



Photo by Mark Hannan

Lake James' waters are rated the purest along the entire Catawba River chain.

Duke paid fair price for lands along river

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Lake James is widely acclaimed for its scenic beauty, but the impoundment was created for purely practical reasons.

In the early part of the century, Southern Power Company, which would later become Duke Power, built dams on the Catawba and Linville rivers and Paddy Creek to form the 6,510-acre lake as a source of hydroelectric power.

Known in the early days as the Bridgewater Reservoir (named for the nearby Bridgewater

community), the lake, which straddles Burke and McDowell counties, was one of a series of impoundments created by Duke Energy on the Catawba River, most of them completed between 1907 and 1928.

The lakes were a key component of the company's master plan of "electrifying" the Catawba River in North and South Carolina. The plan was achieved with great success as hydroelectric stations along the chain produced a cheap source of electricity, stimulating industrial growth throughout the region.

An article in the March 22, 1935, edition of The News Herald noted about Lake James,

"And while nature lovers are reveling in the beauty, they often forget the utilization of the lake, and the fact that the power generated here has played an important part in the industrial development of the Piedmont section of the two Carolinas, for one of the factors contributing to the industrial growth has been the abundance of hydroelectric power."

Construction on the Lake James dams began in August 1916. The hydroelectric plant, which is located at the Linville River dam, began using water from the lake to produce electricity

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