

## How much snow is too much to go fishing?

**Written by: Court Hyer**

Our plan started out as every plan does, perfect! My good friend Eric Cole and I had planned on taking a relaxing fishing trip to Crescent Lake for some of their big Macks. About two weeks prior, we rented one of the Hoodoo maintained cabins, close to the boat launch for easy access to the boat. Then we waited for the anxiously anticipated weekend.

The week leading up to our departure a blast of cold air started making its way into Oregon and Washington from Canada. During this cold weather we saw the temperature drop drastically, especially in the Northeastern part of the state. We figured we could just watch the live webcams of the resort there and just play it by ear. Well as we watched, we saw a steadily increasing ice sheet begin to cover the marina and the boat ramp. At this point, trying to get the boat in there would be too much of a risk, not to mention trying to get it out.

Plan B. The two of us were not going to let the weather keep us from being out on the water, so we decided to move our plans to a different lake. After much deliberation on what lakes in the area would not only open to fishing this time of year, but that would have adequate lodging, we decided on Lake Billy Chinook. The lake never freezes, has less snow than Bend, and maybe we could get lucky on one of their big bulls. I found a set of three cabins that were available for the weekend right next to the marina! I couldn't believe it! Not only that, but they were only \$59 per night! So I booked one.

This whole time we were still keeping a wary eye on weatherunderground for any possible break in the weather, but none was to come. The day before we left it started snowing a really cold and light snow. By the following morning it had accumulated to about 8 inches and brought visibility down to about 200 yards. Most people would have shied at the thought of going out in this, let alone go fishing in this weather, but they don't know how determined we were.



We hooked up the boat and loaded both of our trucks with the necessary supplies. As we were thinking about it, we decided that an essential piece of equipment for this excursion was Eric's snowblower. If the ramp wasn't cleared enough for our liking, then we could just fire it up and blow off the ramp ourselves. If we could start it...

The trip to the lake was pretty uneventful. We stopped off at big R to get some more downrigger clips as well as some frozen herring. We took it slow, never going over 40 mph, passed by the



occasional rubbernecker wondering if we were just transporting that boat somewhere or what?

When we finally arrived at the boat ramp, the state parks service hadn't yet plowed the parking lot or the ramp. This was what we brought the snow-blower for, so we went to work trying to start it. We connected the electric start to an outlet and began turning it over. For some reason, whether it was temperature, water, gas lines, flooded engine or what, we couldn't get the damn thing started. Right about when we gave up the park ranger came by with his snow plow. He drove up to where we were and said, "I really wouldn't be launching that if I were you." Evidently he had seen on occasion trucks sliding right back down the boat ramp into the lake in icy conditions. We asked him if he was going to plow the ramp that day and he stated that he couldn't for fear of his own truck sliding in. He did however say that he would plow all the way up to the ramp and around the parking lot for us. Okay, fair enough.

We then knew we had to do it by hand. We grabbed a piece of drywall that Eric had in the back of his truck, from a job he was working on earlier in the

week. Using that, we plowed two different tracks for the truck and trailer to back down and lined them with ice melt (another valuable item found in Eric's truck.) We slowly backed down his 18' Lund into the lake and, well, no problem! The boat went right in and the truck pulled out without spinning a tire! At this point we dropped off his truck at the cabin and parked the trailer up by the Palisades store up on the hill. He drove the boat around while I took my truck to the cabin and proceeded to unload.



The cabin was amazing! Not too big, about yurt size, but with two rooms, heaters, a full bathroom and microwave, it was perfect! The state parks service even provides customers with a gas grill and free propane! The main selling point however, was that the dock was about 40 yards from the front door, so getting back and forth was not going to be a problem.



As soon as we had everything secured in the cabin, we cracked open an Apocalypse IPA and headed out in the boat. We had been advised to cruise along the shoreline out in front of the boat ramp to spot balls of kokanee and bulls. The temperature at the time was about 17°F, but in contrast the water was about 46! We cruised along the western side of the Crooked arm

spotting the occasional bull and didn't find that many kokanee. You can't catch anything without getting your lines wet, so we rigged up two of the rods with Alan Cole's AC Plugs and set them about 100' back and lowered them on the downriggers to a depth of 20'. Right away, boom, the end of one of the rods started to dance. Eric let me have the first one and after a short little fight landed 6lb 3oz bull.



The depth on the Lowrance was 70', but we were dragging it around a point that was directly south of the boat launch, only exposed this time of year. We think that the true depth where the trout hit the plug was a lot closer to 30'. After reviving him and warming up our hands from touching freezing metal and ice we dropped the lines back down and continued heading north past the launch.





One of the most important items that we had in the boat was the propane heater. Without it we would have developed frostbite within an hour. Not only did it come in useful in keeping our extremities warm, but you could turn it upright and use it to toast your sandwich!

