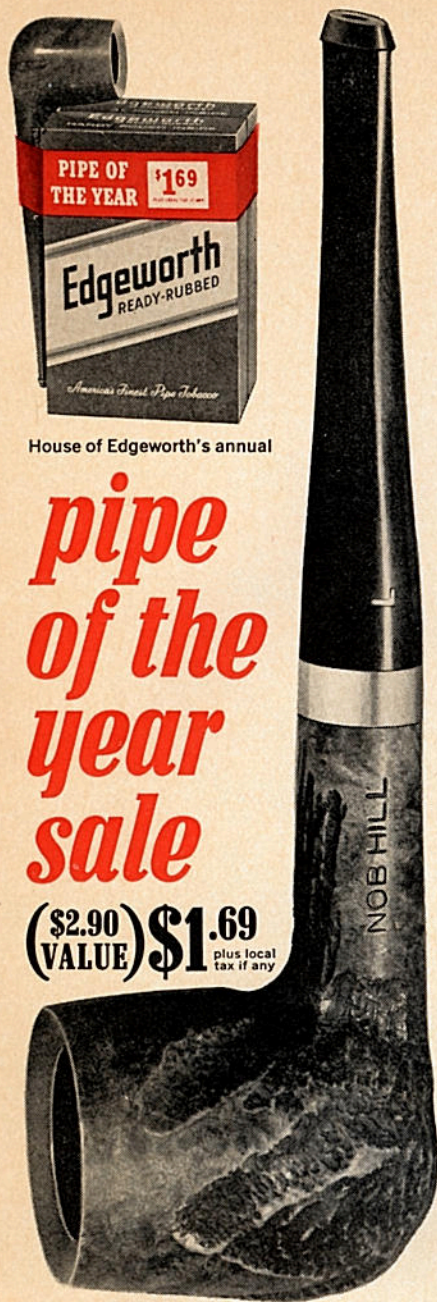
As we came up to the shanty, I saw that it was made of canvas stretched over a bolted *(continued on page 108)*



Jack Wilson, his dad, of Oneonta, examine fish

Warden Duane Hamm helps Herb cook up fish





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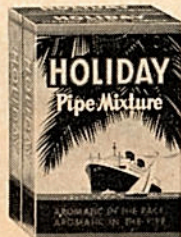
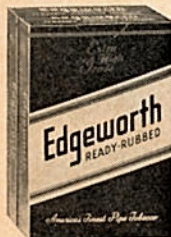
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It is certainly roomy. There are two beds fully four feet wide—the over-cab bed and the one into which the banquettes convert—and two bunks two feet wide. This guarantees no bumping into each other for the three of us at bedtime. There are plenty of lights, ventilators, windows, and even storm windows. Everything works the way it ought to, for after all, any well-made camper like ours carries a lifetime guarantee.

The truck feels as if it is going to run forever, and I can easily believe that 100,000 miles from now it will still be a willing worker and not a laboring wreck. That's the kind of service for which good pickups are built.

Our rig cost about \$6,000, an admittedly high figure since we took almost all available options. The list price on the truck was \$3,096, of which almost \$1,000 represented options. It was the same with the camper. We could have saved \$338 by not taking the shower-toilet combination, and \$245 by not taking the big gas refrigerator in place of the standard-equipment 75-pound icebox. Here are some suggested list prices for basically equipped campers (stove, sink, icebox, closets, roof vent, etc.) made by the company we dealt with: \$1,416 for eight-foot slide-in camper; \$1,560 for 10-foot slide-in and \$1,798 for 10-foot chassis mount, and \$2,225 for 12-foot chassis mount with rear bunks.

But did I get the perfect camper? No. I goofed on that pass-through. If I had to do it all over again, I would correct this error. And, if I were going to do it all over again, March is the time of year I'd start. The 1966 model pickup trucks should have all the bugs out by then, if they had any to begin with, and the camper makers have newer models to pick from.

I'd write to the American Institute of Travel & Camper Manufacturers, 62-A Keeler Building, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49502, and request a list of camper makers to whom I could write for catalogs.

