

WILSON RESERVOIR is located in Central Kansas, about 35 miles northeast of the city of Russell, on the Saline River. Completed less than three years ago, it is still filling, and at present is about 15 feet below conservation pool level, and has a surface area of about 6000 acres. (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Map.)

A Prairie Paradise

By THAYNE SMITH

Whoever makes the final decision on names for Kansas' ever-growing list of large, man-made lakes, doesn't have much imagination. Most bear the names of small cities nearby—Pomona, Kanopolis, Kirwin, Perry, Elk City and a dozen more. One of the newest is no more spectacular than the others in name, but it's creating attention that the others do not possess and can never duplicate.

It, too, has a small city namesake—Wilson—a sleepy village 10 miles from the reservoir, with about 1,000 inhabitants.

With its new dam still showing the marks of construction and its waters not yet to conservation pool level, Wilson is a lake apart.

It could have been given many names, even with local landmarks considered. For instance, there's the Garden of Eden at the nearby city of Lucas, a tourist attraction of some renown. There's also Hell Creek Canyon, which has taken the role of sinner turned saint to form the most beautiful and scenic arm of Wilson Lake.

However, the best bet for the imaginative mind might have been another little city located nearby . . . Paradise. Wilson Lake truly is that—a paradise in the center of Kansas' rolling western prairies.

Less than two years old, Wilson—sired by a dam just a mile long, located between two tall hills in the vast Saline River valley—has a lot to offer.

New, four-lane Interstate 70 highway—one of the nation's busiest east-west routes extending from coast to coast—is 10 miles away, bringing Wilson many hundreds of visitors daily in summer months.

The area is rich in Indian, pioneer and early west history. The lake is located in the center of the state, giving it a unique drawing card among Kansas residents, as well as tourists. A new, wide and scenic state highway—K-232—connects the lake with I-70 and cities nearby. Crossing the top of the dam, the highway give the first-time visitor an eye-catching, col-

orful and breath-taking panoramic view that he wouldn't believe could exist in the area.

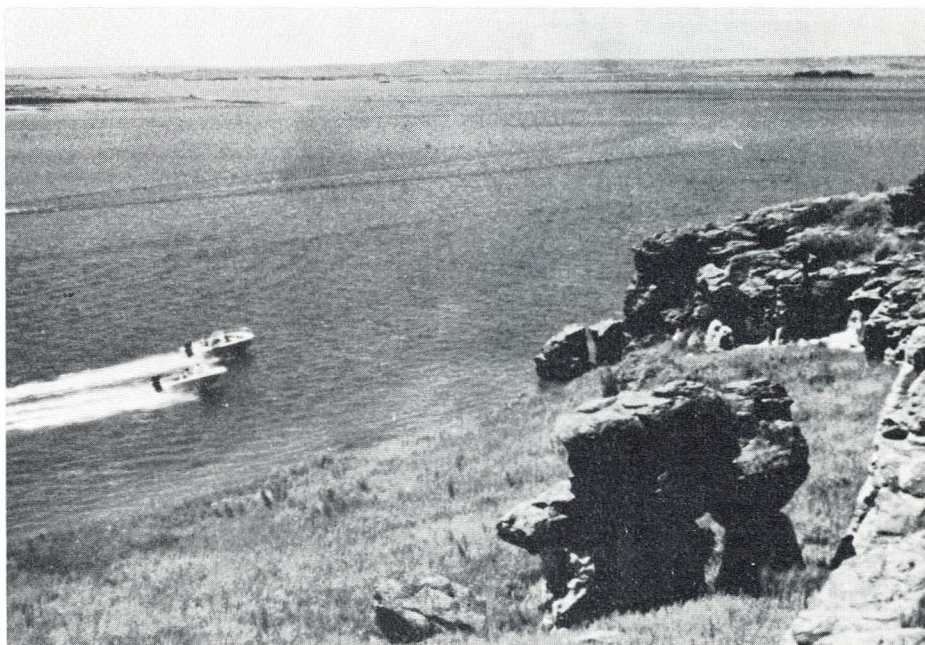
Driving north from Wilson or south from Lucas on the highway, he is surrounded only by flat prairie lands, fields of green sorghums or ripening grain, or lush pastures filled with fat cattle.

Suddenly, the landscape changes, and from either approach, he is confronted with a series of lush, rolling hills. Another mile, as the elevation drops into the ever-hazy and fertile valley, Wilson Lake spreads before him—an azure blue-green, long and narrow body of calm water, nestled between high bluffs and rolling hills, and boasting more than 100 miles of shoreline.

