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Living the Lake Life: Indiana's Lake James in the 1950s and 1960s

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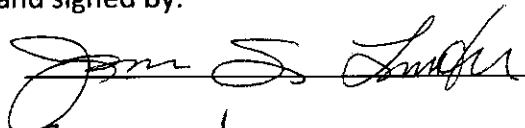
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Living the Lake Life: Indiana's Lake James in the 1950s and 1960s

A Thesis

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

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of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Warren Travis

April 24, 2017

Living the Lake Life: Indiana's Lake James in the 1950s and 1960s

Tens of thousands of years ago a glacier that covered northern Indiana started to melt. As the glacier retreated, it left hundreds of lakes in northeastern Indiana.¹ These lakes eventually gave rise to the phrase “lake life” and have been a center for recreational activities for over a century. “Lake life” has become an important part of culture in northeastern Indiana. Hoosiers will even refer to “going to the lake,” without specifying which lake they are going to. The lakes in this area provide a healthy way for youth and families to spend their summer outside, enjoying what nature has to offer. Families come together to fish, swim, boat, and engage in water sports. There are thousands of homes that sit right on the lakes in northeastern Indiana, ranging in price from a modest amount for a small cottage to millions for large houses on vast properties. While purchasing a lake home might be out of reach for many, there are public access sites on most of the lakes in northeastern Indiana where anyone can trailer in a boat for the day.² Public boat ramps and state recreation areas mean that there are ways for any family to go for a weekend or day and enjoy a lake in northeastern Indiana.

Steuben County has over 100 natural lakes, and most Hoosiers within driving distance have some memory of a visit or a lifetime of visits to a lake in Steuben County.³ Lake James sits in the northeastern corner of Steuben county. Lake James connects to four lakes by boat: Snow Lake, Jimmerson Lake, Little Otter Lake and Big Otter Lake. Lake James is the fourth largest natural lake in Indiana at 1229 acres.⁴ Lake James's deepest point is 88 feet deep, which occurs in the third of three basins that compose Lake James.⁵ Lake James is spring fed and is part of the James Chain watershed, which makes the water incredibly clear and pristine in condition.⁶



The map at left depicts the basins including labels along with nearby Jimmerson Lake.

The fifties and sixties in Indiana were much the same as they were anywhere else, with lots of growth and prosperity. This era brought about many new things to the culture of the lake. Watersports blossomed along with dance and pleasure boating. Lake life was soaring in popularity and the new prosperity following World War II allowed Hoosiers to spend time together in leisure. Lake James was a gleaming treasure that attracted all ages to cool down on hot summer days. Jack Berger, who lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, spent his summers at Lake James, even though it was about four hours away. When asked why his family and many other families chose Lake James, he said the “beauty of this lake system. There really isn’t anything like it.”⁸ Indeed, the crystal clear water and enormous layout of this natural treasure drew people in by the boatload. In addition, there are not very many lakes in Ohio, and in Indiana many are shallow with very poor water quality.

Jack Berger’s family owned or rented property on the Lake James chain since before he was born. Jack Berger has written several books, including *The Bubbles Rise*, an autobiography

that of course includes information about Lake James. The book is titled *The Bubbles Rise* because Jack Berger almost drowned in Lake James while he was young. Almost every summer from birth (January 11, 1929) has been spent on the Lake James chain where Berger has watched the lakes transform.⁹

During the fifties and into the sixties on Lake James, the lakes were strictly summer fun. Nobody lived on Lake James during the winter months, and Berger also said he could not recall anyone who lived on Lake James year round during that time.¹⁰ Most families came up in the spring, with the mother and children staying for the duration of the summer, or about three months. Fathers would generally drive home for the weekdays to work and come back on the weekends. Fathers typically would take off a couple weeks from work during the summer to stay at Lake James as well, if their finances allowed.¹¹ This led to the main draw of Lake James to be habitants of Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana within driving distance, since the men would have to drive back and forth at the beginning and end of the weekends. There were a considerable number of lake residents from other cities, including Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Toledo, Ohio.

Despite the fact that cottage prices on Lake James are outrageously expensive today, they were very affordable in the fifties and sixties. Below is a newspaper article depicting a fully furnished cottage for rent for \$40 a month on nearby connecting Jimmerson Lake (this equals about \$300 a month today, whereas in 2017 they are actually \$2000 or more a month).¹² There was no wealth disparity on Lake James in the 50's and 60's like there is today. Berger recalled the lake being of all social classes and almost exclusively family homes, unlike the large retirement summer homes that are popular today. Berger noted that there were some wealthy families on Lake James during that time, but that they might have had a slightly bigger cottage and a Chris-Craft boat instead of a typical outboard (Chris-Craft are more expensive). There

were families that ranged from factory workers to wealthy business owners and everyone mingled together.¹³

FOR RENT—Furnished cottage
on Jimmerson Lake, one half
mile north of Bledsoe Beach. \$40
a month. Call 744 Auburn or
write Box 255 Auburn, Indiana.
43-44¹⁴

