

Opinion/Letters

Group is committed to saving the largest lakes



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



Siberia. The name conjures up images of gulags, desperate winters and Communist prison camps.

But with change sweeping all of what was the Soviet Union, Siberia is not immune.

At the southeastern edge of Siberia is a vast lake that has much in common with our Lake Superior—Lake Baikal.

If a group of Russian, Canadian and American scientists and adventurers have their way, the two lakes will soon be twinned, as a model for saving Mother Earth.

By area, Lake Baikal is not the largest lake in the world, Lake Superior is. But Baikal is the largest lake by *volume*. You could take all the water from all five Great Lakes and still not fill Lake Baikal.

It is unbelievably deep—at least 1.6 kilometres—according to one scientific expedition that crawled along the bottom of Baikal in the summer of 1990 in a mini-sub and photographed warm water fissures blasting up from the earth's molten core.

Baikal is full of romance and intrigue. Geologists estimate the lake itself to be somewhere between 20 and 25 million years old.

Its human inhabitants are believed by some anthropologists to be the ancestors of North American aboriginal people, who travelled across Siberia to the Bering Straight thousands of years ago to become the original inhabitants of North America.

Nowhere else on earth

Baikal's animal and fish populations are considered to be as important as Darwin's Galapagos Islands—with thousands of species found nowhere else on Earth.

Baikal, like Superior, is also under stress. The *Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Combine*, a large state enterprise, built mega-mills on Lake Baikal's south shore, with no thought to environmental degradation.

Untreated industrial and urban sewage have been pumped into Baikal since 1966.

But the international team of scientists who started cataloguing life in and on Baikal in 1990 report that, so far, the Lake has been able to protect itself from ruin—partly because of its vastness, and partly due to a Baikal crustacean called *epishura* who are so numerous, one scientific writer claims "they can clean the upper 50 metres (of the lake) three times over in one year."

Baikal and Superior are about to learn a lot more about each other. "Baikal-Superior Connect" is a unique international venture, organized cooperatively by the Lake Superior Centre in Duluth Minnesota, and the Adventure Club of Moscow.

Last year, 17 kayakers (eight Russians, the rest North Americans) spent 35 days circumnavigating Baikal by kayak and steamer, making community presentations along the way. The expedition had some international publicity near its end because the trekkers' return train trip to Moscow coincided with the aborted coup and ouster of Gorbachev.

For several days, the fate of the North Americans was unknown, until they reached Moscow and joined the crowds celebrating the military's retreat from power.

Russians in Duluth

This summer, the 17 plan to do the same thing on Lake Superior. The eight Russians will arrive in Duluth July 1, head off on Lake Superior July 4, and work their way up the Canadian side stopping along the way in places like Wawa and Marathon, eventually ending their trip in Thunder Bay August 5. The trip will not be all by kayak. There isn't enough time, money or stamina for that.

Vans and motor homes will take them along much of the route.

Mike Jones from Thunder Bay, one of the Canadian participants, says the trip is designed to foster international environmental linkages and understanding. "The fact is, even though we are a world apart, we share one thing in common. We both live on the shores of the two greatest lakes in the world.

"We're going to be doing activities or programs that help foster a better appreciation of what we have and a better respect for what has to be preserved both here and in Russia."

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Letters to the editor

Parents upset about minor hockey

What is happening to minor hockey in our communities? What a controversial issue it has been over the years, but now it has become totally out of control.

What is the mandate of this organization? Are we here to mould each and every player into NHL stars—or are we here to provide quality recreation for our children, in a sportsmanlike atmosphere?

Every player's dream is to "skate with the stars", but reality shines over that dream. How many kids really make it to the NHL? Yes, we are responsible for providing the best possible hockey for our children, through leadership, discipline and training, in order that each and every player is given the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

But is winning at all costs key to this controversy? We have formed "travel teams" in every league. How devastating it must be for those who don't make it, and aren't given the choice of travelling with their team on tournaments. How discouraging it must be to sit on the bench, while you "star teammates" dominate ice-time. How is a player going to improve if they are deprived of the opportunity to play?

Parents, take the hot seat, for you play a major role in the issues at hand. Just take a look around our arenas. Heaven forbid if we should sit together as a solid cheering section for "our team". Our kids are playing the game as a team while we, as mature adults, sit in the stands bickering and fighting.

Has anyone taken the time to ask the kids how they feel? What are their expectations of their coaches, teammates and parents? Maybe they just want to play hockey and possibly have fun doing it!

Should we be turning our arenas into giant road hockey games? Kids play road hockey for hours and hours—and why? Because they are not subjected to all the controversial issues—parental influences and the shame of being a "loser". They have fun, and isn't that what being a kid is all about?

The message is clear. It's time to take a long and hard look at the direction minor hockey is heading in. There's a lot at stake if we don't re-focus on our objectives and goals.

Is winning at all costs worth the sacrifice of losing our players, coaches, managers and the many dedicated volunteers in our minor hockey organizations? That truly is the direction we are headed in!

Lise Comeau
B. Jeffery
Schreiber

Ski Club trying to provide 'family fun'

I would like to thank you for your letter to the editor in last week's paper ('Parent disgruntled . . .', Letters, March 24). I would like to point out a few issues regarding this event.

First of all I would like to apologize for any inconvenience presented to you at this event. You should have told us, the chaperones—there were ten in attendance—that you were experiencing difficulty. We would have gladly returned your fee for this dance.

There were a couple of instances where children had disagreements, but you will experience these dilemmas whenever there's an endeavour involving children.

The hall was full and yes, this dance was a huge success. We, the Ski Club Committee, never meant to cause anyone any harm. Your suggestions are welcome and if you would like to sit on the Winter Carnival Committee, we would appreciate your input.

This hall was the only one available on that or any night during the carnival. We explored all other options before deciding to have the dance in a hall that size.

Our Winter Carnival is a big fundraiser for the Ski Club Committee. We ask for volunteers and donations from all businesses, organizations and from the private sector.

We hold the carnival each year to promote family entertainment. In fact, providing entertainment for everyone in the family is number one in our club's constitution.

You should have approached the carnival committee at the time of the dance and someone would have addressed your complaint. I feel very bad for our committee members who were thanked for doing a terrible job. We are all *volunteers* and have been contributing our time for the last two years to provide family fun.

I'm really sorry that your child suffered when you decided not to participate in any other events in the carnival. All of the other events were also a huge success, and fun was had by all who attended.

Sincerely,
The Winter Carnival Committee
Terrace Bay

Make your voice heard

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