

LAKE MEAD: A LIVING MUSEUM

By

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ABSTRACT

Lake Mead: A Living Museum

Lake Mead, the largest man-made water project in the nation and a prolific source of electricity, irrigation, and recreation for much of the western population, is currently experiencing a drastic transformation. Amid the ongoing water crisis parching the west, the once overflowing reservoir is consistently shrinking, descending into depths historically uncharted.

While serving as a bleak demonstration of climate change's effects, the body of water is simultaneously assuming an alternative role that may be less apparent to the public. As water levels decline, Lake Mead is actively metamorphosing into a "Living Museum", by gradually unveiling previously submerged artifacts. As a result, it is displaying pieces of the local and regional history that were formerly concealed by its watery domain. Lake Mead's evolving identity has inspired further investigation into what the lake has been storing since its inception nearly a century ago. This creative thesis project adopts the format of an audio documentary, delving into the supplementary persona of Lake Mead and its surrounding areas. By weaving together an interdisciplinary collection of expertise surrounding Lake Mead, this endeavor will work to explore the concealed histories, cultural nuances, and the mysterious artifacts sprouting from the waters. By providing Lake Mead with an alternative narrative, this thesis aims to present a creative and compelling interpretation through which to observe the diminishing reservoir. In doing so, it provides a divergence from the predominant storyline shaped by the climate crisis.

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PART 1: INTRO/TOPIC CONTEXT

Purpose and Historical Significance of the Study

Our understanding of Lake Mead is predominantly shaped by media focus. There are documentaries and podcasts taking on a forensic outlook, plenty of news articles covering the continued water recession, and the archaeological discoveries that have become a regular feature in local headlines. As time progresses, Lake Mead will consistently attract attention mainly through these avenues. Altogether, this perpetual influx of information surrounding Lake Mead's evolution cultivates a perception saturated in absurdity, intrigue, tragedy, crime, and a surge in anthropological surprises. What makes Lake Mead special is its ability to tie all of these stories and feelings together, all within the reservoir's waters, effectively channeling its role as a Living Museum. Each increment added to the bathtub ring simultaneously invites the opportunity for another captivating artifact to surface, truly the one silver lining in this otherwise funereal demonstration of the growing water crisis.

Lake Mead's increasing significance as both a story and a lake lie in its finite nature. The climate crisis is making a grim example of Lake Mead. Those who choose to visit the lake are immediately confronted with the visually jarring gap that separates the rim of the bathtub ring from the water's surface. This lake is ever-changing, implying that each interpretation of its existence is transient. Two decades from now, should another student in this program write a story about this lake, their perception of it would differ from mine at present. Consequently, all subsequent narratives of Lake Mead will inevitably differ. As a master's student in Journalism and Media Studies, I lack the expertise to revise national water policy or regulate the nation's water consumption habits. This means my attempts to preserve the lake's current physical state is not

likely to succeed. But, as a journalism student, I do hold the capacity to preserve the state of its identity through the medium of a narrative. Providing Lake Mead with an inspiring story of human interaction, culture, and history, given its approaching expiration date, is the only way to immortalize one of the most ambitious and influential water engineering feats in American history. Narrating the lake's unanticipated function alongside its impending fate is cathartic and healing for a body of water intricately connected to the city of Vegas and the region.

Introduction

Lake Mead, America's largest manmade lake by water capacity, is situated roughly 30 miles outside of the city of Las Vegas (United States Bureau of Reclamation, 2024, para. 5). A trek out to the multifaceted attraction features a scenic hour-long drive through the sprawling landscape of the Mojave Desert, a distinct contrast from the high-rise hotel-lined streets of the Strip. Strategically situated, the vast stretch of water serpentine through Arizona and Nevada, resting within the fractured seams of steep rock known as Black Canyon. Upon first encounter, it's impossible to ignore the vastness. At 9.3 miles in length, with a shoreline spanning 550 miles, and situated 6.3 miles from the nearest town, the lake is consuming both in size and in solitude (National Park Service, 2022, para. 1). While the name "Mead" might seem fitting in relation to nearby Sin City, which boasts 24-hour alcohol availability, the reservoir was actually named after Dr. Elwood Mead, Commissioner of Reclamation during the time of the reservoir's construction (National Park Service, 1964, para. 5). The Great Depression era prompted a surge of water projects in response to the prevailing economic challenges in the U.S. In the Southwest region, the construction of the Hoover Dam symbolized not only employment and affordable electricity, but also a glimmer of hope for Americans during a time of despair.

The four-year formation effort of the Hoover Dam and Lake Mead was initiated by the

Boulder Canyon Project Act of 1928 and stood as the most costly engineering feat in U.S. history at the time of its creation (National Archives, para. 2, 2021).

The birth of such a pricey electric generation and irrigation endeavor was unsurprisingly accompanied by other national feats. In 1964, Lake Mead and Lake Mohave became the first national recreational areas under the stewardship of the National Park Service in the United States (National Park Service, 2023, para. 1). Currently, Lake Mead receives an estimated eight million recreational visits a year (National Park Service, 2022, para. 38). Despite diminishing water levels, the recreation site's tourism continues to bring in millions of dollars in revenue. A 2019 news release by the U.S Department of the Interior found that the lake supported a total of 3,990 employment positions while also generating \$149 million in labor income and \$247 million in value added, totaling a gross economic output of \$397 million within the surrounding areas and services near the recreation site (National Park Service, 2019, para. 1). Located in the driest state in the U.S, a colossal reservoir such as Lake Mead is bound to tempt a high demand of visitation.

Despite the impressive tourism rates, irrigation serves as one of its primary functions.

The seven basin states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, utilize 70% of the Colorado river supply for agriculture (Bureau of Reclamation, 2016, para. 1). Under the Colorado River Compact, Mexico is also lawfully guaranteed 1.5 million acres of water supplied from the Colorado River each year (Bureau of Reclamation, 2012, para. 1). In all, nearly 40 million people rely on this water as a shared resource (Southern Nevada Water Authority, 2023, para. 1). Lake Mead serves as the predominant source of outflow for its neighboring states within the Colorado River Compact as well as its Las Vegas residents.

Finally, the Hoover Dam continues to shine through its fundamental and primary role - as

one of the world's largest hydropower installations. Each year the dam generates enough power to provide electricity for 1.3 million people (Bureau of Reclamation, 2018, para. 1). Lake Mead, along with its interconnected counterparts, play an integral and comprehensive role in serving both its local residents and the broader region. While its rich history rests atop the shelves of our libraries, Lake Mead has now taken the center stage for unveiling alternative narratives previously concealed beneath its blue waters, adopting an entirely new dimension of appreciation.

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Forensic Revelations

The turn of the century marked an alarming transition for Lake Mead. From 2000 to 2016, the reservoir experienced the lowest consistent water levels of any time span since its construction (National Park Service, 2017, para. 2). Regarded as a profoundly valuable and extensively utilized water source, the bathtub ring encircling the reservoir struck national alarm bells, a sobering symbol of the escalating water crisis in the West. In July of 2022, the reservoir dropped to a mere 1040 feet in depth (Bureau of Reclamation, 2024, fig. 1). The current water levels stand a staggering 185 feet *below* their peak in July 1983 (National Park Service, 2022, fig. 1). Receding shorelines, closed docks, and warning-signs for shallow waters swathed the lake, and subsequently so did the media. Hundreds of articles flooded the internet exhibiting Lake Mead as a cautionary tale for the fate awaiting many other western water sources. Fear became a predominant emotion tied to the recreational hotspot, but it wasn't solely climate anxiety. As water levels decreased, a medley of artifacts embellished in barnacles and rust either surfaced or found their way to shore. For Lake Mead investigators, the summer of 2022 was a forensic-themed game of whack-a-mole.

