

# The Holiday Herald

December 20, 2015

Lake Tahoe, California and Nevada

*See, amid  
the winter's  
snow*

The sun makes an appearance over Lake Tahoe at Carnelian Bay, California. The Douglas Mountains across the water are in Nevada.





## *See, amid the winter's snow*

The annual photo trips I make to the snow each December to create these holiday newsletters are a mix of planning, serendipity and doing the best with what I can get.

Where is the best, most accessible snow at a time when I can get away? In 2011, the beginning of our drought, snow was so scarce I had to settle for shooting frozen lakes (here's that newsletter <http://bit.ly/1UTFYIP>).

What are a few unusual shots to go after, such as last year's front and back nighttime covers of the Kirkwood Inn and Saloon (see those at <http://bit.ly/1YuRuEK>)?

Will the moon phase permit good night shots, and will the weather? There was a full moon out for my 2013 cover at Crater Lake National Park, but so were clouds (what I wound up with is at <http://bit.ly/1mvjwnG>).


This year – the first time Emily has gone with me – we were equipped with sunrise-sunset and moonrise-moonset tables and a computer program that would show us the location of each

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**The public sledding area of Nevada's Lake Tahoe State Park conjures memories I cherish from sledding on the Clay Street hill growing up in Hamlet, N.C. Both places were filled with hundreds of people tossing their regular lives aside for a while to play together in the snow. Douglas County.**





A few minutes after the cover shot, we had moved to Lake Tahoe State Park in Nevada and Emily took this shot of snow clouds re-converging over the lake.

## *See, amid the winter's snow*

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heavenly body plus the band of the Milky Way at any time of the day or night from almost any point on earth to help us plan (you can download the software for yourself at [www.stellarium.org](http://www.stellarium.org); it's free).

We know from past experience that on winter nights in the Sierra – far from the light pollution of urban area – you can drive without headlights from the illumination of moon and stars off the snow. I thought that kind of light would make a great image or two.

The weather would not allow it.

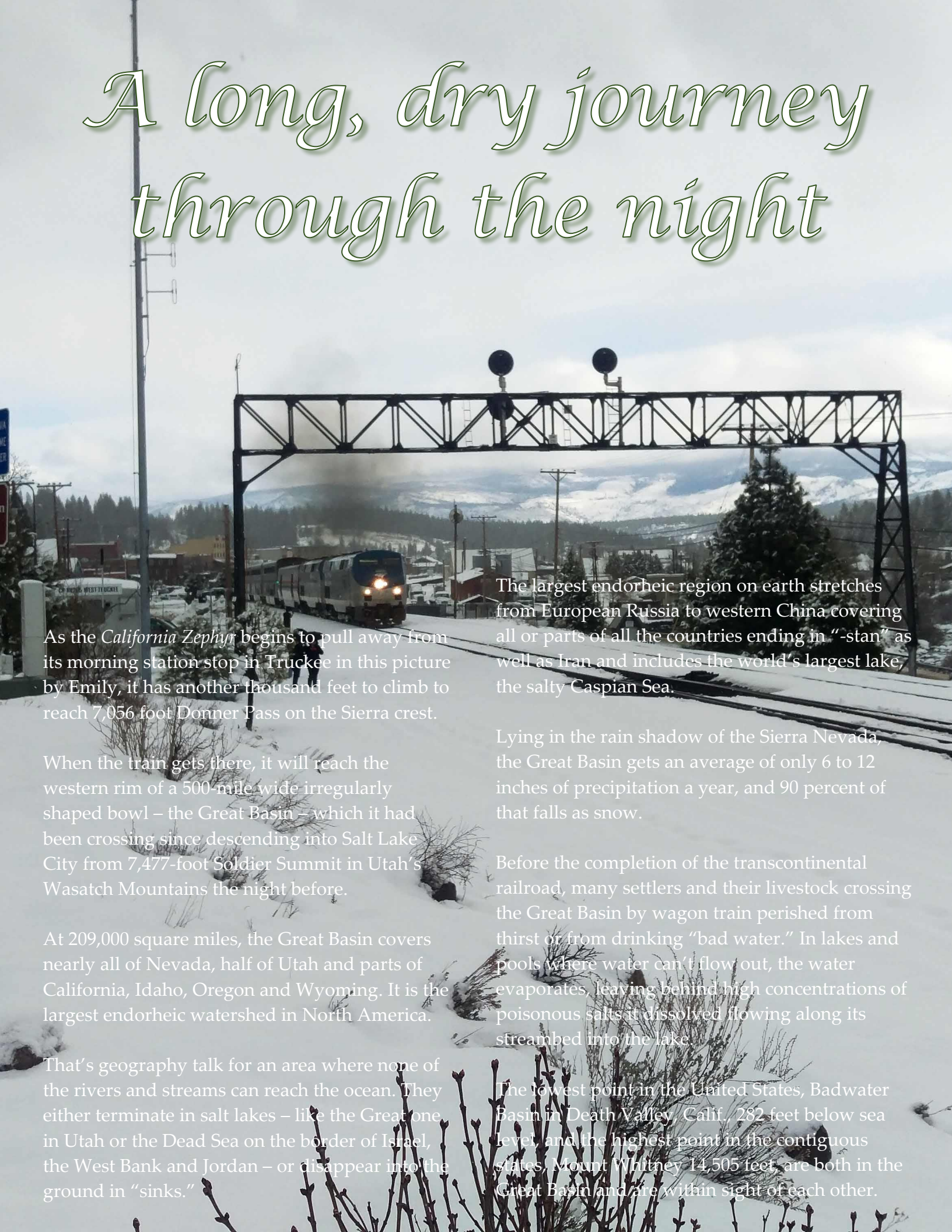
Our day at Lake Tahoe and environs began and ended in clouds and snow. In between there was sun and snow, bright and dark.

