

ABANDONED!
Towns Without People

SALTON SEA RESORT

Death in the Desert



by Kevin Blake

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Death in the Desert



by **Kevin Blake**

Consultant: Jennie Kelly
Director, Salton Sea History Museum
North Shore, California

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Contents

Not What It Seems	4
Disappearing Lakes	6
A Giant Lake	8
Growing Towns	10
Stars in the Sun	12
Runoff	14
A Slimy, Salty Lake	16
Wildlife Graveyard	18
Abandoned	20
Picturing What's Left	22
Toxic Cloud	24
The Future of the Salton Sea	26
The Salton Sea: Then and Now	28
Glossary	30
Bibliography	31
Read More	31
Learn More Online	31
Index	32
About the Author	32

Not What It Seems

From far away, the Salton Sea looks like a paradise. California's largest lake is surrounded by a white beach and red mountains. Birds glide above the cool, crisp blue water looking for fish to eat. It seems like the perfect place for people to enjoy a sunny vacation.

The Salton Sea



The Salton Sea is actually a lake. People probably started calling it a sea because of its very large size.

A closer look, however, reveals the truth about the Salton Sea. The sand is actually covered with **barnacle** shells and the bones of dead fish. The water isn't always blue. Sometimes it turns green or brown. At one time, hundreds of thousands of people crowded the lake and its beaches each year. Now, many areas around the lake are **abandoned**. What happened to the once-thriving Salton Sea?

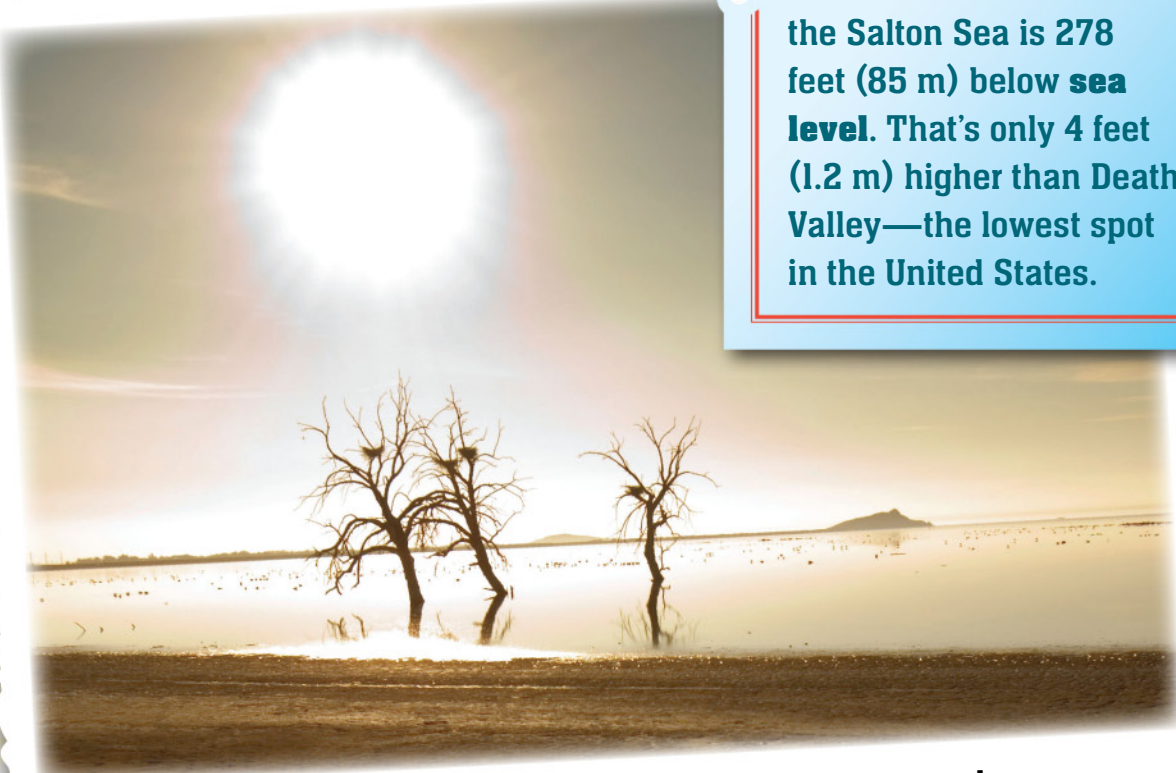


Disappearing Lakes

Change isn't new to the Salton Sea. In fact, there have been many times in the past when there was no lake in that area at all. For the last 10,000 years, lakes have been forming and then disappearing in the Salton **Basin**—one of the lowest points in the United States. Occasionally, **floods** filled the bowl-shaped area with water, creating a lake. Then, over time, the extreme summer heat—reaching over 120°F (49°C)—would cause the water to **evaporate** and disappear.



The bottom of the Salton Sea is 278 feet (85 m) below **sea level**. That's only 4 feet (1.2 m) higher than Death Valley—the lowest spot in the United States.



The hot California sun can cause lakes to evaporate.

Recently, people have played a part in creating a lake in the basin. In 1901, **canals** were dug in the area for farmers who needed water for their crops. These narrow waterways directed some water from the Colorado River toward farms. However, things didn't go as planned. In 1905, the Colorado River flooded. Water poured through the canals into the Salton Basin. The flood was so powerful that water burst through the canal walls.

This canal, built in the 1930s, takes water from the Colorado River to farms in California.

INDEX

- algae 16, 18, 24
- Beach Boys, the 12
- birds 4, 11, 19, 26, 27
- boats 12, 22, 27, 28
- Bombay Beach 11, 20–21, 22–23, 29
- botulism 19
- canals 7
- Colorado River 7, 8, 10
- dead animals 5, 18–19
- developers 11
- farmers 7, 8, 14–15, 24–25
- fertilizers 14, 16
- fish 4–5, 11, 18–19, 22, 27, 28
- floods 6–7, 8–9, 20, 24
- fresh water 17, 29
- location 10
- Los Angeles 10, 12, 25
- motels 21, 22
- resorts 11
- runoff 14–15, 16, 24–25
- salt 14–15, 17, 18, 24, 27, 29
- Salton Basin 6–7, 8
- Salton City 11
- San Diego 9, 10, 25
- Sinatra, Frank 12
- size 4, 6, 9
- smell 16
- swimmers 16, 17
- tourists 10–11, 12–13, 20, 28
- toxic clouds 24–25
- wildlife refuge 26–27
- yacht clubs 12, 21, 22



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Blake has written several books for children.
He lives in Portland, Oregon—not a ghost town!—
with his wife, Melissa, and son, Sam.

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SALTON SEA RESORT

Death in the Desert

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Salton Sea resort area seemed like a paradise. Families flocked to California's largest lake to go boating, swimming, and fishing. Homes, hotels, and shops sprang up around the clear blue lake. Over time, however, the Salton Sea started to change. Globbs of slimy green algae began to cover the lake's surface. Then, millions of dead fish started to wash up onto the shore. Today, very few people live in the towns surrounding the lake. What happened to the resort area that was once called the "West's Greatest Playground"? Look inside to find out more about the Salton Sea, including what caused the changes to the giant lake.

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