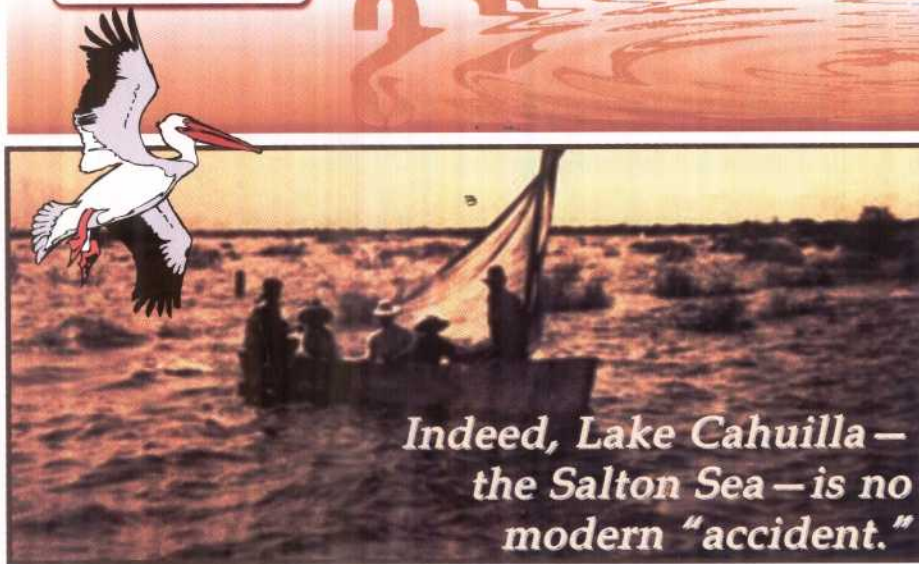




# A CHRONOLOGY SEA FACTS



**Indeed, Lake Cahuilla –  
the Salton Sea – is no  
modern “accident.”**

10,000 BC  
(Approx)

Native Americans occupy the Salton Basin.

700 AD **FLOOD!**

Lake Cahuilla forms in the Salton Sink when the Colorado River silts up its normal outlet to the Gulf of California and swings northward through two overflow channels. Lake is subjected to wet and dry climatic cycles over intervening years, filling up and drying out multiple times.

700 AD **FLOOD!**

In what is today eastern Imperial County, riverine tribes practice farming. After planting seeds and kernels in the Colorado floodplain, they cross the Algodones dunes to exploit the lakeshore and return home for summer harvest.

About 1500 **FLOOD!**

A large inflow of water from the Colorado River fills the lake to a body of water 26 times the volume of the current Salton Sea. Its former water line is still visible on the nearby mountains.

1540

Colorado River Delta first explored by Spanish. Melchior Diaz journeys up the mouth of a river now known as the Colorado from the Gulf of California and sends expeditions from the river to present day Imperial Valley.

1604

Don Juan de Ornate, Spanish Governor of New Mexico, explores the river that he names the Colorado.

1774

Don Juan Bautista de Anza leads the first large European party through what is now the Imperial Valley.

**T**hroughout its 10,000-year life span, Lake Cahuilla – which since 1905 has been known as The Salton Sea – has had a tough existence.

The meandering Colorado River changed course numerous times over the centuries and filled the “Salton Sink” area of the desert Southwest. Lake Cahuilla came and went, came and went, came and went until the dawn of the 20th Century when it finally stayed.

Not only has this lake, today the largest in California, been subjected to the whims of nature over the course of its existence, but also in recent years it has developed a bad reputation. That reputation is fed mostly by misconceptions.






Some like to say the Salton Sea is a man-made accident, formed less than 100 years ago by an engineering mishap that diverted the Colorado River into the Salton Sink. Its value is as a “sump” for agriculture.

True, the accidental diversion did occur. And instead of evaporating over a period of years as had occurred previously, today’s Salton Sea is maintained in large part by agricultural runoff from irrigation in the Imperial and Coachella valleys.

Irrigation of those fertile valleys not only supports the Salton Sea but also an industry that helps feed the world. Agricultural fields in the region join with the Salton Sea to support an ecosystem that attracts hundreds of species of birds and other wildlife. It is a crucial link in the Pacific Flyway, a very important part of the Colorado River Delta.

Agriculture in the region – and the wildlife habitat – go back at least 10,000 years.

