Chapter 1

The Mountain Sea

GREAT SALT LAKE is unique among the great American lakes, towering in its name, yet least known. Its name itself has an aura of the strange and the mysterious, but it resists those who would know it. Lake of paradoxes, in a country where water is itself and land has little value without it, Great Salt Lake is an enigma of nature—water that is itself more desert than a desert.

Moody and withdrawn, the lake unites a haunting loveliness to a few desolation. Not many have achieved a sense of intimacy with it. It is intolerant of men and reluctant in submission to their uses. Endowing itself with its own shallows, the lake is almost impossible of navigation; recalcitrantly it has withdrawn from their piers, leaving them high and dry, or has risen to inundate them entirely. Men have mined its waters of its salts; indiffinitely the lake has replaced the salts from its affluent waters and has remained unchanged.

The pervasive mystery clinging to the lake has found expression in a bizarre folklore. Gigantic Indians riding on elephants have lived upon its islands, and the mysterious white Indians, the Munchees, once dwelt there, too. Maelstroms have ravaged its surface, great vents have opened in its bottom to drain its water horribly into the bowels of the earth, and of course it was connected to the Pacific Ocean by subterranean passage. Appalling monsters have belched in its shallows and made forays upon its shores. Noxious vapors rising from its surface have brought instant death to birds flying above it, and its corrosive salts have burned the skin from swimmers rash enough to risk themselves in its waters.

All these tales one believes or not, at his pleasure. But other tales about the lake are widely held. In the years of the "ox-team telegraph" rumors periodically swept the East that the lake had left its bed and sunk Great Salt Lake City in fifty feet of water. There still exists a tendency to wonder whether the Mormon country can...
The Great Salt Lake

be quite safe from a lake so strangely removed from common experience. Such fears are hardly shared by those who dwell in its immense valley, but even they look upon the lake a little askance. It is regarded as given to irrational moods of violence, its navigation attended by unusual hazards. Its strangling brine is feared unreasonably, and swimmers are carefully indoctrinated in the technique of caring for themselves should the stinging salt splash into their eyes—suck a finger clean and wash the eyes with saliva.

Wholly apart from the folklore, the lake has an obstinate and fascinating identity of its own. It has its own history, a startling history. But also in three centuries it has been a part of the written history of men. Spaniards and mountain men sought it out; the Mormons fled to it for a promised land. Its salt waters and the blazing deserts of its making, lying athwart the American westering, forced trails and roads and railroads north and south around it. A barrier sea, fascinating and strange, implacable and wayward!

Visitors have called its waters bright emerald, grayish green and leaden gray; they have called them sapphire and turquoise and cobalt—and they have all been right. Its color varies with the time of day, the state of the weather, the season of the year; the vantage point it is seen. It can lie immobile in its mountain setting like a vast, green, light-filled mirror, or, lashed by a sudden storm, rise wrathful in its bed to assault boats and its shoreline with smashing four-foot waves. The wind is its only master. The wind drives it contumingly about from one part to another of its shallow basin, piling up the water here, exposing the naked lake floor there, as if the basin itself were twisted and tilted under the surging green brine.

It lies at the bottom of three great north-south depressions which together comprise the valley of the Great Salt Lake. East of the lake the mighty rampart of the Wasatch Mountains, rising as high as eleven and twelve thousand feet above sea level, exacts from the prevailing westerly winds a tribute of rain and snow which created the lake and has maintained it. West of the Wasatch rises a lesser, parallel range, the Oquirrh, which dips beneath the lake at its southeastern shore to create its only good beaches. Farther north, this range rises intermittently as Antelope Island and the speck called Egg Island, then again as Fremont Island, and emerges finally as that long, rocky spine, the Promontory Mountains. A third parallel range, the Stansbury Mountains, falls off to a sand bar at the lake shore, lifts to create Stansbury Island and finally subsides into the water as two rocky crests called Carrington and Hat Islands. Along its west shore the lake is contained for much of its length by the Lakeside Mountains and Strong Knob. It then breaks free to the west for a few more miles to wash against the eastern base of the Terrace and Hogup Mountains.

