

Musings of a Boat Landing Monitor

Glorious Morning at the Dam Site

The Pleasure of Being a Volunteer Boat Landing Monitoring Despite Wind, Rain and Snow.

As taught by reading the writings of Gordon MacQuarrie, fly fisher, duck hunter and local author from the 30s, 40s and 50s, and inspired by many others, it's not the catch or the kill, it's the experience that is important. When I am a volunteer weekend boat landing monitor, it's not the numbers of boat launchers I meet, it's the experience.

It's not just the beauty of the lake, the dam, the river, the woods, or the friendship of other volunteers, or the predictable thanks I get from boaters. But importantly, it's more the moments of silent time, the solitude that is refreshing, replenishing, restoring. It's like the spring we have on our property, a time when interesting thoughts and ideas rise up effortlessly, enjoyably, without a gurgle.

I knew today's rainstorm would provide plenty of solitude.

This sunless gray Sunday morning, May 19th, at 35 degrees and dropping, sports a constant drizzle and wind with cold gusts of at least 25-30 MPH. Today is worse than yesterday's accumulation of over two inches of water in our fishing boat and buffeting winds during the night and in the morning.

The loon across from us on Mooney Bay not far from Mooney Dam remains on nest covering two eggs with insulating downy feathers despite two days of heavy rain and wind and a recent battle with the worst infestation of loon-specific blackflies in years. The flies have gone. The loon no longer pecks at them, shakes its head or needs to spend whole days off the nest in the water diving for relief.

The loon, dedicated and perseverant during adversity, appears to have a bright alert attitude constantly scanning the environment. Unflappable despite the cold wind and rain, the loon effortlessly picks up a twig or dab of mud from in front of the shallow mud and vegetation nest and places it to the side of the nest.

Unfazed by the expectation of this weekend's second successive morning at the boat landing in the rain and wind, I knew my 6am to 10am boat landing monitor shift today would be good. In addition to a brown bag breakfast, I brought Dave Evenson's new MacQuarrie book in first draft manuscript form for copyediting and my personal enjoyment. I have been having great fun collecting words and terms Mac used that are new to today's generation or simply unfamiliar

I anticipated enjoying reading new descriptions of Mac's lake cabin neighbors, the Skamsers, the Tierneys and the Stewarts whose progeny love their same well-maintained log cabins, have become our friends, and friends of the Barnes Area Historical Association museum. They have been happy to share their family and MacQuarrie stories with Mac-fans on the museum's annual tours and pilgrimages and will enjoy this new book.

In addition, I looked forward to a tasty front-seat breakfast with a view of nature and the joy of up to four hours of steering wheel-supported reading of MacQuarrie's 1936-1956 newspaper columns. These haven't been read by anyone in decades, except by Dave Evenson who retyped selected columns into his new book manuscript. The book is due to be published later this year.

All this, perched a little above the dam and boat landing in the rain while the wind blows strong enough to jostle the struggling 2005 Jeep Liberty side-to-side.

Then, at 830am, an invasion. Three pickups, two pulling big fishing boats, suddenly arrived carrying seven well-prepared fishermen, thirtyish to fiftyish, with a dark overcast sky and a strong disrupting wet cold wind

and rain. They were fully layered, well-booted, waterproofed, and gray-olive Cabela-clothed for the weather, jumping out like uniformed FBI agents on a raid. The two drivers and boat captains were really upbeat and friendly but clearly mission-oriented.

No problem. I am good at getting more than just the essence of my mission accomplished with customers who are in a rush. I do this even on beautiful days, even with modest men of few words or who take a long time to use them, men who might seem unfriendly when they really are only focused on getting the boat in the lake, as quickly as possible.

Today's immodest seven men from Iron River, Hayward and Madison fish together for a weekend this time each year. Weather won't stop them. It's on our schedule, one said: "and we follow it".

They know the lakes here well. Driver number one knew my questions almost before I asked them, seemed to know me and had met our new boat landing monitor on Friday.

Driver number two, who parked on the other side of the road, declared as I approached "I haven't been on any other lake with the boat (in the past five days)" somehow anticipating my first question I usually ask.

I am normally well-prepared and tactfully and politely zero in on my questions to avoid wasting their time yet accomplishing my needs. However, his unexpected unsolicited assertion caught me off guard clutching my folded moist encounter record. That and the wind and rain made me momentarily flummoxed and bewildered and at the same time deeply impressed by them and excited for them. I would have liked to join them.

I noticed how effortlessly and accurately driver number one, from Hayward, rapidly backed his boat to the landing ramp and how fast they all were to depart. They could see my expressions of astonishment. They showed no small measure of pride and smiling enjoyment in what they were doing despite the weather. They seemed very thankful for what I was doing.

They were on their way so quickly I barely had time to warn about backing the wheels into the water too far and getting stuck in the drop-off beyond the concrete apron.

Time passed without notice and my replacement arrived interrupting my MacQuarrie reading with a tap on the window. She lives ten miles north and shared that she had two inches of snow, heavy winds and power outages before she departed.

When I arrived at home, not far from the dam, I discovered a wood tick travelling with me; it was 32 degrees, windy and snowing.

The loon, still on the nest, was casually looking around for something, seemingly enjoying the experience as if it were a nice day and nothing was wrong in this world.

It's nice being synchronized with a loon sharing the same sentiment.

Ted Eastlund
