



LIFE ON THE LAKE

BY JEREMY SHERE PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE RAYMER



On a hot, bright, summer day on the lake, three houseboats are tied together side-by-side in a cove.

The occupants—men, women, kids, dogs—are gathered on the upper decks, sipping cool drinks, nibbling on chips and hors d’oeuvres, taking in the sun and breeze, occasionally jumping in for a dip.

Elsewhere on the lake, shirtless teenage boys and bikini-clad girls race across the water on jet skis. A speedboat skims along the surface hauling an inner tube containing two screaming, laughing boys. Single-mast sailboats glide by quietly, their sails whiter than white against the backdrop of intensely green wooded hills.

Water, sun, fresh air, fragrant breezes—it’s hard not to love life on a Sunday afternoon at Lake Monroe.

“People come to the lake from Indianapolis, Bloomington, all round,” says Samantha Goodpaster, the slip-leasing agent at the Fourwinds Resort and Marina. “It’s like a home away from home.”



(left) There are good times galore when three houseboats join together. (right) The flotilla found a peaceful cove in which to anchor.



THE COVES ATTRACT SWIMMERS, FISHERMEN, AND LAKE REGULARS OUT

(bottom row, from left) A speedboat pulls rafters. Canada geese cruise along the shore. Jet skiers buzz among larger craft.



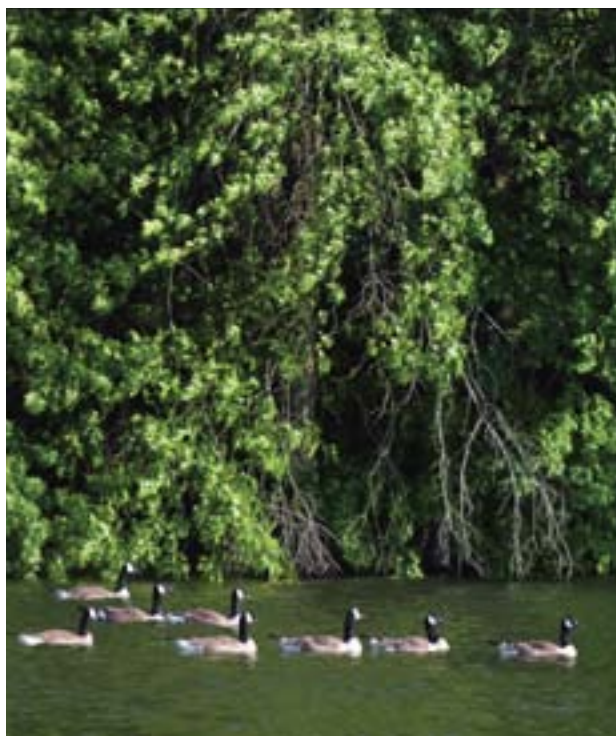


(far left top) A fisherman makes a (small) catch.
(far left bottom) Speedboats abound on a sunny Sunday afternoon.
(left) A bird's eye view of a section of Lake Monroe.

Stretching across Monroe, Brown, and Jackson counties, Lake Monroe is Indiana's largest body of water. Intended for use as a reservoir, the lake was created in 1960 by damming Salt Creek, a tributary of the East Fork White River ten miles south of Bloomington. By 1965, the backed-up creek had flooded more than 10,000 acres and Lake Monroe was open for business. Today, the Fourwinds, Paynetown, and Lake Monroe Sailing Club marinas house more than 1,000 houseboats, speedboats, and other watercraft that bring the lake to life throughout the summer.

From above, the lake looks like an oddly shaped dragon, with a horned head at its southern tip, several spindly arms protruding from the torso and, at the northern end, two splayed legs jutting crookedly away from the main body. The coves created by this irregular shape provide numerous peaceful escapes from the buzz of activity on the lake's wide middle section. The coves attract swimmers, fishermen, and lake regulars out for a leisurely afternoon on their boats.

FOR A LEISURELY AFTERNOON ON THEIR BOATS.



“IT’S REALLY LIKE A BIG FAMILY”... “I FOUND HIM A BOAT AND HE



FOUND ME A WIFE.”



(left) Daytrippers can rent pontoon boats at the Fourwinds and have their own party.

(below) Brad and Christy Gillenwater met aboard a houseboat, married, and now own one themselves. Christy enjoys a swim with her dog Carver.



In late June, a *Bloom* writer, photographer, and editor rented a pontoon boat in order to get a feel for what life on Lake Monroe is like. Motoring away from a dock at the Fourwinds Marina, we cruised among the jet skis and speedboats until we came upon a quiet stretch of water where three large houseboats were anchored and tied together. We were invited to join and, without hesitation, one of the houseboaters dove into the water, boarded our pontoon, and expertly guided us alongside to join the floating party.

“There’s nothing like being on water with friends and having that family atmosphere,” said our guide, Brad Gillenwater, an avid sailor and boat salesman. His wife, Christy Gillenwater, president of the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, showed us around their craft. Like many of the larger houseboats moored at the Four Winds, the Gillenwater’s boat has several small bedrooms, two bathrooms, a full kitchen, and a large living room. During the summer months, families spend long weekends on these boats, forming a close-knit community.

“It’s really like a big family,” said Christy as she led us up to the top deck of the neighboring boat where a group of 20 adults and children were taking in the sun and air. Christy and Brad had met at a party on this same boat three years earlier, soon after Brad had sold the boat to a friend.

“I found him a boat and he found me a wife,” explained Brad, who proposed to Christy six months later while on a sailing trip off the Florida coast.

For Lisa Allen, owner of another of the houseboats, the lake is a place where hardworking businesspeople can relax, enjoy each other’s company, and feel a special camaraderie.

“I would have sold my boat after the first week if it wasn’t for everyone being so nice and teaching me how to drive and take care of it,” said Allen, who owns a State Farm agency in Bloomington. She has come to value the close-knit community that comes with keeping a boat at the marina, “getting to know each other’s kids, networking with other local business owners, and just having fun.”

Perhaps no one appreciates life on the lake more than Jack Sherley, a retired Indianapolis businessman who’s been boating on Lake Monroe for 32 years. What keeps him coming back year after year, he says, are the friends he’s made. “I like boat people—they’re open and willing to help, they’ll do anything for you.” This year, for the first time, Sherley intends to live on his houseboat into the fall and winter. Being on the lake is good for you, he exhorts. “It’s a healthy lifestyle and there’s always something to do on a boat, whether it’s cleaning, or repairing, or just going for a swim.”





All is peaceful as a new day dawns on beautiful Lake Monroe.