

This is the spillway under the Erieville dam. No water is flowing through while the state lowers the lake level through the valves at the gate farther north. Photo/Frank Barilla Jr.



Tuscarora Lake, the Erieville Reservoir, is 20 feet lower than normal this summer so that repairs to the dam can be made. Photo/Frank Barilla Jr.

Built In 1857

The Erieville Reservoir, or Tuscarora Lake, covers an area of 340 acres and is 1,504 feet above sea level, one of the highest reservoirs in the state.

The man-made lake was built on land acquired by the state in 1848 and was completed in 1857. Most of the area had been covered by a forest.

It is one of eight reservoirs in Madison County built to store water for use on the Erie Canal. It now feeds the Barge Canal.

The price of building the reservoir, including the expert iron work and masonry at the outlet, was \$10,884.



Elba and Carl Knight, who have a camp on Tuscarora Lake look west from the dam to the Erieville Rd.

Grass Gets Mowed In Tuscarora Lake

The Erieville Reservoir, a summer playground for residents of about 185 camps and cottages, is far from being a boaters', swimmers' or water skiers' paradise this year.

The water level is down about 20 feet in preparation for the repair of the earthen dam that state officials say is leaking.

Some year-round residents, like Benita and Peter Crispo whose well has run dry, and Susanne and Bill Brennan, who say the state project is poorly conceived and poorly planned, are extremely unhappy.

But others, some of whom have been coming to the lake year after year, are philosophical.

Mary Alice and Edward Purcell of Liverpool have been renting a cottage from Otwell Bobbette for 17 years.

"Lucille (Mrs. Bobbette) sent us an article about the drainage of the lake and said maybe we'd like to make other plans," Mrs. Purcell said. "But we decided to come anyway. We've always loved it here. I have to admit it looks worse than we thought it would."

Ot Bobbette said, "I think it's a mess, but I really don't mind it. The only time I've ever been in the lake, was when I fell off a dock that I was painting."

Dubious of the state Department of Transportation's statement that with normal rainfall, the lake will fill up in 18 months, Mr. Bobbette said he is putting his party barge up for sale.

"By the time the water gets back, I'll be too old to run it," he said.

Brad Crump of Oneida, a college freshman whose family owns a camp at the northern end of the lake, said, "We don't like it, but the flies and mosquitos do!"

He worries about the small crayfish and clams that he says have been killed because of the receding water.

"The seaweed is disappearing and without the oxygen that the weeds produce, the fish are suffering. I think it will take three years before the shellfish come down from the creeks back to the lake."

The Crump family has spent summers on the Erieville lake for 15 years, and plan to stay all summer this year, even with little water for recreation.

Carl and Elba Knight have owned a camp on Pleasant Point since 1966 and like to drive over from their home in Vernon on weekends.

"It's too bad the state had to lower the water, but the repairs of the dam have got to be made," Mr. Knight said.

"We had to have a well drilled this summer," he said, "but I've got to tell you that we'd been talking about doing it for a long time, and this just got us going."

The new well serves the Knights and two neighbors and is 100 feet deep. Formerly they, like many others, pumped lake water for household use and brought in their own drinking water.

"The draining of the lake certainly slows down the summer and the kids miss the water skiing, but it's interesting to see the lay of the land now that it's exposed," Elba Knight said.

Strolling along the top of the dam, one can see the outflow of water from the lake through a valve on the old gate house.

The shore line is growing larger, and parts of it, particularly on the southern end where the Bobbettes live, are nothing but squishy mud.

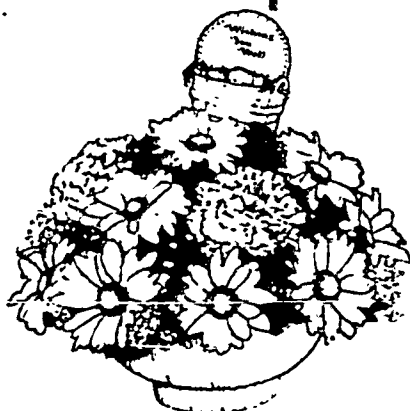
"I find myself mowing grass where there used to be water," Mr. Bobbett said, "but my grandson loves to take mud baths."

There is considerable concern about the effect of the dam project on the fish population and many wonder if, without a public access to the lake, the state will restock it when the dam is repaired.

Rentals are way down, some camp owners say, and whether or not the dam will be repaired by fall, a schedule predicted by the Department of Transportation, appears to be anyone's guess at the moment.

Islands are appearing, some wells are dry, and people who "always" spend their summers at Tuscarora Lake are wondering how long it will be before it all goes back to the way it was.

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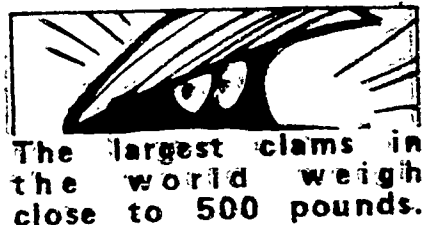
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