Through the cooperation of several

units of government, Wilson is blessed with five excellent park areas totaling more than 4,200 acres. The most attractive is a 788-acre site on the Hell Creek Arm, developed by the Kansas Park and Resources Authority. The land was leased from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, which constructed Wilson dam as a flood control-recreation-irrigation facility as a cost of \$20 million.

They call it Wilson State Park, but the public long ago dubbed it Hell Creek Park. Regardless, like 17 other parks developed by the KPRA at Kansas lakes, the area provides excellent facilities, including brick and concrete shower-latrine buildings with hot and cold running water, flush-type toilets and modern, clean lavatories; several large "toadstool" concrete picnic shelters with sturdy, newly-painted tables; and wide, concrete boat ramps. Under construction at present are a modern bathhouse, complete with concession, showers and toilets, and a swimming beach; a large trailer park area



SHEER ROCK BLUFFS and house-sized boulders along Wilson shores dwarf big speedboats plying nearby waters on north side of lake. Bluff areas, numerous around lake offer excellent fishing.



HISTORIC CARVINGS, believed made by members of the Otoe Tribe of Plains Indians, who hunted buffalo in area centuries ago, adorn walls of rock cliff on Wilson Lake's Hell Creek arm. Carvings eventually will be inundated by rising waters.

with water, electricity and sewer connections, more picnic shelters, and many camping sites.

The KPRA, although tax supported, has a \$5 per year resident vehicle park fee, good at any park which it operates, and a \$1 per day out-of-state vehicle charge. Twenty-four hour ranger patrol and daily maintenance of all areas are provided.

Other areas, all under Corps jurisdiction, include Otoe, named after an Indian tribe which often visited the Lake Wilson canyons centuries ago; Lucas, a 1,370-acre park, and Minooka, an Otoe name meaning Good Earth. All provide excellent free camping, picnic and water skiing, swimming and boat-launching areas. Lucas Park has the lake's only concession—a modernistic, large marina, boasting all services—boat sales, rentals and service, snack shop, fishing tackle and supplies, and a trailer park area.

Minimicki Park, a 390-acre site, is reserved for future development.

Although extremely popular with sportsmen, largely because of its

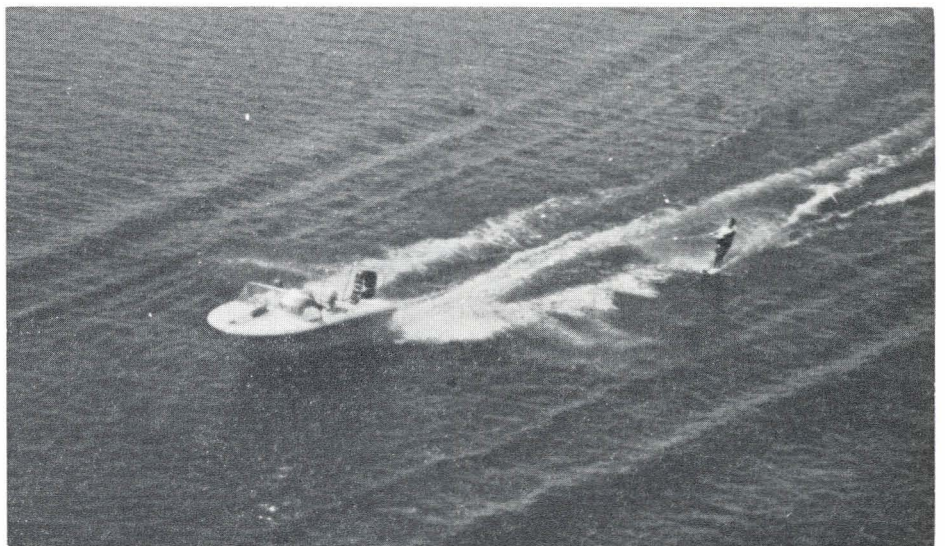
beauty and the fact that camps can be set up at water's edge, Wilson lacks one thing generally associated with outdoor recreation. It has only a scattering of large trees in its parks. There are so few, in fact, that it is often called a "treeless lake." This, however, is a problem which will not

long exist. The Corps of Engineers, through the U. S. Forest Service and Kansas State University, has planted more than 30,000 trees in the area.

The trees are growing rapidly with each passing year. Historians, on studying the problem, believe that trees and the rich buffalo grass in the areas fought a battle for survival for centuries, with the spreading grass finally winning. Some, however, blame herds of buffalo which roamed the area in hundreds of thousands and were hunted by many Indian tribes, as the reason for the "treeless" plains. Others say that raging prairie fires, long before the days of white settlers, devoured the trees and gave the buffalo grass a chance to spread and claim the land.

