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10/29/96
College Writing
Essay #3
Character of a Place
Final Draft
The Finger Lakes

The Finger Lakes Region of western upstate New York possesses natural beauty and characteristics that make it an ideal area for residence and vacation. However, because of New York City, the state's defining attribute to many outsiders and locals, the Finger Lakes' fruits are ignored and shared amongst a relatively small amount of people. In a state that bares the advantages and drawbacks of the World's financial capital, a nearby refuge that challenges even remote sections of the country with its untrampled forests and clean lakes, seems appealing but is somehow missed amid the bustle of Wall Street. People who visit the Finger Lakes will quickly realize that New York includes, along with concrete jungles, wilderness on the other end of the spectrum, wilderness created by the forces of our planet.

Glaciers formed the hilly terrain characteristic of the Finger Lakes region, by carving out the lakes and valleys. Lush deciduous forests with an ample amount of pines cover the countryside, providing homes for abundant wildlife. A very popular method of exploring and experiencing the forest is on horseback which gives riders a completely different vantage point on the passing scenery. Crystal clear brooks meander through rugged terrain as they constantly erode away at formations of prehistoric slate and limestone, making it easy to find fossils and rocks shaped and brilliantly colored by these ancient but persistent streams. Waterfalls nestled deep in the woods serve as ideal places for a picnic or simply to reflect upon civilization without being faced with the world's ordinary pressures. While driving on the winding rural roads, you will greet many deer with your headlights; hopefully not this other parts of your car. Raccoons can become a nuisance by scavenging through your garbage at night while rabbits can be found nibbling on the grass in your yard. Even in the most developed areas, the forest is no more than a walk away and proves to be an ideal place for recreation or simply to escape the stress of modern life and revert back to simpler times.

Swimming in the abundant bodies of water or even a backyard pool refreshes anyone during the region's hot summer days. Fortunately for those who dislike humidity, the air is usually dry and comfortable in comparison to that of coastal areas. Fall is a very beautiful time of the year as the trees turn to their pleasant autumnal shades before shedding their leaves. The typical seasonal traditions are at their heart here, as the area has a rich native American history and the countryside turns out mass amounts of pumpkins, corn, and other defining characteristics of fall. During the harsh winters, the Finger Lakes Region pulls in some of the highest figures in annual snowfall in the Northeast. The enormous lakes are not forgotten by the changing seasons as they freeze over and seem to transform into great barren white deserts. Even the biggest winter enthusiasts welcome springtime which can truly be compared to a rebirth as wildlife and civilization seems to bud out of the melting snow. Lake residents construct their docks and prepare their boats for the upcoming warm weather while farmers till their fields and plan the summertime crop. The local wildlife emerges from hibernation and once again becomes part of this renewed world. This climatic cycle is so distinct in the Finger Lakes, but each season bares a different type of beauty and new way of life and play that is a pleasant change from the previous.

The actual lakes of the Finger Lakes region, like many area towns and counties are named after past Indian tribes of the region. In the 16th century, the famous Iroquois League was centered in this area as it was a prosperous center of eastern Native Americans. Nowadays people are reminded of these tribes only

though the names of the lakes and towns, and an occasional Indian trading post. The principal lakes are the Conesus, Hemlock, Canadice, Honeoye, Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles, and Otisco Lakes, varying anywhere in length from 11 to 40 miles long. Glaciers cut these lakes during the Ice age while forcefully expanding through the interconnecting stream valleys of old. Thus, some of lakes feature steep rocky slopes and depths in excess of 600 feet as does the majestic Lake Seneca. Atop some of these cliffs stand resort hotels and the million dollar homes of the areas wealthiest inhabitants. The views from such scenic points are truly breathtaking, making anyone jealous of those with the fortune of watching a sailing race from their front porch over breakfast. While these lakes are integral part of a beautiful landscape they are pleasing in more ways than just to the eye.

