

Organ Pipe Cactus

National Monument

ARIZONA

ORGAN PIPE CACTUS

National Monument



United States Department of the Interior

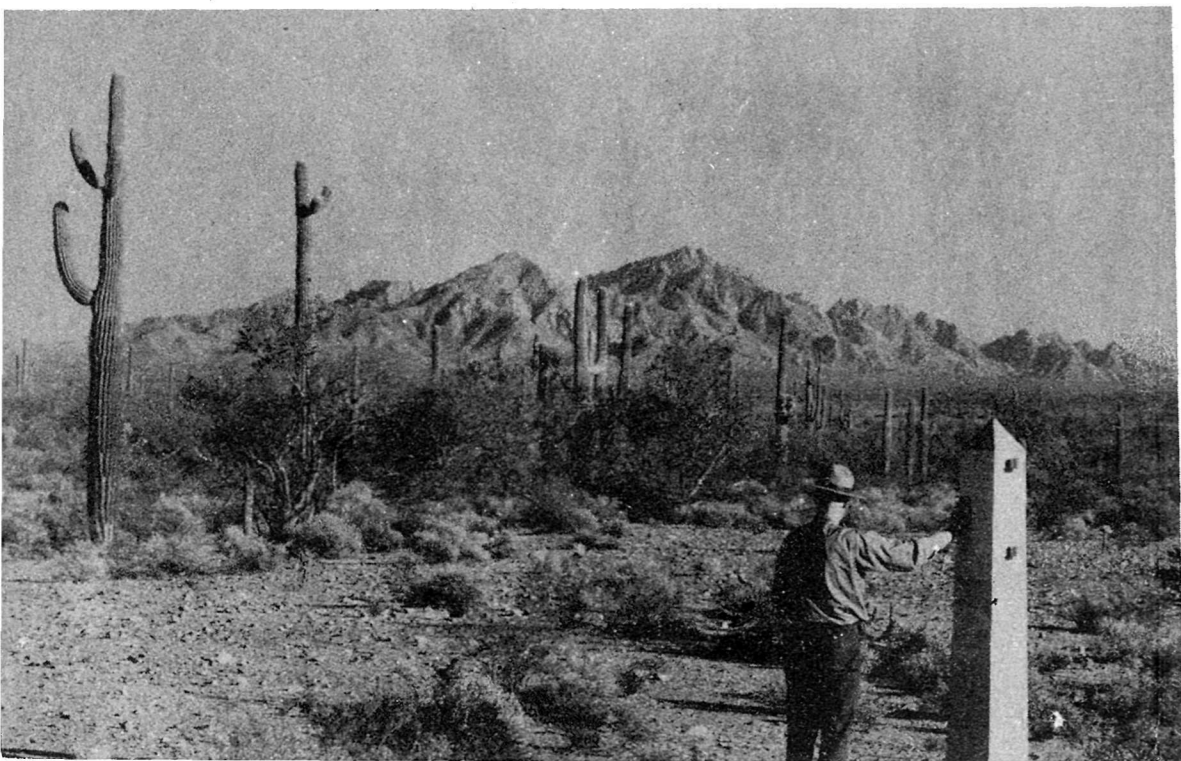
Harold L. Ickes, Secretary

National Park Service, Newton B. Drury, Director



Following the Sonoyta Valley of Mexico northeastward from the Gulf of California to the International Boundary, extends the finger of a subtropical climatic zone. The tip of this finger reaches across into the United States bringing with it picturesque spine and thorn protected plants of the Sonoran Desert—plants found nowhere else in the United States. Rainfall, although relatively light, is sufficient to support a growth of strange vegetation which becomes dense along moist drainage channels or "washes." Here is a native Mexican desert