**Indeed, Lake Cahuilla – the Salton Sea – is no modern “accident.”**

- 1774 Spanish make first contact with the Cahuilla people, ancestors of present day Torres Martinez Desert and other Cahuilla Indians.
- About 1825 Trappers, including Kit Carson, Jedediah Smith and Wm. Wolfskill make trips to the lower Colorado and the Salton Sink.
- 1840 **FLOOD!** Colorado River flooding recorded in the Salton Sink. New River possibly formed at this time.
- 1849 **FLOOD!** Oliver M. Wozencraft records a flood by the Colorado River into the Salton Sink.
- 1849 '49ers begin crossing Imperial Valley on their way to California gold fields, crossing the mountains via Carriso Creek and Warner's Hot Springs.
- 1852 **FLOOD!** More Colorado River flooding recorded in the Salton Sink.
- 1853 Imperial Valley recognized as potential desert "garden spot" if it can be adequately irrigated.
- 1859 **FLOOD!** More Colorado River flooding recorded in the Salton Sink.
- 1867 **FLOOD!** More Colorado River flooding recorded in the Salton Sink.
- 1876  U.S. Government establishes Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Reservation with a grant of 640 acres.
- 1891 **FLOOD!** More Colorado River flooding recorded to the Salton Sink, forming 100,000-acre lake. Explorers discover mouth of Alamo River and connection between the Sea and the Colorado River. Lake evaporates.
- 1891 20,000 acres of land on the northern side of the Salton Sink are withdrawn from public use for the Torres Martinez Band of Desert Cahuilla Indians.
- 1892 New Liverpool Salt Company mines salt from a salt marsh centered west of the railroad station named "Salton."
- 1901  Canal brings water from the Colorado River to the Imperial Valley.
- 1904 Silt blocks the canal, preventing it from supplying water to the Imperial Valley.
- 1905 Temporary diversion of the Colorado River, constructed to replace water from the blocked canal, is breached by floodwaters. River changes course and flows into Salton Sink.
- 1906 **FLOOD!** Floodwaters continue to fill the Salton Sea, washing away a chain of lakes along the route and threatening Imperial Valley's fledgling agriculture industry.
- 1906 George Wharton James explores the flooded areas and reports seeing large concentrations of waterfowl, pelicans and other birds in the Salton Sea area.
- 1906 The Salton Sea is recorded at -195 feet below sea level..
- 1907 **FLOOD!** Floodwaters continue to fill Salton Sea until, in February, Southern Pacific Railroad closes the river breach.
- 1908  Joseph Grinnell surveys the refilled lake and finds breeding colonies of cormorants, white pelicans and other birds.
- 1909  Thinking the Salton Sea would be gone by the 1920s, the U.S. Government reserves in trust an additional 10,000 acres of land under the Sea for the benefit of the Torres Martinez Band.
- 1911 Harold Bell Wright chronicles the floods and efforts to close the break in his best-selling novel, The Winning of Barbara Worth.
- 1911  Imperial Irrigation District formed; discussions begin promoting a new canal to supply water to the Valley.

About  
1917  
About  
1920

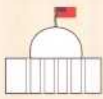
Seining of Mullet becomes profitable industry at Salton Sea during world War I.

Mullet Island on south end of Salton Sea and nearby mud pots become popular tourist attractions.

1924

President Coolidge issues an executive order, setting aside lands under the Salton Sea as a permanent drainage reservoir.

1928



Congress authorizes construction of Boulder Dam and the All American Canal that will result in control of the Colorado and elimination of flooding.

1930

Salton Sea Wildlife Refuge established.

1934

Construction begins on the All American Canal.

1938

Construction of Coachella Canal begins.

1941-45

Commercial fishermen use Salton Sea to supply mullet to coastal fish markets after German submarines make ocean fishing hazardous.

1942



The All American Canal begins supplying water to Imperial Valley; use of old Imperial Canal discontinued in U.S.

1944-45

B-29s from the U.S. Army's 393<sup>rd</sup> Heavy Bombardment Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets, make regular but highly secret practice flights from Wendover Air Base in Utah and drop dummies of a new bomb into the Salton Sea. On Aug. 6, 1945, Tibbets and his crew, in the *Enola Gay*, drop the first Atomic Bomb over Hiroshima, Japan.

1948



The Coachella branch of the canal begins carrying water to Coachella Valley.

1950

Orange mouth corvina becomes the first salt water game fish to be successfully established in the Salton Sea. Short fin corvina and gulf croaker are also successfully transplanted.

