

# KANSAS FISH & GAME



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# KANSAS FISH & GAME



May-June, 1973

Vol. 30, No. 3

## CONTENTS

An Idea . . . For Men Only by <i>Ross Harrison</i> . . . . .	1
Topwater Time by <i>Vic McLeran</i> . . . . .	4
When Fish Grew Big in Kansas by <i>David Dary</i> . . . . .	8
Rainbows in Kansas by <i>Ross Manes</i> . . . . .	11
Fishing Historic Council Grove by <i>Bill Scott</i> . . . . .	13

## COVER PHOTOS

Front cover—Bald eagle. Ektachrome transparency by Ken Stiebhen.  
Back cover—Purple martin. Ektachrome transparency by Ken Stiebhen.

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KEN STIEBHEN . . . . . Photographer  
BEV ALDRICH . . . . . Editorial Assistant

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### U. S. District Court Upholds Hunting

Conservationists and preservationists are of different breeds. Recently U. S. District Court Judge Charles R. Richey was confronted with one of the basic differences in the two separate factions in his courtroom. The result was a landmark victory for conservation and sportsmen of Kansas and the nation in hunting's first major court test.

The suit was filed by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which challenger Rogers C. B. Morton, Secretary of the Interior, to allow public hunting at three eastern federal wildlife refuges, in New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia. Interior Department officials had authorized public hunting on these lands to reduce deer herds which had overpopulated to the point of damaging the area's ecology. This is a common problem and the remedy is fairly standard.

The Humane Society unsuccessfully attempted to prove Morton did not substantiate the need for public hunting, nor did he consider alternate methods of herd reduction, such as live-trapping and relocation, or cropping by professional hunters. The HSUS maintained that either of these alternatives would be more in keeping with principles of sound wildlife management.

Judge Richey, however, ruled Feb. 8 the Humane Society failed to prove that Secretary Morton had abused the power of his office in authorizing such hunts under state game commission control.

The judge stated, "Public hunting is a form of public recreation for which the refuges were established." He further stated that public hunting is consistent with principles of sound wildlife management.

The case was dismissed. Close to one-fourth million Kansas hunters should breathe a little easier. A different decision may have had definite negative implications way back here in Kansas.

Judge Richey may or may not be a hunter. For sure, though, he took the facts, added logic and came out with the decision which environmentalists, biologists, ecologists and all who are in the know about the out-of-doors have been stating for a long time. Hunting, as controlled by state fish and game agencies, is a form of conservation. It is wise use of a resource. It utilizes an annual surplus of a renewable resource, without harming the total resource.

It didn't come out in court, but here's one more thing. American hunters and fishermen have been by far the most responsible for conservation efforts all over the United States. Cut them off, and you cut off almost the entire source of funds for fish and wildlife conservation programs—programs which most often benefit the sight-seer, hiker, and bird watcher just as much as the sportsmen, yet these other persons do not contribute to the coffers of conservation.—ROSS HARRISON.

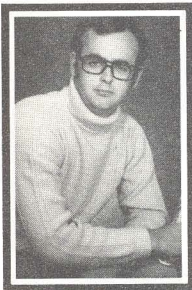
# An Idea . . .

# For Men Only!



By Ross Harrison  
Staff Writer

**A** TIME COMES to nearly every man when job and family should be put aside for a bit, allowing his mind to retreat and regroup for a more vigorous attack on life. (Women and employers, please read special boxed items.)



Harrison

A man's routine hobbies also are subject to the proverbial rut. But he can turn to a long list of other forms of escape and mind relaxers, some of which are illegal or

at least downright naughty!

But let's look at one activity that seem to offer just about everything the hustled and hassled man needs:— A two-day, midweek camping and fishing outing with one or two of his close buddies.

Why two days? Why midweek?

Why camp and fish? And why just the men? There are sound answers for these likely questions. This article intends to provide you men with the incentive to take this remedy for a distraught mind and to provide you with reasons that should influence your wife and employer to let you go. A few hints on how to make the outing successful are included, but most of the organization depends on you—that's all part of it.

First, why should this venture be reserved for just men?

Everyone knows women also need some escape and the kids now and then need a different look at life. But, if everyone went everywhere together all the time, nobody would really be getting away, would they.

Use this stag venture for another purpose too, as sort of a pilot program to organize a family outing to the same place later on. Your first experience there will better prepare you

to plan a well-thought-out family trip.

Men in the company of close buddies can forget language barriers and the many other daily limitations which like hair in a drain, tends to clog the free flow of their mind. They can ignore the responsibilities of seeing that everyone is comfortable and cozy and tucked in. They take care of their own comforts. This particular aspect, freedom from worrying over little Jimmy's mosquito bite or mother's cold feet, is one of the biggest of the stag pluses.

The reasons for taking the fishing-camping route are many and quite logical too. A basic, but minor, reason is that it's cheap. Of course, if you go in for all the latest camping gear, it's not really dirt cheap, just reasonable. The deal is, you can have all the comforts you need without going to the catalog. Here's where you put imagination to work, planning short-cuts. More on this later.

The best part of fishing and camping is that it can cleanly split you from what you want to leave behind for awhile . . . sterile walls, traffic noise, decision making, dirty air, squalling kids, and evil temptations. It's a healthy and invigorating experience that'll flat out remind you there is a natural world out there someplace. It'll revive the primitive, but necessary, gut feeling that you share something with the cottonwood, coyote and catfish. Understanding this relationship and your place in nature is a mind-soothing realization. It'll give you something to share, think and talk about, far more important than a 600 series in a bowling tournament.

There's excitement in trying to catch your next meal and delight in eating it fresh from the lake. Fishing adds zest and purpose to camping. And if you fail to fill your stringer, you can always say you were just camping anyway.

There are a lot of good reasons for a two-day, midweek excursion. You don't want the outing to take all of your vacation time away from your family. And you don't want to appear

so distraught that you need more help than a short outing can provide.

Actually, if you're out of practice and not equipped to the gills with the most modern of camping conveniences, a couple of days and nights is about all you can tackle. Also, since this is midweek, you can still get a lot of work done at the office before and after the trip. The week's not a washout. On the other hand, splitting the week in two parts makes the work on either end delightfully shorter. And you still have the weekend for family or whatever.

Another good thing about the shortness of it all, have you ever had that wasted feeling after two months of planning a two-week fishing trip, only to have it fall through. Well, that feeling is much less severe with an outing such as this one. All the planning can take place by phone one or two days in advance.

A more important reason for the midweek timing is the quality of the campgrounds. By far the majority of activity at state lakes, parks and reservoirs occurs during the weekends and on holidays. To those who really want to enjoy themselves, those are

the times to avoid such facilities. Your midweek trip will mean very few competitors for nature, peace, elbow room and fish. However, you can get similar benefits on weekends from the more remote areas of reservoirs, but be sure and check with the Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Reclamation, whichever built the area, to see if camping's allowed.

Due to the dimensions of this mini-vacation, you generally will be limited to travel in your own state, which again calls for less expense. And don't worry about what's available here in Kansas. Other than mountains and oceans Kansas has all and more than anyone would ever want to make a good camping-fishing trek. Where to go depends on how much time you've got and what you want to fish for and camp like.

Write to the Kansas Park Authority for information on parks, and to the Forestry, Fish and Game Commission for 'Where To Fish In Kansas.' Information on rules and regulations for camping and fishing should also be obtained from the KPA and FF&G.

The state lakes managed by the FF&G, which are suited to the mini-





Fishing and boating in solitude are some of the pleasures of a midweek vacation.

vacation and in which you're bound to catch fish, are shown.

Between the two or three of you in the camping party, chances are someone has a tent and possibly a fishing boat. I'm not saying you should pick your companions on what helpful equipment they may have access to, but . . .

Paper plates and other disposables are easiest for men to take care of, but one utensil is a must—your grandmother's large, iron fry pan. It is unbeatable for cooking fish and spuds and onions. Rest it on a grate supported by bricks over the flame. You may want to save some hassle by taking a charcoaler.