Wilson can be called unique because of such places as Hell Creek Canyon, too, where in a land dominated by thousands of miles of flat plains, it offers many large, rock-rimmed coves, scenic, red-brown-yellow-maroon sandstone rock bluffs, and many famous Indian carvings.

The carvings, found in spots where the Otoes and other wandering tribes camped while hunting buffalo, are on sharp, steep bluffs. They depict figures of Indian children, a sunrise, and markings symbolic of Indian gods. Many of the carvings have been inundated by the rising waters of the lake. However, some of the most prominent, and most historic, have



EXPERT SKIER—Susan Campbell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Campbell, Beverly, is a championship skier at age of 10, and spends much of her time during summer on Wilson's waters. Father operates Wilson Marina.

been removed through painstaking work by archaeologists from Kansas colleges and universities, to be preserved as museum pieces.

Some of the carvings remain above conservation waterline, however, and are located in bluffs and rocks which are a short distance from the lake. They may be seen and admired by visitors, although many can be reached only by boat.

There are many other things in the Lake Wilson area to delight the visitor—and especially the sportsman.

Wild flowers abound in the rock

canyons, fertile gullies and grassy pastures.

Famous stone posts—hand-cut limestone quarried by early-day settlers who used them to hold the barbed wire that turned the plains and prairie into rich cropland—abound. They used stone for fences because trees were not numerous enough for wood posts.

The many bluffs and rocks are havens for wildlife of many kinds. Often, great horned owls and smaller monkey-faced owls nest in the holes or crags of the rocks, and can be seen

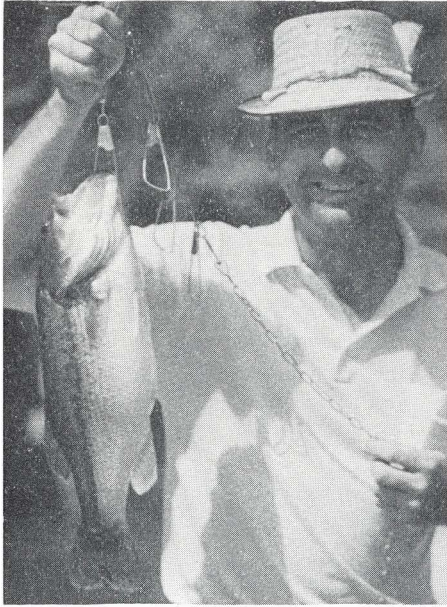
from a boat idling along the bluffs.

For the sportsman, Wilson offers some of the finest hunting and fishing in Kansas, which has become a top-notch state for both in recent years.

The Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission has leased 6,130 acres of rich land on the upper end of the lake for wildlife management and development. It offers unexcelled hunting for ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail (Kansas is one of the nation's leading quail hunting states), both whitetail and mule deer, coyotes and rabbits. The shallow, upper end



SERENE SETTING—"Toadstool" shelters, which have become a trademark of excellent parks of the Kansas Park Authority, dot beautiful Hell Creek Park on south side of Wilson Lake. Marina cove and big bridge are in background. (Photos by Thayne Smith.)



LUCKY ANGLER—Richard Mai, Russell, displays 3½-pound black bass moments after hauling it from Wilson Lake on artificial lure.

of the lake also is an ideal area for waterfowl, and excellent hunting can be had from water-based or shoreline blinds. Primary waterfowl species which frequent the lake are Canada, whitefront and snow geese, mallard, teal, pintail, coot and other ducks.

Fishing is another Lake Wilson asset. In fact, some Kansas Fish and Game biologists flatly predict that it will be the finest of all Kansas lakes for all-around fishing within the next two years.

The Commission began stocking Wilson waters with various fish when water was first impounded in 1965. In addition, the river on which the dam is located was "home" to several native species, such as white bass, channel catfish, bluegill and several varieties of sunfish.

Because of its high salt content, Wilson waters have been chosen for a state experiment with striped bass. The striper, of course, is an original saltwater fish which has become adapted to fresh water in some southeastern states. Kansas has secured several thousand striper fry from South Carolina and placed them in Wilson. The experiment is still too young to determine if successful.

Outstanding growth and reproduction have been achieved through the state and at Wilson with two other "foreign" fish species—the walleye

and northern pike. Northern, in less than two years, are now more than five pounds, and some walleye, planted as fry two years ago, are more than three pounds. The lake also boasts black bass to five pounds, large crappie, white bass to two ponds, bluegill, and channel catfish in the 10-15 pound class.

