

XI. AN INDIAN TRAIL NEAR NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA

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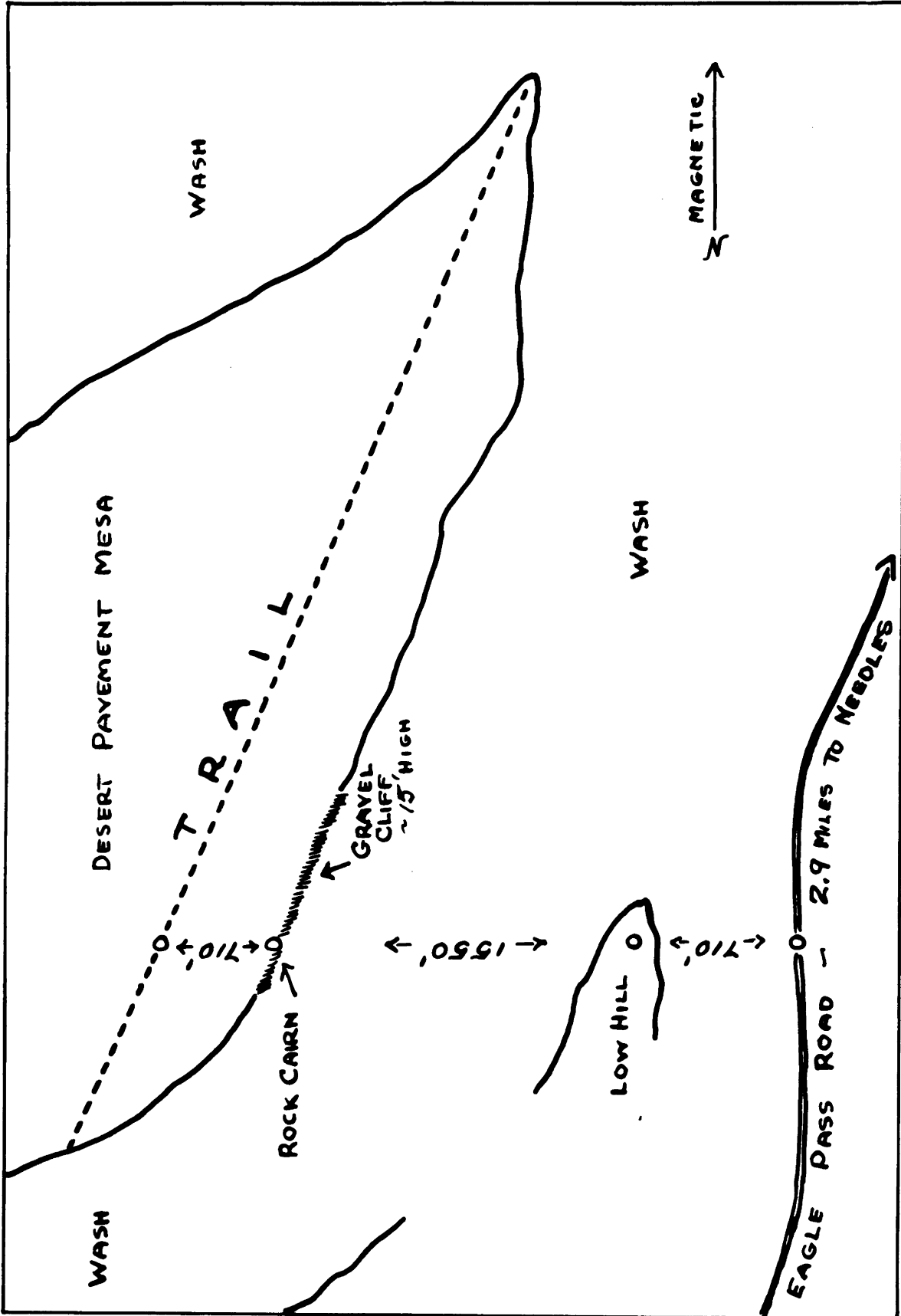
The importance of trails to anthropologists is easy to understand: they provide valuable clues related to the exchange of goods and cultures. Because of their peculiarly perishable nature against the onslaught of the vandal, the thoughtless, and the 4-wheeled "sport," it seems particularly important that any authentic trail segment, regardless of its immediate interest in relation to known major trails, should be described in some detail.

