

# ICE-CAPADE ON OIL CREEK

**I**t was half a lifetime ago, now. But on that late December day 38 years ago, for about seven minutes, this was half of a lifetime I wouldn't have believed I was going to live to see. A light drizzle was falling after days of flooding. The afternoon was gray and the temperature was just above freezing. The early ice, which had frozen half a foot thick, had been lifted by the flood waters and stacked on the shoreline along raging Oil Creek, a stocked trout stream.

A new Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only Area (DHALO) in Oil Creek State Park, here in Venango County, would go into effect the first of January. I needed to get the signs up along the 1.6-mile stretch of stream so fishermen would be aware of the regulation changes. Since there were some folks opposed to the change from catch-and-kill fishing, I thought it would be a good idea to use the stacked bank ice flows to post the signs out of reach. If the opponents to the regulation couldn't reach the signs once the ice melted, they couldn't tear them down. If they couldn't tear them down, they couldn't plead ignorance.

I crossed Oil Creek at the lower end of the DHALO on the railroad bridge and started upstream along the remote back side of the creek. Dressed in blue jeans, hip boots and several wool shirts, I proceeded, making good time,

but quickly realized I would be lucky to get done with one side of the creek by dark. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, where the creek makes a 90-degree turn, I dropped down to the flat from the hillside. I was immediately confronted with what obviously had been a cauldron of churning ice blocks a day or two earlier. As the water receded it had settled in an area the size of several football fields. The area was covered with irregular, broken sheets of ice. A trickle of water a foot wide, Rattlesnake Run, flowed underneath.

Cautiously, I stopped to think. I had only seen the area once last summer. Since the ice field appeared inanimate, I decided I could cross the run on the ice field parallel to Oil Creek. I could then continue up to the developed area of the state park, where I could hitch a ride with staff back to the patrol vehicle a mile down the road. With a backpack full of DHALO posters in one hand and a stapler in the other, I started across what I believed was three or four feet of stacked slab ice sitting on dry ground.

Halfway across, directly over Rattlesnake Run, the bottom fell out of my world. In less time than I had to take a breath I dropped through and below the ice field. I had pitched my pack and stapler as I felt the ice give. I gathered my wits and assessed my situation. It was dire. My left hip-booted foot was firmly on a rock about the size of a basketball. My right foot



**GETTING COLDER BY THE SECOND, I THOUGHT ABOUT SINKING DOWN BELOW THE ICE AND SWIMMING THE TEN TO TWENTY FEET OF RAGING OIL CREEK.**

touched only water. My arms were loosely pinned in an ice and slush cylinder. There was little wiggle room.

I shouted for help. I knew there would not be anyone around, I was a half mile from the nearest, seldom used, state parking lot on a rainy December afternoon. I tried scrambling and cursing, but I could go nowhere. I had wasted a valuable minute or two as the hip-boot deep ice water began to chill me and the slush trickled from between the ice slabs and ran down my wool shirts.

I was helplessly trapped. I had to save me. There was no other way. I worked first one arm loose above my head and then the other. The top layer of wet, slippery ice had tilted down toward the hole as I fell. By standing tiptoe on my left foot, I could barely touch the surfaces of the ice. Nothing allowed a grip. I would have sold my soul to have that

stapler in my hand to use as an ice axe. If only I had held on to it, but I hadn't.

Getting colder by the second, I thought about sinking down below the ice and swimming the ten to twenty feet of raging Oil Creek. Too many "ifs" and no guarantee of a clear passage. Such a move would end in almost certain death in the roiling, turbid waters, trying to swim in hip-boots.

I was now five or six minutes into my ordeal and becoming melancholy. I was getting hypothermic and drowsiness was setting in. A Christmas gathering of parents and loved ones only a few days away gave me the will to try again. I did not want to be a body found downstream on the icebreaker dam's concrete "dragon's teeth." No way to spend a holiday.

The slush from between the ice sheets kept drizzling against me and cooling my body. The sheets, many as big as 1950's Cadillac hoods, were slanted toward me. If they slipped I would be crushed. In the swirling water below me, ice was moving. A large, thick sheet swirled into my free-swinging right foot and stopped, lodged against some underwater object. It offered me an inch or so of lip to stand on. Working my hands down to my hip boot top, I lifted that foot. I now had a toe hold. If the ice slab would support my weight, I could gain some reach.

Slowly I applied downward pressure ... and it held. I began using my forearms, which I had managed to get at chest level,

**PRESERVING EVIDENCE ON A CELLPHONE**

**ONE** of the more gut-wrenching moments for me in a case is when a defendant wants to challenge and suppress any of the evidence I gathered. If I do my job well, that won't happen. Sometimes without a key piece of evidence there is no way we can prove the crime occurred beyond a reasonable doubt.

