

*title*           **THE SALTON SEA**  
**Yesterday and Today**

*author*           **Mildred de Stanley**

*category*        History / Water Issues

*publisher*       Triumph Press, Inc  
1966 paperback edition, 128 pages  
ISBN (none)

*who should be interested in this book?*

Anyone interested in the history and water developments of the lower Colorado River, Imperial Valley, and the below-sea level Salton Sea, the largest lake in California.

*why read this book?*

A unique piece of history involving the Colorado River, the silt it moves, and settlement of the Imperial Valley. A failed attempt in early 1900's to divert part of the river for irrigation caused the ancient below-sea-level Salton Sink to fill - for almost two years up to the full flow of the river was north away from the Sea of Cortez to what became the Salton Sea, approximately 230 feet below sea level.

Written in 1966, this book gives an overview of the geologic history, exploration, canals and water development projects, the "runaway" river, the attempts to redirect the river, the federal government involvement (leading to the building of the Hoover Dam), and modern (to 1966) development of the area. Over 80 pictures and drawings effectively portrait the area. Also about 20 advertisements for area tourist supplies and services effectively date the book.

*review / outline by* Lance Brown, [vistadelsol@telus.net](mailto:vistadelsol@telus.net)

For current information, San Diego State University has a web site with excellent information on the Salton Sea and the Colorado River delta:

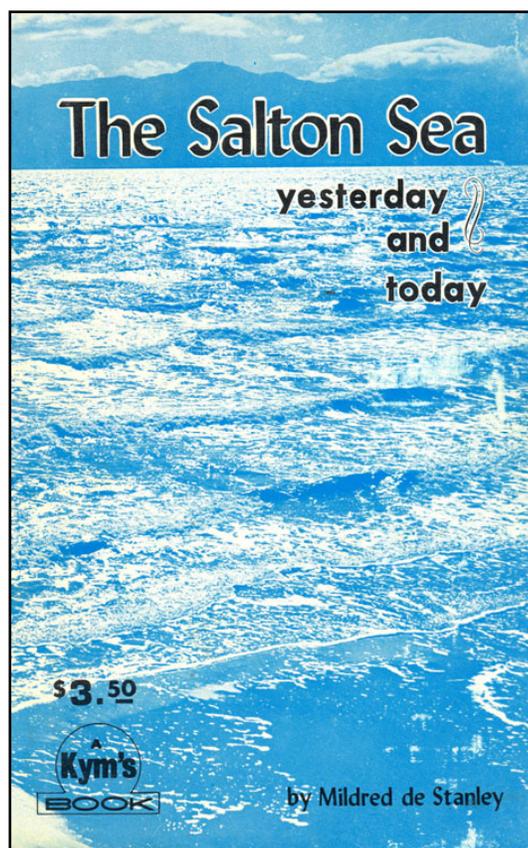
<http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/salton/SaltonBasinHomePage.html>

For a brief overview of the formation of the Salton Sea go to:

<http://institute.redlands.edu/salton/Accident.htm>

Overview

What happen to all the eroded material from the Grand Canyon and elsewhere from the action of the Colorado River? It was deposited into the Sea of Cortez, eventually blocking off the north portion leaving a low area (below sea level), the Salton Sink. The river is known to at times flow north into the Sink during freshet, maintaining a lake and forming a delta of silts. This rich delta is now the Imperial Valley and farmed with irrigation water diverted from the Colorado River. Silt depths to 3,500 m have been estimated in the Valley.



A unique piece of history is the failed attempt in early 1900's to divert to the north part of the lower Colorado River for irrigation in the Imperial Valley where lands sales had started in 1900. Because of water rights problems, the diversion was done across the border in Mexico. With diversion failure, for almost two years the river flowed north (New River) away from the Sea of Cortez in a channel almost 400m wide. It filled the Salton Sink to become the Salton Sea. The pictures of this failure presented in this book, although small, are dramatic – at one location a fall of 9m is shown!

In the 1960's the Sea was about 60 km long by 25 km wide, a maximum depth of 15m, and approximately 70m below sea level.

It is now the largest lake in California and is slightly more saline than the Pacific Ocean.

### Seventeen “Chapters” with Points of Interest

#### *Five chapters on history up to 1904*

- geologic history, Lake Cahuilla is precursor to the Salton Sea; mud volcanoes; salt harvested
- the Cahuilla Indians; early exploration and development; canals, irrigation, land sales

#### *Three chapters on the flooding due the water diversion failure 1904 - 1907*

- the runaway Colorado River; the South Pacific Railway stops the breach
- the US President Roosevelt brings federal government financial involvement

#### *Nine chapters on history up to 1965*

- 1928, the Boulder Canyon Project Act leads to the Hoover Dam, Imperial Dam and All American Canal being built
- modern development, fishing, the Salton Sea today (1965), date gardens, Coachella Valley communities, Anza-Borrego State Park, hot mineral springs and spas