



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



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Lake Chargoggagogmanchauggagoggcharbunagungamaugg



Located just north of the Massachusetts/Connecticut border in the medium-sized town on Webster (MA), and usually referred to by its more sensible name of Webster Lake, this body of water boasts the longest name of anyplace in the USA. As shown above, the name contains 43 letters. Some variations have as many as 45. (I guess it depends on the “gaug” versus the “gog”, or maybe a doubled “n”. Who knows?)



There are a couple of signs around town that flaunt the full name. Webster is a nice town, but this lengthy moniker is one of its major drawing points. It was, after all, why I had taken the ride here.



There was one sign, however, that I wanted my own picture of. Way back around 1980, when I had a couple of darkrooms that I could use for developing black-and-white photos, I had been driving through Webster and had seen this large, wooden sign with the full name of the lake in arched text over the profile head of a Nipmuc Indian in full headdress. It was cartoonish in style, but it was not mocking or unflattering.

For years, I had that B&W photo on the wall in my bedroom. It was always good for a conversation. What it was also good for sometimes, was a buzz game. Get good and baked, and I will teach you how to say it.

The pronunciation had been drilled into me at a young age. Dad had entertained us with it when we were 10 or so. I think he even held something hostage – like a new baseball glove or something – saying that I could have it when I could pronounce the name. Thus motivated, I learned it quickly.

Anyway, my friends Tim and Moonhead both took it as a challenge to learn the name. It took many tries. Eventually, though, Tim learned the simple rhythm of it and nailed it soon thereafter.

The key is that the name is not a word, really; it's a sentence. Actually, it's three independent clauses, combined into a sentence. Legend has it that in the Nipmuc language it meant, "You fish on your side of the lake, I fish on my side, and nobody fishes in the middle." It referred back to the 1600's when British settlers and soldiers were becoming too obtrusive in the area. The name states the agreement that was made between the opposed parties. Basically, the Nipmucs told the Brits to stay the hell off our side of the lake.

Historians have since tried to take the fun out of the name by suggesting that the translation is much different, but I read their very differently worded version, and the spirit is the same.

So, when you use the rhythm of the phrases, the pronunciation follows:

- Chaggogagoggman – You fish on your side of the lake
- Chaggagogg – I fish on mine
- Charbungungamaugg – nobody fishes in the middle

Sadly, though, I could not find my coveted sign. I drove the full loop around the perimeter of the lake, even crossing into Connecticut so I could turn around and see it on my way into Webster. But it was nowhere to be seen.

Finally, I swallowed my pride and started asking people at the combination gas station and eatery. The first woman was new to the area and knew nothing of it. The second woman, about my age, had lived there all her life, had seen it many times, but could not quite say where. She even guessed that maybe it had been removed?

Two local guys, both older than me, overheard us talking and jumped in with directions. They confidently directed me to where she was tentatively steering me, and even provided landmarks: *When you get to the U-Haul place, pull in and turn around, then you'll see it on your way back towards town.*

It wasn't there. I turned back around and back around again. It was not there. I could clearly see where it should have been, but the woman's conjecture looked to be true; that iconic sign had been removed.

Now, where it was could have been the issue. You can find countless photos of it online by googling the town or the lake (example →→→).

That means that a *lot* of people had pulled over to snap a picture of it. Trouble was, there was no safe place to do so. The road (MA-12, Worcester Road) has two lanes, carries a good amount of hurrying traffic, and winds through moderately wooded terrain. Any vehicle pulled up on the shoulder would be an accident waiting to happen. One could speculate that the town of Webster took down the sign because of frequent accidents or close calls.

One could also speculate that some big rig missed a curve, plowed into it, and smashed it to smithereens (wherever that is).

So, no photo of my own. I could lie and say that one up there was mine, but the truth makes for a better story in this case.





Webster Lake is the largest natural lake in Massachusetts, Connecticut or Rhode Island. It consists of three “ponds” (see wall sign photo), and it has quite a few small islands. Today was a beautiful summer day, and Little Bird was eager to do some flying, so I drove to one of the peninsulas that protrudes out into the lake, cozied into the far end of the parking lot of a nice-looking restaurant, and set him loose. Fly, Little Bird, fly!







If you look really closely, you can see Blue Maxx in the near end of the lot. If you look *really, really* closely, you can see me sitting in the open doorway of BM, doing my piloting thing.

GooGirl chose another wonderfully mellow route back to my base camp in Walpole. Great day.

