

# Late breaking likely for Forge Pond ice

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Bright sunshine, warm breezes and the arrival of blackbirds in the meadows and wetlands near Forge Pond have brought a burst of predictions from local sportsmen and others as to the day and time that Forge Pond will be free of ice.

The guessing game has been going on for the 16 years that Postmaster Robert Connell has been keeping records with

the losers questioning the judges as to just how they determine the winner.

The winner last year was Bruce K. Johnson, who picked up as his prize three mail sacks that had been condemned by the Postal System but were still usable for bringing home the catch. The prize, two years ago, an aluminum flat-bottom boat that had fallen off a truck, was never claimed.

This year's prize is to be a 50-gallon oil drum to be used as a buoy to mark the spot whenever fishing gear is lost overboard. This is being donated by Dan O'Donnell of the Forge Village Service Station who has disqualified himself inasmuch as he and his assistant, Kevin Woitowicz, are receiving wagers. Connell at the Center is doing likewise.

Cutoff date for all guesses is Monday, March 21, the first full day of spring. Even if the ice breaks up early, it will be mid-April before fishing can be done legally. More ice fishing on Forge has been noted than for many years.

**RECORDS** of Connell's show that the earliest breakup occurred on March 7 in 1974. The latest, according to his computations, were on April 13 in 1970 and 1971. The pond froze over the day before Christmas and has been snow-covered ever since, which acts somewhat as an insulation. With an unusually cold and "long" winter, however, the water froze to a thickness of two feet, about six inches greater than the previous season.

For the amateur guesser, however, other factors must be considered before the end of the prediction period. This includes the temperatures during the period, the amount of sunlight which softens the surface into black ice, and the effect of high winds (or lack of them) when spots of blue water appear on the edges of ice fields.

In the larger, more northern lakes, of Maine and New Hampshire, the ice usually goes out by the end of April, but the average at Forge has been April 1.