A couple of other items to check include: condition of your fishing line (probably needs replacing), proper boating equipment (life preservers,

lights, fire extinguisher, etc.), and don't forget to buy a fishing license and possibly a park permit.

Okay you're on your way at 5 p. m. Tuesday to a lake 40 miles from home; three grown men riding in the cab of pickup, naturally excited to get camp pitched and on the water by 7 for some fine sunset fishing.

There's one thing you have to remember if your excursion is going to pay dividends. Don't rush, anywhere. That's one of those things you should be trying to leave behind. Also, make it a point to be considerate of other campers and fishermen. There are some definite laws set to encourage this consideration, but it is mostly a case of adult responsibility—there are some things you just can't get away from.

## TO THE EMPLOYER

It's not only good for the business to have happy, well-adjusted employees, it's your moral responsibility. You can get a higher quality and quantity of output, and greater loyalty by granting the occasional midweek mini-vacation.

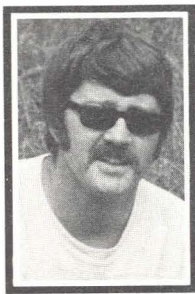
## TO THE WIFE

It's not only good for the kids and you to have a happy well-adjusted husband, it's your loving responsibility (vice versa too). You can bet on more things being fixed around the house and a noticeable improvement in your relationship upon granting the midweek, mini-vacation. (Make sure they go fishing, though.)

# Topwater Time

By Vic McLeran  
Editor

**T**HE STRIP PIT was an old one, lined with willows and cottonwoods. Erosion had whittled once-steep banks to gradual slopes and siltation had begun to fill the weedy coves. With



McLeran

the electric trolling motor, I eased my boat toward one of the coves, now nearly dark with lengthening evening shadows.

Suddenly I saw three V-shaped wakes heading into the cove about 50 feet ahead of my boat—big bass making their rounds on the evening feeding circuit.

Easing off the trolling motor, I picked up my rod and flipped a topwater lure toward the fish. The Rapala landed several feet behind the last wake. Quickly, I took up the slack line and waited. As the last fish turned to head back for deep water, I twitched the plug gently. He spotted the movement and surged toward the plug. It was all I could do to keep from setting the hook too soon.

The lunker inhaled the plug with a violent smashing strike. As I set the hook, the fish exploded from the water with flared gills, shaking its head violently from side to side.

Several minutes later, after a spectacular display of tail walks and aerial

acrobatics, I boated the lunker—a six-pounder. Shaking with adrenalin I strung the fish and tried to relax.

It's action like this which accounts for the immense popularity of topwater plugging for bass. Although surface fishing is at its best for only several short periods, many anglers claim they'd rather catch one bass on top water than a dozen by any other method. Since it's that time of year, let's look at some topwater basics.

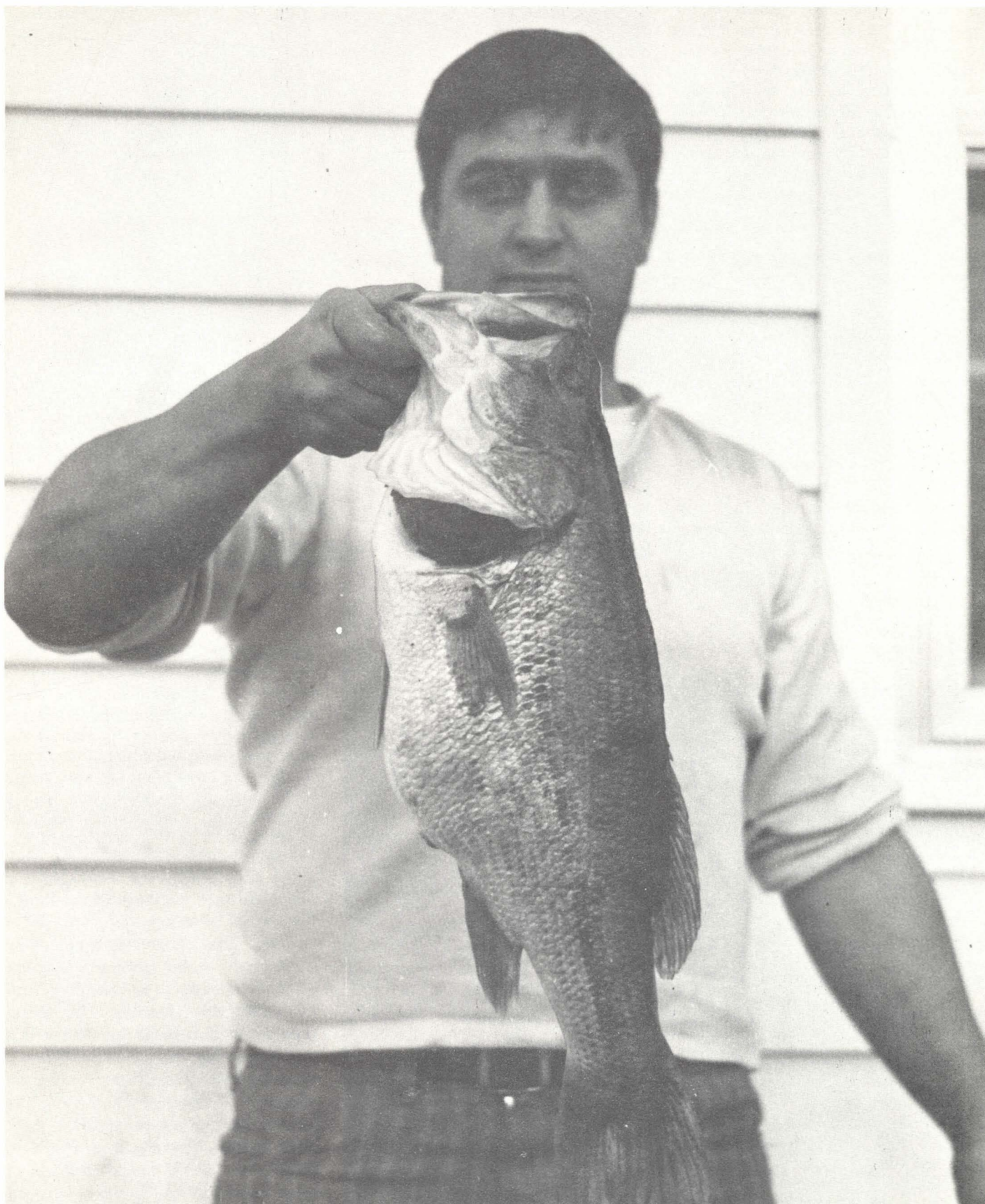
There are several types of surface lures used in topwater bass fishing. Some of the most common are: the *popper*, which has a cupped face that makes a popping sound when twitched—Arbogast's Hula Popper; the *chugger* that has a sloping head and makes a chugging sound when retrieved in short jerks—Heddon's Chugger and Lucky 13, South Bend's Bass-Oreno; the *shallow runner* which floats at rest but slips several inches below the surface when retrieved—Rapala, Rebel, ThinFin, Tru-Shad; and the *puddler* which wobbles along the surface creating a "plopping" sound on retrieve—Jitterbug. There are others of course, but these are seen most often.

As a general rule, topwater lures are fished slowly in calm water and faster in choppy water. Since bass are often spooky in clear water, the cast should be soft, so the lure hits the water gently without a big splash. To do this, draw the rodtip back just

as the plug hits the water. Once the lure is on the water immediately take up the slack line. Since bass won't hold on to a hard top water artificial very long, you have to be able to set the hook instantly. And this is impossible with several feet of slack in your line. Several years ago while fishing the strip pits of southeastern Kansas, I lost the biggest bass of my life because of slack line. I'd just made a long cast to some shoreline cover when the lure disappeared beneath the surface. A lunker had simply "inhaled" the plug.