The first cadaverous discovery of the year washed onto Hemenway Harbor via rusted barrel on May 1st, 2022, and prompted investigators to take further examination of the reservoir for similar cases. This event marked a significant start to a series of searches during the summer. The body was confirmed to be a nearly 50-year-old homicide case from Las Vegas' notorious mobster era, indicating that the lake doesn't just sustain fragments of history; it's been hiding missing pieces of it (Seeman & Forrest, 2023, para. 4). Only six days later, another set of remains were located in Callville Bay, confirmed as a drowning which occurred back in 2002

(Afshar & Wolfe, 2022, para. 3). And in the peak months of July and August when water levels hit record lows, more reports from park goers surfaced, revealing three additional sets of mortal remnants scattered along the shores and shallow waters of Boulder Beach—a popular spot for recreational activities. (Fallon, 2022, para. 19).

Aquatic Ghost Towns

The forensic revelations reinvigorated the public's curiosity surrounding the lake's concealed artifacts. The discoveries during the summer of 2022 marked a surge of archaeological inquiries regarding the mysteries of Lake Mead. Media outlets disseminated a myriad of content, from articles and podcasts to Youtube videos and documentaries, each offering diverse perspectives on the unfolding phenomenon. Some approached it anthropologically, others pursued criminal investigations, and a few even posited supernatural explanations for the emergence of bodies. While the lake has reached its lowest in recent, this drought is nothing new, and neither is the occurrence of interesting findings within it.

St. Thomas, a ghost town nestled on the outskirts of the northern expanse of Black Canyon, along the Muddy River, first emerged from the waters in 1945, a mere seven years after the town's official submersion (National Park Service, 2022, para. 9). Before the inception of Lake Mead, St. Thomas thrived as a solid community. Founded by Mormon settlers in 1865, the town eventually became home to a new wave of inhabitants after the original homesteaders departed for Utah. At its peak, St. Thomas was a charming settlement with approximately 500 residents, adorned with cottonwood trees, a well-established school, a post office, and even an ice cream parlor (National Park Service, 2022, 5:19). The town's official closure occurred on June 11, 1938, after the waters consumed their post office (National Park Service, 2022, 4:33). The aquatic ghost town tended to reappear when water levels dropped, undergoing a couple of significant breaches.

The rural remnants reappeared above water in 2012 and remained visible thereafter. Though now a shadow of its former self, St. Thomas' permanent reappearance served as a catalyst for reunions and reconnections among former residents, who had previously been forced to abandon their homes six decades earlier (National Park Service, 2022, para. 9).

Fort Callville shares a similar fate to St. Thomas; both were submerged by the waters of Lake Mead following the construction of the dam and reservoir. Fort Callville, like St. Thomas, was a Mormon settlement renowned for its role in facilitating steamboat travel along the Colorado River. However, unlike St. Thomas, Fort Callville remains inaccessible to visitors as it lies submerged beneath approximately 400 miles of water (National Park Service, para. 6, 2022).

The sediment that accumulates in the surrounding rivers flowing into Lake Mead and the sediment that blankets the reservoir itself is believed to still conceal other long-abandoned towns from the region's past. As time passes, the shifting layers of silt and debris offer the potential for new discoveries to emerge.

Native American Influence

However, the residents of these communities were not alone in establishing their presence along the base of the surrounding rivers, nor were they the exclusive group impacted by the dam's submersion. The Moapa Valley area showcases evidence of Basketmaker peoples and Puebloan influence dating back over a millennium (National Park Service, 2020, para. 1). The filling of Lake Mead led to the submersion of approximately five miles of Anasazi Indian sites into the water (National Park Service, 2020, para. 1). Vestiges of houses constructed by southwestern Native Americans persist along the Muddy River, some even in close proximity to the fragmented structures of St. Thomas, which emerged centuries later (Nevadans for Cultural Preservation, 2022, 7:27).

Miscellaneous Artifacts

While entire communities have traversed the lands surrounding Lake Mead, scattered remnants of artifacts offer insights into the more individualized human interactions with the reservoir, both before and after its establishment as a national recreation site. Heading southward from the Muddy River and plunging 115 feet to the silty bottom of Overton Arm, A B-29 Superfortress plane, submerged in 1948, remains suspended in time (National Park Service, 2022, para. 1) Tracing the water's edge to its southwestern corner in the vicinity of Government Wash, a tan and oxidized, mussel-invaded speedboat stands vertically amid the marshy waterfront, its submersion date unknown (Phenix, 2022, para. 3). Continuing along the lake's perimeter towards Lake Mead Marina and Hemenway Harbor, near the area where the bone- filled barrel was spotted back in the spring of 2022, the spine of a World War II-era surplus boat rests within the shallow waters of the receding shoreline (Clemons, 2022, para. 2). Despite unique and extensive findings, cultural resource exploration has covered only around 5% of the lake, meaning millions of acres surrounding the park have gone uninvestigated (Sarbak, 2022, para. 26). These historical settlements and forensic findings, originating from distinct time periods and representing eclectic cultures, all came together along the same reservoir and collectively left enduring evidence for spectators to explore. Lake Mead and its environs serve as an aquatic tapestry, stitching together different patches of history into one comprehensive anthropological quilt. The reservoir, originally designed for a purpose unrelated, has now adopted an unexpected function as a curator of histories. As the water crisis persists in the western United States, Lake Mead may increasingly emerge as a repository, holding and reflecting the stories, personalities, and mysteries of the local and regional surroundings.

PART III: PROJECT DESIGN AND FORM

Creative Thesis Approach

This topic combines scholarly sources and a popular media approach, with the goal to explore a phenomenon of interest to people of multiple backgrounds, especially those who use or visit the lake. Choosing to execute this narrative through the medium of an audio documentary broadens access for all types of listeners, be it researchers, locals, tourists, or future visitors.

Audio content is perfect for listening on the move. Considering the year-round influx of visitors at the recreational site, this project provides an immersive experience for listeners driving to the lake or enjoying it during their hikes and water activities. This medium allows my project to contribute to broader discussions surrounding the topics I explore from a research perspective, as well as providing lake goers with an opportunity to participate and engage with the lake experience and its role as a Living Museum.

According to Singer's (2019) analysis of scholarly podcasting, utilizing an audio production medium can be a potent tool for engaging with information. Research indicates that students and listeners retain at least as much, if not more, information from audio content compared to traditional learning methods (para. 20).

As a journalism student, I value the exploration of various communication methods.

While I am proficient in writing papers, audio production presents a fresh challenge. Despite the initial unfamiliar hurdles, this project provides me with an avenue to express ideas in a different format, all the while ensuring that the historical narrative of Lake Mead remains accessible and comprehensible to a broad audience.

Equipment and Production

I conducted six interviews using the 2024 version of Riverside, a web-based platform designed specifically for remote audio recording and production. However, one follow-up interview took place within a professional recording studio at the UNLV Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies. I used Riverside's integrated tools to transcribe all interviews, except for the follow-up interview, which, due to its brevity, I transcribed manually. I edited the audio content using Adobe Audition, a part of the Adobe Creative Cloud suite. Once edited, I exported the audio files as a MPEG-2 Audio Layer III (MP3) file and uploaded it to the server used by the KUNV radio station in order to provide public access for interested listeners.

Interview Subjects

I selected the following interviewees based on their involvement in past research and interviews on this topic:

- Alan O'Neill, former Superintendent of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area from August 1987 until September 2000.
- Chris Nycz, Cultural Resource Manager of Lake Mead Recreation Site.
- David Kohlmeier, retired police officer from the Las Vegas area who led investigations into the bodies found in Lake Mead.
- Jackson Ellis, author of the historical fiction novel "Lords of St. Thomas."
- Kassidy Whetstone. Archives Technician for Lake Mead Recreation Area.
- Kristen Averyt, climate scientist and water policy expert who possesses extensive knowledge regarding the factors influencing Lake Mead's water levels.

Duration

This audio documentary comprised a single episode lasting approximately 40 minutes, falling within the standard duration for single episode productions. Initially aiming for a length ranging between 30 and 60 minutes, it aimed to strike a balance between depth of content and audience engagement.

Narration Style

I adopted a first-person narration approach, blending interviews with my own personal dialogue to shape the narrative of Lake Mead as a Living Museum. The narration drew inspiration from the original project prospectus, intertwining research insights with personal reflections to provide a layered exploration of the topic.

