

Drought exposing forgotten towns

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

EL DORADO HILLS – A severe drought plaguing much of the West is also bringing bits of its past back to life, as long-submerged historic artifacts and natural features are exposed by receding lake levels.

Near this Sacramento suburb, man-made Folsom Lake has receded to less than one-fifth of its capacity amid bone-dry conditions in California, recently revealing outskirts of a ghost town called Mormon Island founded during the mid-19th century gold rush. On an unseasonably warm winter day recently, throngs of visitors descended on the cracked mud flats of the reservoir to inspect hand-forged nails, rusted hinges and other vestiges of frontier life that were inundated when the lake was created in 1955.

California is entering its third year of drought, while much of the West has been abnormally dry for more than a decade.

In Utah, the decline of Lake Powell on the Colorado River to less than half its capacity in the past decade has uncovered artifacts including Native American ruins known as Fort Moki by 19th century pioneers. It has also restored some natural features, such as a towering waterfall called Cathedral in the Desert, that had been buried when the federal government dammed the river to create the giant reservoir in the 1960s.

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