Let's see now, can we afford automatic hot water? The answer is almost as basic as deciding that the time has come to embark on the newest way of camping . . . in solid comfort. THE END

SALT WATER

(continued from page 16)

spincaster, the wounded-minnow-type lure should be retrieved slowly. This lure goes into tumbling rolls and erratic dives, acting like a stunned bait-fish. The wounded minnow, as well as the streamer fly I mentioned in the beginning, frequently takes snook when other top-water plugs and popping bugs fail.

When fishing for snook, always fish

any lure to the very last inch of the retrieve. There are times when snook will follow a lure like a curious dog, striking only at the last moment. On many occasions, my lures have been struck almost at my feet.

Snook runs into easily reached waters of southern Florida are beginning now. The fish are moving out of the Gulf into the creeks and canals of the Everglades. These movements will increase in volume on both coasts as spring wears on. The best snook fishing is during May, June and July. But as long as water temperatures don't fall below 65° F., your chances of latching onto one of these brawlers are good year-round.—George Heinold.

OTSEGO LAKE

(continued from page 43)

wooden framework and guyed by heavy wires.

"Folds right up and stores in a shed," Herb said.

He unlocked the door, and we stepped inside. As my eyes accustomed themselves to the dim interior after the bright glare of sunlight on snow, I saw that the roughly five-foot-square shanty was furnished with two comfortable camp chairs, a bottled-gas heater, and a shelf for storage. An opening about two feet wide in the wooden floor ran across the shanty in front of the chairs, and through this opening I could see the clear water of the lake, tinted a pale greenish-yellow by the sunlight streaming in through the windows. Then I looked up and did a double take. Affixed to the wall in front of me were four large, wooden spools spaced a foot or so apart. From each one, a strand of line descended to a notched piece of Plexiglas perched on the end of a foot-long strip of flexible steel.

"Those are corset stays," Herb explained. "You know, like women used to wear."

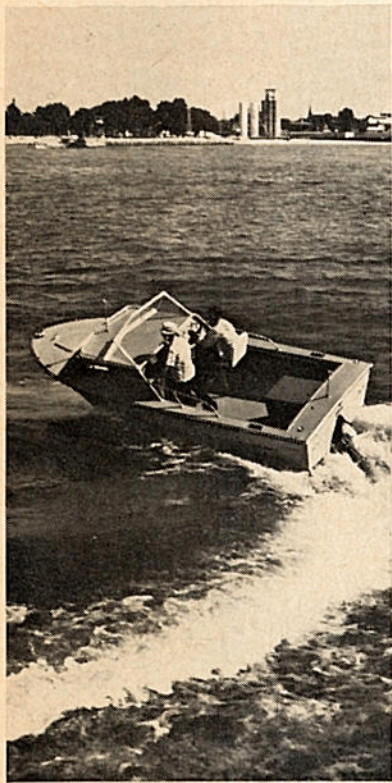
Behind each piece of Plexiglas was a small lump of styrofoam which, according to Herb, acted as an indicator to signal a bite. The line went from the end of the corset stay down through the opening to disappear into the greenish depths of the lake. Arrayed on a panel at the base of each stay were sets of clock springs, clock works, doorbell mechanisms, and electric switches with wires leading up to the shelf.

"These are my automatic fish hookers," Herb said with quiet pride. "It's my own invention. Sit down there and I'll explain how it works."

I sat down and did my best to understand as Herb began. "This whole deal runs off a six-volt battery. Now, I tension the clock spring—so. Then I throw the switch. Now, see, when a fish bites, this alarm-clock hammer hits this rod and that releases the spring, and this gear . . ."

I lost him there. Not being mechanically inclined, I didn't understand the apparatus then and I don't understand

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it now. But I knew I was in the presence of genius.

"Wouldn't it be just as easy to hook the fish by hand?" I inquired hesitantly.

"Not when they're really biting," he replied. "Sometimes I'm here alone when a school hits. I can't tend four lines at once. It's hard even with two men. This way, the fish get hooked automatically, and they stay hooked till you can pull 'em in. We won't use it now, though. We'll hold off till we get a school after the bait, because you can't jig with the automatic hookers turned on."