Using a first-person narration approach allowed me to explore my project authentically, offering listeners a candid account of how I came to perceive Lake Mead as a Living Museum. This strategy facilitated transparency in my own personal learning journey, enabling me to acknowledge any initial misconceptions about the topics I examined. For example, within the “Native American Influence” section, I openly admitted my initial lack of grasp on the extensive influence of Native American tribes throughout the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. By acknowledging this, I was able to incorporate insights from experts within my interviews to help expand my comprehension, thus creating a natural dialogue within the audio documentary.

Overall, this project was designed to strike a balance between authenticity and creativity in storytelling. By employing a first-person narration, I aimed to create an educational and research-based portrayal of Lake Mead while also conveying the nuanced nature of shaping information to construct a compelling narrative.

PART IV: REFLECTION

Gathering Data

My research gathering began with volunteering opportunities—litter cleanups along the trails circling Lake Mead, including the Historic Railroad trail. This provided me with the opportunity to connect with other volunteers and probe their reasons for participating, as well as their personal ties to the lake. Exploring the trails of the recreation site was crucial for acquainting myself with the area. I navigated the St. Thomas trail and explored the Lost City Museum a few miles from the historical site. I toured the Nevada State Museum, where I was able to attend a presentation on the Native American artifacts dispersed throughout Overton, Nevada. I made regular visits to the Boulder City-Hoover Dam Museum, acquainting myself with Boulder City's history, and conversed with residents whose homes were constructed by Six Companies nearly a century ago. I had the chance to share dinner with a couple who were former employees of Six Companies, in their home which was constructed by that same organization.

I purchased a year pass to the Lake Mead Recreation site and made regular visits. While exploring the small museum inside the Lake Mead Visitor Center, I struck up a conversation with the front desk staff, which ultimately led to valuable connections with Chris Nycz, the Cultural Resource Manager of Lake Mead Recreation Area, and Cassidy Whetstone, the Archives Technician. Both were incredibly helpful in providing insights and agreed to participate in interviews, which added significant value to my thesis project as well as my own learning.

I strolled through the Lake Mead RV Village, knocking on every door, in hopes of engaging a resident in conversation about the lake. I spent time down by Boulder Beach, meeting fellow lake-goers and sometimes even just sitting on a towel by the shore, absorbing the sounds of

birds and the sight of dogs playing in the water. I tried to isolate my interactions with the elemental aspect of my project's theme: the waters of Lake Mead, by listening to its rhythm and the surrounding noises. My regular trips to the reservoir evolved into a habit of deliberate drives through the Mojave Desert, where I developed an affinity for the rocky landscape and the peaceful rolling roads.

I reviewed a few books related to Lake Mead and its related features, including "Lords of St. Thomas," and interviewed that book's author. Additionally, I explored podcast series such as "Thirst Gap: Learning to Live with Less on the Colorado River," which offered insightful discussions on lake and water-related topics. I sifted through endless articles and documents related to Lake Mead, discovering a multitude of archived resources containing photos and newspapers, many of which were linked as valuable sources through the assistance of Lied Librarian Susie Skarl in our email exchanges. I also dedicated time to listening to music and reading poetry about lakes, aiming to explore the informal and emotional ways people express themselves when discussing pieces of the environment.

I knew I wanted to share this story, but first I needed to let it crystallize in my mind.

These were the methods I employed to collect data. The more I learned, the more I realized there was still so much more to learn. Because this was my first time gathering data in this manner and at this academic level, it was undeniably overwhelming. Yet, it became my favorite part.

This project provided me with an incredible amount of creative freedom. It was liberating to have the autonomy to select which areas I wanted to explore. Being responsible for my own creative thesis journey was overwhelming yet profoundly empowering. It solidified my confidence

in my own curiosity, demonstrating that I can indeed create something meaningful from it.

Appendix B documents key moments in my research process.

Interview Process

Before diving into the interviews themselves, I first had to select the people I wanted to interview, a process heavily influenced by prior research and the specific expertise needed to shape my project's narrative. While my initial choices mostly aligned with the final selection, a few unexpected twists forced me to think on my feet. One of the most notable challenges occurred when a key interviewee, who was supposed to provide insights into the historical background of the construction of Hoover Dam, unexpectedly withdrew at the last minute. I ended up narrating the historical section myself due to time constraints, but I felt this portion ending up lacking another perspective and nuance. Another individual I contacted was a professional diver who explores the B-29 bomber plane. However, this presented a conflict of interest. As a Lake Mead diver, he didn't share the focus of my project, which centered on highlighting the diminishing water supply. The lesson I learned is that interviewee selection isn't solely based on expertise; it's also about alignment, particularly when crafting a creative narrative. Opting for retired experts like retired police officer David Kohlmier and retired superintendent Alan O'Neill enabled me to elicit more candid responses to my questions, as the topic was no longer a conflict of interest. In retrospect, I wish I had prepared backup interviewees. This would have ensured that I could still incorporate expert voices into those sections if needed. This is something I will take into account when pursuing future projects.

Another challenge I faced during the interview process was the lack of response or delayed responses to my interview requests after reaching out. I had to quickly adapt and become more proactive. This meant being persistent across various platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and

email, and even making in-person visits to locations such as RV Village or the Lake Mead Visitor Center. This experience also heightened my awareness of professionalism. I made sure to present myself well-dressed and courteous, ready with a prepared explanation of my project whenever the opportunity arose.

Initially, I had intended to conduct a combination of in-person and remote interviews.

However, all interviews ended up being conducted via the online platform Riverside, except for one follow-up interview that was done in person due to technical difficulties with Riverside.

With only a month to conduct six interviews, time constraints were a significant factor. Riverside offered greater flexibility and earlier scheduling opportunities, which influenced my decision to opt for online interviews over in-person ones. Overall, Riverside proved to be a smooth platform, notwithstanding occasional technical errors and connection issues. As a young journalist, navigating these challenges was occasionally awkward, but I made every effort to adapt to the circumstances. Fortunately, the individuals I interviewed were incredibly patient and accommodating throughout this process.

Having now conducted numerous interviews, I've developed a sharper ear for how audio content sounds from a listener's perspective. Upon reviewing the recorded audio, both from the raw Riverside recordings and during the editing process, I noticed my frequent verbal reactions to others' speech. It became apparent that I'm an extremely active listener—perhaps too active for my role as a journalist and interviewer. I often found myself giggling at a remark, expressing surprise with a gasp, or an audible agreement. This tendency made the editing process more challenging, as it was sometimes difficult to distinguish my voice from the interviewees'

statements. Additionally, I noticed a discrepancy between my interview “persona” and my narration style, which leaned towards a more serious tone. While my natural speech mannerisms came through in the raw interview content, my placid tone as the narrator didn’t quite align. This contrast is evident when listening. For future projects of a similar nature, I aim to better synchronize my interview and narration voices, whether maintaining a consistently relaxed or serious tone. I found that overall consistency enhances the fluidity of the storytelling experience for the listener.

On the whole, the interviewing process proved to be quite challenging. From preparing background information and crafting tailored emails and questions for each interviewee, to navigating the technical intricacies of an unfamiliar audio recording platform, every step presented its own set of hurdles. Nevertheless, these challenges also provided learning opportunities. The interview process also allowed me to make meaningful connections. Many of the individuals I hosted conversations with shared a mutual appreciation for the lake and recreational area. One interview even led to a job opportunity that aligned with my project, in the realm of environmental journalism.

Editing Process

I entered this project with no prior experience in audio content creation, not even familiarity with using a microphone. It marked my first venture into the real world as an investigative journalist and an audible narrator. Adobe Audition, the audio editing software, was entirely new to me, so I had to rapidly acquire editing skills. Thanks to a valuable tip from Susie Skarl, I scheduled technical consultations and tutorials with David Ramos Candelas, a Multimedia & Design Specialist at the Lied Library. Renting out the MacBook podcast studio daily for about three weeks allowed me to grasp the fundamentals of audio manipulation necessary to craft my

desired narrative. Undoubtedly, this was the most challenging aspect of my project due to my limited experience with the technical aspects of audio production. With each edit taking me twice as long as someone well-versed in editing skills, I believe my output would have better aligned with my creative vision had I possessed more prior experience with the technical aspects.