The segment described here is near to, but apparently not a part of, a very well known and important Indian footpath. In his thorough review of the known trails in California, Davis (1961) shows one beside the Colorado River along the entire length of the California-Arizona boundary. Although the site is largely obliterated by the artificial lakes which have been created along the river, its existence and importance are well documented (Bolton 1930; Sample 1950; Schroder 1952).

None of these authors mention the trail described here, so its destination can only be surmised. A well-worn path across a rough, barren region nearly devoid of springs must have been a link between more favorable regions. Since the only favorable village sites in the entire area would be on or near the Colorado River, it may be postulated that this was a route to by-pass the Mohave Indian camps on the river.

The trail was discovered by the author quite accidentally, about 1926 or 1928. In 1965 it was relocated and studied in some detail. In 1966 the site was visited for a third time in order to obtain photographs and to verify certain details.

The site can be easily located with the aid of Map 1. The city of Needles is situated on the banks of the Colorado River. Near the west end of town, a road known to local residents as the "Eagle Pass Road" departs from US Highway 66 in a southerly direction. The intersection is not conspicuous; the dirt road passes under a trestle of the AT&SF Railroad, traverses a dump area, and then heads approximately southwest along the base of the Sacramento Mountains. Although the road does not appear on many maps, the US Geological Survey Map, Needles Quadrangle, shows it as a "light duty" road. The distance along this road, 2.9 miles (see map 1), is measured from



the Santa Fe trestle and is fairly exact; the distances from the road to the site are estimated from counted paces.

The trail segment is approximately straight, about one mile long, and oriented north-northeast to south-southwest (magnetic) in an area which is largely "desert pavement." It is quite conspicuous, as shown in Plate 1. At both ends of the segment, the trail disappears into sandy washes: the northern extension probably approaches the river without emerging from the sandy wash; and it is quite likely that the trail crossed the broad, sandy wash at the southern terminus and emerged again on to higher ground beyond. This has not yet been determined.

Two things suggest that this may have been an important trail: (1) the nature of "desert pavement" is such that a durable imprint of a trail cannot be easily incised; and (2) the many petroglyphs along the way would seem to indicate something concerning the number of persons who passed that way.

An attempt was made to photograph all petroglyphs along the trail. Perhaps it is significant that the most elaborate and abundant figures were on large boulders near the northern (beginning?) end. Figures 1 and 2 show sketches of the better petroglyphs. Because of their number, and because some are located up to several yards away from the trail, some petroglyphs may have been missed. Many of the figures are beautiful examples of the art; all are incised into well developed desert varnish on rhyolite porphyry boulders.

In addition to the petroglyphs, two other objects deserve mention. Both are large rhyolite boulders which have been spalled extensively. One is roughly conical in shape, 2 feet long, 1½ feet across the circular base. Nearly all of the desert varnish has been spalled off, except for a patch on the base. In this patch is a shallow pit, clearly the result of human agency. Certainly the spalling was also the result of human labor: but for what purpose? The symmetrical nature of the residual boulder and the energy expended in the act of shaping argue strongly against simple vandalism.

In October 1966, during an unsuccessful attempt to find a southern extension of this trail, the author found thirty-seven potsherds in an area approximately 3 by 15 feet at the extreme southern end of the trail. Many had been well assimilated into the desert pavement. They appeared to have originally formed a rather crudely made, buff-colored, undecorated cooking vessel of the type called Tizon Brown.