But it was, as Emily said at one point, “like driving through a Christmas card.”

We'll be celebrating Christmas in a few days. Our hope for the relatives, friends and colleagues – among them Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and several non-religious folks – who receive this are that you enjoy the holidays that are yours as much as we enjoyed creating this vision of the season.



# *A long, dry journey through the night*



As the *California Zephyr* begins to pull away from its morning station stop in Truckee in this picture by Emily, it has another thousand feet to climb to reach 7,056 foot Donner Pass on the Sierra crest.

When the train gets there, it will reach the western rim of a 500-mile wide irregularly shaped bowl – the Great Basin – which it had been crossing since descending into Salt Lake City from 7,477-foot Soldier Summit in Utah's Wasatch Mountains the night before.

At 209,000 square miles, the Great Basin covers nearly all of Nevada, half of Utah and parts of California, Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming. It is the largest endorheic watershed in North America.

That's geography talk for an area where none of the rivers and streams can reach the ocean. They either terminate in salt lakes – like the Great one in Utah or the Dead Sea on the border of Israel, the West Bank and Jordan – or disappear into the ground in "sinks."

The largest endorheic region on earth stretches from European Russia to western China covering all or parts of all the countries ending in "-stan" as well as Iran and includes the world's largest lake, the salty Caspian Sea.

Lying in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada, the Great Basin gets an average of only 6 to 12 inches of precipitation a year, and 90 percent of that falls as snow.

Before the completion of the transcontinental railroad, many settlers and their livestock crossing the Great Basin by wagon train perished from thirst or from drinking "bad water." In lakes and pools where water can't flow out, the water evaporates, leaving behind high concentrations of poisonous salts it dissolved flowing along its streambed into the lake.

The lowest point in the United States, Badwater Basin in Death Valley, Calif. 282 feet below sea level, and the highest point in the contiguous states, Mount Whitney 14,505 feet, are both in the Great Basin and are within sight of each other.



# Happy Holidays



**The source of Donner Creek is at Donner Pass, hidden in the clouds at the top of this picture. It flows east through Donner Lake, just behind this vantage point, and joins the Truckee River, which drains Lake Tahoe, in the town of Truckee. The river flows into Nevada, where it terminates in Pyramid Lake, a salt lake one-sixth as salty as the ocean, and home to the endangered Lahontan cutthroat trout.**