Lake James was a very social place, and the outdoors activities on the lake promoted that. One of these outdoor activities that was very popular was fishing. Fishing on Lake James in the fifties and sixties was incredibly good; Jack Berger commented that it was far better than the fishing today. Lake James has lots of drop-offs where the shoreline goes from eight to ten feet deep to about thirty feet deep or more. Jack Berger stated that those drop offs used to be covered in weeds. He and his friends would anchor their boat right off the drop off and fish right on the edge of the weeds. The larger number of motorized boats on the lake does not permit that wall of weeds to grow on any of the drop-offs in the lake today. When asked what the best fish on Lake James was to catch and eat, Jack Berger mentioned fishing for catfish. He said that the catfish tasted the best and that he and his friends and their fathers would all get into boats just before dusk and head out to catch catfish with worms.¹⁵ As seen in the article below, even someone fishing in the sixties with a small hook and bluegill bait could have caught a fish of a lifetime. James McConnell caught an eleven pound Northern Pike with three pound test line, and a seven pound Northern Pike was considered huge on the lake at that time.¹⁶

Auburn Fishermen Land Big One At Lake James

James McConnell of 906 South Cedar street, Auburn, and Clair Woolever of 1326 South Jackson street, Auburn, two ardent fishermen who are practically on a "first name" basis with every fish in the area, combined their talents to land the "big one" Thursday afternoon.

The two and Arman Campbell of 819 Hazel street, Auburn, were fishing on Lake James, Thursday afternoon and the only two fish caught for a long time were two bluegills by the "rookie" of the group, Mr. Campbell.

The two oldtimers were not to be outdone, however, when suddenly McConnell's bait and hook were given a terrific jar. McConnell set the hook in the fish's mouth and could easily tell that he had a large fish hooked.

He called for aid and Woolever ran over to assist. While McConnell held a tight line on the fish, Woolever got down to the hole in the ice and gently guided the fish toward it. At the end of 20 minutes of tedious work, the two were able to land an 11-pound northern pike.

The feat was even more remarkable because McConnell was using only a three-pound test line and a bluegill bait on a small hook.

Veteran fishermen agree that a northern weighing as much as seven pounds caught on Lake James is a fair sized catch.

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Newspaper clipping at left from 1960 depicts a fishing story of some men on Lake James.

Another fish that was great to eat was a trout like fish called cisco. Like the weeds on the drop-offs that used to grow, pollution and churning from boats on the lake today have made it so cisco cannot be found in the lake chain. Cisco are a lot like trout, requiring pristine water quality, and all the motor oil has eliminated them from the lakes, because the degradation of oil in water lowers the amount of oxygen in the water. Below is a newspaper article from the year 1961 that notes the cisco dying off due to low oxygen content in the water.¹⁸ In the fifties and sixties the cisco were plentiful and many people would catch them and eat them.¹⁹ There are still some lakes in Steuben county where cisco may be found, but sadly they cannot be found in the Lake James chain anymore. Jack Berger mentioned that the cisco would come to the surface for two weeks in the spring every year presumably to spawn, and people would go out with hand nets and net them up to cook and eat them. He cannot recall anyone catching them any other way, such as a rod and reel. The police in Angola would do this and hold a fish fry benefit.²⁰



Conservation and Outdoor Recreation

by "Pinetree" Bill
Angola Conservation Club

CISCO DYING FOR LACK OF OXYGEN

In the past week a Cisco kill took place on Clear Lake. Conservation officer, Bob Summe, estimated that the kill might run to three or four thousand fish. A definite count could not be taken as the dead fish were all over the lake. Conservation officers have received calls on this all week from people who want to know why the fish are dying.

This is a large kill and one that could effect Cisco fishing on Clear Lake for some time. Conservation officers made an investigation on the first complaint of the fish dieing. There seemed to be little cause for it and there wasn't too much to be alarmed about at first as only 75 or 80 fish were seen. As the week wore on more fish appeared and the toll ran up fast. Officer Summe contacted Fish Biologists McRenalds and Leedy of the Department of Conservation. They believed that there had occurred an oxygen deficiency in the water at current water temperature. However, a check was made and Dave Weaver, biologist, was sent in on Wednesday. Water temperature and oxygen content checks were taken at many levels. It was found that if the cisco went into water right for them, temperature wise, the oxygen was deficient. If they went into water with enough oxygen, it was too warm for them. In other words they had no place to go.

This is not an uncommon thing to happen as many lakes that contain Cisco do this about this time in the year. However, they usually do not kill as many fish as this one did. This is the reason Cisco rise in Snow Lake about this time each year. Many lakes have this happen every year such as Snow Lake. Other lakes have it happen every few years. However, we are not trying to minimize the kill in Clear Lake. It is serious and may affect the Cisco fishing in this lake for many years. In fact it could kill off the Cisco completely. This is not likely, but if the condition stays long enough, the kill might not leave enough parent fish to keep the specie going.

In this area we are on the very southern limit of the Cisco range. Some of our lakes, they believe, may be on the verge of extinction now. Cisco are very touchy to pollution in them. The Cisco ranges further south in Indiana than any other place in the United States, but this may not stay.

