

Enhanced Mussel Watch Phase 1: Eastern Great Lakes



Zebra mussels on a rock.

Friday, September 18, 2009

-Kristina Lauenstein

The goal for the 18th was similar to that of most other days: to complete collections at two sites. Our first site, Niagara River, Niagara Falls (NRNF), was only a short distance away. After checking the weather report (snow forecasted in Buffalo, NY), we head south west. The site is located just outside the breakwater for the Niagara River Yacht Club. NRNF has historically been a difficult mussel collection requiring hours of work for a couple handfuls of the bivalves. Just before reaching the sampling location, we come across a long stretch of shore recently converted into a public park. With numerous rocks sticking out of the water just off shore, we decided to look for mussels. The bottom is natural rock and immediately provides us with more mussels than any previous efforts at the old site. It is decided that the site will be moved to this new location, only a quarter mile away. Less than 40 minutes in the water, and Gunnar and Ed have collected a good sample by any standard. After taking a water temperature reading (17° C) and marking down the coordinates, we move to the boat launch.

Out on the water, Mike turns the boat in the direction of the Love Canal (<http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/lovecanal/01.htm>). The partially completed Love Canal became a chemical dump site in the 1950's and famously contaminated the soil and water in the area. Now, the location of this Mussel Watch sediment collection site is an EPA Area of Concern. Considering its history, none of us object to wearing gloves while grab-sampling. This close to shore, the river bottom is only a meter down, and the water is clear enough to see the plants waving back and forth in the current. After four tries we had three samples to check for benthic infauna, and another eight drops of the grab sampler provided us with the sediment for chemistry and grain size analysis. The morning's work only took us three hours.

We head for Olcott but we soon learn from Mike that the axle on the boat trailer has broken. We turn around and several miles back find Mike. A couple of cops direct traffic around us on this narrow road with no shoulder while we wait for the tow truck and discuss options. Eventually, not one, but two tow trucks arrive and help raise the back of the trailer to remove the rear axle. In order to fix the trailer, we need replacement springs and on a Friday, it does not seem likely that parts can be ordered and put on before next week. Instead, we directly contact a shop that makes leaf springs. We are shocked when the springs we need are in stock and do not have to be custom made. We could have been delayed by four days, but instead are only delayed by four hours (or a half day's work – one site). We are coming to see the phrase 'Failure is not an option' stitched into Ed's hat as our motto.



After thanking Gary and Jeff, we return to Niagara Falls. Just before resting up for the next day, we hear loud noises outside our hotel and, hurrying toward the falls, see fireworks just inside Canada. Standing there, we realize that if not for the broken leaf spring, we could never have enjoyed this sight.