

Lake Country Legends

Newsletter of the Lake Country Scenic Byway

www.lakecountryscenicbyway.com



EXPLORE THE ROAD TO ITASCA...AND BEYOND

The Fluctuations of Lake Belle Taine

Lake Belle Taine is a fairly shallow lake of very irregular shape in Nevis Township in Hubbard County. The Scenic Byway follows close to the south shore of the entire length of the lake.

The Indian translation for Belle Taine meant, "Lake into which the river flows and ceases to flow or dies there."

This can possibly explain the great fluctuation in water levels in this lake.

When the settlers came and homesteaded in the area they called it Elbow Lake because of its irregular shape. Lake Belle Taine has probably been called or spelled more ways than any other lake in the county. The various names were Elbow, Belle Tam, Bell Tain, Belle Tain, and finally Belle Taine.

Many other lakes in the county also have had other names. Fish Hook or Fishhook was Fish Line, Potato was

Arago, Lake Alice was Lake Elvira, Hart Lake was Heart Lake on the 1900 census, Itasca was Elk or Lac Labish,

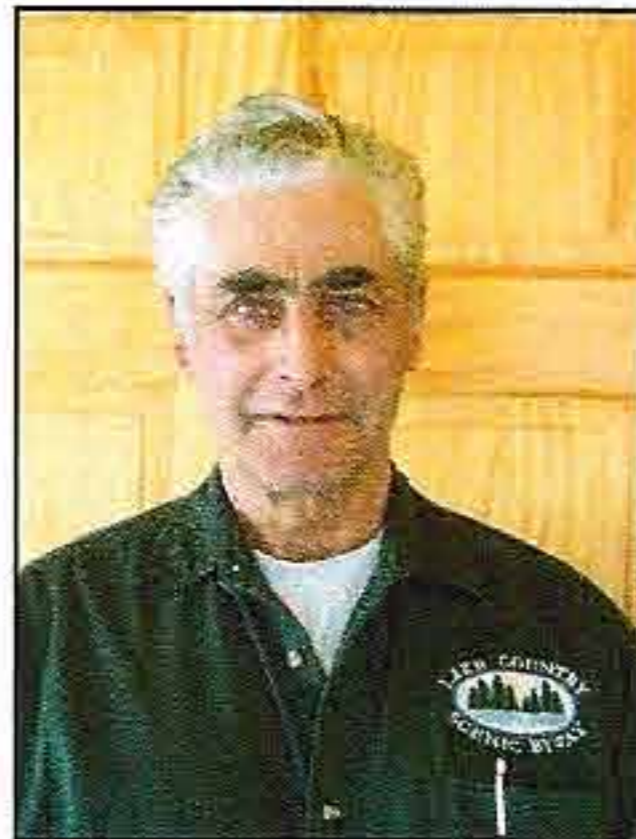
Deep Lake was Lac Chatel, Duck Lake was Round Lake and at one time the Crow Wings were all named for Governors of Minnesota, then changed back to numbers 1-11 as they are now.

Mr. Edward Backus who had a houseboat on Little Mantrap Lake suggested the name be changed to Sapphire Lake. It was reported in the 1918 Enterprise that the proper course for changing the name is being investigated. Of course this was never done, the name of "Potato" was chosen for that lake because of the wild artichokes (Jerusalem) growing around the lake. This artichoke is a sunflower with tuberous roots which resemble a potato.

In 1901 the government records show the name of Belle Taine as

Bell Tam. In later years it was changed to Elbow Lake. J.D. Conzet of Nevis started a discussion that resulted in changing it back to Belle Tam. In 1930 it was known as Bell Tain, then sometime later the name became Belle Taine.

With the water fluctuating according to rainfall it was at high level in the early 1900's. The Park Rapids Enterprise of May 10, 1906 read, "Another attempt made to drain the Elbow-Mantrap Lake systems." Farmers in the area wanted the level lower to give them more hay land around the lake. They had decided to dig a trench through a ridge to lower the lake level. It was determined that the elevation of Elbow Lake was about 45 feet above the level of the Crow Wing chain. The people of Nevis objected because they were interested in a sawmill that was established there. Some people say the ditch was dug. I cannot find information to authenticate this.