What will be the effect of this on Clear Lake Cisco? They do not know at this time. Time will only tell. If we catch a few fish on the lake this fall, it will indicate that they may be on the out. If the take is good it will indicate that they come through well enough that they might make a comeback. However one of the things that could be done by the people is to keep from netting the lake if possible. For best results it might be better for Cisco netters to net elsewhere this year and leave as much parent stock in the lake as possible. I don't think the fish will be good anyway. However conservation officers would like to have one or two nets in the lake this fall to see if there are any fish left.

One of the big problems fac-

ing the Cisco as well as other fish is pollution in the lakes. This affects Cisco very quickly and will be one of the major causes for it's disappearance. We as conservationists must help to keep pollution out of our lakes as much as we can. The place to start is not at Indianapolis but here in Steuben county. Many people are saying "Why don't someone do something about our fishing and at the same time they have a sewage drain going into the lake. Our county health department is doing a wonderful job, but they don't get much help from the people. It also might be a good idea if we as fishermen would take a few less Cisco in a year and have them a little longer.

DID YOU KNOW?

Do you know the difference between the terms, deciduous and coniferous, when speaking of trees. Deciduous means leaf dropping trees and refers to the hardwoods. Coniferous means cone bearing and refers to softwoods.

FISHING AND HUNTING REPORT

Fishing is still good on most of our lakes, with Center, Crooked, Marsh, Ann, and Round lakes best for Bluegill. Bass are hitting on Crooked, Lime and Hogback lakes. Pike are hitting on Silver lake.

Squirrel hunting is picking up in the county. A few limits have been reported lately. Hunters report the squirrel are running early and late in the day. They are cutting in hickory now.

Archery Shoot Rescheduled

The Pokagon Archery club, due to a mixup in schedules, will hold their September shoot, which was scheduled for the 17th, on the 24th with registration starting at 1:00 p.m. and shooting starting at 1:30 p.m.

Awards will be awarded in all classes.

A short business meeting will follow the above mentioned shoot.

Angola Students Gain Recognition

Prior to reporting to the campus of Ball State Teachers College to begin their freshman year on September 17, two Angola students attended one of the two freshman camp programs at Lake Tippecanoe.

Students from Angola participating in the "get acquainted with Ball State" camping session were Michael Lee Haley, 213 South Wayne, and Sigrid Diane Somerlott, 423 North West Street.

The camp program set up by the college officials is for approximately 300 freshmen. It is part of the college's orientation program to acquaint new students with Ball State. Each student spent two days on the campus earlier this summer taking tests, arranging housing, and planning a program. The remainder of the orientation program followed September 17 and 18 before students beginning classes on Tuesday, September 19.

The three following articles were all published between 1956 and 1961 and inform readers about how to catch cisco, to how good the cisco fishing is, to why the cisco in Lake James are dying out.

Sportsmen Getting Ready For Annual Cisco Run

Cisco applications are now available, according to Dawson Gorrell, conservation officer for Steuben county, who says that the annual cisco run, when these tasty white fish may easily be taken by nets near the surface of the water in the larger lakes may be expected at most any time with the approach of cooler temperatures. Officer Gorrell says the applications may be picked up at any time now from conservation officers, or at Woody's Hy-Flash station in Angola, Higbee Welding Shop in Fremont or the Army-Navy Store in Pleasant Lake. Cisco nets may be picked up at the Fawn River Hatchery at Orland on and after November 1 by taking the usual fishing license and showing it to the hatchery superintendent.

Tri-State Fishing Facts

Ken Clapp

If you are not a cisco "fan" you didn't have much fishing fun this past week. Normal fishing was rated poor to bad on most of our lakes. However, the cisco stirred things up a bit and created much fishing conversation and plenty of action. Cisco, like the Democrats, began their campaign early this year and nobody will know the results until November and about one year from now as far as the cisco are concerned.

Cisco generally come to the surface of the water in late October or the first of November, just before the lakes start a thin crust of ice. Fishermen see them only three or four days each year. But, during those three or four days they get plenty of them—that is, if you like to eat them. Cisco is a rare fish in most parts of the United States, but they are abundant in these parts. Steuben county has many unusual and interesting

to the provisions of this act, applicable to the driver of a vehicle, except as to special regulations of this article, (47-2101—47-2109), and except as those provisions of this act, which by their nature can have no application.

A person propelling a bicycle shall not ride other than upon the permanent and regular seat attached thereto, nor carry any

things—cisco is just one of them. Cisco exist only in the Great Lakes area.

They are classified as belonging to the whitefish family in appearance. Scientifically they are known as *Leucichthys artedii*. They are a long, narrow fish having an average length of ten to twelve inches and weighing about one-half pound. They resemble an over-grown shiner in appearance. They seem to be kin to the herring and smelt from an edible standpoint. They are often referred to as fresh water herring because they are fat and oily. If you are on a "fatless" diet, don't eat them as they will run 600 to 700 calories to the pound.