He went about his preparations with real skill. The small hooks were on a red spreader, one at each corner, with a lead sinker at the center of the crosspiece. Herb baited the hooks with tiny slivers of scallop.

"These bass live mostly on small crustacea," he said, "but they like little fish, too. They've got small mouths, though, so these slices of scallop make good bait. Stay on the hook good, too."

Before dropping the baited hooks through the opening in the floor, he produced a quart-size metal can with holes in it and two long cords, one fastened to a handle on the top of the can and the other to the can's hinged bottom. From a plastic bag, he filled the can with small, white particles.

"What's that?" I inquired.

"Chum," he replied. "Some people use oatmeal, but I like this dubatini."

"How do you spell it?" I asked.

"D-u-b . . . I don't know. Call it macaroni," he said. "It's the same thing." He lowered the can into the water. "When it hits bottom, I trip this cord and spill out the chum."

"Did you invent that, too?"

"Well, this particular can," he said modestly, lowering the baited hooks. "Now then, we'll hitch the lines to the Plexiglas at the end of the corset stays, with the baits hanging just over the bottom."

I was struck with a sudden thought. "By the way," I asked, "where do you get the corset stays?"

"That's a good question," he said. "They're scarce as hen's teeth these days. I've had these a long time, and if anything happened to them they'd be hard to replace." He finished rigging the sets. "Now, you tend the two lines on the left, and I'll handle the others. Jig 'em up and down now and again, and we'll see what happens."

I jigged the lines now and again and what happened was that, all of a sudden, the corset stay bobbed up instead of down with the results reported at the beginning of this piece. I don't know if it was the same fish or another one, but only a moment later Herb had a bite. As his stay swung upward, he grabbed the line and set the hook.

"These fish have awful tender mouths," he said, gently drawing in the line. "You got to play 'em easy or they'll tear loose."

I watched as he alternately pulled in line and let it run through his fingers. After what seemed like a long time, I finally saw a silvery flash in the clear,

green depths, and at the same time Herb reached for his short-handled landing net. Easing the fish to the surface, he slid the net under it and lifted.

"There," he said, passing the fish over in the net for my inspection.

Streamlined and sporting a deeply forked tail, it weighed about 1½ pounds and shaded from light green on the back to glistening white on sides and belly. We'd just put this first fish out in the snow when Conservation Officers Bill Gregory and Duane Hamm came slogging across the lake. They crowded into the little shanty and stood warming themselves at the stove. The fishing, they reported, was poor.

"The best time to catch these bass is when the ice gets so thin you don't dare go out on it," Bill Gregory said.

"Do you ever lose any shanties?" I asked, and they laughed.

"We lose one now and again," Duane said, "and we have some awful near misses, don't we, Herb?"

"I've seen times," Herb said, "when . . . hey, you got a bite."

I saw my stay swing upward, and when I set the hook this time, it bit into something solid. I pulled gingerly but let the line slip through my fingers when the fish wanted to run. He made several short lunges, and I could feel him shaking and flurrying far below. Then he came into sight, zigzagging and wavering in the water until he splashed the surface and I slid the net under him. As I set the net down, the hook came loose from his jaw.

It was getting a little stuffy in the tightly closed shanty, so I relinquished my seat to Duane and went outside. Bill Gregory went with me, and we stood in the snow, enjoying the fresh air and the sweeping panorama of lake and hills around us.

This is the lake made famous as the Glimmerglass of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. Coopers-town, at its foot, was named for the author's father, Judge William Cooper, who founded the early settlement and built an imposing estate overlooking the water. Today, besides being a popular summer vacation resort, Cooperstown is known as the Town of Museums. No visitor to the area should leave without going through the Farmer's Museum, Fenimore House, and the National Baseball Museum and Hall of Fame. In summer, the Indian Museum and the Woodland Museum are also well worth visiting.

In *The Deerslayer*, Cooper describes Otsego Lake as it looked in early days: "On a level with the point lay a broad sheet of water, so placid and limpid that it resembled a bed of the pure mountain atmosphere, compressed into a setting of hills and woods.

"This is grand!—'tis solemn!—'tis an edification of itself to look upon!" exclaimed *Deerslayer*, as he stood leaning on his rifle."

