





# Wisconsin WINTER "Fun", or Driving the Ice Roads of Lake Winnebago by Steve Owen

Well as I write this, it is Mid February 2021. Winter has set into its normal weather pattern of cold sunny days, where temperatures drop to -27C overnight and may "warm" up to -14C during the day. This wonderful weather system leads to the lakes around the area freezing solid. Then we get something not seen in a lot of places, well OK Northern Canada . Ice Roads.

When the ice gets to be at least 12 inches thick, it deemed safe to drive on. *Disclaimer here.. NO Ice is ever 100% safe.*

The local Fishing clubs then go out and plow and mark out the roads. Old Christmas trees are used to indicate the roads. Upright trees are safe travel. Trees on their side, mean a unsafe area. Bridges are placed across areas where the ice has expanded and cracked.

There some general "unwritten rules" of driving the road.

1. Be courteous to other users.
2. Seat Belts OFF (My '53 has none fitted.)
3. Windows open, or in my case NO door tops

fitted.

4. Have a floatation device with you.
5. Speeds should be kept below 20 mph.
6. Try and stay warm. (I have No heater.)

The main reason for the "no seat belts and windows open" is for modern cars. If you fall through the ice the electrics fail and you cannot open the windows etc to escape. The automatic electric door locks fail and you are trapped in the vehicle.

There are a few vehicle each year wander away from the road and find the thin ice [1].

Now, I had to pick a suitable day to take TCM across. I have a few "rules" of my own. Cold temps. This is so they do not put salt on the city roads. Below a certain point salt does not work. Light winds, it gets cold out there and a sunny day.

This year these conditions came together on Thursday, the 18th of February and I was off work. The Rover was fully fuelled and ready to go. Temps were around -7C for the day. Mostly sunny and light winds from the North made it ideal.





donation made in their collection box for their work on maintaining the roads.

Finally a quick check on the Land-Rover. Making sure things are secured and away we go. First thing to look for is the tree line. The roads are plowed to expose the ice, .Snow insulates the ice and it does not form as well and can become slushy.

Access the roads is approximately three (3) miles from my home with a drive through the City of Oshkosh WI. Start up on the Land-Rover is actually simple enough in the cold All regular oils are used and the radiator is filled with a 50/50 water-glycol mix. 1/4 choke. Allow the fuel pump to wind up. A quick pump of accelerator. Hit the starter button.

The engine spun and started on the second attempt. I let the thing warm up for a few minutes and off we go. The city side streets are not plowed, so the yellow knob was duly engaged and off we motored.

Once, reaching the Lake access you need to do two things. Check-in with the Local Fishing Club on road conditions. Any active cracks and/or bridges. I always ask for a current map, but they were out. A

I drove just the West-East road from Oshkosh to Quinney, one of the short routes. There are intersecting roads which run North-South and these can be joined at points along the way across. The lake being approximately 10 miles wide E-W and 40 miles long N-S. [2] .

You will notice there are plenty of "sheds" out on the lake, these are actually fishing shacks, a lot of which are fitted with TV's, heaters and beds, the luxury of modern ice fishing. I think the count this year was 6,000 shacks out on the lake, a veritable mini city.

The drive goes ever so simple and slow. Four wheel drive high ratio with top speed I kept at 15-18mph. This give me time to watch the road ahead for cracks and slushy holes. The traffic being midweek was not too heavy with only about eight trucks passing each way. The journey was





uneventful and upon reaching the East shore I stopped took a quick break. In normal times I would of stopped off for a beer and a bite to eat at the local pub over there, but Covid rules being what they are, it was turn around and head back west.

A quick turn around and leisurely drive back across to Oshkosh. If I had to drive around the lake it would be a 40 mile trip 80 miles round trip. The total from this trip was 26 miles of which 20 were on the Ice Road.

The roads will last until Mid March depending on the weather. They are a great thing to drive and a way of getting and enjoying the most of the Wisconsin Winter. So if people "do Land-Rover's go everywhere?" The answer is "yes they even drive on water"

Regards Steve

Keep Calm & Rover On!

Notes:

1. Given the relative shallowness of the lake, if your truck does go through, it can easily be recovered. However, recovery doesn't come cheap. Donny Herman who owns Sunk & Dive



Recovery charges a minimum of US\$3,000 just to turn out. Average cost is \$5-6,000. Given the need for solid ice, they may need to cut a channel there. Last year one channel was a quarter mile long. \$\$\$ Plus the Department of Natural Resources fines for pollution. They give you 48 hours to get it out and then you begin to gather approximately \$350 per day in fines. The days of leaving it there are long gone. Total for Winter 2020-1 was two vehicles went through.

2. Lake Winnebago is actually rather shallow, with an average depth of 15.5 feet, and a maximum depth of 21 feet. The lake is a remnant of the interglacial lake Oshkosh and once was part of Green Bay. Now it connects with Lake Michigan via the Fox River, which drains at Green Bay.