Leaning back hard, I set the hook or tried to. But the slack line prevented me from penetrating the bass's hard, bony mouth, and he erupted from the surface a split-second later throwing the Jitterbug 30 feet. Since then, I've paid close attention to keeping the line taut at all times. I've seen some bass anglers who were so skillful they could transfer the rod from one hand to the other while the lure was in the air. Casting in this manner, they were ready to take up slack line as soon as the lure hit the water.

When fishing the topwater with a slow retrieve, it's a good idea to pause for a few seconds—as much as a minute or more—between twitches of the rodtip. Let's say you're topwater fishing in calm water and you're about 30 feet away from this submerged

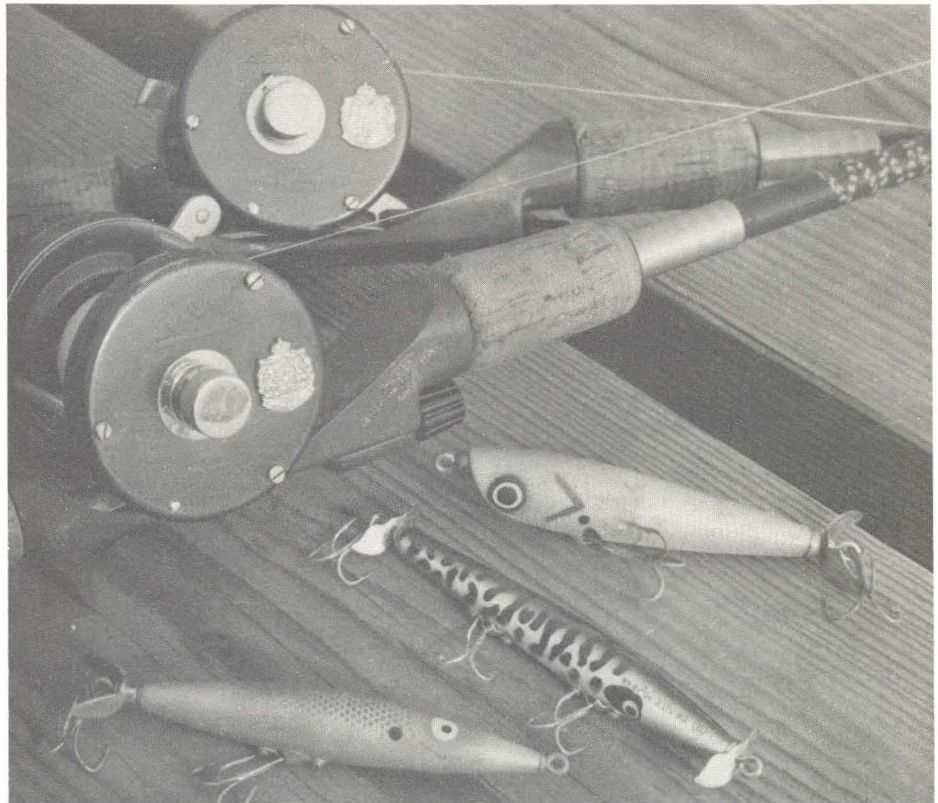


Larry Basky, head football coach at Wichita's Bishop Carroll High School, hoists a 6½ pound largemouth taken on a topwater lure.

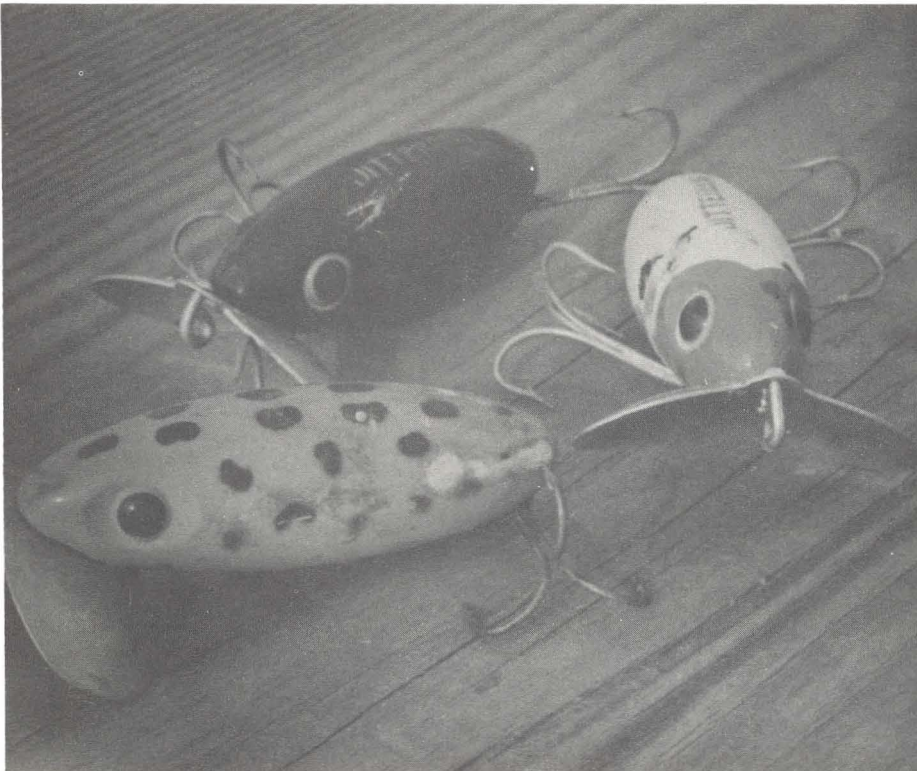
brush pile which you know is the home of a lunker bass. After making your initial cast, let the lure lie motionless for several seconds. There's a good chance the bass was spooked when the plug hit the water. But he'll be back, curious about the "thing" outside his living room. So now, after the pause, with a gentle twitch of the rod tip, give your lure some life—make it quiver like a dying minnow or jerk like a crippled bluegill. If nothing happens, repeat the performance after another pause.

At this point, persistence can pay dividends for the serious bass angler. If you don't get any action on your first several casts then move on to the next spot—but come back later and try this spot again with another lure or another presentation. The point is—stay after him, especially if you know the area harbors a big bass.

Since big bass are both lazy and cautious they usually don't move far to take a lure, especially a topwater lure. This means you'll often have to place the bait consistently in a



Jitterbugs are reliable surface lures which have accounted for numerous large bass through the years.



relatively small spot with your casts. Six inches too far and you're hung up on a log. It's no big deal but every time you have to move in and free a snagged lure, you spook fish in the area and waste valuable fishing time. So give yourself a break and spend some time in the back yard with a practice plug. There's something else to be said for this casting repeatedly to the same spot. But doing this, many anglers feel you can agitate a big bass into striking even though he may not be hungry.

When the surface is rippled by wind or the water is murky, bass are often handicapped in trying to feed by sight. In situations like these, they tend to strike at movement or a commotion in the water. This is when a fast, noisy retrieve can be effective. After your cast, yank the lure toward you in a series of short jerks, quickly taking in slack line after each jerk. There are a number of other variations which can be worked by experimentation.



