

THE ALABAMA HILLS



Photograph By GLF Photography

How They Were Formed

The Alabama Hills are a golden-brown wonderland of rounded hills and twisted rock formations lying between Lone Pine and the Sierra. The Alabamas, once incorrectly touted as "the earth's oldest hills," are now known to be the same age as the Sierra, both being formed a "few million years ago" by faulting. Identical in composition, their difference in appearance comes from different weathering processes. Up high, the freezing, expanding and thawing of rainwater and melting snow has caused the more chiseled splintering of the granite. Down in the warmer valley, the Alabamas took shape when "the climate was

more moist and the rock was covered with soil," according to a recent geologist's report printed in "California's Eastern Sierra" by Sue Irwin. As the climate became drier, erosion slowly stripped away the soil mantle, exposing and shaping the piles of boulders we see today. Water and wind continue the shaping process. The beiges and blacks in the mottled coloring are the result of being stained for millions of years by the oxidation of the iron minerals in the rock.

How They Were Named

The unusual name Alabama Hills came about during the Civil War. In 1864 Southern sympathizers in Lone Pine discovered gold "in them thar hills." When they heard that a Confederate cruiser named the Alabama had burned, sunk or captured more than 60 Federal ships in less than two years they named their mining claims after the cruiser to celebrate. Before long the name applied to the whole area. Coincidentally, while Southerners were prospecting around Lone Pine, there were Union sympathizers 15 miles north near Independence. And when the Alabama was sunk off the coast of France by the U.S.S. Kearsarge in 1864, the Independence people struck back. They not only named their mining claims "Kearsarge" but a mountain peak, a mountain pass, and a whole town as well!

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