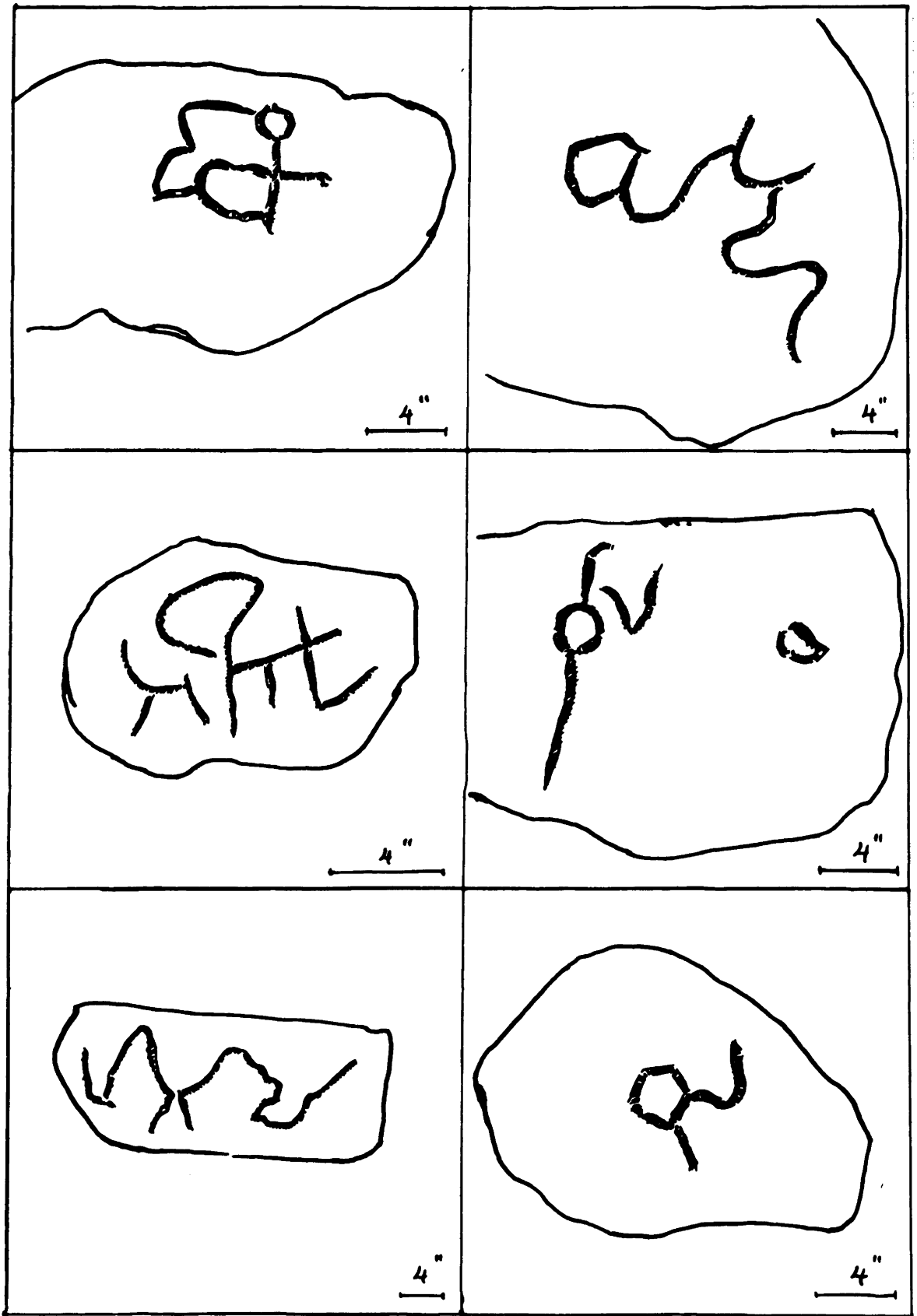


Figure 1

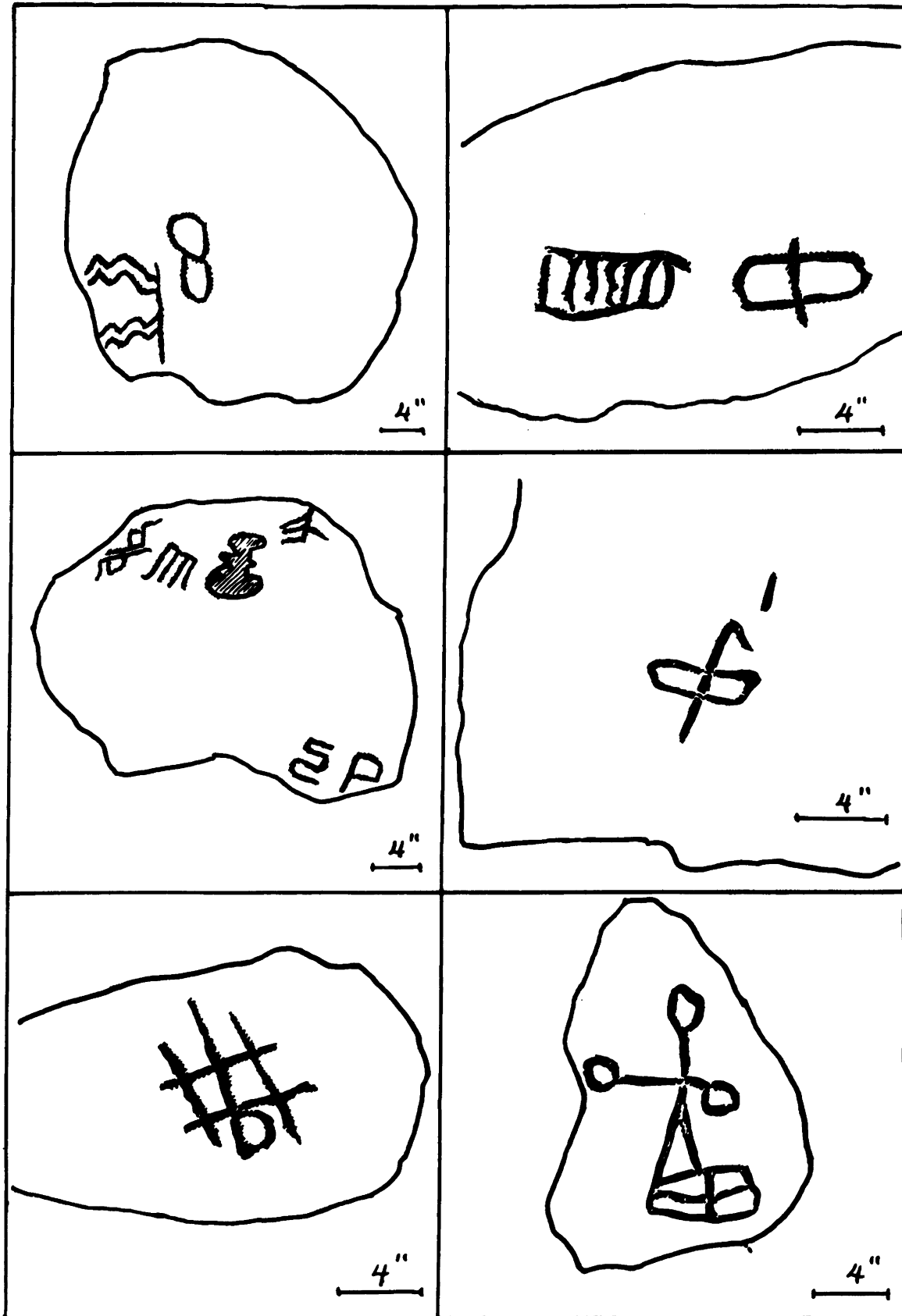


