

New Clues to the Pegleg Gold . . .

Willits, California

To Pisgah Bill,
Borrego Valley, California

Dear Bill:

Some months ago I opened the current issue of Desert Magazine and read about the group of Desert Rats who were going to build a monument to the memory of Pegleg Smith, and start an annual trek in search of his long lost deposit of gold, erroneously called the Pegleg mine.

Since my name was mentioned in connection with the story, and since the time is approaching when the second annual Pegleg Trek is to be held—I believe January 1 is the date—I have decided to reveal some inside information never before published which may help you-all locate the nuggets which Pegleg left behind.

You published a picture of some of the old-timers who've been more or less on the Pegleg trail for many years. Three of them, John Hilton, Eddie Duval and Doc Beatty I have known personally for many years. Harry Oliver I have not had the pleasure of meeting, but know him through the Desert Magazine, and from his own publication *The Desert Rat Scrapbook*, every copy of which I read with interest. My other two friends, the burros in the photograph took me back to the beginning of this century, when John Collins and I with six burros journeyed over some hundreds of miles of that desert country. The two shown in photo look quite a little like two of those.

I recognize the location of the photo as on the east side

of Coyote mountain, not far from Dry lake in Clark valley, which before Fred and Frank Clark drilled their well, was called North Coyote.

I thank you for inviting me to join the trek next year. I hope to be able to go and shall do my darndest to keep the date. In the meantime, as I wrote above, I shall divulge a few secrets.

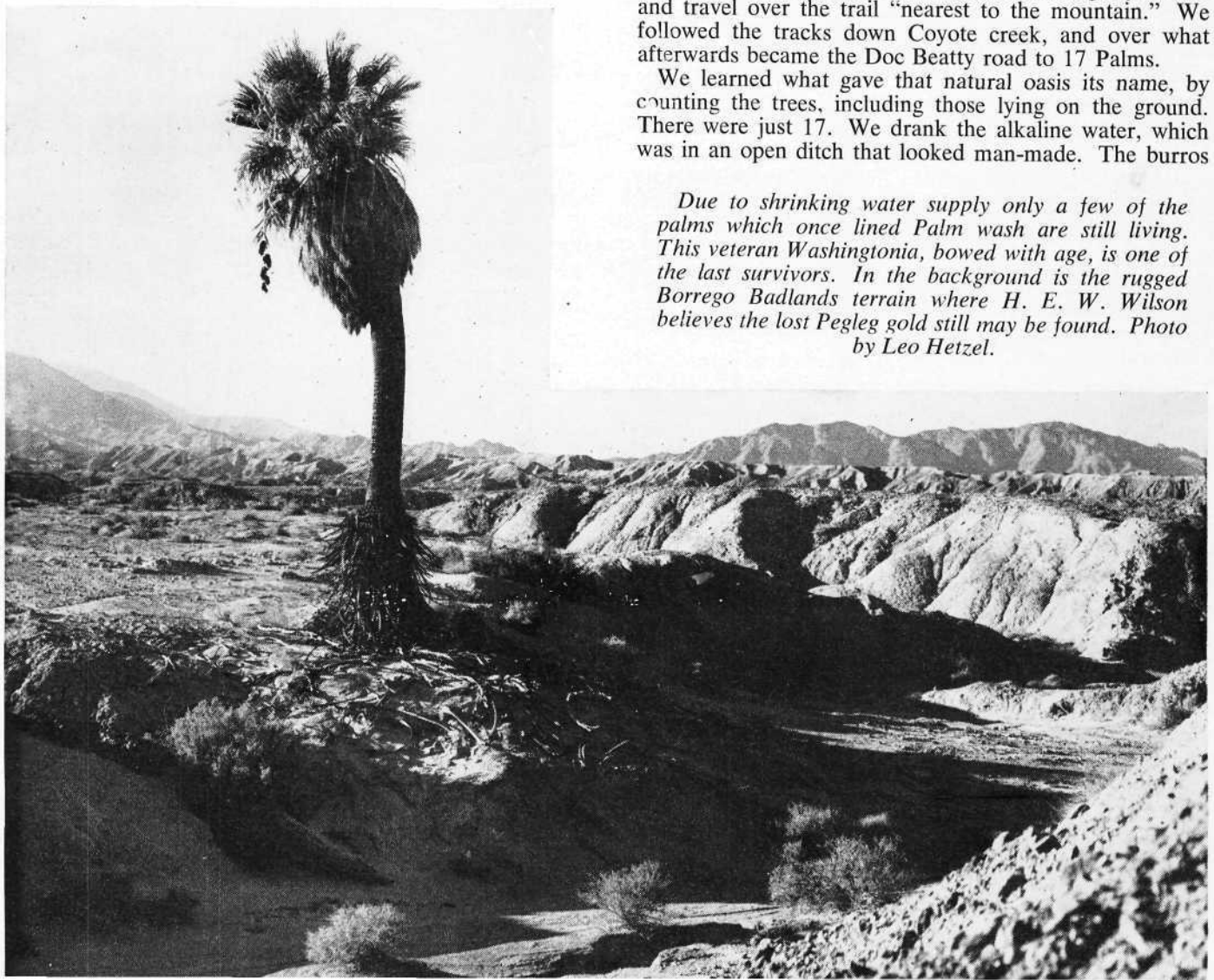
In October 1900 an Indian rode his pony from the Martinez reservation in the Coachella valley to San Ignacio reservation in the San Ysidro mountains. He stopped at Collin's house, and John, as was his custom, invited him in for something to eat. The Indian told John that he had ridden over the nearest trail, around the Santa Rosa mountains, and only diverged in order to water his pony at 17 Palms. To everyone who knows the Badlands it is quite obvious that the nearest trail would be the one around the end of the Santa Rosas. There are many trails through the Borrego Badlands which extend in the form of a fan—the mountain being the handle and the tips extending to the Salton sea on the east and San Felipe creek on the south.