The lake is deepest in the sunken valley lying between the two island chains. In 1850 Captain Howard Stansbury found depths up to 36 feet between Carrington and Antelope Islands, as against an average depth of 13 feet. The depth is less today; for the lake in 1947 was approximately 4 feet lower than in Stansbury's time.

Roughly Great Salt Lake is 75 miles long by 50 wide, but its dimensions can rarely be stated with any precision. All its shores slope so gently that its shore line is subject to extraordinary fluctuation. A rise of a few feet in the lake level may change its contours amazingly and add hundreds of square miles to its surface area.

The shallowness of the lake's basin has been its primary defense against intruders. Save only for the southeastern beaches at the base of the Oquirrhs, it is everywhere bulwarked with mud marshes and salt marshes which have made it nearly inaccessible and have done much to preserve its atmosphere of desolate strangeness. From all but a very few it has withheld itself. There have been those who have gone out upon its waters to find it possessed of an unimaginable glory, a true splendor. But intimacy with the lake for most has been of a more remote kind.

Since 1903 the fills and trestles of the Lucin Cut-off have hurled trains east and west across the lake, and the Southern Pacific's passengers have come to know something of its character. But a Pullman is insulated from reality. Carefully groomed upholstery, starched white pillows, obsequious porters and unwearying air conditioning do violence to the very nature of the lake.

Walk the salt-encrusted beaches of the southeastern shore and savor the sour, strange odor, half-stench yet alive and individual, that rises from the drying salt flats. Watch the heavy, unquiet water seeking the beach, while with harsh, unceasing cries the gray-and-white winged gulls wheel above you. This is a holiday hour; children play along the beaches; an old man floats on his back before...
you, gently rising and falling in six inches of brine transparent above
the rippling lake floor; girls sun themselves on the sand; and a boat
with tall white sails is making for the boat harbor. But listen to the
gulls and stare out over the water. Behind you is the shoulder of the
smoky Oquirrh, burnt umber and ochreous gray; in front of you,
fall out, is deepening green water intercepted by a band of deep, dark
blue in which is set the low-lying gold-and-amethyst bulk of Antelope
Island. To the west the high, bare silhouette of Stansbury Island awaits the descending sun. The sunlight plays magically
with the water, spilling quicksilver on it the while it prepares the
stain of scarlet and gold which must see the sun to its setting. The feel of the sun and the salt on your skin, the wide sweep of the open
sapphire sky, the strangely scented wind raucous with the screaming
of the gulls, the intermingled beauty and stripped ugliness of lake
and shore... in all these things is something of the experience of
Great Salt Lake.

There are other, more distant intuitions. Take US 89, the moun
tain highway, south from Ogden, follow it around the hillsides to the
mouth of the Weber, above the green-and-gold cove of Uintah, then
drive on around the shoulder of the Wasatch south toward Salt Lake
City. The highway climbs a long hill and curves gently amid the
orchards from which come Utah's surpassing peaches. All at once
the land to the west falls away and the Great Salt Lake spreads far in
the plain before you. There is the wide silver ribbon of beach be
don the green valley farmlands, the concentrate blue line of the lake,
and the warm-hued mass of Antelope hugging the dark band of
water. The lake lies immaculately alone under your sight-with*
drawn and desolate, yet touched with a strange, compelling beauty.

Similarly, it is worth bumping and bouncing over the old road to
Promontory to go on a few miles beyond the gray, pyramidal Golden
Spike monument and experience the sudden shouting presence of
the northwestern arm of the lake. Except for the twisting, rutted
road and the unsteady line of dusty telephone poles, this is the lake
of history that lies abruptly under sight—withdrawn and desolate, yet touched with a strange, compelling beauty.

