

Listening to the Lake Radio Program

View From the Lake boat trip

7/13/05, KUMD Radio, Duluth, MN

7:53 minutes

Images by Dorothy Pramann

(Opening music)

Welcome to Listening to the Lake. I'm Marie Zhuikov with UMD's Minnesota Sea Grant Program.

Today we'll journey aboard the research boat the *L.L. Smith Jr.* onto Lake Superior. The trip is part of the popular "View From the Lake" program, which offers residents a chance to see what their communities look like from the water and to get hands-on experience collecting water samples. The trips have run the past 2 summers in Western Lake Superior, from Ashland, Wisconsin, to Grand Marais, Minnesota. The educational voyages sold out quickly so I hopped on board at Two Harbors to see what the fuss is all about.

But first, here's what the lake had to say yesterday morning off the North Shore Scenic Drive near the Talmadge River.

(Enter lake sounds)

It was very very calm and quiet. I was tempted to splash my hand to mimic wave sounds, but refrained. What you're hearing is actually Lake Superior with cars on the North Shore drive in the background -- also a song sparrow. At 63 degrees, the water temperature on the western end is downright balmy. Wednesday's nearshore marine forecast calls patchy fog in the morning and a northwest wind at 5 knots, becoming easterly in the early afternoon. Waves calm to 2 feet. Tonight the wind will continue from the east at 5 to 10 knots, mostly clear with waves 2 feet or less.

(Fade out lake sounds)

Jeri Schwerin, with the University of Wisconsin Extension Program warns people in the bow of the *L.L. Smith* that this trip is not a pleasure cruise.

"As you've noticed it's cold, there's a lot of wind. Sometimes there's spray coming over the bow. And there's also the noise of the engine. So I appreciate that you're being durable and tough to be out here in the front."



Despite the challenging conditions, Schwerin tells some of the 25 "View From the Lake" trip participants about the fish and other animals that live in the lake. In the depths are burbot and another species...



"Has anyone here heard of the siscowet? Anybody? It's also called the fat lake trout. I like to call it the voluptuous lake trout. It's not fat."

Schwerin and educators with Sea Grant conduct these trips to show people how land use influences Lake Superior. The trips are funded through grants from the Great Lakes Regional Water Quality Program and from the coastal programs in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Participants in the front of the boat are learning about fisheries and coastal wetlands. Those in the more sheltered stern are playing a game invented by Sea Grant staffer, Jesse Schomberg. In the game, people must decide the best way to develop 80 acres of land just outside the fictional town of Clearwater. They are given different lot sizes and amounts of housing to choose from.

"And then for the resort here, they could maybe get...what's a good number of resort cabins? Ten? So I'm going to break you up into groups and let you fit those houses on here..." (fade)

After some more instruction, Schomberg lets participants decide things on their own.

"You've got to get 17 on there and everybody has to have a road that goes to their house. Roads are important. They have to have access. So here's the road. A 70-foot wide road. Some are a little curvy but we do what we can. And....go!"

Meanwhile, in the bow of the boat, participants get raincoats to stay dry from the chill of Lake Superior's spray.

"You guys are going to get extra cookies and coffee when this is over."

Dan Rau, captain of the *L.L. Smith*, says the trips have exposed him to different ports and gotten him out of town more than usual.

"The big difference for me is that we've been going around to places I haven't been before, namely Grand Marais and Silver Bay."

"... These past two years, this view from the lake trip has been almost three weeks out of town. So it's a pretty extended stay and so we're spending a lot more time on the boat than normal."

The boat stops near Encampment Island where the crew lowers a shovel-like device called a Ponar sampler over the side to take a bite of Lake Superior sediment.

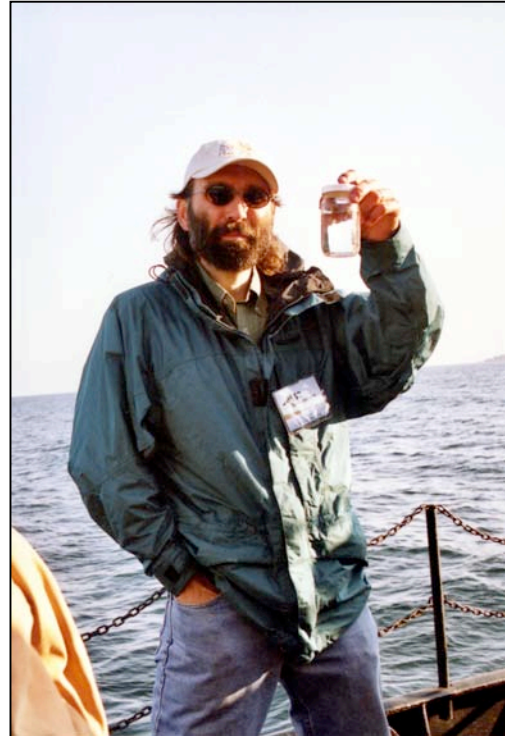
"We'll grab a sample of the bottom and they'll stick it in a bucket. Then we'll get to look through that and find the bugs-- the critters that are in there..."

In the stern, Schomberg lets out a net to catch the tiny plankton that live in the depths. He contrasts a sample of surface water with the sample from the plankton net.

"This is a sample just of straight water out of Lake Superior. Don't see anything in it. And this is from about 20 meters down where all the stuff is in the water. All the critters that are floating in the water."

[Participant] "Twenty meters equates to what?"

[Schomberg] "A little over 60 feet. If you can pass that around and look at it, we'll run it in to the microscope in a couple minutes. If you can see, there's a little bit of an orange glow? That's actually fat globules that are inside their bodies that they use to help them keep warm – a little bit warmer in the water here so they can be active."



In the bow, two teams lower black and white disks over the side to judge the clarity of the water. The depth at which the white disappears is the measure of clarity. One team measures 9.6 meters. Schwerin asks the other team for their results.

"Eleven meters, 64 centimeters. It's common for them to not be exactly the same because you guys are beginners."

The clearest spot during the boat trips has been the Grand Marais Harbor, where readings were at least 14 meters.

Meanwhile, the tiny plankton caught in the net are now under a glass slide in a microscope. Participants view them inside the small lab located in the middle of the boat.

"...Up on a computer screen on the wall. You can also look through the microscope and take a look at them. Really not very many kinds. I'm surprised. We usually have several kinds of copepods in relative abundance. There's mostly just one kind, one small kind of copepod, and there's a lot of those."

Then it's time to head back to port. The groups in the back and front of the boat switch places and learn what they missed on the trip out.

Back in Two Harbors, I asked 81-year old Dorothy Pramann, who was one of the hardy souls in the bow, what she thought about the trip.

"It had its ups and downs, but it was really super interesting."



Young James Norlien from the Twin Cities, a budding entomologist, had this to say:

"One of my favorite parts of the trip was looking into the microscope at the zooplankton. That was very fun, and most people don't get an opportunity to do that. So I would say I'm on of the very lucky ones."

His aunt, Becky Norlien, a Two Harbors resident, has been on the cruises before, but appreciated learning more about the relationship between the water and the land.

"I am very strongly attached to the lake and want to learn all I can about protecting the lake so I'm just grateful for another opportunity to learn a little more."

If you missed the View From the Lake boat trips, contact Sea Grant for information about how to get on one next summer. The phone number is 726-8106.

If you missed one of the Listening to the Lake radio programs, they are now archived on the Web. Just do a Google search for Listening to the Lake and the information should pop right up.

I'm Marie Zhuikov for Listening to the Lake from UMD's Minnesota Sea Grant Program.