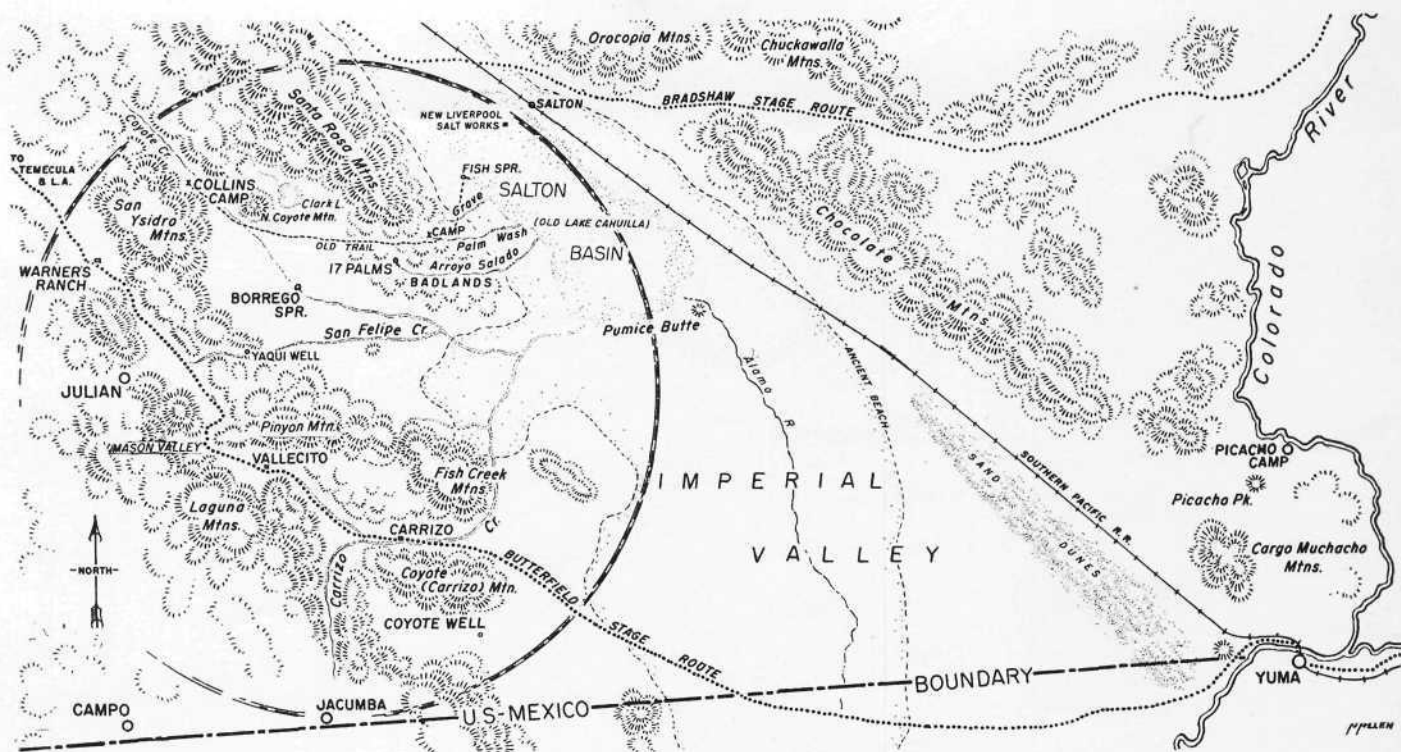
A week after the Indian had gone through Collin's valley, John and I were ready to venture forth in our quest for the territory traversed by the pioneer of the desert with the wooden leg.