This long, narrow strip of land, only 20 or 30 miles wide, has
been called the Wasatch Oasis and comprises most of Utah's five
richest and most populous counties—Utah, Salt Lake, Davis, Weber
and Box Elder. Seven-tenths of the population of the entire state
lives in this green oasis. Provo, (18,071 population) in Utah Valley
is surrounded by a cluster of vigorous small towns. Salt Lake City
(149,934 population), the state capital, wholly dominates Salt Lake
Valley and is a regional metropolis as well, profoundly influencing
life for hundreds of miles in all directions. The Davis Valley is a
continuous wealth of green farms broken up into a succession of
small towns. In the Weber Valley is Ogden (43,688 population),
Utah's second largest city, and its chief rail center. Northernmost
of these prosperous towns is Brigham City (5,641 population), at the
head of Bear River Bay. Though the Wasatch Oasis is regarded as

The Great Salt Lake

The Mountain Sea
extending northeasterly into Cache Valley, where Logan (11,868 population) is Utah’s fourth city, this area is more remote from the lake shores.

For all these cities the distance to salt water varies from five to twenty miles. Land adjacent to the lake is generally poor, alkaline and badly drained; the benchlands lying close under the mountains not only have richer soil but may be more readily irrigated by diversion canals which bring the waters of the canyon creeks to the land. The population has naturally concentrated itself on the higher land.

The lake has three great affluents—Bear River in the north, emptying into Bear River Bay; Weber River, with its delta some miles to the south; and Jordan River, emptying into the lake several miles northwest of Salt Lake City. Both the Bear and the Weber rise in the high Uinta Mountains 80 miles to the east, and after long and tortuous courses break through the Wasatch mountain wall to reach the lake. The Jordan drains fresh-water Utah Lake, which itself is principally fed by the Provo River, a stream rising within a few miles of the Weber and the Bear. Among Great Salt Lake’s three primary affluents, the Bear is by far the most important, the waters of the Weber and the Jordan to a large extent having been diverted for irrigation purposes.

Great Salt Lake itself is the remnant of a vast inland sea which once rolled over most of western Utah and small areas of eastern Nevada and southern Idaho. Called Lake Bonneville, that prehistoric fresh-water lake was almost as big as Lake Michigan and far deeper. For a time it spilled over the rim of the Great Basin, north into the Snake, but as the climate changed, it shrank upon itself, breaking up into half a dozen smaller lakes. Great Salt Lake, Utah Lake, Rush Lake, Sevier Lake, and Little Salt Lake, far south in Utah, are all remnants of the ancient sea.

Through thousands of dry years, perhaps fluctuating widely in that time but in the long run receding, Great Salt Lake withdrew toward its present lake bed. Evaporation of its waters during all these years created a higher and higher concentration of the mineral salts its tributary waters had poured into its depths, and the withdrawal from the Pilot Range, at the Nevada border, formed a vast, level, salt-strewn desert like nothing else under the American sun, a poisoned earth where the old idea of the Great American Desert has taken final refuge.

The lake has been many times given up to death since men came to its shores. In the 80’s the great geologist, Grove Karl Gilbert, predicted its early disappearance. Increasing diversion of its affluent waters for purposes of irrigation could have no other outcome, he reasoned. Antelope and Stansbury Islands would become permanently united with the mainland; the greater part of Bear River Bay and Farmington Bay would become dry; the deltas of the Bear and the Weber would join near Frémont Island, and the lake would make its last stand in the central depression west of Antelope Island.

Gilbert’s reasoning was impeccable, but the lake has shown a great obstinacy in the matter. Although its level has exhibited a general downward trend, from time to time the lake has embarked on astonishing adventures.