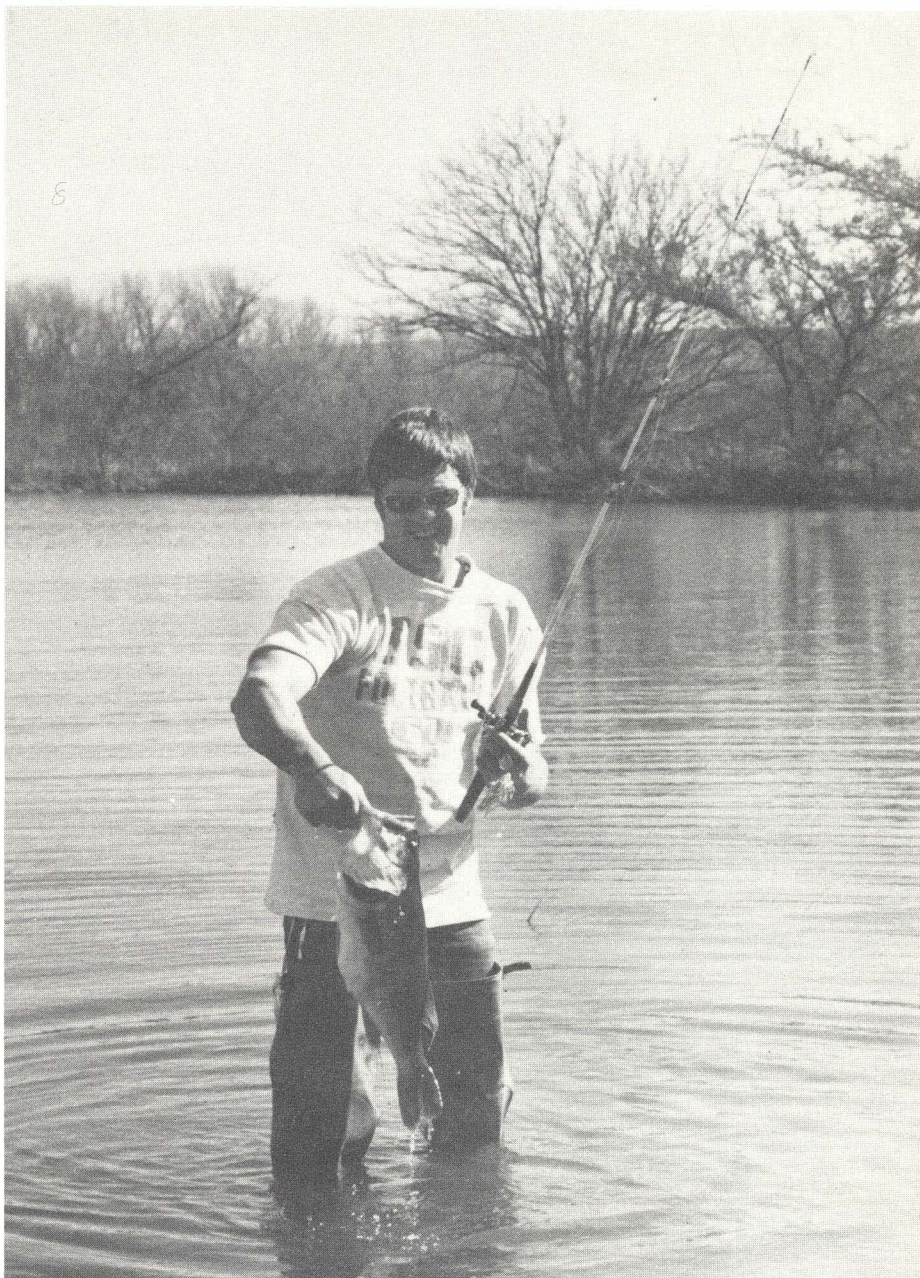
The angler should experiment with these various methods until he discovers which ones work best with the different lures.

Another bait which isn't normally thought of as a topwater lure, but can produce well on the surface is the spinnerbait. Good bass fishermen use this lure in a topwater technique called "buzzing." The bait is retrieved just beneath the surface fast enough so that the lure's spinner blade creates a surface wake and a buzzing sound which bass sometimes find irresistible. One spring evening at Milford Lake I watched this method account for two stringers of bass in less than an hour. It had rained for several days and the water looked like chocolate. We found the bass back in some flooded timber. They didn't want ordinary surface lures but they went wild over the buzzing wake created by spinnerbaits fished in this fashion.

In recent years fishery research has indicated that a bass's eye is extremely sensitive to light. For this reason, bass avoid bright sunlight by seeking deep water or the shady sides of shoreline objects like submerged logs, rocks, trees and brushpiles. Also, forage species like minnows, crawfish and frogs will seek shady areas when they're available. By lying in these shaded areas, bass not only protect their light-sensitive eyes, but they are also in a good position to prey on forage species as they move in.

This light factor is also why bass are more active at night and during the twilight periods of dawn and dusk. The twofold inference should be obvious—your best topwater fishing will usually occur during these dimly-lit periods and you should concentrate your casts on the shady side of shoreline cover as the sun comes up.

Good shoreline cover for topwater bass fishing includes submerged or partially-submerged brush, logs, trees and clumps of cat-tails or lily pads. Always remember that when bass are in the shallows, they're usually after food. And areas which provide cover and baitfish will eventually draw bass.



The authors lifts a husky five pounder which fell for a spinnerbait "buzzed" top water fashion.

A friend of mine once created some prime topwater fishing habitat in his ponds by felling cottonwoods and willows along the shoreline in shallow water. This cover attracted baitfish like minnows and bluegill which in turn lured bass.

Plugs which float at rest and dive shallowly on retrieve are excellent in waters where submerged cover is

found only a foot or so beneath the surface.

Day in and day out, topwater plugging is not the most productive method of bass fishing, but there's little argument about it being the most exciting. The smashing strike of an enraged bass, the ensuing battle and a heavy rush of adrenalin—that's what topwater time is all about.

# When Fish Grew Big in Kansas

By David Dary

Photos Courtesy Kansas Historical Society

The modern-day record for a channel catfish in Kansas is 32 pounds. But 50 or more years ago a 32-pound catfish would have been considered almost commonplace. Catfish weighing more than 100 pounds were caught in early-day Kansas.

Yellowing pages of many 19th century Kansas newspapers are filled with stories about giant catfish. One of the earliest describes how two such fish were taken early one morning from the Kansas River near Topeka. That was the summer of 1859. The largest fish weighed 160 pounds, the smallest 110 pounds.

One witness noted: "The mouth of the larger one measured, on the inside, 8 by 12 inches. That fellow could carry a pretty good lunch in his head."

A few days later a 106-pound catfish was caught near the same spot. It was one of many catfish weighing slightly more than 100 pounds caught that summer in Kansas.

In 1865, soldiers from Ft. Riley were fishing with a seine (then there was no law against it) in the Republican River near Junction City. On one sweep they pulled in seven fish weighing between 40 and 105 pounds. A

Junction City newspaper reporter saw two of the fish. One weighed 68, the other 73 pounds, he reported. Each measured about four feet in length.

"These finny gunboats ply the Smoky Hill, Republican, Saline, Solomon and their tributaries," wrote the reporter.

The following year a 125-pound catfish was caught by a settler in the Republican River at Bachelder, Kansas. He took the fish to Junction City where he sold it to Watson & Record's butcher shop. It was five feet long, about 15 to 18 inches across the head.

Not many months later another giant was pulled from the Smoky Hill River near Junction City. It weighed 120 pounds and also ended up in a Junction City butcher shop.

During the early years of statehood, many Kansans fished for a living. Meat markets offered catfish along with beef, pork, lamb and buffalo meat. When a 100-pound catfish was taken from the Kansas River near Lawrence, the fisherman sold it to Kretsinger & Timmons' grocery store in Lawrence. The fish's head was placed on display.

The boasting Lawrence newspaper editor said it was so big "you have to go in at the back door of the store to get out at the front, the thing's snout sticks a good ways across the street."

The King brothers found river fishing so good near Manhattan, Kansas, in 1869, that they formed the "Manhattan Fishing Company." During the several years that they remained in business their giant catches included a 131½-pound catfish, another weighing 89 pounds and several in the 60-pound range and countless other "cats" of lesser weight.

Rocky Ford Dam, just north of Manhattan, was an especially good spot to catch big catfish. One Manhattan newspaper editor wrote in 1879 that "people from all over the country gather there for the sport. Some very large ones have been taken lately.



Mr. Thomas Hair, from Wild Cat took about 400 pounds a few days ago. On Thursday, Messrs. Jenkins, Horton, Elder and A. M. Taylor made a visit to the dam and returned with about 100 pounds of fish. The largest cat weighed 48 pounds. They left a 20-pounder at 'our house,' whereat the editor makes his best bow. Baked catfish is good."

