

### ***Zama River***

The Zama River rises in the wetlands around Bootis Hill about 30 km northwest of Zama City and flows generally south for approximately 85 km before entering Hay Lake. The river was named by **Ernest Wilson Hubbell (ME# 3427)** of the Dominion Land Survey. **Hubbell** was born in Brockville, Canada East (later Ontario) in 1862. He joined the military and served as a Lieutenant during the Riel Rebellion, following which he attended the Royal Military College in Kingston, graduating in 1881. A few years later, he was employed by the Dominion Land Survey.

As chief of a survey party, **Hubbell** traveled extensively throughout western Canada. He recorded the name “Zammah River” in his 1921 field notes. That same year, **Hubbell** drew a map of Hay Lake. On this map he notes the “Zamah River” being on average two chains wide, four feet deep, having a current of two mph and flowing through muskeg and swamp. He also notes an “Indian trail” on the river’s west side. In a letter dated 21 March 1922 to the Geographic Board of Canada (GBC), **Hubbell noted** that “[d]uring the season of 1921, I traversed Hay Lake, Northern Alberta, and named rivers ... being unable to identify those streams with any others previously recorded.” He further explained that the name “Zammah [is] the transliteration of the name of the Slavey Chief whose trail follows up this river.” The GBC accepted the name during its 4 July 1922 meeting, but altered the spelling to Zama River; no explanation being given for the alteration.

Other surveyors have also commented on the river, notably B. M. Rustad in 1965, who noted in Section 34 of Township 116-7-W6, that the Zama River was 13 feet wide and flowed through “gently undulating country well stocked with Poplar and Spruce to 12 inches diameter, Willow and Alder.” The Dene Tha’ people (formerly known as the Slave or Slavey Indians) identify the river by the traditional name *Kólaa Zahéh*, which translates as “Old Man River.” There is some thought that this may be a reference to Dene chief Zamba or Zammah referred to by **Hubbell**, but it is more likely to be a reference to First Nations spirituality and creation stories.

### ***Zama Lake***

Zama Lake is located about 50 km southwest of Zama City. The lake also appears to have been named by **E. W. Hubbell**, DLS. Oddly, the Zama River does not directly enter Zama Lake; Zama Lake and Hay Lake are connected by a substantial wetland. Although the name for both the river and lake were recorded in 1921, the name Zama Lake was not officially adopted until November 6, 1944. The Dene Tha’ do not use the name Zama Lake, but use traditional names to identify the lake. Some of the Dene Tha’ use the name *K’ah Woti Túé*, which translates as “Main Blind Lake” (referring to a hunting or duck blind). The Dene around Assumption on the Hay Lake Reserve identify the lake with the name *Tulonh Mieh*, which translates as “Where the Water Ends.” This is thought to be a reference to the lake being the western-most of the Hay-Zama Lakes group.

### **Additional Resources:**

More information about these Ernest Hubbell and the Zama group of geographical features and places can be found at:

Alberta Land Surveyors Association, “Ernest Wilson Hubbell,” *Alberta’s Land Surveying History*, available from [http://www.landsurveyinghistory.ab.ca/Characters/Hubbell\\_EW.htm](http://www.landsurveyinghistory.ab.ca/Characters/Hubbell_EW.htm).