Exact data have been kept on its fluctuations since 1874, and traditional data have been correlated for the quarter-century before that time to give a precise picture of its fluctuations. The lake level is calculated with reference to an arbitrary elevation designated as the “zero level.” The present zero, on the Saltair gage, is at an elevation of 4,196.85 feet above sea level. This is used as the convenient standard of comparison, although there is another gage at Boat Harbor with the zero mark 10 feet lower. At the time of the Stansbury Survey in 1850 the lake was 4,201 feet above sea level. In the next 5 years it rose almost 4 feet higher, but at the end of the decade fell 5 feet. In 1862 it began a sudden, sharp climb, by 1868 rising nearly 12 feet, and in 1872 and 1873 rising 6 inches to its highest recorded mark. After 1875, however, it began to plummet, falling more than 10 feet in 9 years, and persuading Gilbert that it would soon dry up entirely. It rallied briefly in 1884-1885, rising to 4,207.5 feet, but it fell yearly thereafter until in 1905 it plumbed a depth almost a foot below zero on the Saltair gage. Gilbert’s prophecies seemed on their way to rapid fulfilment when, under the stimulus of a succession of wet years, the lake started climbing again; in four years it climbed 8 feet, to a level 3 feet above Stansbury’s mark of 1850. For 15 years the lake level remained fairly stable, but trending slightly upward until it reached the 4,205 mark. Then again,
The Great Salt Lake

however, it dropped clear out of sight. In 1934 it struck zero on the Saltair gage, and kept going right on down, in 1935 reaching a low of 3.1 feet below zero.

However, the lake level promptly rose 2.5 feet, but drought in 1940 brought it down again to an all-time low, 3.2 feet below the zero level, or 4,193.55 feet above sea level. At this point stubbornly the lake again began to struggle upward, and in April 1946 for the first time since 1934 it rose above the zero level, climbing as high as 3 feet into the plus zone (4,197.15 feet) before relaxing back below the zero line, in the usual late summer fluctuation.

The lake fluctuates from month to month as from year to year. The level is always highest in the late spring, when the lake has been swelled by the spring runoff, and usually lowest in late November and December, when evaporation has got in its deadly work; this fluctuation during the year normally approximates about one foot, though in 1907 the lake actually gained about 3.5 feet, losing only about a foot of that amount during the months of adversity.

These fluctuations in the lake level directly follow upon conditions of precipitation. A series of wet or dry years will be followed by a corresponding increase or decrease in the size of the lake. It is said that the effect of wet or dry years in the lake's watershed is felt with diminishing effect for seven years.

Though irrigation has cut down the inflow of water, the lake has been more intimately responsive to general conditions of precipitation than to diversion by irrigation projects, and here rests the lake's case for survival: it cannot dry up until all its affluent waters have dried up, until a far-reaching climatic change has come about. And there may be as much reason to anticipate a cycle of wet years as of dry. So, far from disappearing, the lake may become as obnoxious a neighbor as it showed itself to be in 1924-1925, when it threatened to put the Lucin Cutoff out of business and flood the highway along its south shore. Or it may behave as it did in the 70's, when it flooded vast areas of low-lying meadowland and induced the Salt Lake County Commission to send out an exploring expedition to learn whether the rising waters could not be diverted westward to expend themselves in again flooding the long-dry Salt Desert.

This continuous fluctuation of the lake level has given the Great Salt Lake islands an adventurous history. Depending on the stage of the water, there are as many as 13 islands. In low water some are joined to the mainland or each other, and in high water some are inundated in whole or in part.

Antelope, the largest of the islands, is 15½ miles long by 5½ miles wide with an area of 23,175 acres. It rises abruptly from the water on its western shore but slopes gently toward the brine on its eastern side. Alone among the lake islands, it has been continuously inhabited since 1848, used for the grazing of sheep, cattle and horses. Antelope disappeared from it in the 70's, but a small herd of buffalo has been maintained there since the early 90's. In time of low water it is connected to the mainland by a sand bar over which cars may be driven, but visitors, whether by land or by water, are not encouraged by the owners, for fear of such fires as in 1945 destroyed thousands of acres of valuable grass.

Frémont Island, north of Antelope, is 5 miles long and 2 miles wide with an area of 2,945 acres. Though Frémont in 1843 described it as "simply a rocky hill, on which there is neither water nor trees of any kind," there is a seepage of brackish water near the waterline on the north coast, and two artesian wells provide an additional supply for the sheep which are pastured on the island.