Figure 2

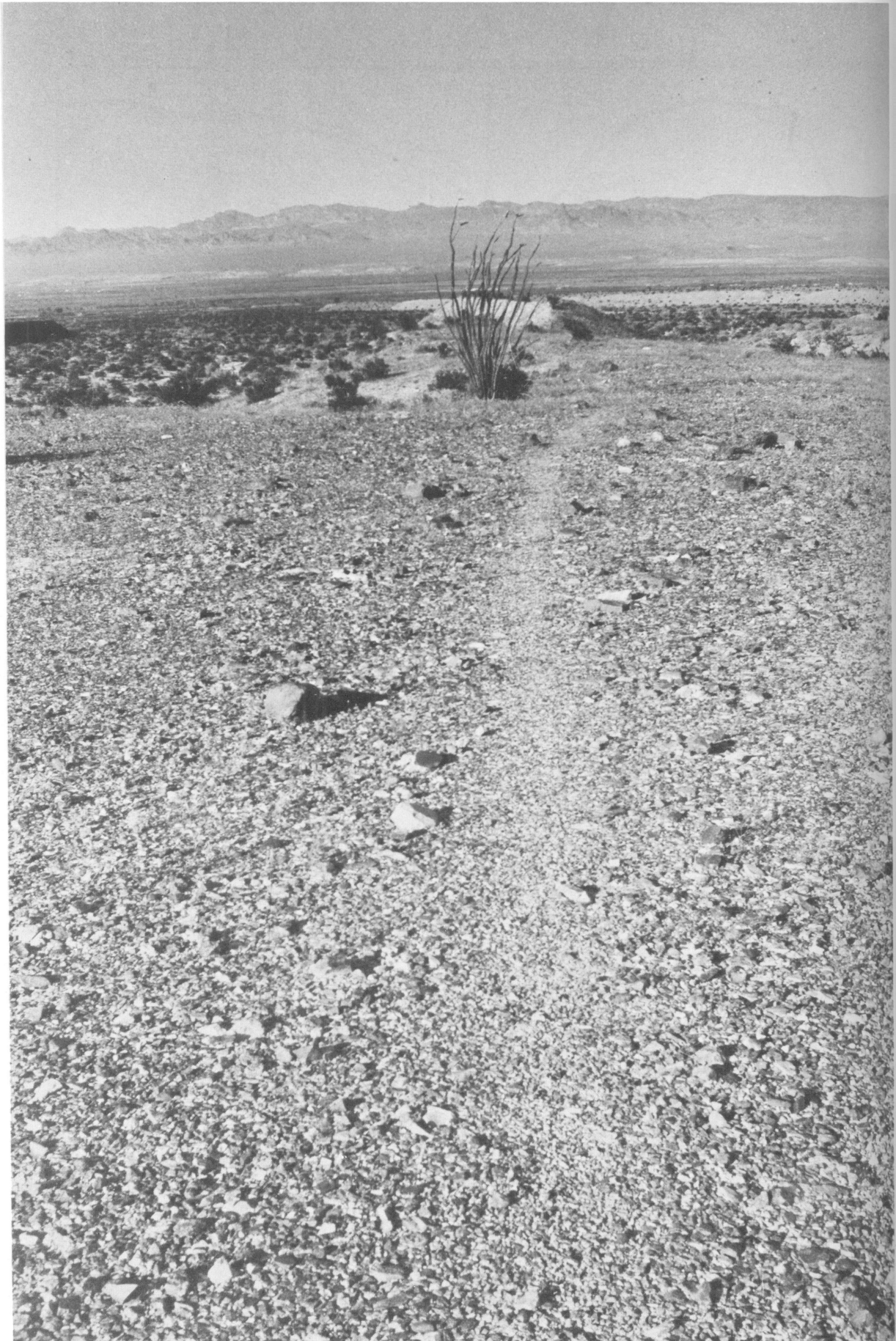


Plate 1. The Trail, Looking North

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