



WHITE LAKE

Property Owners Association
Environment Volunteers

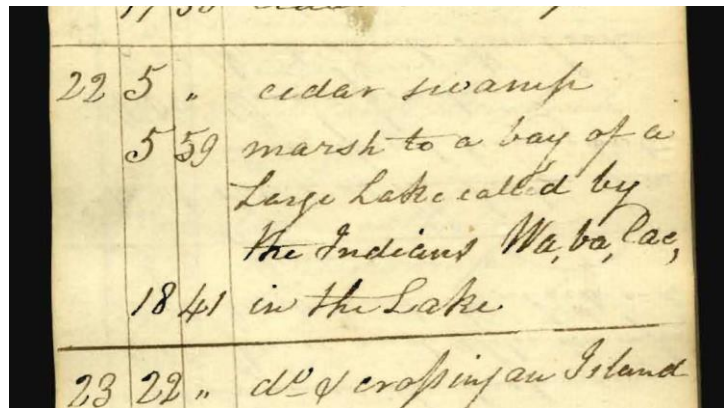


ENVIRONMENT BULLETIN

Conrad Grégoire and David Overholt

White Lake: What's in a Name?

The first published report including the name of the lake we know today as White Lake, was that of surveyor Reuben Sherman. An excerpt from his 1823 field notes (shown to the right) reads “cedar swamp marsh to a bay of a large lake called by the Indians Wa,ba,lac”. A hand drawn map (below) of the area resulting from this survey labels the lake as ‘Wa,ba,lak’.



White Lake is a translation from the Algonquin name ‘Wàbà Sagaigun’¹. Taking onto consideration that the final letter of the name of the lake found in the field notes was a ‘c’ and on the map a ‘k’, one can speculate which European group first re-named the lake. It could have been either the French (lac) or the British (lake). The first recorded Europeans, however, who explored this area were French; Étienne Brûlé (1610) and Samuel de Champlain (1613).

Today, it is not obvious to anyone boating the lake, why it should be called White Lake. Everywhere you go, the lake water ranges in colour from clear to brownish. The sediments are essentially black and quite muddy. Yet, for First Nation Peoples, it was obvious to them that the lake was exceptional and named it Waba (white) for its defining property.

¹ Hessel, Peter (1987). *The Algonkin Tribe. The Algonkins of the Ottawa Valley: An Historical Outline*. Kichesippi Books. ISBN 0-921082-01-0.

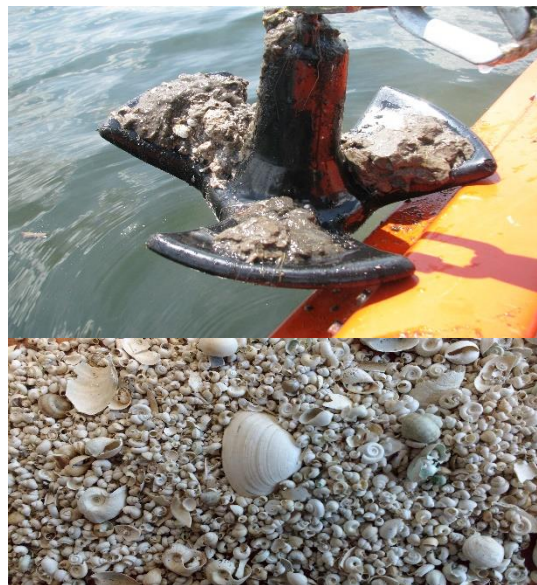
The installation of a dam on White Lake in 1845 started a process resulting in the covering up of the existing lake bed (especially at the Northern end of the lake) with black sediments which are today about 15 cm thick. Below these sediments is a layer of white marl². The Southern, and deeper part of the lake, already had from 3 to 5 m of black sediments dating back to nearly the end of the last ice age.

The very first description of marl in White Lake was by William Logan³, who founded the Geological Survey of Canada in 1842 and for whom Mt. Logan, Canada's highest peak, is named. He described White Lake marl in this way: 'In the lower part of White Lake about seven hundred acres are covered with marl, which was found to have a depth of from five to seven feet, and was covered by not more than two or three feet of water'. The location on the lake he was referring to is off of Norway Point on the White Lake Village basin.

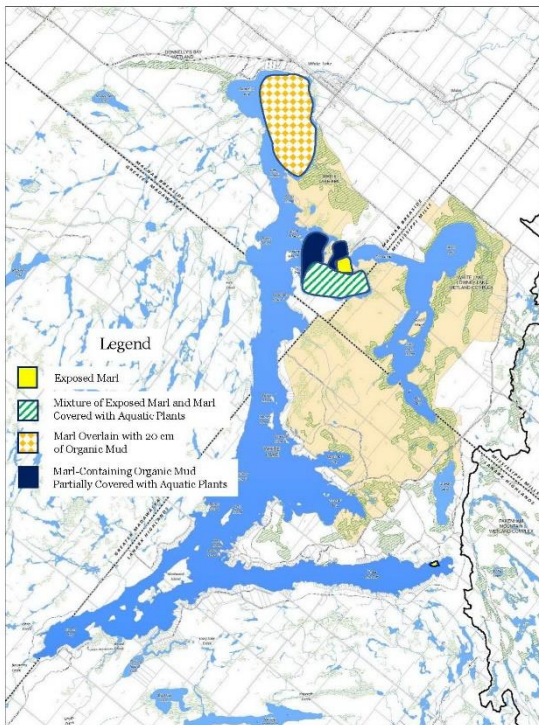
Marl is a calcium-rich sediment formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate from mineral-rich spring waters entering the lake.

It is also formed by the accumulation of snail and small clam shells.

Both of these are white in colour, as shown in the photo on the right of marl sediments recovered from near Norway Point in the Village Basin.



Areas of White Marl on White Lake



The map on the left show areas on White Lake where there are marl deposits. Anyone arriving at White Lake at any time prior to the construction of the dam would have seen large very shallow areas of the lake that appeared to be white in colour.

It could be that when First Nations peoples arrived on its shores and looked out over the water, they would have pointed towards the lake and said 'Wàbà Sagaigun'.

September 1, 2021

² Marl in Ontario, G.R. Guillet, Industrial Mineral Report 28, 1969, Ontario Department of Mines.

³ W.E. Logan, The Geology of Canada, Geological Survey of Canada; 1863, p. 765.