Stansbury Island, west of Antelope, is usually a peninsula connected with the mainland, 11½ miles long and 5½ miles wide, with an area of 22,314 acres. Mountains rising 3,000 feet above the lake make it the most rugged of the islands. Like Antelope and Frémont, it is privately owned and used for grazing purposes.

Carrington Island, north of Stansbury, is a circular islet slightly more than 2 miles in diameter with an area of 1,767 acres. Although good roofing slate was early found on it, the island was never utilized until it was homesteaded by sheepmen in 1927.

Gunnison Island, the other principal island, in the northwestern part of the lake, is less than a mile long and has an area of only 155.06 acres. Like Bird (or Hat) Island, a 22-acre pile of granitic conglomerate, it is held under mineral patent for its guano deposits and is the largest of the 4 islands harboring bird rookeries.

Egg Island and White Rock, lying off the west coast of Antelope, are tiny islets also occupied by waterfowl, and like Dolphin and Cub Islands in the northwestern part of the lake, still public domain.

Mud Island, off the mouth of the Weber, is actually a 600-acre
sandbar exposed only when the lake is low; another such sandbar is Badger Island, between Stansbury and Carrington Islands. Strongs Knob on the west shore with an area of 703 acres is normally a part of Strongsknob Mountain, severed from it only when the water is very high.

Although an island at no stage of the water, Promontory (almost universally miscalled Promontory Point), with its long, mountainous finger probing the heart of the lake, is a feature of the shore line as important as any of the islands; it, too, is privately owned in large part and is used as a range for livestock.

The Pacific Railroad in 1868 was tantalized by the idea of driving directly west across the lake but had to settle for a circuitous course to the north, and the Golden Spike was driven at the wind-blown summit of the Promontory Range on May 10, 1869. In 1902-1903, when the Union Pacific and its affiliated lines were engaged in straightening their routes, the opportunity was seized to build west across the lake during a time of low water, and the Lucin Cutoff resulted, slashing the distance to Lucin, far west in the Salt Desert, by 44 miles and eliminating the heavy grades over the Promontory.

The Cutoff drove a final spike into the hopes Salt Lake City had never been able to abandon, that it would get on the main line of the Union Pacific by adoption of “the only logical route” to the Pacific, around the south shore of the lake; the city was not entirely reconciled to the Cutoff until railroad lines down into the heart of Utah were completed to Los Angeles in 1905, giving Salt Lake City arterial connection with the Pacific Coast. In 1908 the old dream of a railroad around the south shore of the lake was finally realized when the Western Pacific was completed, giving the Denver & Rio Grande Western an outlet to San Francisco.

To construct the 102-mile Lucin Cutoff 3,000 men worked a year and a half. The cost was in excess of $8,000,000, and the job required hundreds of trainloads of rock and the timber from 38,000 trees. The arm across Bear River Bay to Promontory Point is 9 miles long, all of it rock fill except for 600 feet of pile trestle midway its length. From Promontory Point to Lakeside on the west shore of the lake is 20 miles. There are 4 miles of rock fill, then 20 miles of wooden trestle work, and a final 6 miles of fill at the west shore.

The salt water seems to preserve and harden the 100-foot pilings, but the Southern Pacific, the modern incarnation of the Central Pacific, must maintain a safety patrol at Saline, on the west shore of Promontory, to keep the rock fill under constant inspection, for storm waves exert an inconceivable battering force against the fill. For boatmen the Cutoff presents some problems, for clearance between bents of the trestles is not great, and passage is difficult if not impossible when waves are high. Moreover, when the lake level is high, vertical clearance is limited, and sailboats must dismast.

Like the railroad, the airlines chose the direct course westward. A flashing series of beacons guides planes east and west from the Salt Lake Airport across the low-lying salt water. The lake has never been hospitable to commercial boats, so its history is almost barren of dramatic shipwrecks, but since 1935 airplanes have periodically crashed in the heavy brine to provide the lake with derelicts of a different kind.

