

# Ice breakup awaited by eager area fishermen

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Although fishermen can't wet their lines for another month, the annual guessing game has already begun here as to the time when the ice leaves Forge Pond.

In the past decade, the average crack-up time of the ice has been April 7, although after a rather mild winter last year, it didn't leave until April 12. Earliest in the past thirteen years was 1966 during a windy night on March 27.

This year, however, is a different story. Although weather statistics show the temperatures this winter have been about average, lack of snow plus relatively mild weather the past ten days have turned the ice covering into 212 acres of "rotten," or watersoaked, ice.

Veteran prognosticators say that the ice will be gone, as it has in smaller bodies of water, before the end of the week.

Especially hard on the ice has been mild days this past week, plus heavy, warm rains.

By mid-January, ice fishermen reported the ice depth as a foot, ideal thickness for harvesting ice, an industry that vanished 40 years ago. But Washington's Birthday, another six inches had been added with two feet reported in some coves. Guesses as to when this will all disappear are being registered, as usual, by Postmaster Robert Connell at the Forge Village post office.

The pond first froze over completely this winter on Dec. 13, about two weeks later than usual. Could winters have been colder in the

old days? Records show that there was skating on the pond on Thanksgiving Day, 1905.

CONNELL IS now registering conjectures as to the day and time when the ice "officially" leaves. He has set the ground rules for 1973: When blue water shows on two-thirds of the surface, that shall be deemed the time the ice gives up, for the records. He and his assistant, Carrier Al Woitowicz, both ardent fishermen, are recording all guesses.

They remind participants that Forge is one of the larger ponds in this area with a mean depth of 15 feet and the deepest part 33 feet. Smaller bodies of water, such as Nagog, have been free of ice for a week.

Winner of last year's contest was Russell Dodge of Littleton. For his efforts he won a second-hand pair of wading boots which he soon had to discard because the patches came off. The promoters of this year's contest, therefore, are seeking a donor of a first prize, say a bent fishing rod, or perhaps a rust-bound reel.

AND WHO KNOWS, by the time this story comes out in print, heavy winds may have cracked the ice sheet into smaller, more vulnerable pieces. Then once again, Forge Pond will have become "smiling blue waters," a name incorrectly attributed to the Indians who once fished the many coves and inlets. Unfortunately, whatever the Indians called it, that name has been lost forever.