1951

65 sargo are introduced into the Salton Sea—they quickly multiply and become the most abundant fish caught in Salton Sea until their numbers begin declining, presumably due to salinity.

1955

Salton Sea State Park dedicated; at the time, the second largest state park in California.

1958

M. Penn Phillips Co. a subsidiary of Holly Corp., maps out a community on the west shore of Salton Sea, calling it Salton City.

1960

North Shore Beach and Yacht Club Estates opened on north side of Sea.

1961

The California Department of Fish and Game predicts the Salton Sea will eventually die by 1980 or 1990 because of increasing salinity levels.

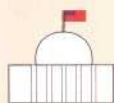
1968

Salton Sea's surface elevation recorded at -233 feet below sea level.

1968

Tracey Henderson in her book, *Imperial Valley*, writes that the Salton Sea's "salinity threat is constant and is growing more serious each year." She notes that by 1972, it may be too late to save the sea.

1974



A plan is discussed to reduce salinity levels with a diking system. After a meeting on the matter in North Shore, a leading proponent of the Sea, Congressman Jerry Pettis, is killed in a plane crash. His wife replaces him in Congress and takes up the cause.

1976





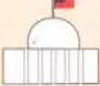


Tropical Storm Kathleen sweeps through Imperial Valley, flooding farming and increasing the level of Salton Sea. Above average rainfall for the next seven years, along with increased agricultural runoff and increased flows from Mexico, cause flooding of shoreline resorts.

1977

Tropical Storm Doreen sweeps through Imperial Valley, the second "100 year storm" in two years.

1979

Salton Sea's surface elevation recorded at -228 feet below sea level.

- 1985 Salinity of the Salton Sea exceeds 40 ppt.
- 1986 State issues advisory suggesting adults limit their intake of fish due to selenium threats.
- 1988 Salton Sea Task Force formed. It was the forerunner of the Salton Sea Authority, consisting of representatives from local government agencies.
- 1992  150,000 eared grebes die at Salton Sea.
- 1993  Salton Sea Authority formed in a joint powers agreement among the counties of Riverside and Imperial, the Coachella Valley Water District and the Imperial Irrigation District.
- 1994  Die-off of eared grebes claims 20,000 birds.
- 1995 Salinity of the Salton Sea approaches 45 ppt.
- 1996  Type C avian botulism causes large-scale mortalities of white and brown pelicans. This die-off focuses national attention on the Sea. An estimated 15 to 20 percent of the western population of white pelicans and more than 1,000 endangered brown pelicans die. This is the largest reported die-off of an endangered species.
- 1996 California voters pass Proposition 204, providing funding to the Salton Sea Authority to match federal funds.
- 1997  Congressman Sonny Bono resolves to champion restoration of the Salton Sea and forms the Congressional Salton Sea Task Force.
- 1997 Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt launches multi-agency effort to restore the Sea; warns IID to cut water use for transfer to the coastal plain.
- 1997  The Science subcommittee is organized early in the year to conduct research into environmental issues impacting Salton Sea. Dr. Milt Friend is executive director.
- 1998 Mary Bono, widow of the late Congressman Bono, is elected to Congress and picks up the banner for the Salton Sea.
- 1998  Congress passes Salton Sea Reclamation Act directing the Secretary of Interior, acting through the Bureau of Reclamation, to prepare a feasibility study on restoration of the Salton Sea and submit it to congress by Jan. 1, 2000.
- 1998 In August, 7.6 million tilapia and croakers die from oxygen being depleted due to algae in Salton Sea. Yet scientific studies show the Sea may have the most productive fishery in the world.
- 1999  Salton Sea Authority and Bureau of Reclamation release alternative plans for Salton Sea restoration.
- 2000 Pilot projects are approved and years of just talking about the problems end.
- 2000 Several methods, including an enhanced evaporation system and solar ponds, are tested to determine the best way to reduce salinity.
- 2000 A wildlife disease program is underway for early detection and response to disease outbreaks as a means for minimizing losses.
- 2000 The Salton Sea Authority enters into a partnership with the Salton Community Services District to fund a fish cleanup effort on the West Shore.
- 2000 A pet food manufacturer evaluates Salton Sea tilapia, and commercial harvesting of the prolific fish becomes a possibility.

## SALTON SEA RESTORATION PROJECT

(760) 564-4888 or (702) 293-8129

[www.salttonsea.ca.gov](http://www.salttonsea.ca.gov)