Cisco spend about 360 days of the year in very deep water and they cannot be readily caught with any kind of bait. They are a selfcontented sort of fish and hibernate for this long period of time. Another peculiar characteristic of cisco is that they spawn in the late fall in place of the spring, like most of our fresh water fish. When it is time for them to spawn they come to the surface and lay around for several days in a semi-conscious condition, which makes them easy to catch with a cisco gill net or even dip nets. Special nets are made to catch them, which conform to legal regulations. Most cisco fisherman I talked to last week were catching them by the hundreds with dip nets and motor boats. There seems to be no limit to the number you can take or the quantity you can have in your possession. Guess the fish commission figures you don't have much chance to get them except during those few days

preceding their annual spawning, so the "sky" is the limit.

Since they are like herring in preserving for the table, they are either smoked or salted down. When it comes time to cook them, most people either boil, bake or broil them. And brother, you know you're eating fish when they get to the table. They have a very strong odor like most fish which are smoked and packed in oil.

Few fishermen, even authorities, seem to know the real reason for cisco coming to the surface of the water. Some of the theories are that they become choked from eating weed seeds at a particular season of the year, that they get choked from sand in their gills and that they come to the surface to get more oxygen. Most of these theories will be accepted by the layman as their true habits are not known to man. Every cisco caught this year was full of eggs. It may be that they become too buoyant when they are full of eggs and float to the surface. One thing we do know about cisco is that after looking around on the surface of the water for several days, they go to a sandy or rock shore and deposit their eggs in two to three feet of water. And that is the end of them for another year. Funny, isn't it?

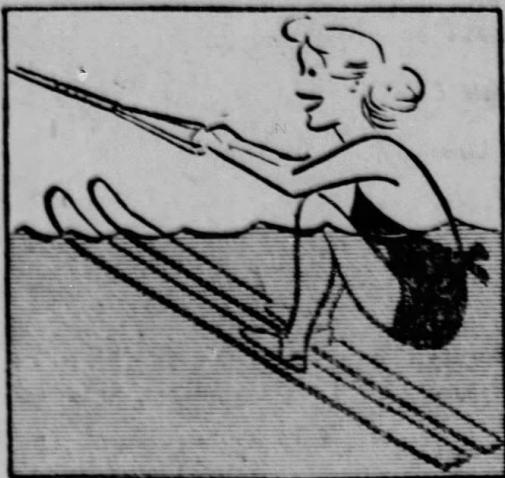
It is well known that small and young herring are often canned as sardines, so why doesn't some enterprizing person figure out a means of catching young cisco and can them as sardines. This would be a new and interesting industry for Angola. They should be as good to eat as any other sardines and

In addition to fishing, boating was another popular social activity on Lake James. There were no rules regarding the size or speed of watercraft on the lakes as is primarily the case today. Watersports were just becoming conventional and mainstream. In the 50's prior to the popularization of the water ski, many Lake James natives used a surfboard of types, with a rope connecting the board to the boat, and a towrope handle that the person held on to also connected to the boat. Water skiing caught on in the fifties, with slalom skiing (one ski) becoming popular just after water skiing caught on. Another water sport that everyone enjoyed was kayaking. Many

people had canoes or kayaks, which were primarily made from wood in the fifties and sixties and were an easy way to get around the lake and take in some quiet fishing.²⁴

If You Can Swim You Can Water-Ski!

Young and old alike are now easily and safely discovering the thrill of skimming swiftly over the surface of the water on skis. Reckless and daring though this exciting aquatic sport looks, it's truly very simple.



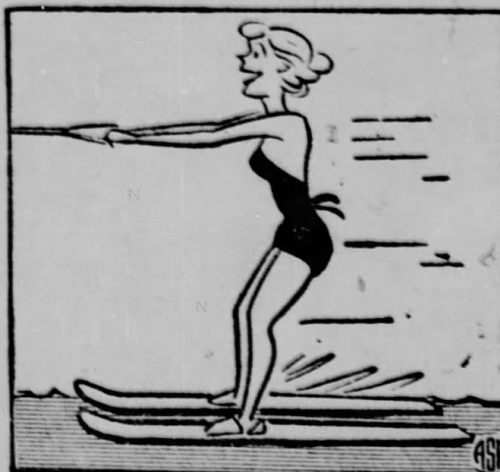
Put skis on in shallow water—three to four feet deep. Assuming “sitting” position, grasp tow bar firmly, and raise tips of skis just clear of water. Signal boat driver to go ahead.



As driver accelerates, let the tightening rope pull you to your feet; it's like arising from a low chair. Keep weight centered, knees bent, arms straight.



Skis may be wobbly and hard to control under 15 miles per hour, but as you approach the minimum speed, you'll start “planing” or skimming, and then . . .



The fun begins! Your back and arms should be kept straight . . . knees flexed slightly to cushion the jolt of the waves . . . and Away You Go!

If you think you'd like water-skiing—and everyone who tries it does like it—write to the American Water Ski Association, 307 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. They'll send you illustrated booklets that will give you fully detailed instructions for learning this exhilarating sport.