Near Paola, Kansas, in June, 1876, two fishermen on Pottawatomie Creek managed to haul in a "cat" weighing 56 pounds, and several others weighing 20 to 40 pounds.

But fishing for the big ones was sometimes dangerous. Harry Pipher went fishing in the Kansas River near Manhattan in April, 1871. After a few minutes he had a bite. It was a big catfish and it was all Pipher could do to pull it to shore. It weighed 40 pounds. Harry Pipher weighed 56 pounds.

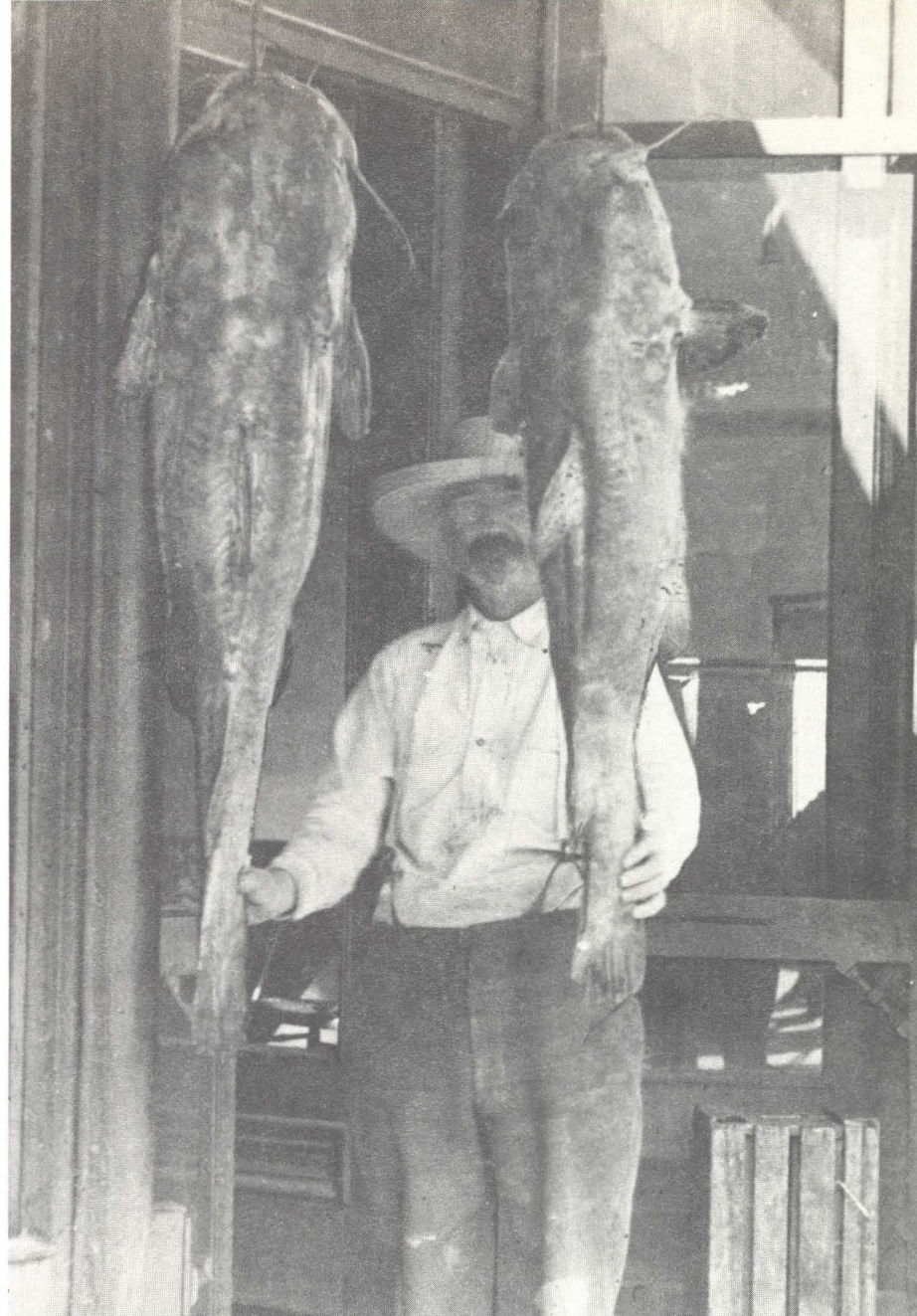
Phil Ernst, Sr., who owns a Lawrence hardware store, has heard many stories about the really big catfish caught in the Kansas River near Lawrence. When asked if large catfish are still being caught there, Ernst replied, "Occasionally someone catches one that may weigh about 75 pounds, but it has dwindled down—the catching of the really big ones."

Asked if he had done much fishing for the large catfish, Ernst said he had done some. "I've caught some 40-to-50 pound cats. I used big bullheads for bait and used bank lines."

Ernst said fishermen used to use grab-hooks and nets to catch the big catfish, but he added, "Of course, that's illegal now."

Then he told the story of Abe Burns, a Lawrence fisherman of the 1890's. Burns, said Ernst, liked to strap a grab-hook to his wrist, dive into the water near the Bowersock Mill at the dam on the Kansas River in Lawrence and try to hook the big catfish that lived under the dam and the mill.

"Oldtimers around Lawrence said the big catfish under the mill and the dam were like hogs in a hog lot," said Ernst. "Burns would dive into the muddy water and go under the wooden dam or back under the mill. He had to feel around for the big catfish. When he found one he would



try to hook it. If he did, Burns would tug on the line. A man on shore would help Burns pull the fish in," said Ernst.

Ernst then related a story about Burns that fishermen around Lawrence tell.

"One day Abe Burns went fishing down by the Bowersock Mill on the Kansas River. He attached the grab hook to his wrist, waded into the river and went under the mill to hook one of those big cats, but he never came up. No one knows what happened to him, but according to the oldtimers, Burns apparently hooked a big cat he couldn't handle. Fighting with the fish, Burns probably lost. He

may have drowned," said Ernst.

So far as is known, Burns' body was never found.

Whether these early-day catches in Lawrence and elsewhere were channel catfish, flatheads or blue catfish is not recorded. Oldtimers simply called them catfish. But Dr. Frank Cross, curator of fishes at the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas, feels certain that most of the fish Abe Burns went after were flatheads.

"Flatheads are usually found under such dams. Then too, it's hard to wrestle blue catfish. They're too quick. Flatheads are more docile, said Cross.

It seems quite probable, according to Cross, that many years ago blue catfish may have run up the Kansas River to the Blue and Republican rivers. It was then that frequent floods would have enabled the big fish to swim over the low mill dams. With flood control today, the fish do not have a chance to swim very far up stream in the Kansas River.

But blue catfish are on their way back. About two years ago the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission began stocking lakes throughout Kansas with small blue catfish. In time giant blue catfish may again entice the patient fisherman in Kansas.

There is no angling record for the blue catfish in the modern-day record books of the Kansas Forestry, Fish

and Game Commission at Pratt. Their records for catfish are limited to the channel and flathead species. The channel catfish record is 32 pounds. It was caught in the city lake at Gardner, Kansas, in August, 1962, by Edward S. Dailey, and the flathead record is 86.3 pounds. It was caught in the Neosho River by Ray Wiechert of Brazilton, Kansas in August, 1966.

But the present-day angling record books do not take into account what may be the all-time record catfish pulled from the Kansas River near Lawrence on April 11, 1877. A Lawrence newspaper described the fish as a "shovel-nosed cat" with a "guessed-at-weight" of 250 pounds.

That was a big fish.

David Dary, a native of Manhattan, is a journalism professor in the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas. His stories about Kansas and the Old West have appeared in *The Kansas City Star* including *Star Magazine*, *The Catt'eman*, *The Western Horseman*, *True West*, *Frontier Times* and other magazines. Dary is the author of *The Buffalo Book: The History, Legend and Lore of the American Buffalo* to be published by Swallow Press, Chicago, later this year. He is married, has four daughters and lives in Lawrence.