What I found most enjoyable about this process was discovering my voice. Initially, I was a little self-conscious about how I would sound, but I found that I didn't mind the output at all. Through this journey, I was able to strengthen my voice and identify my preferred narration tone and pause length. I've observed that practicing speech through audio narration has also helped improve my natural speech tendencies, ultimately enhancing my speaking skills overall. As a reference, I listened to numerous intros to the Twilight Zone to study Rod Serling's narration style at the beginning of each episode.

Through my experience with audio editing software like Adobe Audition, I've gained a deeper understanding of the visual nature of sound. It involves manipulating wavelengths and amplitudes to achieve a desired equation for an intended audible outcome. Engaging in this editing journey has made me quickly realize that sound is an artform, one that I hadn't fully appreciated before. Now, I process sound differently. I pay more attention to the ways I and others articulate words, including how we "pop" our P's, elongate S sounds, and speed up our cadence when speaking about something we're passionate about. I've also become attuned to the differences in audio quality across various interviewing platforms. For example, the in-studio recording for my single in-person interview had a much richer quality compared to recordings made on Riverside. Smooth communication is often subtle; if it's seamless, you may not even notice it—and that's the goal. Exploring audio narration and editing has introduced me to a whole new set of skills related to verbal communication. I've found myself developing a newfound appreciation and interest in

this aspect.

Post-Production

During the beginning stages of this project's fruition, my committee emphasized the importance of choosing a highly specific topic, as the depth of exploration often exceeds initial expectations. Looking back, I realize I started with a broader lens than I ended with. Attempting to encompass a millennium of history within a single lake proved too ambitious. While I amassed a significant amount of content, I only skimmed the surface of the research opportunities available and overlooked many potential avenues to explore. Each interview opened doors to further research, suggesting additional sites to visit, books to read, or people to interview.

One significant topic I regret not exploring further is the Black History section at the Lake Mead Visitor Center. Here, I discovered that Black Americans were barred from participating in the construction of the dam, shedding light on the pervasive racism that marked the Hoover Dam's construction. This revelation opens up the possibility of dedicating an additional episode to this aspect in future episodes.

During my interview with Chris Nycz, I learned that the enduring Native American influence within and around the Lake Mead recreation site is far more significant than I had previously understood. This insight presents another compelling avenue for further exploration. Throughout the interview process, I attempted to connect with a few tribal leaders, for which Chris provided contact information. However, their availability did not align with the time slot allocated for my interview portion of the project.

If there were no time constraints, the process of gathering data could have seemingly continued forever. The depth of information available on any given topic is often greater than one might initially realize. Refining research to achieve conciseness, without sacrificing depth, is a skill

I am still developing. Throughout the process, there were numerous threads of information that remained unconnected, as well as some that I retained but never added. Hopefully these can be utilized and shared in the future. Despite including a vast amount of information, there was still more than I could incorporate into the project. Looking back, I wish I had allocated more time to thoroughly review all the interviews and meticulously craft my script for both conciseness and richness in information. The outcome, while still open to revisions and additions, reflects my growth as a narrative journalist and audio documentarist. I take pride in my journey's outcome and feel inspired for future endeavors.

APPENDIX A: SCRIPT

Title: Lake Mead: A Living Museum

Narrator: Marley Salveter

Hook:

[Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 1: Alright let's talk about Lake Mead, Lake Mead is hitting historically and dangerously low water levels]

[Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 2: We are taking a closer look at the climate crisis] [Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 3: Earlier tonight we got a look at some of the artifacts being uncovered right now at the bottom of Lake Mead where there's water levels keep dropping]

[Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 4: We have seen significant progress at Lake Mead with water levels higher than they were three years ago]

[Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 5: Lake Mead is low, you can see the so-called bathtub ring...] [Sound effect: Radio static]

[News clip 6: As the heat keeps coming, Lake Mead will only reveal more and more...]

[Gradual transition to mysterious music]

Intro:

Marley:

For some, it's known as one of the nation's largest manmade lakes. Vegas locals might view it as the massive aquatic playground just beyond the city limits, or more likely, they associate it with their tap water and sprinkler systems. And it's even possible that the term "bathtub ring" resonates. A lake so versatile may encourage a wide variety of perceptions.

Initially engineered as a reservoir to supply the western region with water, irrigation, and recreation, Lake Mead's preset functions inevitably shape public understanding. But like all mortal things in life, Lake Mead has succumbed to the passage of time, where change becomes inevitable. Yet, change also presents opportunities for evolution in functionality. In the case of Lake Mead, this reservoir has assumed a new and entirely unexpected role in light of its physical changes.

Amid the fluctuating water levels of the Colorado River and the enduring warm streak afflicting the west, Lake Mead's expansive waters are steadily receding. What remains are the remnants of our past, slowly unveiled as the shoreline shrinks. Every so often, you might turn on the television and stumble upon a news segment featuring a newly surfaced artifact from the depths of the reservoir. This phenomenon often coincides with prolonged periods of recession, especially during the warmer spring and summer months. However, through my own exploration, I've found that these brief news specials only offer a glimpse into the endless stories this lake has been hiding from us.

What remains in the wake of Lake Mead's ongoing transformation is a mirror of our past.

During periods of recession, artifacts from various time periods and communities emerge

from beneath the water. Due to the lake's vastness, versatility, and extensive use, this phenomenon might easily be overlooked, project aims to piece together what the lake has decided to preserve. Lake Mead serves as a collection of narratives, a library, dedicated to portraying the unique local and regional identity through the stories told by uncovered artifacts. Lake Mead is an unorthodox museum, reflecting our diverse and extensive past to the land, while simultaneously symbolizing the future of humanity's relationship to water.

Welcome to Lake Mead: A Living Museum. I'm your host and museum tour guide, Marley Salveter. This episode will take us through a captivating journey by unraveling the intricate fabric of Lake Mead's history and its significance in the present day. From the intriguing reemergence of bodies in the late spring of 2022, reminiscent of the mobster era, to the submerged town of St. Thomas and the rich Native American heritage woven throughout the Lake Mead Recreation site, we'll uncover the stories that shape this dynamic reservoir.

The goal is to provide an engaging perspective on Lake Mead's evolution. By drawing on a diverse range of expertise, we'll explore the hidden histories, cultural nuances, and enigmatic artifacts that emerge from its waters. Follow along through this journey of discovery and reflection on the metamorphosis of one of our nation's most ambitious and monumental water projects of its time.

Before we dive into the heart of this project's theme, let's take a moment to explore the history of Lake Mead. Understanding its past is crucial for appreciating the significance of our exploration. So, let's take a moment to briefly review some context.

A sudden need for escape from the high-rise, light-polluted streets of the strip may impel one to take a trip through the sprawling Mojave Desert, where the reservoir stretches across a shoreline 550-miles long. This vast continuum of rippling blue serpentine through Arizona and

Nevada, resting within the fractured seams of steep rock known as Black Canyon.

Creating this lake was no easy feat, yet the west's indomitable desire to conquer the desert's uninhabitability inspired a surge of water projects in the southwest region. The formation effort of the Hoover Dam and Lake Mead occurred during the height of the Great Depression, a monumental effort led by steadfast laborers and skilled engineers from around the nation. In the face of sweltering temperatures, perilous working conditions, and ragtag living arrangements, the project was completed in just four years - ahead of schedule.

The Boulder Canyon Project stood as the costliest engineering operation in U.S history at the time of its creation. The birth of such a pricey electric generation and irrigation endeavor was unsurprisingly accompanied by other national feats. In 1964, Lake Mead and Lake Mohave became the first national recreational areas under the stewardship of the National Park Service in the United States. In 2023 alone, Lake Mead received 5.8 million recreational visits.

Despite being a major tourist destination, Lake Mead primarily serves irrigation purposes. The seven basin states, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, use 70% of the Colorado River supply for agriculture. Approximately 40 million people rely on the water channeled into Lake Mead from the Colorado River, which subsequently flows out to these states.

