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## Great Salt Lake: An Anthology edited by Gary Topping

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Great Salt Lake: An Anthology.** 2002. Gary Topping, editor. Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah. \$19.95, paperback; 276 pages. ISBN 0-87421-436-X.

Between Woods Creek and Stinking Springs, I grew up on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. As a boy in Brigham City, Utah, I remember running through the muck of the sloughs and playa lakes that surround it. My relatives on the Nelson side wintered sheep and cattle in the salt grass near Little Mountain, and my kin on the Larsen side were market hunters for ducks and other waterfowl on the wide bends of the Bear River in the early 1900s. They shipped barrels of birds to the markets of the East. We changed little over time; the sheep and cows were moved back and forth from the salt grass to the aspen and spruce groves at the head of Perry Canyon, and we guided the Easterners who came to shoot their own ducks.

I can remember the 1st day, at age 8 perhaps, when I gazed over the lake from the tops of Baldy and Ben Lomond Peaks above Willard. My gaze was drawn always to the silhouette of Fremont Island, but I realized that I could see to Nevada, Idaho, and Wyoming from my quartzite perch. I'm tied quite firmly to that peak, to those mud flats, and to the silky waters surrounding 3 sides of the Promontory Mountains. As a younger boy I had heard of Fremont, Stansbury, Jedediah Smith, and the rowdies of Corinne. I also had stepped in the Bear, Malad, Ogden, Weber, Jordan, Provo, and Spanish Fork Rivers.

As a man I study the human impacts on and the biodiversity of these rivers; and when I work or play at the Great Salt Lake itself, I welcome the scent of methane and sulphurous gas clinging to my boots and curling my nostrils as I trudge through the "toolies." (Heck, I don't know the proper spelling of stands of *Scirpus*, *Juncus*, and *Typha*, but my heart

pounds even now remembering squawks [herons], owls, and pheasants bursting from between my feet in the 1st week of November during so many autumns of my youth.) I can taste the pink salt from the wooden sluices near Little Valley carrying brine to the evaporating ponds. My heart races in remembering the view from the ridge on Antelope Island that overlooks Bridger Bay. And when my father was stove-up and dying with cancer in his bones, he sent me from his bedside, for a time, to see what seemed like the smoke of a thousand fires, columns of midges and pelican-sized mosquitoes rising from the marshes of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. I found my own refuge there, shared along with many others. But enough of the memories; no, not enough for me, but perhaps for you.

With these ideas scrambling in my head, I welcomed the chance to read the anthology of the Great Salt Lake assembled by Gary Topping. It pulled together short, readable excerpts from the writings of others who have documented their relationship with the Great Salt Lake. As I read David Madsen's summary of prehistoric Indians, I remembered the obsidian bird points I found on a knoll overlooking the marshes and salt flats of our "farm" near Corinne. My grandfather, Einar Larsen, presented me with a metate from the same area when I was less than 8 years old. Since that time I've learned to leave the flaked stones and flattened grinders in place in hopes that a trained student of human prehistory can squeeze more information out of them than my younger self, who views them as mere trophies in a junk drawer or wall hangings.

I learned from this book that the trapper Jedediah Smith and the explorers John C. Fremont and Howard Stansbury were poets and dry-lipped, horse-eating wanderers as well as formal recorders of latitude and longitude. Incidentally, I used my own GPS and found their coordinates reasonable, within a mile or

so. This is actually quite remarkable, especially considering that their key landmarks, like the mouths of the Bear and Weber Rivers, can wander as far as a thirsty cow on these same salt flats. This wandering and meandering being the consequence of a lake the depth of a cookie sheet in a climate that dumps rain or dust for years at a time on a whimsical hydrograph. I'd love to be at Locomotive Springs or Kelton right now.

The Gentile history of Corinne and the saintly history of Saltair are summarized nicely in the excerpts that Topping chose. I appreciated the prefacing summaries he gave to the chapters written by others. His additions guided me, and hopefully other readers, through what could have been choppy anecdotes. I especially am grateful that he assembled these from so many other sources, which long hours of library searching had revealed. When I take the time, I can read these references myself thanks to the notes associated with the chapters.

The works of several philosophers of the oolitic sands are sprinkled throughout the factual accounts. I enjoyed these ponderings, and some may appreciate them more. I liked the balance of fact, speculation, perspective, dreaming, and introspection. Hopefully, you will too.

So, as a people, we've diked and cut, pumped, plucked, dried, and sacked the riches of this inland sea. We've crossed, walked, raced, fried, and died on or around this amazing lake and its feeders and flats. Let's make sure we leave a legacy of life as we control at least part of its fate.

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