Most memorable of these crashes was the first, a two-motored Standard Oil Company of California plane on October 6, 1935. Three men lost their lives, and it required four months of intensive work to locate the plane; the oil company brought in Coast and Geodetic Survey officers familiar with hydrographic work, outfitted four search boats and carried on full scale surveying and dragging operations. Headlines were also made by the crash of an Army plane on August 31, 1937. One flier made the long swim to the highway west of Black Rock, frightening motorists with the specter of “a naked maniac” waving his arms at them, but his companion, after electing to stay with the ship in the stormy seas, swam for it too late. Search parties found his body two days later. On April 25, 1943, a B-25 bomber flying out of Sacramento crashed in the northwestern part of the lake, five men losing their lives, and a P-47 ship was wrecked off the west coast of Antelope on August 7, 1944, the pilot being killed. Early in May, 1946, a student pilot, stunting just off Black Rock, dipped his wing too low and paid with his life for his foolhardiness, plunging into the lake within 50 feet of two bathers.

More headlines have been made by crashing planes and by marooned boating parties than by drownings. Because the lake is feared for its strangeness and regarded as dangerous to swimmers and boatmen, its safety record is probably unapproached by any American lake of remotely comparable size. Among the few drownings per-
haps the most celebrated was that of the Salt Lake merchant, J. D. Farmer, on August 6, 1882. His "semipetrified" body was not found till October 11, 1886.

Boating activity has periodically been attended by fatal mishaps; the earliest, perhaps, was that of three young men sailing out of Hooper in mid-June 1889. In general, however, boatmen are not flattered by the hue and cry that goes up in the newspapers when a boat does not get back to the boat harbor on schedule. The salt water sometimes splashes on the engines of outboard craft, putting them out of commission, and the high waves kicked up by storms are always regarded with respect, but a boat can ride out almost any storm if it is equipped with an anchor and scope of line and a means of bailing the boat. With a proper anchor overboard and the motor off or the sails furled, the bow of a boat will stay in the wind and withstand wind and waves. In fact, a boat with an anchor can come home safely without any other means of propulsion, simply by anchoring when the wind is unfavorable and lifting the anchor to drift with the wind when it is favorable. The prevailing winds, being westerly, will soon drift the boat to the inhabited eastern or southeastern shores of the lake, for in only a moderate wind a boat will drift a mile, an hour.

During the 1930's more attention was attracted to the salt flats west of the lake than to Great Salt Lake itself, when the possibilities of the salt beds for racing automobiles were first fully realized. As early as 1911 W. D. Rishel had taken a big Packard to the salt to "open 'er up" to the terrific speed of 50 miles an hour. Thoroughly sold on the vast, salt plain as a speed course, Rishel three years later induced the speed demon, Teddy Tetzlaff, to take his Blitzen Benz to the salt flats. Tetzlaff broke all records with a mark of 141.73 miles an hour, but the American Automobile Association and the Automobile Club of America declined to recognize the feat.

The salt flats then lapsed back into oblivion, but after the Salt Lake daredevil, Ab Jenkins, became acquainted with the salt flats in 1925 by winning a race with an excursion train from Salt Lake City to Wendover, in which he traveled the newly completed Victory highway, he conceived the idea of turning the level expanse of salt to serious purposes of speed demonstration. In case of mishap a driver had plenty of room to fight his car. The concretelike salt also had a cooling effect on tires, and its hardness ensured that in case of a blowout the rim of the wheel would not dig into soft sand, as it had been known to do at Daytona Beach, Florida, hurling car and driver end over end. The only disadvantage was that the salt, always a little moist from the effect of solar evaporation upon the mud and water underlying it, furnished slightly less traction than a dry dirt, board or concrete track.

Jenkins made a 24-hour run on the salt beds in 1932, driving the entire time himself at an average 112.935 miles an hour, but he could get no official recognition, and it was a week before the Salt Lake City newspapers would condescend to notice the "stunt." The race course, a 10-mile circle, had been marked out by the Utah State Road Commission with 4-foot stakes, placed every 100 feet in holes made by driving a steel wedge into the salt. Jenkins says that the surface was so hard that at times the steel wedges bent like wax while they were being driven in. Twenty small oil flares lighted the course at night.

