



SALT OF THE EARTH

In Egypt, an industry veteran learns the workings of salt supply



By CARL BOLM, CSP

Egypt possesses a mysterious aura. Maybe it's the combination of the culture and the people. Most definitely, it's the food. All I know is I keep going back for more, and not just for the most magnificent rock salt for my snow management businesses.

Then and now

A lot has happened during my 30-plus years in the snow and ice industry. When I first started, I would purchase salt by the bag from a nearby hardware store. As my company grew, we would buy bulk product by the truckload. By 2010, we had grown so large that I started traveling with my own vessel to New Orleans to fulfill our clients' ice management needs. That's when I got hooked.

I liked the autonomy of selecting my own salt firsthand. Intuition plays a big part in my current role

as a major salt supplier throughout the Northeast and Midwest river systems. I now get to use my instincts to deal with a lot of unknowns. I am comfortable in this setting, and I embrace the challenge of what it takes to excel on this side of the business.

In 2014, we purchased 10,000 tons of quality rock salt from Egypt for the first time. A product sample was sent to me prior to ordering the shipment, and that was my "a-ha!" moment. It was unlike anything we had ever purchased. Egyptian salt has a finer consistency than North American salt. It doesn't clump and has less than 1% moisture so it is much easier to handle and doesn't freeze when the weather turns cold. I can still remember the texture of the salt, as well as the feeling that something bigger was about to happen.

It's a whole new world now that I am more involved in the supply side of the business. I enjoy working with foreign countries like Egypt and the associated variables in terms of price fluctuations due to fuel and logistical

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QUALITY CONTROL: Carl Bolm, CSP, traveled to Egypt this fall for a hands-on purchasing experience. Bolm says the ability to inspect first-hand the quality of the salt being purchased is important for his company's snow management service and his purchasing customers.

ICE MANAGEMENT

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costs, tariffs, exchange rate of the dollar, government agencies, contracts and more. The company is aligned with savvy and passionate individuals who run the logistical operations and customer service.

An Egyptian primer

Egypt is on the northeastern corner of Africa and ranks in the top 30 largest countries in the world. Egyptians wholeheartedly enjoy food-based gatherings with a roundtable family atmosphere. Belly dancing is a popular form of entertainment, and the official language is Arabic. Everything — from the downtown market in Cairo to dealing with vendors — is a negotiation.

The rich history and culture are marvels to be cherished. The people are very kind and giving, and relationship building is the foundation of international business. I have already built strong, deep relationships with our suppliers. It is a long trek to get there (more than 20 hours of travel coupled with an eight-hour time difference), and the only thing certain is uncertainty in the Middle East. I enjoy change, which is why I think I am so drawn to this land.



IMMERSED IN CULTURE: Experiencing the culture of Egypt has been a life changer for Carl Bolm. In his latest trip, he was able to mix business with pleasure for an immersive experience where he enjoyed the sights and sounds while also building relationships.



SALTTRACKER



I have learned so much about the supply side of our industry. Transportation logistics play a key role in the availability and price of salt:

- The total cargo allowed to be loaded onto a vessel depends upon the restrictions for the load port and the discharge port. For example, when the draft (the depth of a vessel's keel below the water line when loaded) is shallower, the vessel will have to load more lightly. Conversely, where the draft for the port is deeper, the vessel can carry more cargo.
- When a vessel is heading to a barge port such as New Orleans, the salt is transloaded into barges that are towed to their final destination. Depending upon the river's depth, salt barges generally hold from 1,500 to 2,500 tons of cargo.
- These huge vessels can cruise to New Orleans and move the cargo to any number of terminals on the river system. We have brought in vessels with 55,000 tons of salt to New Orleans and then transloaded the entire cargo onto dozens of barges for delivery to six or more destinations.
- This entire process takes time, logistics, manpower, financial resources and a level of unpredictability as it moves to its final destination. Once a barge has been unloaded at a terminal, it is off-loaded, piled and placed in trucks that can hold anywhere from 10 to 40 tons. Then it's off to the end user.

My latest salt odyssey

My company has personally sourced salt worldwide from Brazil to Egypt. All of our product is third-party inspected and certified clean specifically for loading salt. The salt gets tested multiple times, both before it is loaded onto a vessel at our Egypt yard and when it is received in the United States. It's an intricate process with countless moving parts.

We work with many transportation methods, including laker vessels (they carry smaller loads of up to 22,000 U.S. tons of bulk salt into the Great Lakes from overseas), as well as larger ocean vessels that transport approximately 50,000 to 60,000 U.S. tons of bulk salt into deep water ports. The self-loading vessels have cranes and grabs to load and offload the bulk salt. The smaller and very large vessels have no equipment onboard for loading or offloading bulk salt, so shore equipment (such as shore cranes, conveyors, and floating cranes) is used.

My journey to date has been filled with plenty of life-changing memories and awe-inspiring people. I'm looking forward to continuing this sweet and salty experience for many years to come. **SB**

Carl Bolm, CSP, owns BSR Services, St. Louis' largest locally owned and operated snow and ice management provider, as well as bulk salt supplier Champion Salt. Learn more at www.bsrservices.com or www.championsatl.com.

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