The newspaper ad at left was published in the summer of 1955 and was designed to help teach how to water ski and encourage learning.

As skiing became popular in the mid 50's a Lake James Ski Club was formed. "In 1956, Ed Coblenz organized a group of enthusiastic Lake James skiers into the Lake James Ski Club."²⁶ The ski club competed all over and even won some of the top awards, such as overall Men's title at the Great Lakes Open, held in St. Charles, Illinois.²⁷ They held shows out of Bledsoe's beach and WOWO, a radio station from Fort Wayne, would cover them. A poster shows eleven categories in a water ski show put on by the club and launching from Bledsoe's Beach, with over twenty club members participating in the show for the crowds.²⁸ A newspaper article below details the show that the club was going to put on in 1960, with many different categories.²⁹

<p style="text-align: center;">Lake James Ski Club</p> <p>The Lake James Ski Club performed in front of Bledsoes Beach resort on Sunday afternoon. The ski meet and demonstration was well received by the crowd who were particularly thrilled by a lad named Bill Vanderslive who sailed through the air approximately fifty feet above the water pulled by a boat and suspended from a huge red kite. The radio station, WOWO, erected a special broadcast center and information booth and broadcasting originated from Bledsoes Beach throughout the Beach Ball celebration. There were special rides for the children on the beach as well as the usual activities.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Water Ski Show At Bledsoes</p> <p>The Lake James Ski Club will present their fifth annual ski show at Lake James next Sunday afternoon. The show will consist of acts of jumping, trick riding, mixed doubles and bare-foot skiing. The show will rendezvous at Bledsoe's Beach, and will start at 2 p.m.</p> <p>Nine skiers from the Lake James club entered the Indiana State Water Ski Tournament at Lake James on Friday and Saturday, July 15 and 16. Of the nine all placed in the first ten.</p> <p>Bill Crotty took third in men's jumping and tricks. Dick Baade and Crotty both jumped over 100 feet, which qualifies them for the Century club.</p> <p>Sandry Doldson also took first place in the girl's slalom.</p> <p>These sensational performers will also appear in the annual ski show at Lake James next Sunday.</p>
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The boats that pulled those engaging in water sports were very small and low powered compared to the boats of today. Jack Berger recalled his first boat had a two and a half

horsepower Johnson motor on a small wooden boat he fashioned a steering wheel onto.³² The most popular boats had ten horsepower Johnson or Mercury outboard motors.³³ The most highly regarded boats of the time (and most expensive) were the Chris Craft boats mentioned earlier with reference to the wealthier families on the lake. The Chris Craft boats had an inboard motor and Jack Berger recalls that they were not high enough powered to get up on plane, and so they plowed through the water.³⁴ The most exciting motor of the time was the twenty-six horsepower Johnson outboard. Jack Berger recalled that his neighbor had one on a boat similar in style to the Chris Craft, but with the Johnson outboard instead of an inboard motor. That was the fastest boat he rode in during the fifties and sixties.³⁵

Sailboats were also very popular. Surprisingly, Rieke Corporation, a family manufacturing company from Auburn, Indiana, made some sailboats.³⁶ This would have been unusual for a family that really was into cars to somehow produce a fine sailboat. Nevertheless, people in Steuben County, including Lake James, had some of these sailboats, and there are still a few in existence. Sailing was another great pastime for those spending their days on Lake James.

Sail Boat Races To Start At Lake James

Sailboat races will be held next Sunday afternoon on Lake James, sponsored by the Meyer Boat Livery, with more than fifteen entries in the several classes of sailboats expected to compete in the race. Included among the contestants will be entries from both Pokagon Boys' Camp and Pokagon Girls' Camp, and the races are expected to attract much interest. Trophies will be awarded to the winners in the several classes.

Outboard motorboat races were held last Sunday at Lake James, sponsored by the Meyer Boat Livery, with trophies awarded in the various class entries.

In the kids' class, Ronnie Knauer, of Marion, won first, with Ronald Merkle, of Fort Wayne, second; and Johnnie Huth, also of Fort Wayne, placing third.

Class A, for motors of 7½ horse power, was won by Don Warnock, of New Castle, with Ronnie Gray of Hagerstown, second; and Dick Morrow of Fountain City, third. Winners in Class B, for motors of 10 horse power, were Earl Humes, of Yorktown, first; John Rinker, of Noblesville, second; and Bill Nicodemus, of South Bend, third.

