



The Living Great Lakes: Searching for the Heart of the Inland Seas

Jerry Dennis

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If fresh water is to be treasured, the Great Lakes are the mother lode. No bodies of water can compare to them. One of them, Superior, is the largest lake on earth, and the five lakes together contain a fifth of the world's supply of standing fresh water. Their ten thousand miles of shoreline bound eight states and a Canadian province and are longer than the entire Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States. Their surface area of 95,000 square miles is greater than New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined. People who have never visited them -- who have never seen a squall roar across Superior or the horizon stretch unbroken across Michigan or Huron -- have no idea how big they are. They are so vast that they dominate much of the geography, climate, and history of North America. In one way or another, they affect the lives of tens of millions of people.

The Living Great Lakes is the most complete book ever written about the history, nature, and science of these remarkable lakes at the heart of North America. From the geological forces that formed them to the industrial atrocities that nearly destroyed them, to the greatest environmental success stories of our time, the lakes are portrayed in all their complexity. The book, however, is much more than just history. It is also the story of the lakes as told by biologists, fishermen, sailors, and others whom the author grew to know while traveling with them on boats and hiking with them on beaches and islands.

The book is also the story of a personal journey. It is the narrative of a six-week voyage through the lakes and beyond as a crewmember on a tallmasted schooner, and a memoir of a lifetime spent on and near the lakes. Through storms and fog, on remote shores and city waterfronts, the author explores the five Great Lakes in all seasons and moods and discovers that they and their connecting waters -- including the Erie Canal, the Hudson River, and the East Coast from New York to Maine -- offer a surprising and bountiful view of America. The result is a meditation on nature and our place in the world, a discussion and cautionary tale about the future of water resources, and a celebration of a place that is both fragile and robust, diverse, rich in history and wildlife, often misunderstood, and worthy of our attention.

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