

Great Lakes Google

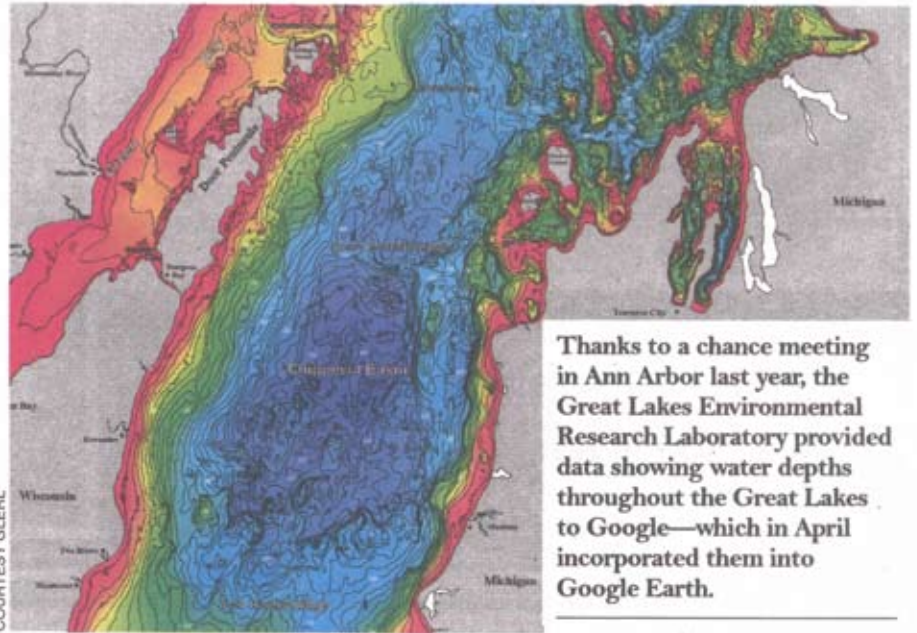
An Ann Arbor lab helps Google Earth go in depth into the Great Lakes.

Early versions of the Earth-imaging software were mocked as “Google Dirt” by renowned marine explorer Sylvia Earle, because they showed topography on land, but not the ocean floors. Google fixed that in February by adding an “oceans layer.” Thanks to Ann Arborite David Schwab, in April Google Earth added the Great Lakes, too.

Schwab is an oceanographer at the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory. GLERL is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Schwab learned that Google had asked NOAA for ocean floor images. At a conference in Ann Arbor last year, he recalls, “I saw my friend Pete Giencke. Pete used to work nearby in the Great Lakes Commission. He’s now with Google Earth. . . . I asked him how it was going with getting the oceans into Google Earth and whether the Great Lakes were going to be included.

“He kind of nudged me with his elbow and said, ‘Shh, we can’t talk about that.’ It

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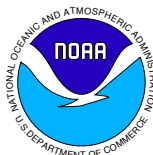
seems Google normally doesn’t give out any information about an upcoming product until it’s released. So I said to Pete, ‘If there’s anything I can do to help with the Great Lakes part, you let me know.’” That led to an email exchange and eventually to GLERL supplying Google with bathymetric data showing water depths throughout the Great Lakes – information collected by “hundreds of ships for almost a hundred years,” says Schwab.

To help publicize the new feature, a team at GLERL worked with a team at Google to develop a narrated “virtual tour” of the Great Lakes. Recently added as a layer to Google Earth, the tour fea-

tures four or five “Points of Interest” for each lake, each with an accompanying visual element, often a clip from YouTube, such as scuba divers exploring a sunken vessel. Users can customize the tour by adding their own points of interest.

Google told GLERL to avoid any links that might have a copyright complication, so you won’t hear Gordon Lightfoot singing *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*. But, Schwab says, they were told that most of Google-owned YouTube was “fair game.”

And how did the GLERL team find the YouTube clips it needed? “Well,” says Schwab, with the tone of someone stating the obvious, “we just Googled.”



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