Otsego's surroundings have changed since then from virgin forest to rolling farm country and wooded hills, but it is still a beautiful clear-water lake, and neat camps and cottages border its

rocky shores. Otsego Lake, incidentally, is the principal source of the mighty Susquehanna River.

"Over there," Bill said, pointing to the east, "is the site of Deerslayer's cave, and the old military road that ran from Schenectady to the western forts passed the northern end of the lake."

He told me about the colonial troops that followed this road in the French and Indian War and about the steamboats in a later era that carried milk, freight, and mail from the head of the lake to Cooperstown. While we were talking, the shanty door opened and Herb came out with two more fish.

"My stomach says it's noon," he said, "and I'm going to do something about it. Duane says he'd just as soon have a bite to eat. How about you?"

"I'll tend the lines for you," Bill offered, and went inside the shanty.

I stayed around to watch while Herb deftly steaked the fish and built a fire of split boards in a folding grill he brought from the shanty. Then he took a king-size skillet and dumped practically a whole can of shortening into it. When the grease began to smoke, Herb dusted the fish steaks in flour, salt, and pepper and fried them to a crisp, golden brown. He served them with slices of bread and cups of coffee as black as Satan's left hoof.

The whitefish is acknowledged to be one of the tastiest of fish. Expert chefs do intricate things to them with butter sauces and wines, but I submit that they never taste better than when fried

crisp and eaten between slices of bread on a winter lake from the icy waters of which they have just been caught.

Bill and Duane left after lunch, and Herb and I settled down in the shanty again. The fishing was still slow. "That's always the way," Herb said. "When you want to show someone some action, the bass never cooperate. I could come out here alone and be busier than a dog with fleas."

There was a long wait between bites. Herb dumped more chum down the hatch, and we jigged the lines up and down industriously. Herb had a false alarm on one of his rigs, and then my stay went up. I was a little over-anxious, though. I pulled too hard, and the fish tore loose halfway up.

That's the way the afternoon went. I lost one other fish and caught one, and Herb caught two. The legal limit is 10 bass apiece, and, though we ended the day with far fewer than that, I'd had my introduction to this fishing and had enjoyed myself. That night, at a restaurant, I had Otsego bass for dinner. These fish can be sold legally, and restaurants and markets gladly buy all that are offered them. In the Great Lakes area there's a commercial fishery which, in some years, has netted 500,000 pounds of whitefish.

At breakfast next morning I spotted a man in fishing clothes and figured he was probably a local angler, but we got talking and I found out that he was from Pennsylvania.

"I get up here a couple of weekends

every winter," he told me. "I wouldn't miss it for anything. There are a lot of fellows who come over from New York City and New Jersey."

I didn't doubt it. I was beginning to understand the fascination of this fishing. In fact, I had quite a feeling of anticipation as I followed Herb across the ice later that morning. It was Saturday, and on weekends the lake comes to life. Four of the six shanties around us were already occupied, with stoves going and equipment piled outside the doors. Down at the big colony off Three Mile Point, we could see people coming and going around the shanties. The March sun shone brightly, but a cold north wind whipped puffs of dry snow across the lake, and the superheated interior of the shanty felt good as I sat down beside Herb and began to jig with what I considered to be a practiced hand.

The hooks had hardly touched bottom when one of my stays went up. As I set the hook, I felt the fish flurry away, and I let line slip through my fingers till the short run ended. Then I hauled quickly but gently until the bass splashed the surface and lay flopping in the net. It can't be said that these fish fight like rainbow trout hooked on a dry fly, but there is a certain satisfaction in successfully maneuvering an animated two pounds of delicious eating up through 80 feet of clear, cold water.

Right after I caught my fish, Herb snagged one, and we thought our luck

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had changed. Then things quieted down again. Up on some remote arctic lake, this kind of fishing could get a little dull, but not on Otsego Lake on a weekend. We hadn't been there an hour before the neighbors began dropping in. A fisherman from the green shanty next door came over to chat, and then a man and his son wandered over from a red shanty nearby. Bill Gregory came mushing across the ice, and soon it was like old home week. That's one of the pleasures of this folksy sport. Herb Brown put it this way: "It's fun whether you catch fish or not. Sitting in a warm shanty chewing the fat with the boys is a sociable way to spend a winter day."