By Ross Manes  
Staff Writer

**A**FTER ANY spring or summer shower at least one magnificently hued arc is painted across the clearing Kansas sky. In fact, it often seems that we get more than our share of rainbows. Frequently two will appear, sparking joking comments about legendary pots of gold and instilling a sense of well-being in the dazzled viewer.



Manes

If, however, you mention rainbows in a group of fishermen all thoughts will turn to pictures of tautly arcing rods and leaping fish. The rainbow trout has probably inspired more pages of colorful writing, and stimulated more daydreams among winter-bound fishermen than any other fish. Although there are essentially no trout in Kansas, "ol' bow" still has a dedicated, if somewhat informal, fan club. Among club members, the question most often voiced is, "Why can't we have trout in

Kansas?" The answers are numerous. Actually, there are rainbow trout in Kansas, but their occurrence is so limited that it hardly bears mentioning. A few are taken by anglers on the Arkansas River over towards the Colorado border, but the only trout fishing of any significance takes place at the other end of the state.

Wyandotte County Lake is an extremely heavily fished area near Kansas City that is stocked annually by the Wyandotte County Parks Department. Residents of the county can try their luck on northern pike, walleye, bass and channel cat, as well as trout, for a yearly fee of \$2.00. Non-residents must shell out \$5.00 a year to fish the 300 acre lake, or they can go the dollar-a-day route if they choose. The fees are used to restock the lake, and they are a good indication of one reason there aren't more trout in the state.

Each year Wyandotte County Lake gets about 8,000 pounds of rainbow trout from a Missouri hatchery, at a cost of 84 cents a pound. Kansas has approximately 300,000 licensed resi-

dent fishermen who plunk down \$3.00 a year for the privilege of fishing in the state. If the entire \$900,000.00 from resident license fees was used to purchase trout at 84 cents a pound it would provide only three and a half fish, averaging a pound each, for every fisherman. Of course, that's not considering any natural loss of fish after stocking, and it doesn't allow for several thousand unlicensed fishermen under 16 and over 65 years old. It also doesn't leave any money for management and stocking of other fish.

It would appear logical, since commercially reared trout are so expensive, for the Fish and Game Commission to get into the trout hatchery business for itself. Such is not the case. Disregarding the considerable cost of constructing hatchery facilities, according to several other states it still costs about a dollar a pound to get a rainbow out of the egg and into the lake.

Even if the fishing public of Kansas was willing to finance a put-and-

take trout fishing program for the entire state it wouldn't work.

In the first place, Kansas is cursed—or blessed, depending on your point of view—with an almost total lack of suitable water for hatching and rearing rainbows. Clear, clean running water, lots of it, is required for a hatchery operation and these finicky fish prefer temperatures from 50 to 52 degrees for spawning. With those requirements, possibilities are extremely limited. Of course, trout have been successfully raised in 68 degree water, but at that level the potential for catastrophic disease and/or infestations of parasites is fantastically high. Kansas streams reach much higher temperatures during the summer.

If trout could be raised in Kansas in sufficient quantities to make it worthwhile we would still face the problem of where to stock them.

With the possible exception of a few old quarries, strip pits, or spring-fed ponds we simply don't have any trout water. While spawning requires water in the 50's and rearing may tolerate temperatures into the upper 60's, adult fish can stand higher ranges. Unfortunately, the mid to upper 70's are lethal for trout and even a steady 70 degrees is too much for any lengthy period of time. Temperatures of Kansas lakes frequently exceed 80 degrees at the surface.

What about the deeper water in some of our larger reservoirs? Well, one of the state's most notable features is wind, and when it comes to fish it's a mixed blessing. The mixing action produced by wind results in very nearly uniform water temperatures from top to bottom in most of our lakes. During the summer this spells doom for trout. Long windless periods don't offer any hope either.

On the rare occasions when the wind abandons the Kansas prairie for days, or perhaps weeks, the situation becomes grim for other fish as well as our hypothetical trout. At these times, lake waters may become stratified, or layered. A layer of warm water rests at the surface in summer months, a cooler layer beneath, and in deeper areas a dark, cold layer at the bottom. A dark, cold layer almost

without oxygen. The same mixing action that produces even temperatures also carries dissolved oxygen to the depths.

Some of our Kansas fish can stand very low levels of oxygen. Trout, however, require about 8 parts of O<sub>2</sub> per million parts of water and suffocate when the level drops to 5 or 6 ppm. The oxygen level in deep water falls below this level when a reservoir stratifies.

An 8-pound rainbow was taken from Wyandotte County Lake by a lucky angler in 1972. According to a representative of the County Parks Department the fish had to be stocked in 1969, which proves that trout can be carried over from year to year in Kansas. The circumstances that permit carryover are complicated, and probably don't exist anywhere else. Wyandotte County Lake is 90 feet deep in one place and is fed by numerous springs.

It is barely possible that somewhere in the state an impoundment exists which has the necessary combination of conditions to maintain trout. The strip pits in southeastern Kansas once seemed to hold possibilities. In the early 1950's trout were stocked in a particularly inviting pit. Like the trite

old line in a grade B horror movie,—they were never heard from again.

Other states have gotten around the temperature problem by stocking trout below dams where water drawn from the bottom of a reservoir comes out relatively cold. Missouri's Lake Taneycomo, which receives water directly from the bottom of Table Rock Lake is a prime example. In Kansas once again we can't duplicate the situation.

When water from the depths of a Kansas reservoir is cold enough it's low in oxygen content. When it has enough oxygen it's too warm. As if that wasn't bad enough, because our reservoirs are designed for flood control rather than electrical power production, water flow is intermittent and often fails when it would be most needed.

The outlook, if you're hung up on trout fishing, just isn't very bright. The Fish and Game Commission hasn't given up on trout because new reservoirs are being built constantly and things can change. For the moment, though, you better look for your rainbows in the sky and while you're at it—hang a hook in old big mouth, or walleye, or white bass, or northern, or crappie, or channelcat, or—



Wyandotte County Lake is about the only water in the state which offers rainbow trout like this youngster has hooked.

# Fishing Historic Council Grove

By Bill Scott  
Staff Writer

Photos by Ken Stiebhen

**S**OME OF the finest walleye fishing in Council Grove is found right down there! Oh man, have I seen 'em drag big walleye out of there!"



Scott

State Game Protector Willard Jones and I were below the dam perched on a hill overlooking the opened outlet gates. The roaring torrent of muddy water crashed and churned like a berserk monster, looking madly for something to devour.

"Council Grove" conjures up familiar names and places to most Kansans. The jumping-off place for the Santa Fe Trail was here, as it was the last outfitting post between the Missouri River and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The fabled "Last Chance Store" took its name from this frightening fact. Old Hays Tavern, the Old Indian Warning Bell, Post Office Oak, Last Chance Store, Custer Elm and Council Oak are all located in this amazing haven of history.

The town is so steeped in 19th

century Americana one seems to not only see it, but inhale it. Its atmosphere breathes from the sidewalks and steals from the buildings. Surrounding Council Grove are the Flint Hills, whose precipices and hollows are blanketed with that same mysterious haze, pregnant with told and untold secrets.

One of the old legends says Kit Carson cut the name "Council Grove" on a buffalo hide and nailed it to the towering oak tree under which a treaty with the Osage Indians was signed in 1825. Only the stump of old Council Oak remains today, the victim of a 1958 windstorm.

However, if the Osage still perform their tribal dances in the valleys north-northwest of Council Grove they are indeed Indians with wet feet! Thousands of acres of blue water now inundate the places where the Indians stomped. Today, Council Grove is the home of the "Twin-Lakes": Council Grove City Lake and Council Grove Reservoir. This article will concern itself with the reservoir: 2,860 acres of water at conservation pool level.

