

SHELF LIFE

EXPLORING AN ADVENTURER

As Vermonters celebrate the rich heritage and stunning beauty of Lake Champlain, there may be no better companion reading this summer than “Champlain’s Dream,” a biography of French adventurer Samuel de Champlain by Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Hackett Fischer.

“Champlain’s Dream,” named by The New York Times as one of the “100 Notable Books” of 2008, is also the biography of a place and an idea. The place was New France in the 17th century — a huge area that once included the Champlain Valley. And the idea, the “dream,” was the radical notion for the time that Native Americans were human beings worthy of respect, and that the European newcomers could live in peace with them.

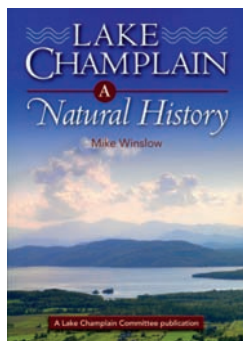
Champlain realized this dream imperfectly — his entry to the lake included a deadly armed clash, and he was not above backing one tribe against another in war if it suited his purposes — though he was far more respectful of Native Americans than most other explorers of his day.

Champlain is credited by Fischer with establishing and later salvaging New France. Yet though he traveled far and accomplished much, there was only one location he chose to name after himself — the magnificent lake that today separates Vermont from New York state: Lake Champlain.

- **“CHAMPLAIN’S DREAM”**

BY DAVID HACKETT FISCHER, 848 pages, hardcover, \$40, Simon & Schuster, New York

— Tom Slayton



SHELF LIFE

POPULAR SCIENCE

This accessible collection of natural history essays explores the complexities of the huge Lake Champlain ecosystem without being abstruse or jargon-ridden. Ranging from the prehistoric origin of the lake to its contemporary problems (largely man-made), author Mike Winslow steers a middle course between popular and academic science, and generally succeeds.

The book answers dozens of puzzling and interesting questions: What causes the heavy white foam that accumulates offshore on windy days? What effects are zebra mussels, an invasive species, causing on the lake? Why has it proven so difficult to re-establish lake trout in Champlain? And so on.

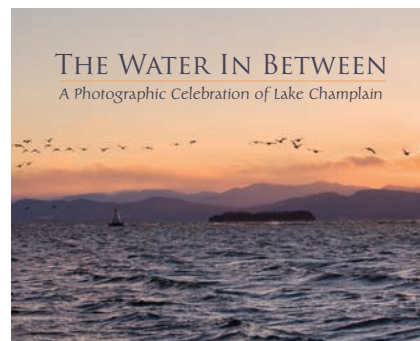
The book’s more than 50 short essays are consistently clear and interesting. For the most part, Winslow maintains a scientist’s detachment when addressing the future of the lake, but, in a final essay, he asks philosophically what the value is of a child’s happiness at catching a fish, the beauty of a lakeside marshy morning filled with fresh winds and wren calls, the comradeship of a lakeside bonfire in the evening.

We can only hope that “Lake Champlain: A Natural History” will help us — the humans who interact with this great ecosystem — make better and more informed decisions about its future.

- **“LAKE CHAMPLAIN: A NATURAL HISTORY”**

BY MIKE WINSLOW, 160 pages, paperbound, \$18.95, co-published by the Lake Champlain Committee, Burlington, and Images From the Past, Bennington

— Tom Slayton



SHELF LIFE

WATERSHED EVENT

Lake Champlain and the Champlain Valley, one of the most spectacularly beautiful regions in the Northeast, have a distinctive sense of place that is unlikely to be confused with anywhere else.

This book, a collection of photographs of the lake and its encompassing watershed, aims to evoke that sense of place visually. To that end, editor-publisher Jared Gange has collected photos that show the lake in many modes and seasons — stormy, whitecapped days as well as sunny, placid days, winter’s iceboats and ice-fishing shanties as well as summer’s sailboats and kayaks.

“The Water In Between” is beautiful, to be sure, a fun book to look at. But there’s a subtle intelligence included in its pages. For Gange has designed the book not simply around the lake or the valley, but around the watershed. There are photographs from the top of some of the tallest Adirondack peaks as well as from Lake of the Clouds, high on the north flank of Mount Mansfield.

Also included is a selection of photographs of the notable buildings and human activities of the region: the staunch, red-brick edifices that define the University of Vermont architecturally, Fort Ticonderoga, Shelburne Farms, the spires of Rutland, and several of the bridges that span the lake’s narrow places.

And so what we have is a deft blend of the ecological and the human in an elegantly designed book. The beauty of Lake Champlain has seldom been so well or completely depicted.

- **“THE WATER IN BETWEEN”**

EDITED BY JARED GANGE, 132 pages, hardcover, \$29.95, Huntington Graphics, Burlington

— Tom Slayton