Talk ranges widely over all the subjects that are discussed whenever outdoorsmen get together—the best deer rifle, the all-round dog, buck laws, and hunting and fishing adventures from northern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, for, in these modern days, sportsmen really get around.

I went visiting, too, over to some of the neighboring shanties, and it was interesting to see the different schemes of interior decoration. One fisherman had a rocking chair in his shack, and several had curtains at the windows. Pinup art was well represented, and almost every shanty boasted a radio. I wondered what old Deerslayer would have thought. I saw a couple of mouse-traps rigged as automatic hookers but nothing as elaborate as Herb's electrical setup. All the shanties I visited, however, had the corset-stay tips which seem to be standard equipment for this kind of fishing. I didn't see anyone fishing with hand-held lines, as is often done in other types of angling. When I got back, Herb had caught another bass and was lowering a can of macaroni down the hatch.

"I'll bet there's a four-inch layer of chum on the bottom under us," he said. "Ought to bring something in."

It did, but it took a while. One of my stays flexed upward, and I had a fish on for about five seconds before it tore loose. There's a knack to this fishing, and it isn't learned in a day or two. Even Herb didn't net them all.

"Their mouths are so tender you generally lose a third of 'em," he said. My average was better. I lost two thirds.

I'd just started jigging again when John Gould and Russ Fieldstone came along. John is a regional manager of the New York Conservation Department, and Russ is a department biologist. They weighed and measured our bass and those of the fishermen around us and took scale samples from each fish.

"Scale counts give us valuable data," John explained. "The circuli, something like the rings of a tree, show every slight change in the growth rate of a fish as well as its age. Rapid growth causes wide spacing, and slow growth causes narrow spacing. From samplings like this, we can tell pretty well how the fishery is doing."

When they'd finished checking our

catch they stayed around for a while to pass the time of day. Someone brought over a thermos jug of soup, and there was more talk about bass, and grouse, and trout, and woodcock. John and Russ each took a turn at the fishing, then they headed for the big colony down at Three Mile Point, and the little gathering broke up.

I was finishing a cup of soup outside the shanty when a shout from Herb brought me running to the door. "We got a school in!" he said. "I lost one fish, and I've got another on, and you had a hit. I'm going to turn on the automatic hookers."

I sat down, feeling as though I were seated at the controls of a jet, while Herb threw switches and tensioned springs. Almost immediately, with a buzz like an angry rattlesnake, the mechanism in my corner let go. Clockwork whirred, gears turned, and the corset stay whipped erect. I was still hauling in that fish when the right-hand rig went into action. Now I saw what Herb had meant. With four lines working, it kept two men busy. One man alone would have gone crazy without these gimmicks to hook the fish.

As it was, things were plenty hectic. Buzzing, whirring, and clicking, the gadgets went off while we hauled in lines and baited hooks. I lost more fish than I caught, but when the flurry ended a few minutes later and as suddenly as it had begun, we had seven bass on the shanty floor, not counting one that flopped back through the hatch.

We stayed a while longer, but after that action-packed half hour the fishing seemed anticlimactic. Besides, we had all the bass we wanted. So, in midafternoon, Herb locked up shop. After another round of the neighbor's shanties for a little more togetherness, we trekked back to the car.

You can't really compare this sort of fishing to the summer kind, but it has its own satisfactions. As Herb says, it's a sociable way to spend a winter day. And, if being a little crazy is a prerequisite for this sport, I don't know of any better place to wait for the men with the butterfly nets than in a warm shanty hauling Otsego bass out of deep water and chewing the fat with the boys.

THE END

REFORMATION OF BILL

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hens just where they could find him.

This is the time you do most of your shaking. Mornings in Alabama during the last part of March are usually cool but not cold enough to make a man shake the way turkey hunters do. Must be anticipation. Whatever it is, you shake. The only time you might shake more is just after you've killed a big gobbler. I have seen grown men unable to light a cigarette because of the shakes. Bill was shaking, but he just looked at me and grinned. He had learned well the fact that a turkey