Finally, we cannot ignore the Hoover Dam's fundamental and primary role as one of the world's largest hydropower installations. Each year the dam generates enough power to provide electricity for 1.3 million people. Lake Mead, along with its interconnected counterparts, play an integral and comprehensive role in serving both its local residents and the broader region. While its rich history rests atop the shelves of our libraries, Lake Mead has now taken the center stage for unveiling alternative narratives previously concealed beneath its blue waters, adopting an entirely

new dimension of intrigue.

Section 1: Forensic Revelations

On May 1st, 2022, the remains of a body were discovered inside an old, rusted barrel, washed ashore at Hemenway Harbor, a popular boating and fishing area for lake goers. Further investigation revealed that the remains were linked to a nearly 50-year-old homicide case from Las Vegas' infamous mobster era. The news of a crime scene within a popular recreation site, already grappling with low water levels at the time, garnered widespread attention from both national and international media outlets.

I had the chance to speak with David Kohlmeier, a retired police officer from the Las Vegas area who led one of the investigations into the bodies found in Lake Mead. David's expertise and firsthand experience offered insights into the forensic mysteries surrounding the lake.

David:

So I was a police officer for 17 years. I started out when I was 22. I was a New York City police officer in Brooklyn and Manhattan. And then I was looking for a better job, took about 13 police exams by choice to figure out where I would wind up going and I chose Las Vegas, which was 21 years ago when I moved out here, I became a Henderson police officer in Henderson Nevada. And basically that borders up to Lake Mead. So a lot of times I would drive up to Lake Mead. Long story short, I mean, I basically was a cop in Henderson for 13 years. I was patrol community policing, did the neighborhood watch program, the DARE program, stuff like that, but I was very involved. And also the Crime Stoppers program, which is a prevention program where you get tips.

Marley:

After retiring from his career in law enforcement, David drew on his experience with the Crime Stoppers program to develop the idea of implementing an investigation reward system for the forensic discoveries emerging from the waters.

Dave:

One of the concepts where it gets into the bodies and reward money was I was always involved in Crime Stoppers as a Henderson police officer, I was the liaison for getting tips. And I was very creative at the time where I was trying to come up with different marketing strategies to have people call on tips. So like I had the phone number 702-267-DRUGS. So if you had a tip about drugs, people would call it in. But it was a vanity phone number that was easy to market in the community.

So eventually later on when I got involved in the Lake Me situation, that's where kind of the reward money comes in, because I was always involved in the reward money programs, which I believe creates an incentive for people to come forward to provide information that leads to that leads to the arrest or to receive tips to basically help close out cases.

Marley:

David was offering up to \$5,000 as an incentive for anyone who could uncover additional bodily remains around the lake, aiming to facilitate progress in the unsolved cases within the recreation site. He felt that this investigation would not only drive progress in previous cases but also serve as a crime prevention measure. With increased awareness and community involvement in these cases, people were now more mindful of the area, potentially deterring future criminal activity.

By the end of the summer months in 2022, the lake reached a historic low, unearthing

additional remains and reopening long-dormant cases, thus shedding further light on the hidden underbelly of Las Vegas's history.

Dave:

It was bringing up old history of what happened back in the day. The problem that is, is that when the water was getting lower, that there was more excitement because people were like, what's going to be next? What's going to come out of the water? You know, what type of history? And I think I already forgot, but it's been over like 50 or 75 years, the water never got this low. So basically anything that came out of the water, like basically, this was the time to uncover things.

Marley:

It's worth noting that the peak of these types of discoveries occurred two summers ago.

Since then, the lake's water levels have risen, suggesting that the likelihood of further discoveries is diminished. However, considering seasonal patterns, it's evident that the warm and dry conditions experienced by Lake Mead during the spring and summer months of 2022 won't be the last. David explained that the slowdown in investigative progress is largely attributed to the recent rise in water levels. Nevertheless, he also emphasizes that such discoveries are not uncommon for a vast body of water such as Lake Mead.

Dave:

You know, times are crazy, things happen, criminal activities out there, but basically there's a large lake or large ocean, right? People drop things, you know, and so you got to be really careful who you hang out with and what criminal activity you're involved in, but it's definitely a real thing, you know?

Section 2: Aquatic Ghost Towns

Marley:

These forensic revelations reinvigorated the public's curiosity surrounding the lake's concealed artifacts. The discoveries during the summer of 2022 marked a surge of archaeological inquiries regarding the mysteries of Lake Mead. Media outlets disseminated a myriad of content, from articles and podcasts to Youtube videos and documentaries, each offering diverse perspectives on the unfolding phenomenon. While some centered on the diminishing outflow from the Colorado River, others took an anthropological approach, emphasizing the vast and varied cultural influences dispersed throughout the recreational site.

You might be familiar with the mythical city of Atlantis, as recounted by Plato—a bustling and successful civilization said to have been swallowed by the ocean under the wrath of Greek gods. Well, Las Vegas has its own version of Atlantis. While perhaps not as grand as the mythical tale, this was a very real town, once fully submerged by Lake Mead, with remnants still visible along the outskirts of the Muddy River.

Before the inception of Lake Mead, the town of St. Thomas thrived as a solid community.

Founded by Mormon settlers in 1865, the town eventually became home to a new wave of inhabitants after the original homesteaders departed for Utah. At its peak, St. Thomas was a charming settlement with approximately 500 residents, adorned with cottonwood trees, a well-established school, a post office, and even an ice cream parlor. The town's official closure occurred on June 11, 1938, after the waters consumed their post office. The aquatic ghost town had a tendency to reappear when water levels dropped, undergoing a couple of significant breaches.

The rural remnants reappeared above water in 2012 and remained visible thereafter. Though now a shadow of its former self, St. Thomas' permanent reappearance served as a catalyst for reunions and reconnections among former residents, who had previously been forced to abandon their homes six decades earlier.

Chris Nycz, Cultural Resource Manager at Lake Mead Recreational Area, offered insights into the once-submerged historical settlement. With two decades of experience as an archaeologist, she also holds a deep connection to the land surrounding the Lake Mead recreation site.

Chris:

One of the LDS leaders in Utah told members to come down and settle in this area, find a location to settle. And this location was found to be really fertile at the conjunction of the Virgin River and the Muddy River. And so then the floodplain there is very fertile ground. And so they established a community there and they grew cotton and had their settlement there. They grew other things.

And over time, the state of Nevada did a survey and found that they were actually in Nevada. They thought they were in Utah. And Nevada told them they had to pay back taxes for living in the state of Nevada, and they didn't use paper money. So the majority of the community left for Utah except for one family, the Benelli family, they remained. So the town was abandoned for a period of time, but not long after Mormon members came in and non-Mormon members moved to the town and built it up even more. And it had ice cream parlor, there was a train that came through to deliver ice. So they had that and there was a school, all sorts of stuff like a fully functioning town. And then when the dam was being built, they knew the town would be inundated.

Marley:

Despite being submerged beneath the waters for nearly 60 years, remnants of this bygone community endure. Today, the town of St. Thomas offers a hikeable experience just outside of Overton, Nevada. A leisurely 2-mile loop trail allows visitors to explore the remains of the once-thriving settlement and envision the life that existed there over a century ago.

Chris:

There's a lot of housing foundations, chimneys, there's other agricultural features there, cisterns that hold water and channels that channelize water throughout town and even the trees. The trees had to be cut down because they would become a boating hazard but the stumps are still there.

Marley:

After discovering the history of St. Thomas, I felt compelled to explore the remnants of this former LDS mini metropolis firsthand, eager to witness what the lake had chosen to preserve. The deteriorated frames of houses and waterless cisterns shed light on how St. Thomas residents coped with the harsh desert heat of the Moapa Valley. However, it was the scattered shells strewn across the site that truly caught my attention. To me, they symbolized Lake Mead's transformation into a Living Museum, where the aquatic environment once held within its depths continued to leave its mark on the community long after the waters receded. The shells, scattered across every corner and fissure of the formerly subaquatic ghost town, offered tangible proof of the merging of two distinct environments. Their presence illustrated a convergence dictated by destiny, intertwining not just alongside each other but in the closest possible manner.

Jackson Ellis, the author of the historical fiction novel "Lords of St. Thomas," found

inspiration not only in the historical settlement, but also in its unique relationship to Lake Mead and the surrounding desert landscape.