Preserving digital evidence doesn't have to be hard or complicated, but when trying to do so from a cell phone it can be a bit trickier. There are a few ways that you save the photos or videos you have found. If you can seize the suspect's cell phone or online account, and have it analyzed by a forensic analyst, that is the best method, but that's not always possible.

If you are using Facebook's app, you can long press on an image, select "save image" and save it to your phone. You can't do that with a video or on Instagram at all. If you are on most other normal web pages (including TikTok), you can also long click on an image and/or some videos and download it that way.

In the past we talked about several useful extensions for your desktop Firefox or Chrome web browser to help in OSINT investigations. While the Chrome web browser on your phone won't let you install extensions, you can use a Chrome alternative such as Kiwi Browser or use Firefox. There is an extension that works on both you can download called 'SingleFile' that will allow you to save a whole webpage into an html file. This won't work on those social media apps though.

Another option on all phones, and on most apps is to take a screenshot. On an iPhone (since the iPhone 10), press the side button and the volume up button at the same time to take a screenshot. On most Android phones, it's a combination of the power button and volume down. This will work OK for saving photos and parts of pages, but of course won't work for videos or a full webpage.

**NOTE:** If you are on SnapChat and attempt to take a screenshot, it most likely *will* alert the other person you did so.

Another way is to use your phone's 'Screen Record' option. If you have an Android phone on at least Android 11, you should have the option. On some cheaper phones the manufacturer had disabled this function, so check hardware. If you have iOS version 11 or later, you should have the option. If you use this option, SnapChat may not notify the other person.

There are numerous other screen recording options out there, but I would be careful about using random screen recording software for privacy reasons on law enforcement work. The other option I would recommend is to use a program called 'ADB' to record your android phone screen, but it is complicated to set up and beyond the scope of this article. Research it if you are interested.

Lastly, you can always use a second phone to take a photo or video of the phones you are conducting investigations on but this will provide the worst quality image or video. Many of us now have body cams that can record the information in a pinch.

After you have your photos or videos in hand, make sure to follow your department's policy on saving the evidence to your evidence system.

That concludes this (very brief) four part series on conducting investigations on cell phones. While a computer is my main method of conducting open source investigations, sometimes nothing can compare to using a cellphone to collect the extra evidence you need.

As always, send your questions to Patrick@wildlifecyberinvestigations.com.

Happy Holidays, and Happy Hunting!

➔ **By Patrick Murray**

to exert pressure against the ends of the ice sheets, while slowly straightening my leg. I was making incremental gains with light, steady pressure from my forearms and leg. After what seemed like forever, I had worked my forearms above the hole, and then managed to get my torso, from the waist up, over one side of the hole. My legs slowly followed and I was spread eagle on the ice field, primarily on one big sheet, with my draining hip boots against the far side of the hole.

Six or eight feet ahead of me, a tree-root mass sat on the ice, its trunk log touching dry grass on the upstream side. I slowly coiled my near-frozen legs and gave one feeble push. The wet ice that had prevented me from climbing out at first now let me slide to within reach of the root mass where my stapler and pack had lodged. When my fingernails hit that log they sunk in. I scrambled along the log, sliding on the ice, pushing my gear to shore.

I took a few deep breaths, realizing I was going to live, then stood up and began to staple a poster to a tree. My knees buckled and I shivered uncontrollably. I needed to cover the half mile to the park area before dark and the debilitating hypothermia killed me. I was stumbling, falling and driving myself on. Reaching the parking lot just as the last car was leaving two hundred yards away at the park office, I began to shout for help and wave my arms. The car headed my way. The driver had seen me.

The park secretary was the last one leaving and recog-

nized me. I mumbled that I needed to get to my vehicle and get warm. She took me to the maintenance barn where the workers were wrapping up their day. Around a wood-burning barrel stove I told the story, while drinking hot coffee. Finally, I felt warm enough to drive the fifteen miles home.

Upon reaching home, I asked my wife to run several tubs of hot water and I immersed myself in them. In a minute the water would be cool to the touch. After an hour warming up, I told her to put on "goin' out" clothes. We had to celebrate. Over dinner I told her of my day's adventure.

The takeaway from this tale is simple. Don't just think you are thinking, then act. Actually think before you act.

After a career that spanned nearly three decades with the Fish and Boat Commission and filled a book, "River Boots," I realized that if you don't get yourself into a mess you don't have to get yourself out of it. I never got enough training on "thinking."

\*\*\*

*Bob Steiner retired from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in 1999. He was a Waterways Conservation Officer in southern Luzerne and Venango counties and finished his career as assistant manager in the Northwest Region. His book, "River Boots: A Fish Warden's Tales of Pennsylvania Fish and Game Law Enforcement," is available on Amazon.com.*

➔ **By Bob Steiner**

