

LAKE BONNEVILLE

The **Great Salt Lake** is a remnant of the Ice Age **Lake Bonneville** formed between 34,000 to 14,000 years ago. It once covered most of western Utah, parts of Nevada and Idaho totaling 20,000 square miles.

For thousands of years Lake Bonneville was contained by mountains acting as a natural dam. It contained fresh water averaging 1,000 feet deep. The lake reached its highest level, at 5,100 feet elevation, approximately 15,500 years ago. The Bonneville bench marks this ancient shoreline and currently acts as a roadbed.

A thousand years later the lake spilled over Red Rock Pass in southern Idaho and drained into the Snake River. The level of the lake fell 350 feet to what can now be seen as the Provo level, or lower bench. The benches of Lake Bonneville are some of the best examples of Ice Age shorelines to be seen in the world. Sadly they are being eaten away by the need for sand and rock as building materials.

As the climate warmed and water evaporated away, the salts and minerals once dissolved in the giant lake were concentrated. The lake continued to recede and the rivers and streams that once carried water out of the lake disappeared. The remnant, the **Great Salt Lake**, became a **terminal lake**. Evaporation became the only way water could leave the lake. Water continued to flow into the smaller lake from rivers such as the *Bear*, *Jordan*, *Weber* and *Ogden* carrying mineral salts from higher elevations. With no waterway running out of the lake, salt and minerals continued to accumulate until the lake became as salty as it is today.

The lake was named for Captain Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville who published the first map showing the Great Salt Lake with no outlet after exploring the area in 1837.