Class D, for 25 horse power motors, was won by Mike Lemmon, of Anderson, first; Nelson Hyre, Centerville, second, and Joe Webster, Kalamazoo, Michigan, third. The free-for-all was won by Ralph Van Osdale, of Fort Wayne, placing first, with Hyre and Webster again placing second and third

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Races on the lake were also very popular and happened quite often. There were several classes for each race: ten horsepower, sailing, and high horsepower. There were even more than that, as can be seen in the articles below.³⁸ The races were very competitive and sometimes quite dangerous. Anyone who wanted to compete in a race was more than welcome to join. There were sometimes twenty or more boats per race that would race around the second basin. The races were very competitive and those who won the races were very proud, and even their names would be put in the paper as is evident in the article above.³⁹ Jack Berger said that his brother and his friends would always race in the sailboat race with their twelve foot Thompson sailboat that was not very fast, but they would be out there tipping it over and having fun and not so focused on winning.⁴⁰ Sailboat races are still held on Lake James each summer.⁴¹ In the fifties and sixties, the high-powered class would have two people per boat and they would be going very fast for the time. The ten horsepower boats that would race would usually be either the

Mercury or Johnson ten horsepower motor, of which the Mercury was generally faster.⁴² The races, regardless of kind, were social and competitive and brought people together. Races were something to look forward to and something that united people under the blanket of “lake life.” The races all went through Bledsoe’s Beach, which was the main social scene of Lake James throughout the fifties and sixties.

Annual Tri-State Canoe Race Saturday

<p>Bledsoe's beach will be the finish line for the third annual Tri-State canoe race which will be held October 12 at 1:00 p.m., announces Tri-State athletic director Burnell (Doc) Mummert.</p> <p>All interested Tri-State students are eligible to compete in the race, which starts at Nevada Mills and follows a course across Jimmerson Lake and Lake James to the island in the first basin of Lake James. After circling the island the canoers will drive across the lake to the finish line at Bledsoe's Beach.</p> <p>Regulations for the race demand that the persons involved be students of Tri-State college, using ordinary canoes and regulation paddles.</p>	<p>Scholarship prizes of \$300 for first place, \$200 for second place and \$100 for third place are awarded mainly through the courtesy of Tri-State area businessmen. Some Tri-State college student organizations also contribute to this fund.</p> <p>A minute by minute account of the race will be broadcast by members of the Tri-State college radio club which operates W9BF, the Tri-State college radio station. This broadcast will come over loudspeakers at the Bledsoe Beach finish line.</p> <p>Registration for students interested in participating will be held until Friday, October 11.</p> <p>The public is invited to attend the race for which there is no admission charge.</p>
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Bledsoe’s Beach was a little bit of everything. Bledsoe’s Beach lies in the corner of second basin, directly next to the channel to get to nearby Jimmerson Lake by boat. Bledsoe’s Beach had a large U shaped pier with a high and low board for diving.⁴⁴ In prior times there was a slide, but that was gone by the fifties. The main attraction at Bledsoe’s Beach (named after the Bledsoe family), was the dance pavilion. There were loud bands there and often the bands were quite good and well known. Everyone would travel there at night by boat to dance. The cost to dance was 10 cents a dance, and dancers got a ticket for each dance they bought. As bands became less popular DJs started to come and play popular songs across the dance pavilion and Lake James. The radio station WOWO was present with both DJ’s and broadcasting at Lake James and Bledsoe’s Beach regularly. Some local businesses or groups would host events or

dances at Bledsoe's Beach, so the beach also ended up promoting the already strong sense of community that is present in "lake life," as shown in a newspaper article below.⁴⁵ In addition to dancing there was a beer pavilion where they sold beer and also had a soda fountain. Despite the beer pavilion, Jack Berger claimed that there was not much drinking in excess that actually occurred, nor were there any drugs either.⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, not much drinking might have occurred because women were not allowed under state law to drink or sit at the bar until 1969, which would have prevented much socializing between men and women there.⁴⁷ In addition, women were also not allowed to walk anywhere with an alcoholic drink, so drinks were required to have been brought to them sitting down at a table.⁴⁸

**Angola Fire
Department To
Have Big Dance**

**Annual Party Will
Draw Large Crowd
To Bledsoe's Beach**

The Angola Fire Department will have their annual party and dance at Bledsoe's Beach, Lake James, on Friday night of this week. There will be social plan for dancing and fun is assured for everyone who goes. Good music, door prizes and a big master prize are available for the guests.

This is the one time of the year when the general public is asked to consider the fire department which gives services on a volunteer basis. The proceeds from the sale will go into the special fireman's fund, with which the department provides entertainment for the group and for the ladies auxiliary, which is an active adjunct to the organization and its various interests. The department has grown and improved during recent years until it is now second to none in its class in the state of Indiana.

In addition to dancing, there was a post office at Bledsoe's beach, where mail was delivered by boat. Lake James was one of the last places in the state to have mail delivered by boat. Each cottage had a mailbox at the end of the pier, and the mailman would come around by boat and deliver mail to each pier every day.⁵⁰ The tradition started decades earlier when there were not any roads around the lake and the only way to get to one's cottage was by boat, but mail by boat continued even into the fifties and sixties despite the fact that there were sufficient roads around the entire lake. "As of a 1954 newspaper account, Fred Ziegler had been delivering for twelve years. During the school year he was principal of Auburn Junior High School. Fred said that he survived one storm that nearly swamped his boat but he managed to protect the mail. It would take him about three to four hours for the delivery."⁵¹