Despite the lakes' constant recreational use, they remain clean and peaceful, especially in the evening. Each lake boasts at least one manmade sandy beach which are rarely ever crowded with swimmers, while others choose to swim at the private docks that line the shores. Motor boating and water skiing are very popular especially because of the smooth surface that becomes dangerously choppy only during a substantial storm. Because the lakes are nestled in valleys, winds are often strong enough for remarkable sailing and windsurfing, although crafts such as jet-skis and sleek speed boats definitely outnumber the wind-powered vessels. Paddling a canoe or kayak can be fun and a great workout, especially in the early morning before the power boats head out for the day. Eating lunch on your boat while dangling your feet into the cool water and drinking the locally produced, caffeine packed Jolt Cola, is a great way to take in your mid day meal. Fast food restaurants like Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds cater to boaters as well as some feature docks along with a conventional parking lot for automobiles. Fishing, whether from your front lawn, a waterfront park, or a boat, is great on all the lakes and is a very popular pastime. The lakes are home to trout, bass, and large bottom feeding carp in particular as well as edible shellfish such as mussels and clams. During the winter, when the lakes freeze over, ice fishing, skating, and pick up hockey games can be seen taking place while the more adventurous take their Jeeps out for a spin on the solid ice. In addition, the premiere night life of the Finger Lakes revolves around the lakes themselves, as the shores are lined with numerous expensive restaurants and classy bars which are all accessible by boat. It goes without saying that the lakes are the heart of the region, but this is not by accident, for they provide entertainment and enjoyment for all.

The local residents are another attribute that make this region so pleasing and accommodating, to visitors and fellow inhabitants. For the most part a laid-back, friendly nature is characteristic of the locals, enhancing one's experience in the area. As tourism has and continues to increase in the Finger Lakes region the area has slowly become more commercial, but this shift has been limited to larger towns. Still, simple people who hold family values high on their list of priorities appear to comprise the majority of the population. Privately owned Inns and restaurants in which the cook will offer to make you any food you desire as long as the local supermarket sells the ingredients, are a welcomed change from hotels like the Marriot which does not rely on each customer's satisfaction for success. Stands set up on the side of the road selling refreshments or locally grown fruit also hint towards the friendly personal atmosphere. All in all, the Finger Lakes Region is very down to earth, as pastimes such as baseball and bowling still thrive, compared to drugs and radical cutting edge lifestyles and entertainment found in urban centers. While a resident of Soho may find the company in the Finger Lakes rather boring and stale, traditions such as the family dinner and good-hearted hospitality which were once considered the fabric of America, still exist there today.

Farming is a major source of income in the Finger Lakes area as the climate and soil is conducive to many crops. The seemingly endless fields of golden corn and lush green pastures for dairy cows make up a large sector of the total land. While it seems that abandon farms with overgrown fields being converted into subdivisions are more common than ever, the feeling of being in farm country is

definitely not foreign. Even people who live in more populated areas often keep prolific fruit trees or raspberry bushes in their yards. The famous and growing Canandaigua Wine Company's center of operations, main vineyards, and distillery are all within miles of Lake Canandaigua. Taking a tour of this facility will remind you of a winery from central France rather than upstate New York. The performing arts center of Finger Lakes Community College emits a glorious glow over the lake during performances. Obviously, with the increase of technology, people have moved away from the farms and into the booming towns and small cities of the region. Tourism grows considerably each year and the real estate market has expanded as well to accommodate the influx of wealthy people who have recognized what the area has to offer. A wide spectrum of lifestyles, occupations, and culture is found in the Finger Lakes making it a diverse region that offers simple pleasures within mere miles.

Outside of the lakes themselves recreation and outdoor activity is a big part of the full Finger Lakes experience. Hiking and camping in the many nearby parks and campgrounds will satisfy any outdoor enthusiast. During the winter, one can snow ski in the areas three ski resorts that, while not comparable to the skiing of the West or even Vermont, gain popularity because of their convenient proximity. Cross-country skiing and snowmobiling are perfect for the abundant and vast farm fields while blanketed in snow. Sports are also a major part of the Finger Lakes Region, as local schools have competitive baseball and football leagues. Hockey is also gaining formidable popularity as one will discover by the construction of several neighborhood ice rinks throughout the area. The possibilities of outdoor activity are nearly endless and make the natural beauty of the land accessible to anyone.

The Finger Lakes region bares much of the fruit that this integral state has to offer, but who knows what the future will bring. The natural rustic atmosphere defines the area, giving it a distinct aura that no other place I have ever seen can duplicate. But more and more people discover what I and others have always known each year and it has already started to take its tolls. The Gap and Urban Outfitters have replaced Snow Country Bike and Ski shop and the Native American pottery store. What will happen when the big corporations move in and commercialize this peaceful place where one can as of now escape consumer exploitation? Will the down to earth friendly locals be replaced by shrewd profit minded businessmen? Only time will tell, but for now it is still a haven that we can rely on for bringing the pleasures of our ever dwindling natural world. I thus encourage anyone to experience the Finger Lakes before they are corrupted by the ignorance of the masses and wills of the elite. Hopefully this great land will be saved by the shadow of New York City that has protected it so far and visitors will come to get away from the city, not to bring it with them.

