



## *"Dinosaur Tracks" at Split Mountain*

*Many of the "tracks" have the definite and uniform shape shown above. A few of them such as are shown here have received a deposit of alkali carried down by rainwaters and stand forth in bold relief. Note the section just below center that has been chiseled out by a souvenir hunter. It is hoped for his sake and other vandals like him that they are NOT dinosaur tracks. For size comparison note the black hat in the upper right hand corner.*

In the sandstone floor of a little side canyon near Split mountain gorge there are indentations that look to the untrained observer like the tracks of some prehistoric monster. For many years they were accepted as such—until the scientific men came along and said it wasn't so—that this sandstone was formed long after the age when giant reptiles roamed over the face of the earth. The controversy still goes on, and you can choose your own side—but regardless of what caused these strange dents in the rock, you'll find this a gorgeous spot for a weekend excursion into the Southern California desert—when cool weather comes.

By HULBERT BURROUGHS

"**Y**OU fellers been to the dinosaur tracks?" I glanced quickly at the desert-lean face of the man filling our gas tank.

"What dinosaur tracks?" I asked hopefully — hopefully because thus far our week-end on the Southern California desert had been a dismal failure. Not through any fault of Mother Nature, but only because we had been fools enough

to get our car stuck in some of her artistic handiwork on the edge of Salton sea. After spending Friday afternoon and all day Saturday digging out, we finally limped into a service station late in the afternoon, tired, thirsty, disappointed at having ruined a vacation trip we had been planning so long.

So when we heard mention of "dinosaur tracks" we were interested.

"Why, sure," the attendant was say-

ing, "those tracks've been there close to a million years! — right in the sandstone plain as if the critters that made 'em had walked over the rock yesterday!"

Chuck Sheldon and I looked at each other. Funny how quickly that tired feeling leaves you when excitement begins to brew. Dinosaur tracks! This was getting closer to the adventure and mystery we had hoped to find on the desert.

" . . . and you go south down high-

way 99 to the Julian and San Diego road, highway 78 — that's just this side of Kane springs. Turn to your right, which is west, an' keep going till you come to a little place called Ocotillo. It's on the left hand side of the road. There's a dry lake on the right which the army and navy aviators use for bombing practice. Turn south at Ocotillo on a sand and gravel road. Continue south seven or eight miles toward the Vallecito mountains. Just before you come to an old gypsum mine the road crosses a big dry wash comin' diagonally down from the right. That wash is the trail to the dinosaur tracks. If it ain't rainin'—an' there's no prospects of it—head your car up the wash. You won't get stuck—the sand's hard. Pretty soon you'll be going through Split mountain canyon. As soon as you get past that narrow gorge keep your eyes peeled, because the tracks are up a side canyon to the left. Somebody painted a red arrow on a boulder so's people could find it. Don't know if it's still there or not. You boys'll find it though—can't miss it."

I think our profuse thanks puzzled the old fellow, but we were really grateful and excited over the prospects of seeing some real dinosaur tracks.

It was nearly 5:30 in the evening when we turned west on highway 78. And by the time we reached Ocotillo the sun had dropped behind the western mountains.

By rights, we should have started looking for a campsite. But the darkening shadows of the Vallecito range ahead of us were an invitation we couldn't resist.

"The moon'll be pretty close to full tonight," I told Chuck, "and it'll be fun to see if we can find the tracks at night."

We had no difficulty recognizing the big dry wash coming out of Split mountain canyon below the gypsum mine. It was nearly dark as we turned off the road and headed up the dry hard sand of the streambed. There was no wheel track—no visible sign that anyone had ever traversed the wash before, and we had the feeling that we were pioneering a hitherto unexplored territory!

Dodging among huge boulders, gliding along over velvet smooth stretches of sand, stopping to measure the clearance over a big rock — it was not long

*Above—Entering the gorge of Split mountain canyon. This is one of the scenic spots in the proposed new Anza Desert State park.*

*Below—Most of the markings are a hodge-podge of shapeless small pits in the surface of the exposed sandstone. Chuck Sheldon who accompanied the author of this article is examining the formation.*