"Walleye fishing below the tubes is best when the gates are opened, or

closed after being opened for several days," Jones continued, jerking me out of my reverie.

All species of fish are caught below the outlet gates, but walleye fishing is unusually good there. "Ninety percent of the walleye are caught on and just below the concrete. Use a slow, steady retrieve with a ¼- or ⅝-oz. jig and keep it on the bottom; let it bump the rocks." Don't worry about jiggging it with your rod. As the jig bounces along, rises and falls from rock to rock it will have that up-and-down motion.

Lyle Jones (Willard and Lyle are not related), owner of the Neosho Park Marina, adds that "After 12 hours of opened gates, fishing is best. For walleye, use dark-colored jigs like purple, black or brown in muddy water and bright colors like pink, white, yellow and orange in clear water."

A playground of piscatorial pleasure does exist below the tubes if you play the gates right. But there is no schedule by which the gates open and close. According to U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Reservoir Manager Cleon Linton, the gates do not open at a certain time on a specific day on an exact week.

"Water control upstream and downstream is the reason for opening the gates," Linton said. Gate openings are therefore made on the basis of heavy rains or drought in the area. Since no one can determine exactly what the weather will do when, the gates open at random times. Besides, Linton notes, "We don't govern any gate changes here. The hydraulic system in Tulsa controls our gate changes."

So how can you play the gates if you aren't a native? You can't drive constantly to the reservoir if you live in Topeka!

Call Cleon Linton. His office number is 316-767-6612. Office hours are 8:00 to 4:30 Monday through Friday. "Sometimes there won't be anyone here. If you don't have any luck, try again in an hour. I'm usually in and out of the office more than an hour at a time. We don't have an office girl here as they do at some reservoirs."



White bass were recently introduced to Council Grove and should fill the gap between walleye and crappie runs.

Or, let's say that on Saturday you decide to skip church and go fishing Sunday morning. Muttering "the devil made me do it," call Lyle Jones at the marina. He'll be glad to help you hear the angels sing in the heavenly fishing of Council Grove; his number is 316-767-5924.

"And do you see that muskrat slough?" Jones asked. I did. It was a backwater area, shallow and interspersed with weeds, a placid pond. Located below the tubes on the east side of the channel just above the trees, many walleye bash baits there as they rest in the quiet water.

Trollers toss temptations at wandering walleye on the main lake in three hotspots. Off the face of the dam and east of the "Church Camp Cove" are two favorites. On the west side of the church camp is an old rock quarry, the third of the top main lake areas.

Walleye are hefty at C. G., averaging 1½ to four pounds and there are many nine and ten pounders lurking in the depths. Old Walleye Killer

Paul Buchman of Council Grove hoisted an 11 lb., three oz. walleye from the waters below the tubes Feb. 16, 1973. Unverified reports whisper that twelve pounders have been taken. Like walleye, fishing for northern pike is a year-round sport. The present state record of 24 lb., 12 oz. was wrestled from these waters. A 15-pounder is considered small! They blitz your large Hellbender, Bomber, or bobber and chub set about three feet deep. The south shore of North Richey Cove on the reservoir's east side, is traditionally the lair of northern. Be sure, though, you don't wind up in South Richey Cove. Just over the hill to the south, it offers only fair fishing for all species.

Another yearlong fish is the crappie. "There has been simply tremendous crappie fishing here the last two years," Game Protector Jones said. Scene of many climatic crappie capers is Munkers Creek, which feeds into the reservoir from east of Highway 17. Picking its way northeast into the

Flint Hills and heavily timbered, Munkers has crappie like Campbell's has soup. Fishermen slaughter crappie on jigs or bobber and minnow set three, six, eight or ten feet deep.

This past year, North Richey Cove experienced its first crappie boom. Don't overlook it when searching for the captivating crappie. Other locations periodically good are the Neosho River Cove, Slough Creek Cove and Short Creek Cove. Big strings of crappie are also taken off the bridge spanning Canning Creek, just below the Council Grove City Lake.

Wherever you fish for crappie, work the logs, submerged brush piles and deep drop-offs. Average weights run ¼-¾ pound.

Just introduced, the white bass should help fill the gap between walleye time (winter) and crappie (early summer). Whites, running both in summer and fall, move into the tributaries to spawn and smash artificials there. Particularly late April and the first two or three weeks of May, rods



double over sharply from the scrappy white bass. While still a small population, they can provide fast-moving sport off rocky ledges, the face of the dam and gravel points. Whites find small Bombers, Hellbenders and Thin Fins attractive, particularly when trolled near the bottom. From ½ to a pound average, these vanilla bass have been caught up to two pounds.

The third of the nonstop species in this Morris County impoundment is the Kansas Flash, the channel cat.

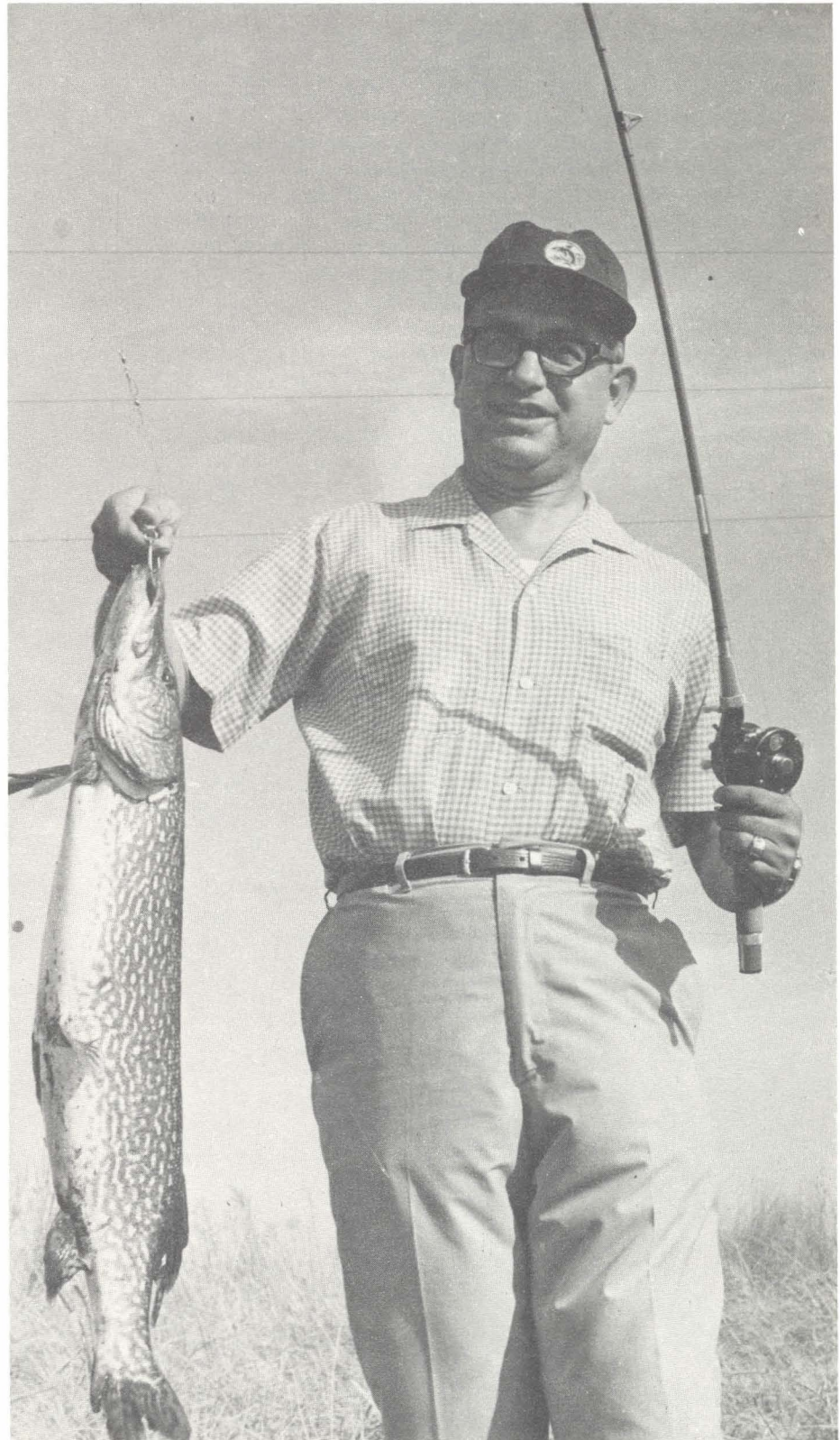
Using set lines off dead timber in the Neosho River Cove and Unkers Creek, six, eight, 10 and even 12 pounders regularly succumb to channel cat experts. A sure way to mark yourself as no expert is to use garden worms or nightcrawlers, for the small fish keep the wrigglers nipped off at maddening speed. Instead, try goldfish, crayfish, large chubs or small sunfish.