Where should we go first? John had never been east of Clark valley and Borrego spring, and I had never been anywhere and knew nothing. The Indian's ride gave John a clue and he suggested that we backtrack the pony's route and travel over the trail "nearest to the mountain." We followed the tracks down Coyote creek, and over what afterwards became the Doc Beatty road to 17 Palms.

We learned what gave that natural oasis its name, by counting the trees, including those lying on the ground. There were just 17. We drank the alkaline water, which was in an open ditch that looked man-made. The burros

Due to shrinking water supply only a few of the palms which once lined Palm wash are still living. This veteran Washingtonia, bowed with age, is one of the last survivors. In the background is the rugged Borrego Badlands terrain where H. E. W. Wilson believes the lost Pegleg gold still may be found. Photo by Leo Hetzel.





Henry E. W. Wilson, who has been searching for the lost Pegleg gold off and on since 1900, believes it still will be found within the area marked by the circle.

were not thirsty enough to do more than smell it. We backtracked a little way up Arroyo Salada (which is well named), and traced the pony's track over a well marked trail to Palm wash. From there the trail led across Grave wash and three or four others to Fish spring, where the burros got a drink. There we camped that night in spite of Fig Tree John ordering us to vamoose.

Somewhere between 17 Palms and Fish spring, I saw the tops of three little hills, on the same level as the trail we were on. The top of the middle hill was covered with black rock. I walked out toward it—but did not climb it. Collins was disappearing with the burros. He had not seen the hills. It was my first trip and I was as green as grass and afraid of being lost, so I joined the burro train, saying nothing to John. Several years later I remembered this spot and ever since have been trying to relocate it. Maybe I found the Pegleg hill that day.

To return to the Pegleg Smith story: Smith's story merely locates the gold as being on one of three hills between Yuma and Warner's ranch. But two other persons are said to have located the gold also, and by dovetailing their stories with that of Pegleg it is possible to narrow the search down to a comparatively small area.

First, there was the Indian woman who, traveling eastward—the opposite direction from that taken by Pegleg Smith—stood on the hill where she found the black gold nuggets and saw the smoke of the construction camp at Salton on the line of the Southern Pacific. She was dying of thirst when she reached Salton. Her story would indicate she was in the Borrego Badlands, but close to the base of the mountains for she missed the water at 17 Palms and was dying of thirst when she reached Salton station.

The halfbreed at Warner's ranch also told of finding the gold. The three days required for him to visit the rich deposit would also locate the treasure somewhere in or near the Badlands.

I believe one reason why the Pegleg gold was never

found is that the searchers have been looking for large hills instead of low ones.

In the March issue of *Desert*, Marshal South told about the Yaqui Indian for whom Yaqui well was named. The mystery gold which he is reported to have found came from the Badlands. I suspect he and the halfbreed whom I have mentioned, were the same persons.

The last but not least important clue to this whole proposition is the fact that the Pegleg gold was black, not dark brown, but black. What made it black? Gold is naturally yellow, and exposure to the sun does not turn gold black in a million years. Let us consider petrified wood. Practically all petrified wood that I have found on the Colorado desert, and I have seen a lot, is a greyish-brown color, and—now mark this—the only black petrified wood I have ever seen comes from Grave wash. I have in my collection of desert specimens, a fine piece of black petrified wood. It is a part of the limb of a tree and as hard as iron. It came from the ridge on the south side of Grave wash. On the north side of the same wash there is a very indistinct trail leading to the next wash north of Grave, and on that trail is some black petrified wood, spread over the ground as if a tree had fallen and broken up, and petrified where it lay. This trail is very hard to find because it does not lead from Grave wash direct, but from a tributary—and there is very little of it left.

Grave is the next large wash north of Palm wash, and the bridge number on 99 Highway is 5848. That of Palm wash is 5846. The latter is the third wash north of Truckhaven—the first two being small ones.

To return to the petrified wood, is it not likely that the same mineral solution which caused the petrified wood to turn black also colored the gold? If this is true, then Grave wash is the key to the mystery of the Pegleg gold. The Indian trail crosses Grave wash, and if you can pick up this trail north of the wash you may have found the route to the lost Pegleg treasure.

H. E. W. WILSON