By Frank Mitchell,
Byway Ambassador

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **AUGUST 3, 2006**
Monthly meeting at Park Rapids Chamber, 8:30 am
- **SEPTEMBER 27, 2006**
Fall Color Tour by coach bus along the Byway
- **OCTOBER 10-11, 2006**
State Scenic Byway Conference at Douglas Lodge, Itasca State Park.

Byway Briefs

Update on Community Entrance Signage

Common signage in communities along the Lake Country Scenic Byway are closer to becoming a reality. Locations have been selected and visited by MnDOT personnel. The sign face design is being finalized and will use the Lake Country Scenic Byway logo and community name. Plans are to have the sign faces completed this summer. The faces will be anchored by vertical logs and a concrete and stone base. A federal grant will fund 80 percent of the sign faces.



(Continued on back)

Lake Belle Taine (continued)

Then came the drought year. In 1930 the water level was four feet lower than normal. The lake level was so low that "boathouses are roosting high and dry and beaches are much wider than they were originally." There was consent to try to restore the lake level to normal. Then to the delight of the people around the lake it was reported that about 30 springs, with the semblance of real gushers were adding a large volume of water to the lake. However, this evidently did not solve the problem.

In 1929 the local game wardens reported to the state game and fish department that unless something is done, the thousands of fish in Shallow Lake would winter kill. The State Department ordered that a temporary

dam be built at the outlet of Shallow Lake to hold back a head of three feet of water. The People of Belle Taine instituted an injunction and stopped the building of the dam.

In 1930 the state again attempted to build a dam. This was again stopped by the people. A letter dated November 23, 1929 to Mr. Benson, Attorney General of Minnesota, stated that the people were opposed to having a dam built across the Sand River. This objection was also issued by the Park Rapids Community Club and the County Commissioners refused to be a party to the building of this dam. The Akeley-Herald Tribune in an article said that this region should be "A Playground and not a Battlefield."

In the fall of 1930 Chas Kellner, owner of Shady Knoll Camp,

bought a tract of land on the Little Sand River. The next spring he built a brush dam.

In July of 1931 a meeting was held with about 150 people attending for the purpose of getting the dam removed from the Sand River. They claimed that the dam was holding back the water and it was being absorbed into the soil so it never reached Lake Belle Taine.

Water levels have varied greatly over the years. V. P. Szusitzky was employed by the county, and stated that "a well defined course can be found leading from Belle Taine down into the Crow Wing Valley and to Sixth Crow Wing Lake, indicating that for a period of time the waters of Belle Taine overflowed the Mantrap Valley bowl and sought lower levels in a visible course." Stumps a foot in diameter were found where they grew and were covered by several feet of

water. So for a long period of time the water had been as low as it was in 1931.

The 1930's was a period of less than normal rainfall. As the rainfall increased, the lake level returned to normal levels until the end of the century. According to one precipitation total from 1984-1994 the average yearly rainfall was about 24 inches. After this the totals increased almost every year until in 2000 the total precipitation was 33.17 inches. This caused the lake levels to again be above normal. So again there was a great outcry from the people around Lake Belle Taine to look for a way to lower the lake level.

A pumping system was suggested and looked into, however the cost was so great, and the County Commissioners refused to get involved, so nothing was done. So now nature is taking its course to solve the problem just as it did a century ago.

Why become a member of the Byway?

"I became involved in the Lake Country Scenic Byway because tourism is a fundamental part of our regional economy. Visitors contribute substantially to maintaining the high quality of area restaurants, businesses, services and social life that we all enjoy in the Byway communities. And, since Itasca State Park does not have accommodations for all of their many visitors, the Byway helps by providing information about other attractions, accommodations and services in the area."

Tim E. Holzkamm

Membership Levels

- 88 Mile Benefactor \$88/year
- Scenic Sponsor \$25/year
- Friend..... \$10/year
- Ambassador\$5/year

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail to: Lake Country Scenic Byway Association
PO Box 249, Park Rapids, MN 56470

Benefits of Membership

- Newsletter subscription
- E-mail announcements
- Opportunity to attend monthly meetings
- Input in key Byway Association issues
- Stakeholder in sustainability of the Byway
- Opportunity to attend Annual banquet and State Byway meeting
- Stay abreast of latest Byway developments