In addition to these daytime events, starting in 1963 at Bledsoe's Beach, the IU Hoosier Basketball Camp took place. Head Hoosier basketball coach Branch McCracken was persuaded by some local coaches, and eight basketball courts were built. One hundred twenty campers came out for the first year in 1963 and it grew steadily from there, along with some buildings to house the campers at a later date.⁵² The camp ran for twenty-three years with profound success and many, many campers enjoying the basketball along with everything that Bledsoe's Beach and Lake James had to offer.⁵³

The Hoosier Basketball Camp was not the only camp on Lake James during the fifties and sixties; there were boys' and girls' camps put on by Hermon Phillips in the third basin of Lake James. Hermon Phillips was a "track legend" who won gold and silver medals in the 1928 Olympics in Amersterdam. Phillips coached track at both Purdue and Butler Universities prior to forming these boys' and girls' camps. Hermon Phillips started with a boys' camp at Pokagon State Park, but then opened a girls' camp in 1946 on the opposite shore of the third basin of Lake

James. Phillips girls' camp in that bay of third basin gave way to the bay being named after him to this day; the southwest bay of third basin is titled Phillips Bay. The campers participated in "horseback riding, a recreation hall, arts and crafts, archery, gymnastics, shuffleboard, tennis, and volleyball," besides all the activities on the water. The camp lasted eight weeks starting at the end of June. The girls' camp ran for thirty-two years until 1978.⁵⁴ Seen below is a picture depicting swimming and some boating on the shores of the Girl's camp.



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A third camp on Lake James also existed during this time. The Lake James Christian Assembly was formed in 1929 to bring Christians together, and it exists on the shore of first basin, taking up about 300 feet of waterfront with a large building. The first summer camp class was full at 200 kids, and started in 1957. The Lake James Christian assembly exists to this day.⁵⁶

Lake James Christian Assembly To Open Soon



The Lake James Christian Assembly Inc. will open its 1957 Summer Camp and Christian Training School on Sunday, June 23, with a capacity enrollment from the Christian Churches of the Tri-State area. The first week is limited to 200 enrollees of age 9 to 11 years, with Edward Schantz, of Harlan, serving as Dean, together with a selected staff of qualified teachers and assistants.

The Lake James Christian Assembly, one of the first of its kind in the country, was organized in 1929, at its present location, by the following ten local citizens: Judge Clyde Carlin, Orville Stevens, Burton Handy, J. O. Rose, Fred Hubbell, Burdette Goodale, Sam Lappin, Raymond Luse, William Shearer, and U. L. Wambaugh. The original purchase included the Villa hotel, the grocery store, the dance hall, the ice cream parlor and about 15 acres of wooded land, with about

500 feet lake frontage on which is now located the bathing beach and boat docks. The old grocery store and ice cream parlor have long since been converted into dormitories and four modern cottages have been added to care for the faculty members. The old dance hall has been converted into a chapel where services are held mornings and evenings during each camp week.

The present officers and board of directors of the assembly are: Glen Myers, president; Orville Stevens, vice president; Robert Brokaw, secretary; Gaylord S. Gilbert, treasurer; Paul Grimm, manager grounds and facilities; Garrett; Don W. Butler, director promotion and curriculum, Toledo; and Robert Brokaw, T. P. Charles, Gaylord S. Gilbert, James Grange, Paul Grimm, Robert Hargrave, Harold Kagey, Ross Mann, Glen Myers, Floyd Myers, T. W. Overton, Eldon Page, Robert Sprinkle, and Orville Stevens, as directors.

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Even after a long day boating, swimming, and fishing, there was still excitement in the evenings for everyone in the family during the fifties and sixties on Lake James. Evenings at Lake James would consist of various activities, depending on age. If someone were in their late teens or 20's they would generally head down to Bledsoe's beach to dance and socialize all night. If one did not wish to dance many families and children played card games or Monopoly. Televisions were not very common at Lake James during this time, however radio was. Parents would gather and talk if they did not engage in card games or Monopoly.⁵⁸

In addition to Bledsoe's Beach, another popular destination on Lake James was Pokagon State Park. Pokagon State Park lies on basins one and three of Lake James, and has two beaches

–one at the Potawatomi Inn on the first basin and another at the campground on third basin. Pokagon State Park was founded in December of 1925, coming during “progressive-era interest in natural preservation.”⁵⁹ Pokagon was named “to honor one of the last leaders of the Potawatomi-Leopold Pokagon.” The Potawatomi were “increasingly displaced by settlers in the 1830’s” and so this was a way to honor the original Lake James inhabitants.⁶⁰ Pokagon State Park was developed by Company 556 of the CCC from July 1934 to 1941.⁶¹ The CCC stands for Civilian Conservation Corp and was started in 1933 as part of the New Deal, signed into action by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The CCC generally was composed of young men, and during their time with the CCC they were taught useful skills involving stone working and building.⁶² The CCC built everything from a toboggan run for winter guests to a saddle barn, to a beach house for summer patrons, and cabins.⁶³ Pokagon State Park includes the Potawatomi Inn, which was built prior to the CCC arrival from 1926-1927.⁶⁴ Pokagon was a fun recreation area and even Lake James inhabitants would venture to the main beach at Pokagon on the third basin to socialize during the day.