Jackson:

You see remnants of a town and you see remnants of a lake and it's weird because in that kind of climate, neither of those things should naturally occur there. So you're seeing like a lot of things that really feel out of place. And for me, that was like a big part of why it captured my imagination so much.

Marley:

Jackson first heard about the town of St. Thomas while perusing the pages of a local magazine called the Desert Companion. This particular edition featured a list of local hikes, among which St. Thomas appeared. Following Jackson's expedition out to the time-honored trail, he found himself profoundly impressed by the remarkable level of preservation. Despite being submerged beneath Lake Mead's waters for over half a century, the desert's arid climate, devoid of humidity, had left behind enough remnants to vividly reconstruct the ways of life embraced by the residents of St. Thomas.

"Lords of St. Thomas" chronicles the life of Hugh Lord, a real-life resident of the town who, alongside the entire community, faced the inevitable displacement due to the formation and subsequent filling of Lake Mead. However, Mr. Lord's authentic story is a captivating narrative, one that sparked Jackson's own creative journey.

Jackson:

The story goes that he never took any money from the government and he just in defiance

one day flicked a match, lit his house on fire, and rode away from his front porch in a boat. And I was like, if that isn't the most literary real life story I've ever heard. I just thought it was an interesting story. It almost sounds made up.

Marley:

Reading narrative accounts such as “Lords of St. Thomas” almost resurrected the site in a way, deepening our understanding of the weathered relics frozen in time from the once-thriving community, adding depth to the complexities and emotions of its former population. The collapsed buildings and remnants of lives once lived transcend their physical state, embodying the repetitive rhythms of human existence—a testament to the cycle of life and death. These artifacts, though worn, serve as evocative reminders of the residents’ daily rituals—toiling at work, visiting the grocery store, or mailing letters at the post office—where the echoes of their stories persist.

Marley:

Kassidy Whetstone is an Archives Technician for Lake Mead Recreation Area, and oversees documentation of the various archeological sites.

Kassidy:

It seems like the people who lived in St. Thomas, you know, they were proud to live in St. Thomas and they really enjoyed being there. And so the descendants have come back and ... really worked to document historical photographs and really label what this what we're looking at in these photos and oral histories and just really trying to piece together their own story as well...

Marley:

However, the residents of St. Thomas were not alone in establishing their presence along the outskirts of Lake Mead, nor were they the exclusive group impacted by the dam's submersion.

Chris:

There's another community called Fort Callville that was established at the same time, I think it was actually prior to St. Thomas, just by a few weeks. And again, another church member had been asked to come down and settle. And the Mormon community, the LDS community was looking for a port city that they could use the Colorado River to transport goods and people to different areas and downstream. And then they were looking for the furthest north that they could go up the Colorado River. And Colville, Colville Bay in the park here now, was the site of Fort Colville where they established a warehouse, a post office, and folks lived there. But it only lasted, I want to say eight or 10 years before it failed.

Marley:

There is one important difference between the two towns. Unlike St. Thomas, Fort Callville is still fully submerged by the Lake Mead waters.

Chris:

But just recently, the submerged resource center, which is a National Park Service office out of Denver, found remnants of the walls of that fort under 300 feet of water still.

Marley:

And yet the exploration doesn't end there. A third town, unnamed and patiently awaiting discovery, remains concealed within the boundaries of the Lake Mead Recreation Area to this day.

Chris:

There's actually a third one. I can't remember the name of it, but it's never been found. It's probably deeply, deeply buried under the sediment from the Virgin River and the Muddy River.

Marley:

It's understandable why communities, navigating the baking terrain of Southern Nevada, might opt to settle near a river. As Chris discussed during our interview, water is a fundamental human necessity, prompting communities to naturally flock to such vital resources. However, rivers can also pose a threat, because they possess the power to swallow entire territories. What enables Lake Mead to fulfill its role as a museum is the stillness of its waters. Unlike rivers, lakes lack the constant friction of flowing currents. This is why towns like St. Thomas and Fort Callville still retain some semblance of structural integrity.

Section 3: Native American Influence

Marley:

Long before American settlers set foot in what is now the Lake Mead Recreation Area, Native American influence permeated the park, a legacy that persists to this day with indigenous communities residing in the surrounding areas.

Prior to embarking on this project, I lacked a complete understanding of the profound impact that Native American communities have had on the areas surrounding Lake Mead.

Thanks to individuals like Chris, I gained insight into the deep-rooted connections these communities hold with the land and its natural resources.

Chris:

So we have 18 tribes and a lot of them are scattered a little further now as their reservations have brought them further from their homelands here at Lake Mead and others are closer.

Marley:

As Chris emphasized, the park bears witness to the enduring legacy of Native American tribes. Among the discoveries are ancient trails, spear points, knives, pottery for food storage and cooking, baskets, and an array of tools crucial to the daily existence of these communities.

As one could imagine, many of these populations, despite being separated by centuries, chose similar locations for settlement, often prioritizing proximity to water.

Chris:

As water levels get closer to that original river channel, we're likely going to find more Native American remnants of Native American communities that live along closer to the river.

Marley:

Lake Mead and its environs serve as an aquatic tapestry, stitching together different patches of history and culture into one comprehensive anthropological quilt. While each thread represents a connection to the overarching identity of the lake, certain patches have seemed to garner greater exposure. As Chris emphasizes, the voices of these Native American tribes resonate strongly within this narrative.

Chris:

The landscape in and of itself is very much alive to these native communities, the ancestral communities and the communities today... A lot of the tribes today were put on this earth by their creator to take care of the Colorado River and the surrounding landscape. So the landscape is taking care of them for generations.

So one of my goals in this program is to just keep communicating and learning from tribal nations and sharing the words that they're willing to share with us. Their stories that are often forgotten and left off of park guides and park information because there are some sensitivities behind it. You know we really don't want to share too much but we want to share enough so that folks understand the significance of this area to the tribes and tribes are not a thing of the past. There are still tribal communities today that do come into the park on a very regular basis and perform their ceremonies. They collect the seeds. They visit these areas as a spiritual place for them to have their thoughts and be with their families and friends and just celebrate life as we would at any special place.

Marley:

Lake Mead Recreation site is nothing short of a Living Museum. From the prodigious reservoir, so massive it spans two states at once, to the meandering yet indispensable rivers that have supplied settlers with water since antiquity, and the jagged profiles of the mountains overlooking the lake, each element presents endless narratives. It begs the question: amidst the vastness of its landscape, do we often overlook the intricate details that shape these compelling stories? Those familiar with the region will affirm that the lake and its surroundings have a profound and multifaceted impact on individuals.

Alan O'Neill served as Superintendent of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area from 1987 until the year 2000. His tenure not only provided him with expertise from a superintendent's

viewpoint but also instilled in him a profound respect for and connection to the surrounding landscape, especially for Spirit Mountain.

Alan:

To drive over there blew my mind because I said, you know, this is Lake Mead. You know, I thought, God, this incredible granite mountain and something about the energy of that mountain. just shocked me. I don't know how other do. I just, I was mesmerized by the energy of this mountain. Come to find out that it's one of the most holy places, sacred places. In the Southwest and probably in the country. This is a place of creation for the 10 human speaking tribes and also of importance to the Hopi and the southern Paiute tribes.

Marley:

Through extensive advocacy and policy efforts, Alan successfully secured recognition of Spirit Mountain as a traditional cultural property, honoring its spiritual importance. Chris also underscored the importance of this landmark.

Chris:

Spirit Mountain is a very, if not the essential, but yeah, very essential spiritual center for a lot of Colorado River centric tribes. And there's like, Grapevine Canyon is a large tourist attraction down in the southern end of the park near Spirit Mountain. And it has a lot of petroglyphs and it's a really amazing location.

Marley:

While Spirit Mountain is approximately an hour's drive from the lake, it remains a significant feature of the park, steeped in endless history and cultural importance. Its presence underscores the extensive influence of Native American heritage across the park's territory. As I

mentioned earlier, it feels as though every corner of this land is imbued with profound meaning and value.

