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DULUTH -- The layman might take it as a slightly zany observation but Lake Superior has "nothing in abundance except water itself."

To the biologist, it's a sensible evaluation. He simply means that the largest body of fresh water in the world is not far from being perfectly pure.

Since 1956 a limnological (fresh water) research force from the University of Minnesota's Duluth and Minneapolis campuses has been collecting basic information on Lake Superior.

It began with the study of surface currents, water temperatures, nutrients and chemicals and, this summer, the University team is busy learning how these factors--along with sunlight--affect the development of the lake's plant and animal life.

"What we're doing is establishing 'baselines of normality'," explains Dr. Theron O. Odlaug, head of the UMD biology department. "We're determining the amount of microscopic life and algae at certain depths for reference in future studies."

That little life is being found prompts Dr. Theodore A. Olson, professor of public health in the School of Public Health on the Minneapolis campus, to remark:

"It (the lake) is the closest thing we have anywhere to a perfectly pure surface water."

Started on a temporary basis, a permanent Limnological Research Center was established in 1963 in UMD's Lake Superior Research Station--a converted fish hatchery--on Duluth's shoreline (6008 London Road).

The Center comes under the University's Graduate School with a portion of the Louis and Maud Hill grant of \$207,721 that made it possible partially supporting the 1964 operation. Dr. Herbert E. Wright, Jr., Minneapolis, is director.

There are three graduate students from Minneapolis and two undergraduates from UMD working with Odlaug and Olson this summer.

David Clem, a native of Washington and an officer in the U.S. Public Health Service; Curtis Golden, a North Carolinian, and James Summers from Tennessee are doing graduate work.

Golden and Summers hold M.A. degrees from North Carolina College at Durham and are seeking second master's degrees in public health biology.

UMD is represented by Ron Cheetham, Duluth, and Bill Tuominen, Floodwood. Both are biology majors.

Last summer the U.S. Corps of Engineers donated the 30-foot launch Oneota to the researchers. Until then boats had to be rented. The Oneota periodically moves away from its moorings at Knife River to collect samples in a four-mile towing round a mile off the North Shore in the vicinity of Larsmont.

The boat's equipment includes several types of water bottles and nets for sampling the water, a bathythermograph for measuring water temperature at various depths and the "secchi disc" and photometer-- both used for registering light penetration.

At the laboratory the water samples are concentrated, filtered and often concentrated again. A visual count can be made by microscope to determine plant life present and samples measured with a colormeter to check the milligrams of chlorophyll present in a cubic meter of water.