Lake James during the fifties and sixties was a paradise that contributed heavily to the culture of the people in northeastern Indiana. Lake James shaped children’s childhood memories at any of the summer camps that took place at the lake. The races and music captivated all who took a stroll down to Bledsoe’s beach for a variety of entertainment. Those who wished to get involved in skiing could join a club, and those who just wanted some quiet time with some buddies to fish had plenty of space to fish, and plenty of large fish to catch. People could not have found somewhere more exciting to spend their summers than Lake James, nor could they have found a place that left such a lasting effect.

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- ¹ https://igs.indiana.edu/ReferenceDocs/StateParkGuide_Pokagon.pdf
 - ² <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/5498.htm>
 - ³ <http://www.steubencounty.com>
 - ⁴ Aquatic Enhancement & Survey, Inc. "Lake Diagnostic Study Lake James, Snow Lake, Big Otter and Little Otter Lakes Steuben County, Indiana." 24 Oct. 2006. Page 10
 - ⁵ Aquatic Enhancement & Survey, Inc. "Lake Diagnostic Study Lake James, Snow Lake, Big Otter and Little Otter Lakes Steuben County, Indiana." 24 Oct. 2006. Page 25
 - ⁶ Aquatic Enhancement & Survey, Inc. "Lake Diagnostic Study Lake James, Snow Lake, Big Otter and Little Otter Lakes Steuben County, Indiana." 24 Oct. 2006. Page 14
 - ⁷ https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=gnispq:3:0::NO::P3_FID:436929
 - ⁸ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ⁹ Berger, John R. *The Bubbles Rise: An Autobiography*. Angola, IN: Lake James, 2010. Print.
 - ¹⁰ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ¹¹ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ¹² Angola Herald. Wednesday October 28, 1953.
 - ¹³ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ¹⁴ Angola Herald. Wednesday October 28, 1953.
 - ¹⁵ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ¹⁶ Steuben Republican. Wednesday March 2, 1960.
 - ¹⁷ Steuben Republican. Wednesday March 2, 1960.
 - ¹⁸ Angola Herald. Wednesday September 20, 1961
 - ¹⁹ Steuben Republican. Wednesday September 5, 1956.
 - ²⁰ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ²¹ Angola Herald. Wednesday October 29, 1958
 - ²² Angola Herald. Wednesday September 20, 1961
 - ²³ Steuben Republican. Wednesday September 5, 1956.
 - ²⁴ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ²⁵ Steuben Republican. Wednesday August 17, 1955
 - ²⁶ Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 229
 - ²⁷ Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 230
 - ²⁸ Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 233
 - ²⁹ Angola Herald. Wednesday July 18, 1962
 - ³⁰ Angola Herald. Wednesday July 18, 1962
 - ³¹ Angola Herald. Wednesday August 3, 1960
 - ³² "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ³³ <http://www.duckworksmagazine.com/01/articles/oldoutboards/>
 - ³⁴ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
 - ³⁵ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.

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- ³⁶ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ³⁷ Angola Herald. Wednesday August 15, 1951
- ³⁸ Angola Herald. October 9, 1963
- ³⁹ Angola Herald. Wednesday August 15, 1951
- ⁴⁰ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ⁴¹ Angola Herald. Wednesday August 15, 1951
- ⁴² "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ⁴³ Angola Herald. October 9, 1963
- ⁴⁴ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ⁴⁵ Angola Herald. Wednesday June 20, 1956
- ⁴⁶ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.wibc.com/blogs/abdul-large/indiana's-history-odd-alcohol-laws> and "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. X Mar. 2017.
- ⁴⁸ <http://www.wibc.com/blogs/abdul-large/indiana's-history-odd-alcohol-laws> and "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. X Mar. 2017.
- ⁴⁹ Angola Herald. Wednesday June 20, 1956
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- ⁵² Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 212-213
- ⁵³ Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 216
- ⁵⁴ Somers, James G., and Flaim C. Cupp. *A History of Lake James*. Angola, IN: Lake James Association, 2011. Page 202-205
- ⁵⁵ http://pokagongirlscamp.com/Photo%20Album/Camp%20Scenes/camp_scenes.htm
- ⁵⁶ Angola Herald. Wednesday May 15, 1957
- ⁵⁷ Angola Herald. Wednesday May 15, 1957
- ⁵⁸ "Jack Berger Interview." Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Madison, James H. *The Indiana Way: A State History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. Page 256
- ⁶⁰ Williams, Matt. *Indiana State Parks: A Centennial Celebration*. Bloomington: Quarry, an Imprint of Indiana UP, 2015. Page 44
- ⁶¹ Wooley, Fred (Pokagon State park interpreter) "Chronology of Civilian Conservation Corps Projects at Pokagon State Park" 2000.
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- ⁶⁴ Wooley, Fred (Pokagon State park interpreter) "Chronology of Civilian Conservation Corps Projects at Pokagon State Park" 2000.