After an hour or so with no strikes, it was starting to get dark, only about 4:30 with the whiteout. So we figured that we would head back to the cabin and relax for a bit and cook some dinner. We had all the time in the world the following day to fish.

The following morning we awoke to 2' of snow on the ground! I haven't seen 2' in Bend, so we just sat there slack-jawed for about an hour wondering what our next step was going to be. We ate our breakfast and started warming up the engines, deciding that we could at least go fishing. About that



time, we saw the rotating lights of the rangers plow and decided to have a word with him. The little road that goes down from the Palisades store to the cabin had two quite steep hills. One steep enough that we were unable to get our trucks up without the road being plowed. The park manager made his way down the road slowly plowing as he went and eventually arrived at the cabin. He plowed us a little parking area and to my surprise even dug us a little

walkway to the cabin and shoveled out our picnic area. Best park service I've ever encountered! After his snow removal, he backed up the plow truck and made a run at the first hill... he didn't make it. The back end of the truck slid to the right and dug into a little divot on the side of the road, leaning the truck

up against a small juniper.



We tried to attach a tow strap to the back of his truck in order to pull the rear back onto the road with Eric's dodge,

but it only moved about an inch.

The ranger then had to call in the big guns. He phoned his son to come get him and he was going to return with his brand new John Deere backhoe. We returned to the water while we waited.

We ran up to the dam to see if we could spot some kokanee and ended up spotting some balls down at about 120'. So we went deep with the downriggers to see if we could entice some browns with a couple Kwikfish lures. We trolled for about an hour at about 2mph back in forth, wary not to go into the Metolius arm. Although, with a near whiteout, we probably could have gone where we pleased and nobody would have been the wiser. Nothing. So we returned to the cabin to see if the backhoe had arrived.

Upon arriving we could see the massive backhoe and the park manager had already picked up the rear end of the plow truck and had moved it back onto the road Gold Rush style. We helped him spread a bucket of ice melt onto the first hill and

gave it about a half hour to melt. Then, after all that, our Dodges crept

up those hills without a hiccup. We parked them next to the boat trailer and made the long walk down back to the boat.



At this point we needed more fish in the boat. Immediately we returned to where we caught the fish the previous day. This time we used big flashers followed by a split herring. After spotting some bulls on the Lowrance, we lowered the downriggers to 35' and 40', both lines about 80' behind the ball. Almost immediately we had a hit and then, fish on! Eric reeled this one in and he turned out to be a little smaller than the previous days, just over 5lbs.

Then we decided to stick with the herring. We dropped both lines down to the same depths. We were on the western side of the Crooked arm, close to where the parks service puts their big mooring buoy for the houseboats, and after only about 15 minutes, my turn. Immediately we could tell that this fish was bigger than the previous day's. When it came about 30' from the boat, it started running and took out about 20' of line, so





this was a nice bull we had on. It didn't take too much longer to land it, and when we did we found we had a nice 7lb 2oz bull. He wasn't the fattest guy, but he was long and sleek.

We lowered them back down. During this time we had some difficulty either with snags, or the herring just getting too soft and breaking off. We went through almost an entire package. We

made one more pass in front of the boat ramp and then Eric hooked into another one. This guys was a little fattie and put up a good fight! I think the weight we got on him was high 4's.



After about another half hour of retracing our paths on the gps, we decided to head upriver. We trolled hugging the bank on the eastern side of the river with both lines staggered so they fell within 10' of the bottom. We did this for about an hour or so, without a hit, before it started to get dark again. We felt pretty good about the day seeing as how we had setbacks on land that kept breaking up our fishing time. The best part about the whole thing was WE WERE THE ONLY ONES OUT THERE! We contemplated that we were probably, with a high chance of being right, the only people fishing in central Oregon at all! Can't beat it.

After cooking up some dinner and relaxing we decided on a plan of action for the next day. We knew we weren't going to get any fishing time in for the day because we both had to get home and plow the snow that had hit Bend so hard.

Upon waking up the next morning, we noticed that we didn't get as much snow as we had the previous night. Just a dusting. We ate breakfast and cruised by the

boat ramp in the small chance that it had been miraculously plowed. It hadn't. The parking lot wasn't even plowed, so just getting to the ramp was going to be difficult enough and I certainly wasn't plowing with a piece of drywall all the way down from the road. We decided the best plan of action was to leave the boat in the water at the marina and come back after everything had thawed. We didn't want to end up on youtube's stupidest boaters montage. So we packed up the trucks and made our way back to

snowy Bend where even more snow plowing ensued. So I guess the answer to the question how much snow is too much to fish is, well, I haven't experienced it yet.



(Some other great pics of the lake)





**The Topper:**

After Eric returned the following Tuesday, he thought that since he was on the water he might as well get some lines wet. He brought along a friend of ours, Jon Slaton, who was anxious to hook into a big bull. They trolled for a couple of hours without a single hit, but right when they were about to give up, Jon hooked into a 10lb 8oz bull!