Below the faithful old tubes gives another good go at channels. One to three pounders is the typical size. Here, catfishermen use shad in cold water and large minnows, liver and striped frogs in hot weather. Using a pole, fishing on the bottom and moving as quietly as stalking ducks, brings the prize to the elated sportsman. Concoctions such as ground-up fermented minnows, cheese and anise oil are extensively used strictly in running water. This makes the water below the gates ideal for using this type of stuff. Fished upstream from the channel cat, this mess carries its message downstream. Apparently, the message is far different to the channel than it would be to a human being. The smell of shad, for example, has been compared to the smell of a thousand WPA toilets.

Another old timer's delight for running water is boiled crayfish. This softens the shell and releases more scent. But perhaps the topper is blowing worms up with a syringe!

Lyle and Willard Jones told me that an ingenious stunt of many Council Grove experts is to take an old syringe, such as a veterinarian or M.D. uses to give shots, and insert the needle behind the collar of a worm. The worm has a hollow body, except for the collar which is a muscular struc-

Council Grove Reservoir has become famous for its catches of large northern pike including the state record.



ture. When inserted with air, the tail of the worm blows up like a balloon. Then hook the worm through the body in front of the collar so he won't deflate.

The reason behind this is almost all Kansas streams, lakes and ponds have a layer of silt on the bottom. The air in the worm makes it buoyant, keeping it from settling into the mud where the fish can't find it as well as making the bait larger and more attractive to the fish.

This technique, if used immediately below the tubes, accounts for many channels and flatheads.

Growing to spectacular size with eyes on top of his head, the flathead catfish regularly reaches five to 20 pounds at Council Grove. Canny catfisherman Ralph Drake of Council Grove fishes right off the concrete wall immediately below the gates. Here, he dangles a huge wad of

blown-up nightcrawlers from several hours to as many as six or eight a day. He has muscled out many flatheads in the eight-to-24 pound class fishing in this manner. Fishing in the main lake for flatheads means the same general places, methods and baits as channels. Large minnows and crayfish seem to be preferred by most bait soakers.

And there is an added bonus nature has handed Council Grove fishermen. As Willard Jones says, "Council Grove is one of the few Kansas lakes where protection from high winds is always possible. There's always a place to fish here; wind need not stop you."

I hope you don't finish this article believing it is a story that is designed to guarantee that you will catch fish when you go to Council Grove. It's just to give you a general idea of what fish you can catch and what methods work for many people there.

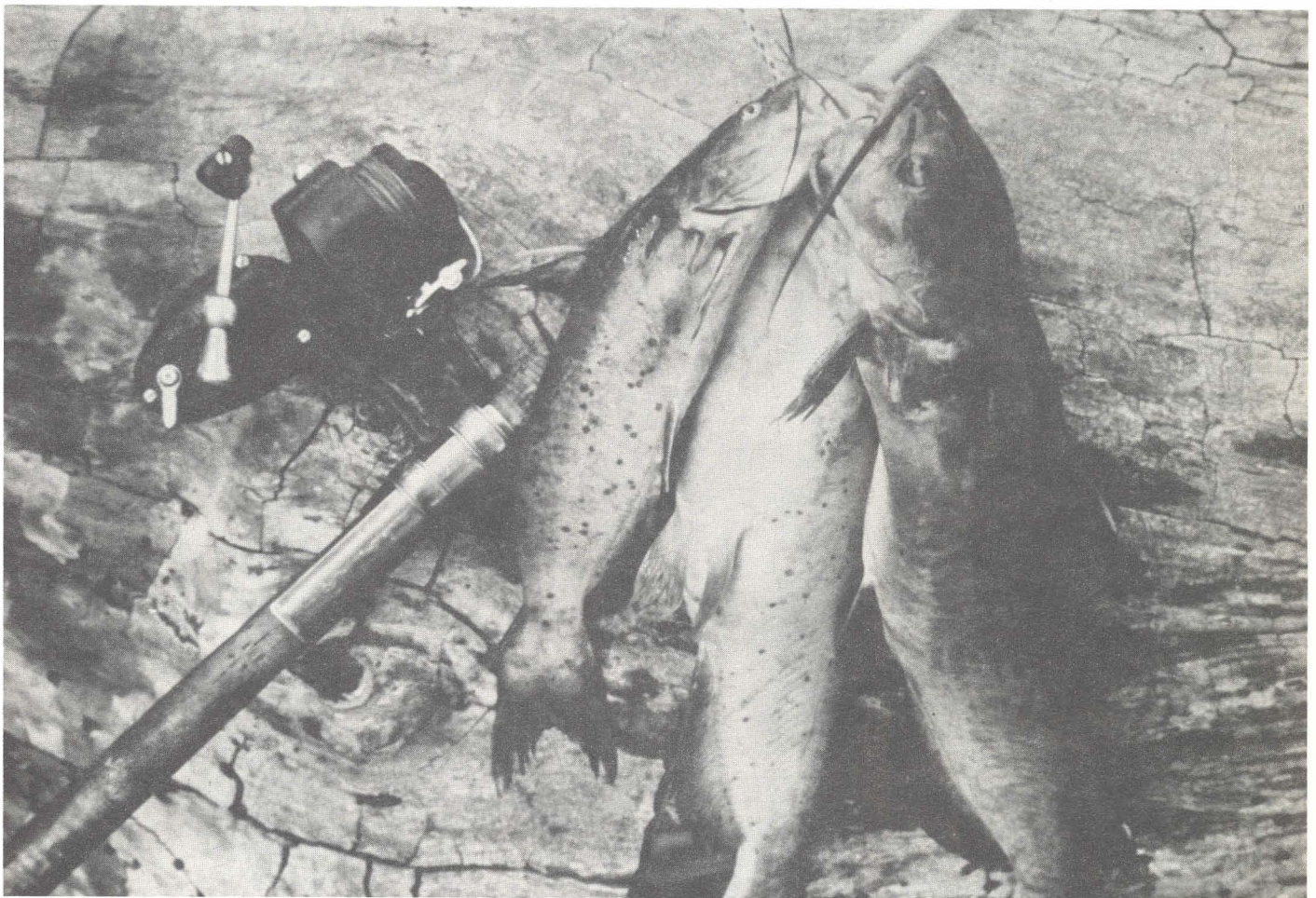
When you first go fishing at Council, the natives will tell you many tips covered here. And if you're lucky enough to find a friendly expert, you will learn much more than can be covered here.

Remember that reservoir fishing usually takes years to master, it probably took you several years to solve the little ponds and creeks near where you were raised. How much time should you expect to take in grasping 2,860 acres of water? Even a fabulous fishing lake like Council has its own "feel." This is true of every body of water.

But work at it, be patient, and fish in the freezer will be the result.

Council Grove wrote Old West history in the 19th century. Today, in the 20th century, we are watching Council Grove write fishing history before our eyes.

The ever-present channel catfish is a favorite with many anglers at Council Grove Reservoir.





Jackrabbit by Ken Stiebben

