

Submarine update and a National Park bill status

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on August 10, 2012)

First let me thank those readers who have pitched in to help clarify the “submarine” story. As is often the case with *Historically Speaking* articles, I get a start on the story from some individuals and readers who know about the subject from personal experience chime in immediately upon publication and contact me with additional and often clarifying information. What a great thing that is as I am the first to admit history is not dependent upon a single individual's contribution or documentation...and rightly so.

I have learned that the submarine was a “quarter scale” model and involved work done at both Y-12 and K-25. The K-25 shop was chosen because of experience with large fabrication projects and likely for the workload capacity to do the work. But only part of the submarine was built there. Some fabrication and test equipment development was evidently done at Y-12.

Tom Smith, a good friend who has lived some of this work for others history over the years, having traveled from Oak Ridge to the site to watch a test of the submarine, identified the actual lake where this testing was done as Lake Pend Oreille in Bayview, Idaho, (near Coeur d'Alene). The lake is in northern Idaho and is over 1,000 feet deep. Tom identified the name of the model as “Steelhead” (as they mainly name them after fish).

A web search quickly turned up the name of the lake as French for “ear-hanging or pendant” a characteristic of the Kalispell Indians, who made their home near the lake. Viewed from the air or on a map the lake is shaped like a human ear.

It is also a glacier formed lake that is the fifth deepest in the United States. The Farragut State Park is the present location where the United States Navy continues to occupy a portion of the original Farragut Naval Training Station of World War II and still conducts acoustical underwater submarine research.

Bill Klemm, retired Navy Admiral, and now B&W Y-12 Vice President and Deputy General Manager shared some information about recent U. S. Navy work at the lake. Bill said, “Most recently they have been doing testing with a more sophisticated scale model submarine which the Navy ran a contest among school kids to name. The kids came up with ‘Cutthroat’ (after the Salmon). And the Navy accepted and named the boat Cutthroat!”

Tom went on to say that his personal involvement with the submarine model where the large parts were built at K-25 was actually in the mid 1980's. He traveled to Idaho for one of the tests of “Steelhead” and also saw the results of work done in Oak Ridge on the “Yellow Barge” which Tom said, “...was a facility on the lake for performing and monitoring tests.” He described the lake as a “beautiful place.”

I am sure there will be more information about this work for others effort for the U. S. Navy as more people who participated in the work come forward or are contacted. I am pleased that Robin Spradlen who has been a force in overseeing work for others efforts at Y-12 for several years has taken an interest in this “submarine story” as well. She also made a trip to the lake to view one of the tests.

This “submarine” model is but one example of some of the exciting and technologically significant work that has been done in Oak Ridge over the years. There is much more that has been done, more that is being done today and, I am sure, even more to be done in the future!

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This brings me to an article I read online today from the National Park Conservation Association regarding the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The link was posted on Facebook by the Atomic Heritage Foundation. Here is the link: <http://www.parkadvocate.org/new-national-parks-would-help-fill-the-gaps-in-our-culture-and-history?p=1376>

The NPCA placed emphasis on the opportunities the Manhattan Project National Historical Park presents to the Park Service as they advance toward the goals of parks of the future. According to the NPCA, a gap that exists in the present park system is "Expanding Science and Technology," which certainly is filled by the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, which will feature on technology that grew out of the Manhattan Project here at Oak Ridge as well as Hanford and Los Alamos!

I also learned today that both the U. S. House of Representatives and the Senate expect to take action on the Manhattan Project National Historical Park bills in September. I am also very pleased to see that Los Alamos and Hanford are planning events on August 13 to encourage added attention to the efforts being made by the Congressional delegations. Hopefully we in Oak Ridge will include and emphasis on the park bills as plans are made for a similar effort on September 19 in Oak Ridge.

The reason these dates have been chosen for special events is that August 13 is the 70th anniversary of the official formation of the Manhattan District and September 19 is the 70th anniversary of the date when General Leslie Groves chose the site in East Tennessee that has become Oak Ridge. Interest in this commemorative event has been expressed by the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association, the American Museum of Science and Energy and the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau and others.

More will be said about the planning as we get closer to the date. I will also keep us informed of what takes place at Los Alamos and Hanford on August 13. I know that Heather McClanahan is planning a reception at the Los Alamos Historical Museum where Senator Bingaman will be the featured speaker giving an update on the status of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.

Heather sent the following quote, "The Los Alamos Historical Society appreciates the leadership Senator Bingaman and his colleagues from Tennessee and Washington, as well as Congressman Hastings and his colleagues from New Mexico and Tennessee, have shown in support of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. We have preserved this world-changing history for nearly 50 years and are excited that the National Park Service will be joining in that effort."

If you desire to contact your elected representative regarding the park, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has provided an easy way to send a letter to your congressional representatives: <https://secure2.convio.net/nthp/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=721>

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Photo of Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho, used by permission of Wikipedia Commons and made by the U. S. Corps of Engineers as a public domain image