

Welcoming Dave Graybill To The Nickel Ads Classifieds

The Fishin' Magician

I spent last weekend at the town of Molson, attending the 8th Annual Ice Fishing Festival, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. According to the sign on the road approaching Molson the population is 35. I think that everyone in town either participated in the event or helped out by volunteering for the many chores associated with such an event. This is a community effort, where everything from setting up the tables at the grange hall to preparing the food in the kitchen is done by cheerful town folks. Close to one hundred anglers, in both the adult and youth divisions, bought tickets to earn prizes at the festival.

I had driven up from Leavenworth in the late afternoon, and after traveling through driving rain to near white-out snow conditions was pleased to settle into my cozy cabin at the Eden Valley Guest Ranch. Robin Stice, owner of the ranch and chief organizer of the NW Ice Fishing Festival greeted me while putting together some final touches on what was to be a very busy day. She had to be ready early in the morning to greet the anglers that had traveled from as far away as Seattle to compete for a whole range of prizes, including the top prize of \$500.00, provided by Kinross Gold.

The day starts at the Grange Hall in Molson at 7 a.m., where derby entries are purchased. Most all the ticket buyers postponed their trip to Molson and Sidley lakes to start fishing, to first enjoy the hearty pancake breakfast. Ham, eggs, hash browns with sausage were consumed in heaping piles. With this meal under their belts the cars and trucks jammed the parking lots at the edge of both lakes and ice anglers



tramped through fresh snow to drill their holes.

Molson Lake, which is just outside of the town of Molson, is just 20 acres. Sidley, just down the road is over 100 acres, but only about 12 feet deep in its deepest spot. Anglers spread out over both of these lakes and set up for fishing. Most anglers just brought a bucket or chair to sit on, and many brought a container and had a warming fire going. There were a couple of plastic tarp and PVC shelters, and even one pretty fancy shack that had been pulled out onto the ice that completely enclosed the fishermen.

At the Sidley Lake parking area, the Okanogan County Search and Rescue unit had turned out in force. They had brought all of their equipment and had it on display. They had some really cool ATVs,

even on tracks, and a very special piece of gear for water and ice rescue. Called a Rapid Deployment Craft it is a pontoon boat with a bow and stern that are high and middle floor that leaves both ends open. This allows the boat to go right over someone that is holding onto a rock in the middle of a stream, or hanging onto the edge of the ice. They can maneuver the boat right over the person and pull them onto the floor. The boat is then retrieved by the stern rope that is being pulled by those on the shore or even with an ATV. They inflated the boat for me, using a small SCUBA-like tank and it took no time at all from folded into a bag to rigid and ready to go.

I visited with anglers on both lakes, and found spirits high, but fishing had not produced any results. Most all of them that I talked with had been coming to the NW Ice Fishing Festival for years, and told me that last year not a single fish had been caught. They were hoping that the fishing would be better this year, but admitted that catching fish wasn't the primary reason they had come. It was a good excuse to get together with friends and family, eat some great food and maybe win a prize.

When the fishing officially ended at 4 p.m. they all gathered back at the Grange Hall. The results were in. For the second year in a row not a single fish was taken at either of the lakes. This has everyone stumped. Both lakes produced good catches of rainbow (Molson), and Lahotan cutthroat (Sidley) earlier in the

year. The prominent theory for the lack of fish pointed to low oxygen content in the water.

This raised the question: Can you run a successful fishing derby when no fish are caught? The answer is yes. After a great Italian-style dinner at the Grange Hall, provided by the folks at the Sitzmark Ski Area, all the participants learned that there would be a drawing for all the prizes. Everything from the smallest fish, oldest angler, even the top prize of \$500.00 would be handed out. All the purchased ticket numbers were put in a bucket and along with all the raffle ticket prizes were given away. Applause erupted in the packed Grange Hall when this was announced and as each winning ticket number was called out. The stage that had been pile with merchandize and certificates was emptied. The winner of the \$500.00 prize was Kenny Cry of Omak. The money raised by the festival will benefit the Visitors Center, which saw an increase of visitors to the area of almost three fold from the year before. The Highlands have been discovered. Its wide open spaces that are filled with lots of great lakes and streams that produced good catches of fish the rest of the year. Most of all it's populated with lots of friendly folks that know how to have a good time, no matter what.

Reach Dave at: www.FishingMagician.com
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QVTA 2nd Annual Trout Derby

Prizes for:

- Tagged Fish
- Heaviest Fish
- Cumulative Weight
- Mystery Fish
- Raffles

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Saturday, March 3



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