Most people think of the Salton Sea as an accident happening at the beginning of the last century. Though the current lake in Imperial County was the result of a break in a canal in 1905, the Colorado River was really just filling a basin that had already been there for thousands of years, according to the oral traditions of the Kumeyaay people who still live here. An uncontrolled diversion of the Colorado River filled the basin, replacing the Teen River, just as the Salton Sea did today. Ancient Lake Cahuilla was one of many freshwater lakes that made their way into the Imperial Valley, part of the Salton Sink, filling what is now Imperial and Coachella valleys, 2,000 square miles, six times the area. The lake was 114 miles long, 33 miles wide between 700–1700 CE. It would take between 100 to 200 years for the lake to fill. After reaching a surface area of approximately 2,000 square miles, six times the size of San Diego Bay, the lake was 22 feet deep. It was roughly 2,000 football fields long, 560 football fields wide, and a football field deep. The lake’s surface was more than 60 feet above sea level. The lake was 30 percent saltier than today’s Salton Sea. The last remnant of the ancient lake was gone by the time Juan Bautista de Anza reached the Imperial Valley in 1774. As the lake receded, its shoreline moved in an orderly fashion. The lake filled and then once again breached the ocean. It then filled back up to the ocean. Lake Cahuilla was a dishwasher of fish, changing the types of fish that could live in the lake, it. The salinity killed the fish. As the lake filled, the salinity of the lake increased, and it might have provided a source of salt for preserving foods, it would have become increasingly limited re- sources of fresh drinking water became more important to the issues that people dealt with for the last 500 years. A changing environment, an increasing population, and new relationships of complex societies competing for increasingly limited resources.

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