Having learned about the various communities who have traversed the land, it's interesting to think about the fact that there are vestiges of artifacts constructed by Native American tribes in close proximity to the fragmented structures of St. Thomas, which emerged centuries later. Lake Mead, functioning not merely as a Living Museum but an integrative one, allows “artifacts” and “exhibits” to intersect and overlap, transcending time periods and cultural origins. This fusion creates a confluence of culture and history, an immersive experience that, when not expertly divided and identified, may appear absurd. Picture wandering through a prehistoric exhibit and coming across what seems to be a Neanderthal listening to a radio—an illustration of Lake Mead's unique ability to blend histories.

As Chris emphasized during our discussion, artifacts are like pieces of a puzzle. Without the box providing the complete picture, each new remnant we identify contributes to the gradual creation of an image, stitching together our quilt of understanding with the pieces we do have.

Section 4: Miscellaneous Artifacts

Marley:

While entire communities have journeyed across the lands surrounding Lake Mead, scattered remnants of more contemporary artifacts offer insights into the individualized human interactions within the reservoir. Plunging over 100 feet to the silty bottom of the northern portion of Lake Mead, A B-29 Superfortress plane, submerged in 1948, remains suspended in time. Heading into the western portion of the Mead exhibit, a tan and oxidized, mussel-invaded speedboat stands vertically amid the marshy waterfront, its submersion date unknown.

Continuing along the museum's halls of the lake's perimeter is the spine of a World War II-era surplus boat, resting within the shallow waters of the receding shoreline. Despite unique and extensive findings, cultural resource exploration has covered only around 5% of the lake, meaning millions of acres surrounding the park have gone uninvestigated. These forensic findings, historical settlements, and modern day evidence of the lake's pervasive use, all came together along the same reservoir and collectively left enduring evidence for spectators to explore.

Section 5: Climate Change

Marley:

It would be incomplete to discuss the waters of Lake Mead without acknowledging the impacts of climate change and the extended drought it's faced for the past two decades. During my conversation with Alan, the former Superintendent, he shared perspectives on his experiences with the fluctuating water levels over time.

Alan:

when I was there, and I was there from 1987 to 2000, and, you know, the water level was, about 1200, you know, so 160 feet higher than what it was now.

And so as the water started dropping down, you know, it wasn't possible to do the same level of special events. So that's one shift. You know, I've seen it like that, you know, there's a little bit different than when I came. And so, you know, it's been very difficult for the National Park Service to chase this water down. I don't think people realize how difficult it is to move facilities like a marina. You know, you know. So constantly having to move that out and chase the water down. Some of those boat launching ramps, the beginning of the ramp when I was there, is like a half a mile from where the water is now. And so the cost of trying to get dollars to extend

those ramps down to an ever diminishing water level was just an incredible headache.

Marley:

The climate crisis is making a grim example of Lake Mead. Those who choose to visit the lake are immediately confronted with the visually jarring gap that separates the rim of the bathtub ring from the water's surface. Much of it has to do with the water allocation process brought on through the Colorado River Compact, where Arizona and California receive much of the water from Lake Mead, the outflow source of the Colorado River.

Alan:

I mean, it's hard to not escape the fact that we're 23 years into a drought cycle. If you look at past dry cycles, there's nothing comparable. So why is that occurring? You know? I'm an eternal optimist that you can never outguess nature, that nature met, but the Colorado River is over-appropriated.

Marley:

Effectively sharing water resources equitably and sustainably is a daunting task, given the multitude of stakeholders involved in the decision-making process. Negotiating this intricate policy terrain while striving to meet the diverse needs of all parties involved adds layers of complexity to the endeavor.

I had the opportunity to speak with Kristen Averyt, a climate scientist and water policy expert who possesses extensive knowledge regarding the factors influencing Lake Mead's water levels. Kristen has a deep understanding of the impacts of climate change and water scarcity on the reservoir.

Kristen:

In terms of recreation in the lake, you know we saw some pretty significant impacts in terms of closing the different ramps and having to move marinas and etcetera across the lake. I know my family waited two and a half hours to launch a boat. There is one launch rap that is high and dry because it's literally cut off from the lake.

Marley:

Southern Nevada Water authority has already taken initiative to adapt their infrastructure to the diminishing water levels, to ensure that the Hoover Dam's preset functions, such as supplying electricity to a substantial portion of the region, is still in effect.

Kristen:

Southern Nevada Water Authority put another straw into Lake Mead at a lower elevation to be able to capture the water, they developed some technology and changed the turbines so that way the turbines can actually capture water and still spin at a lower elevation than it could in the past so there are adaptations, and they are things being done.

Marley:

The predominant narrative of Lake Mead, through the lens of the climate crisis and water scarcity, is tragic, seemingly inevitable, and is becoming more common among U.S. lakes.

However, Lake Mead can also serve as an example of how we choose to adapt.

Kristen:

In some ways Lake Mead is a demonstration of why these anticipatory projects that have been considering climate change are so important, and how they're proving our community is resilient because of what we have been thinking about.

So I actually think it's proof of concept of hey, this is the kind of thing, look we anticipated this, this is why we're water secure, y'all need to be doing this.

Marley:

Alan expressed similar sentiments.

Alan:

The reality is we're going to have a lower water level and how can we work within that?

It's really kind of an interesting time in looking at Lake Mead and its future role.

Section 6: Protecting this Museum

Marley:

Irrespective of Lake Mead's current condition, it's crucial to safeguard both the water and the surrounding land within the Lake Mead Recreation Area. This protection is essential not only for the wildlife inhabiting the area but also to preserve its cultural and historical significance.

Chris passionately advocated for the preservation of these lands.

Chris:

Archaeological sites never recover because they're a non-renewable resource. So, once they're destroyed or impacted, that impact is there forever.

Marley:

Chris encouraged visitors to be conscientious about their actions, mindful of where they tread, what they touch, and how they interact with the environment during their explorations and

activities.

Chris:

Well if you're, say you see artifacts, whether they're historic artifacts or native American artifacts, the best thing to do would really reroute yourself and avoid walking through that area, avoid that space, and maybe try an alternate route. Um, if you do want to continue on that path, you know, think about your footsteps and how they may impact.

Marley:

She also stressed the importance of leaving items undisturbed in their natural surroundings, reinforcing our earlier puzzle analogy.

Chris:

If folks are taking some of the really cool artifact's home with them or removing them and relocating artifacts to another location, it really is like removing some puzzle pieces from a puzzle. And then, so we're already putting together a puzzle and we don't have what the picture looks like, right? We don't have the box.

Section 7: No Museums for Museums

Marley:

While Lake Mead effectively fulfills its role as a Living Museum, it obviously possesses characteristics that distinguish it from traditional one. Firstly, its walls are visibly deteriorating, evidenced by the expanding bathtub ring. As an encapsulator of artifacts, the lake has a finite existence, or at least, a changing one. This sets it apart from traditional museums, which may preserve items for centuries while remaining unchanged in the process.

Prior to my exploration, my understanding of Lake Mead was predominantly shaped by

media focus. There are documentaries and podcasts taking on a forensic outlook, plenty of news articles covering the continued water recession, and the archaeological discoveries that have become a regular feature in local headlines. As time progresses, I'm certain that Lake Mead will consistently attract attention through these avenues. Altogether, this perpetual influx of information surrounding Lake Mead's evolution cultivates a perception saturated in absurdity, intrigue, tragedy, crime, and a surge in anthropological surprises. What makes Lake Mead special is its ability to tie all of these stories and feelings together, all within the reservoir's waters, effectively channeling its role as a Living Museum. Each dismal increment added to the bathtub ring simultaneously invites the opportunity for another captivating artifact to surface, or another site to examine, truly the one silver lining in this otherwise anxiety-ridden demonstration of the growing water crisis.

Lake Mead's increasing significance as both a story and a lake lie in its ever-changing nature. As a master's student in Journalism and Media Studies, I lack the expertise to revise national water policy or regulate the nation's water consumption habits.

[Sound effect: Inspiring music]

This means my attempts to preserve the lake's physical state are not likely to succeed.