In 1933 AAA sanction was finally obtained, and in his 12-cylinder Pierce-Arrow Jenkins averaged 117.77 miles an hour for 24 hours and covered 3,000 miles in 25 hours, 30 minutes and 36.62 seconds. This was far in advance of anything it had been possible to do on European tracks and immediately attracted the attention of British drivers. When Jenkins' runs of 1934 shoved the 24-hour average up to 127.229 miles an hour, these drivers began making preparations to try their own luck on the Salt Desert.

For some time Sir Malcolm Campbell had been trying for a new record at Daytona Beach in his Bluebird, and in August 1935 he brought his car to the salt flats. His first trial, on September 3, brought him his coveted record of 301.13 miles an hour for the measured mile. Before Campbell's arrival, his fellow countryman, John Cobb, pushed Jenkins' 24-hour mark up to 134.85 miles an hour, though the Utah-born driver alone made a specialty of driving the entire run himself. Jenkins regained the record at 135.58 later in the summer, but the following year the English drivers, Cobb and George E. T. Eyston, returned to the competition. A summer of racing left the record in Jenkins' possession, but the 24-hour mark
The Great Salt Lake

had been pushed up to 153.823 miles an hour. Under the stress of competition, all the cars were now being powered by airplane engines.

In 1937 Jenkins advanced his record for 24 hours to 157.27 miles per hour, and in 1939 he boosted it to a still higher figure, 161.18 miles per hour. Campbell retired from racing after his triumph in 1935, but his countrymen, Cobb and Eyston, embarked upon a competition between themselves for the one-mile record. In November 1937 Eyston covered the distance in 311.42 miles an hour, and the next year to 347.49 miles. Cobb streaked over this record lasted for just one day, as Eyston promptly regained supremacy with a 357.5 figure. Cobb, however, had the last word. He returned to the Bonneville Salt Flats, as they had now been named, just before war broke out in the summer of 1939, and set the record, 368.9 miles an hour, which has since stood.

The rigorous testing given the British engines and the engineering genius that went into them bore rich dividends during the war when the gallant few of the RAF had to fight the Battle of Britain. It is primarily contribute to automotive engineering advances. The salt beds “speed laboratory,” for making cars safer and better.

In this contrary fashion, by sharing its bed with a few lusty engineers and racing drivers, Great Salt Lake contrives a certain utility. But it seems more in character in other situations. In May 1939 it inveigled off course an Ogden resident herding sheep on Fremont Island. He had started for the mainland with horses and a two-wheeled cart along a narrow sandbar eight inches under water spanning island and shore. Though the way was marked at quarter-mile intervals with stakes, the herdsman, unused to “horse and wagon seamanship,” wandered off quicksand. He had to hike the six miles to shore and arrived in no very happy frame of mind.

That is rather more like the Great Salt Lake to which history has always had to accommodate itself. Always it has defied those who would use it. The most ambitious project of all, to dike it along its chain of islands—from the south shore to Antelope, from Antelope to Frémont, and from Frémont to Promontory, shutting the salt...
water into its western half and creating of its eastern reaches a freshwater lake to provide industrial water—has threatened the very existence of the obstinate mountain sea. But even though the great French engineer, De Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, is said to have urged the practicability of the idea, and though intensive studies were made in 1935-1936 establishing its feasibility, the lake has a way of wriggling out of all such tight spots. Dr. Thomas C. Adams, who directed the engineering investigation, says that present public attitudes trend toward the feeling that it would be better to reserve such a development until other developments are made at higher levels on the affluent streams, where the water would be fresher and might be more economically developed.

Although there are a few scattered salt and sodium product refineries along its shores, and although potash has been mined from its Salt Desert, the mountain sea manages to maintain itself aloof from easy money-making. In the end you must take the lake on its own terms—refractory, obstinate, not to everyone’s taste. Self-preoccupied, often sullen of mood, yet on occasion yielding itself up with an abandoned beauty that only the desert knows, it is a fit lake for a desert land.