

On the Bright Side: Cooperstown man works to keep lake clean

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- By Shweta Karikhalli Staff Writer
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ContributedTrash picked up from Otsego Lake is shown in Angus Mackie's canoe in this undated photo.

When Cooperstown resident Angus Mackie first started picking litter out of Otsego Lake from his canoe more than 10 years ago, he didn't expect it to become a regular part of his life.

Mackie, who is the music director for Otesaga Hotel, said he was out for exercise that day and noticed trash floating on the lake. From that point on, he said, he'd make it a point to pick up whatever trash he saw floating on the lake when he went out on his racing canoe. Mackie said he tries to go every day, spending an hour and-a-half on the lake each time. Sometimes, to get a good workout, he said, he will go out to three miles from where his camp is, mark down where he sees litter, and pick it up on the way back. A recent haul from the lake included a small trash bag, a mylar balloon, a baseball cap, beer cans and an old chair. The most common things he sees are plastic water bottles, he said, but he once found parts of an old fan, which Mackie said he has "no idea how it got there." Sometimes, things like bottles are still in good shape so he'll bring them in to be recycled, he said. The things he sees on the lake have usually fallen out of people's boats, or have been thrown off the lake's docks, he said.

"The lake is interesting because you can get stuff that floats across the lake," Mackie said. "If the wind is right, it'll blow it straight across."

Native Americans inhabiting the Otsego Lake watershed called the lake O-TE-SA-GA, and it provided them with food and water, according to SUNY Oneonta's website about the lake. Otsego Lake is the headwaters of the Susquehanna River, which flows to the Chesapeake Bay. It is a 4,046-acre water body with a boat launch in the village of Cooperstown, according to the DEC's website. Several species of fish live there, including alewife, Atlantic salmon, yellow perch and walleye. It's also home to some aquatic vegetation along its shorelines and bays. While out on the lake, Mackie said he's had the opportunity to observe some of the wildlife that depend on it, such as mergansers and ducks, and has seen the nests of other birds.

Mackie said he feels satisfied knowing he can help contribute to the welfare of the lake along with benefiting his own health.

"Originally, I was just out for exercise and I saw something and I thought I should pick that up," he said. "Every day, it became interesting. It just feels good to do it."

Shweta Karikehalli, staff writer, can be reached at skarikehalli@thedailystar.com or 607-441-7221. Follow her @DS_ShwetaK on Twitter.