But as a journalism student, I do hold the capacity to preserve its identity through the medium of a narrative. Providing Lake Mead with a story of human interaction, culture, and history, given the uncertainty of its physical future, is the only way to immortalize one of the most ambitious and influential water engineering feats in American history, particularly one intertwined with a recreation site steeped in historical and cultural significance since time immemorial.

Narrating the lake's unanticipated function alongside its ambiguous fate is cathartic and healing for a body of water intricately connected to the city of Vegas and the region as a whole.

APPENDIX B: PHOTOGRAPHS

These photographs document key moments in my research process.



Figure 1: The Lost City Museum in Overton, Nevada, is located near the town of St. Thomas.

The Lost City Museum in Overton, Nevada, is located near the town of St. Thomas. This served as one of the first sites I visited to gather immersive data.

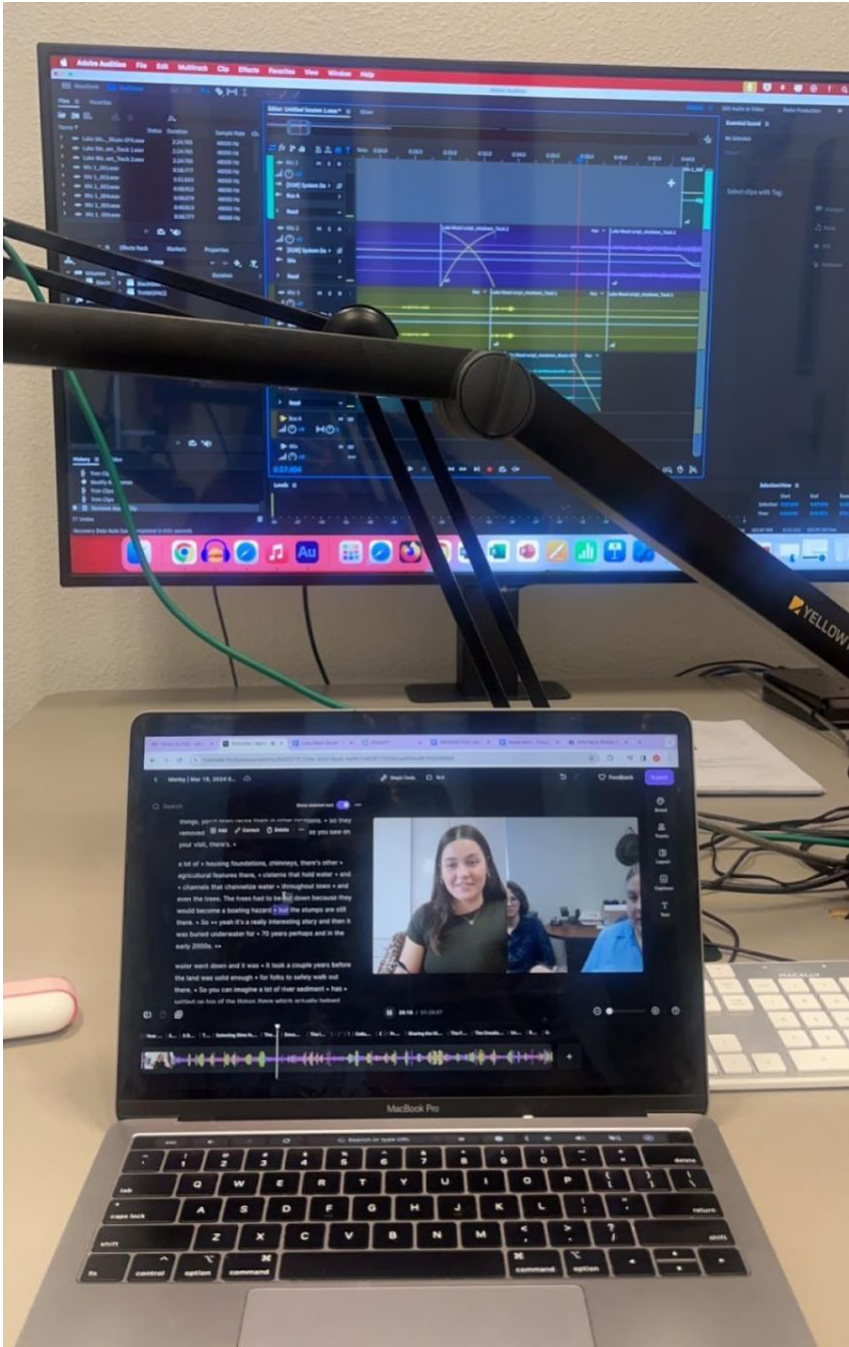


Figure 2: Transferring audio from Riverside to Adobe Audition via Lied Library's podcast studios was straightforward.

Transferring audio from Riverside to Adobe Audition via Lied Library's podcast studios was straightforward. However, editing the content proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of this project.



Figure 3: Remnants of a house located in St. Thomas reflect the town's past.

Remnants of a house located in St. Thomas reflect the town's past. Much of the surviving elements in the ghost town are the foundations of houses.



Figure 4: Debris from Lake Mead remain throughout St. Thomas.

Debris from Lake Mead remain throughout St. Thomas. The scattered shells symbolize the town's past beneath the waters.



Figure 5: Lake Mead RV Village located near Boulder Beach is a popular vacation spot for campers and retirees.

Lake Mead RV Village located near Boulder Beach is a popular vacation spot for campers and retirees. Many individuals living here hold special ties to the lake.



Figure 6: A couple relaxes on Boulder Beach, enjoying the view.

A couple relaxes on Boulder Beach, enjoying the view. This destination spot is popular for picnics and relaxing by the shore.



Figure 7: An image of the United States illustrates the number of workers from each state who contributed to the constructed of the Hoover Dam.

An image of the United States illustrates the number of workers from each state who contributed to the constructed of the Hoover Dam. This diagram symbolizes the nationwide effort required to construct this engineering feat.

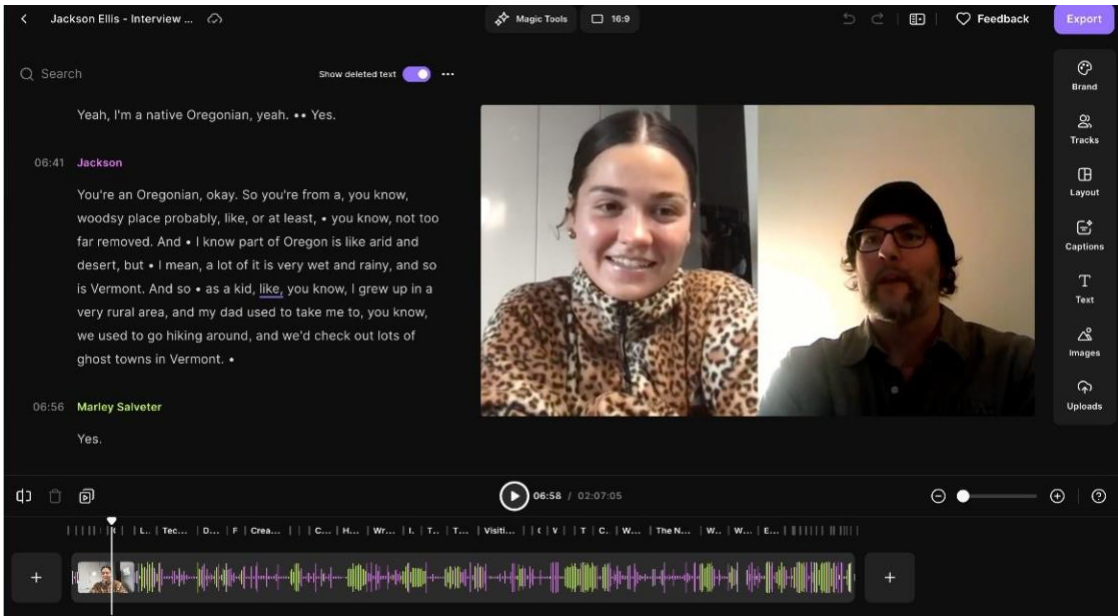


Figure 8: A snapshot of the Riverside platform, capturing remote interviews.

A snapshot of the Riverside platform, capturing remote interviews. It displays transcribed audio, sound waves, sections, and editing tools.

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