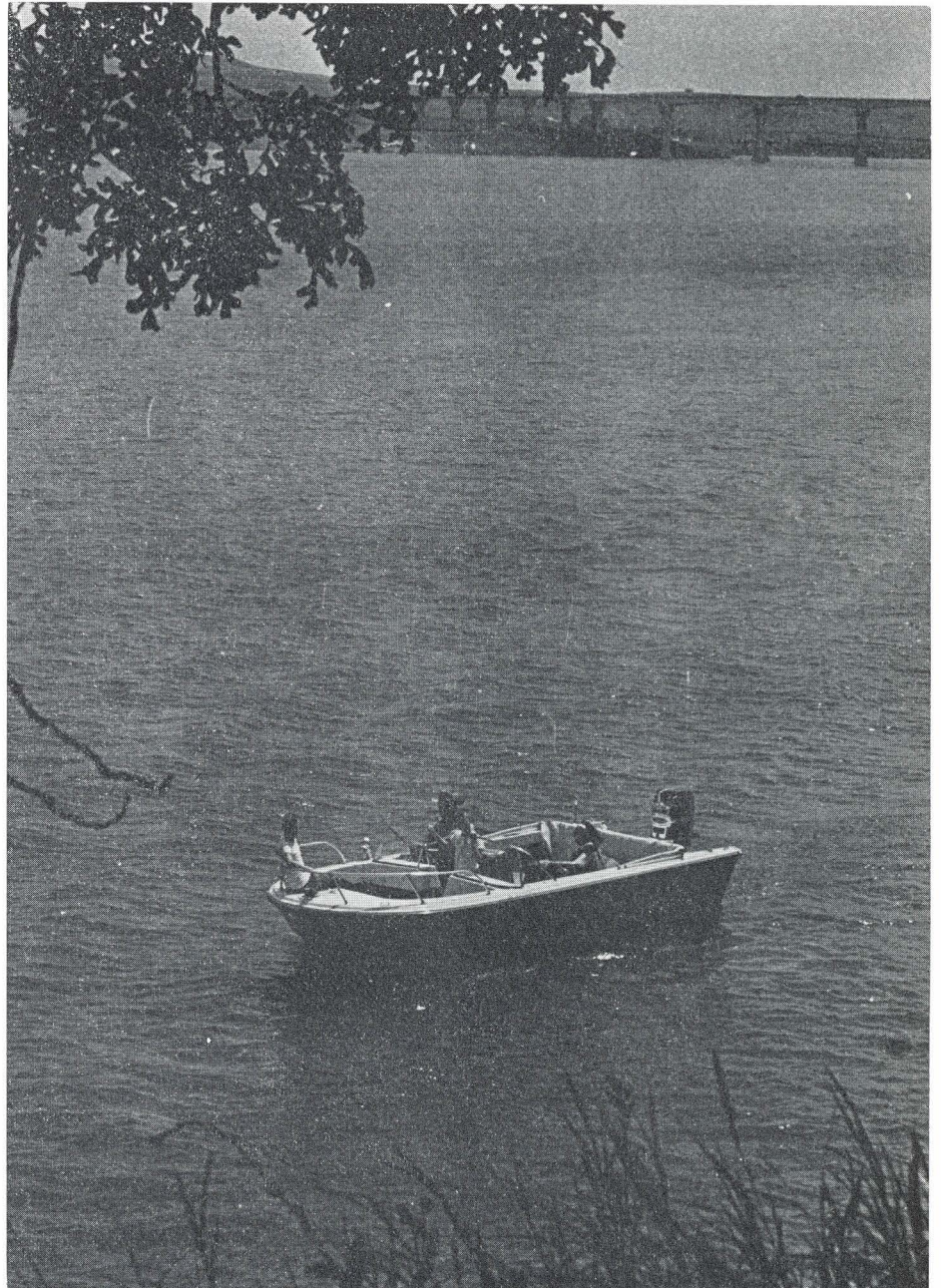
Many visitors, upon seeing Wilson for the first time, will tell you that it is the most beautiful spot in Kansas.

Others—but a definite minority, and

understandably most are campers—marvel at Wilson's beauty, but are quick to add that it needs one thing—shade trees.

In fact, there is somewhat of a good-natured controversy going in places like Lucas, Paradise, and the city of Wilson, about whether more trees should be planted around the lake and in the various parks.

Most agree that shade is needed. Some fear, however, that numerous trees might block the view, and spoil all the excellent scenery.



PICTURESQUE AND TRANQUIL are the waters of Hell Creek Canyon on Wilson Lake, with big, high bridge in background.