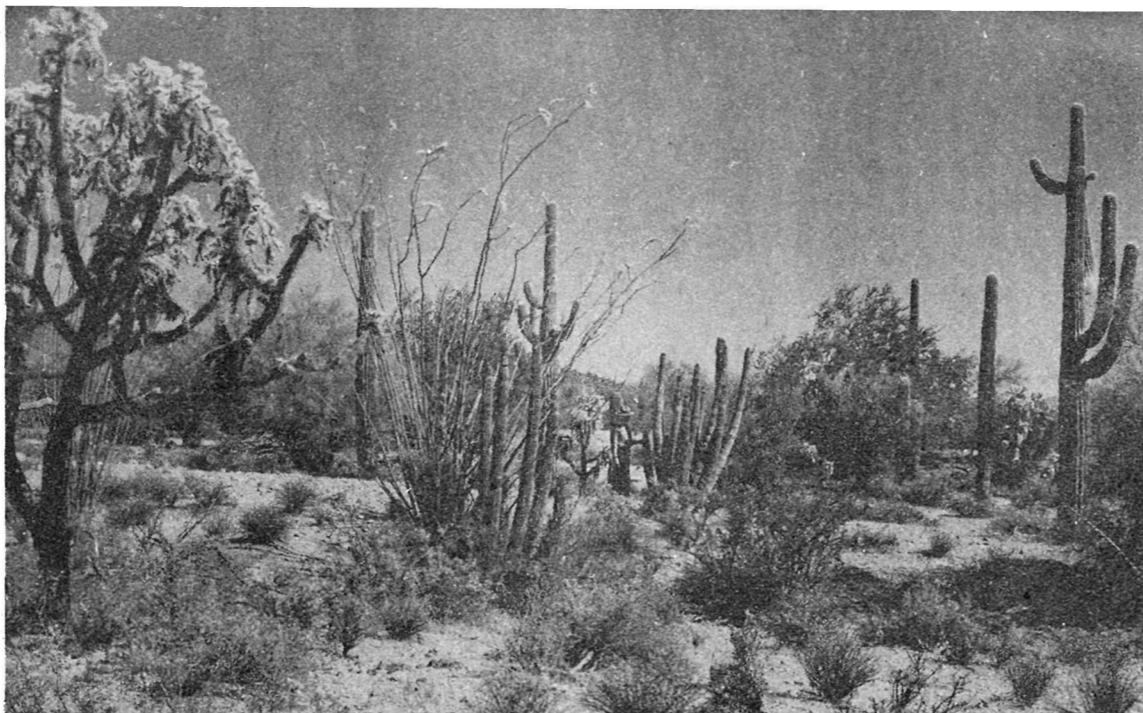
At International Boundary looking south into Mexico



garden which a whim of nature has placed on the north side of the International Boundary.

Organ Pipe Cactus and Other Desert Plants

Most conspicuous of the Sonoran Desert plants found in abundance in this national monument are the massive clusters of the strange appearing, long-armed giants, the Organ Pipe Cacti. So named because of the fancied resemblance to the huge rows of pipes of a pipe organ, a single plant clump may contain 30 or more unbranched arms, some



A fantastic display of desert vegetation

of which reach a height of nearly 20 feet. Although found in dense stands in some parts of the monument, especially on the southern slopes of the several ranges of hills, this species occurs but rarely on the level alluvial plains lying between ranges.

Blossoms of the Organ Pipe Cactus appear in May at branch tips and occasionally on the sides of the stems. The lavender-tinged white flowers open at night and close soon after sunrise the following morning.

Somewhat similar to the Organ Pipe Cactus in general appearance, but found only in desert washes in close proximity to the International Boundary, is the Sinita or Whisker Cactus. This species does not grow as tall as the Organ Pipe. Sometimes it spreads to cover many square yards of sandy flat, and is

characterized by long, hair-like, grey spines at the tips of older arms, looking like uncombed hair or whiskers. Arms of the Sinita are less finely fluted or ridged than those of the Organ Pipe, the cross section of an arm resembling a five- or six-pointed star; hence, this species is sometimes called Star Cactus locally.

Among other desert plants occurring in the monument is the Mexican Jumping Bean, the Desert Willow (a relative of the catalpa), the Corona de Christo, or Crucifixion Thorn, and, in a few localities, the Smoke Tree. Mesquite (mees-keet'), Palo Verde, Ironwood, Ocotillo (oh-koh-tee'-yoh), Saguaro (sah-wah'-roe), Creosote Bush, and many other plants characteristic of the desert of northern Mexico and southern Arizona occur in abundance.

During the months of March and April, portions of the desert are carpeted with masses of wildflowers of different hues. Golden Desert Poppies, magenta Owls Clover, blue Lupines, yellow Encelias and Desert Marigolds, and apricot-tinged Wild Hollyhocks occur in solid colors or blended in a delicate pattern. One of these, the Desert Lily or Ajo (ah'-hoe), adds to the spring breeze a delicate aroma not unlike that of orange blossoms.

Animal Life

Many forms of animal life take advantage of the food and cover provided by the great abundance and variety of plants here. For some species of birds, such as the Lark Bunting and the Gambel Sparrow, this is the winter home; while

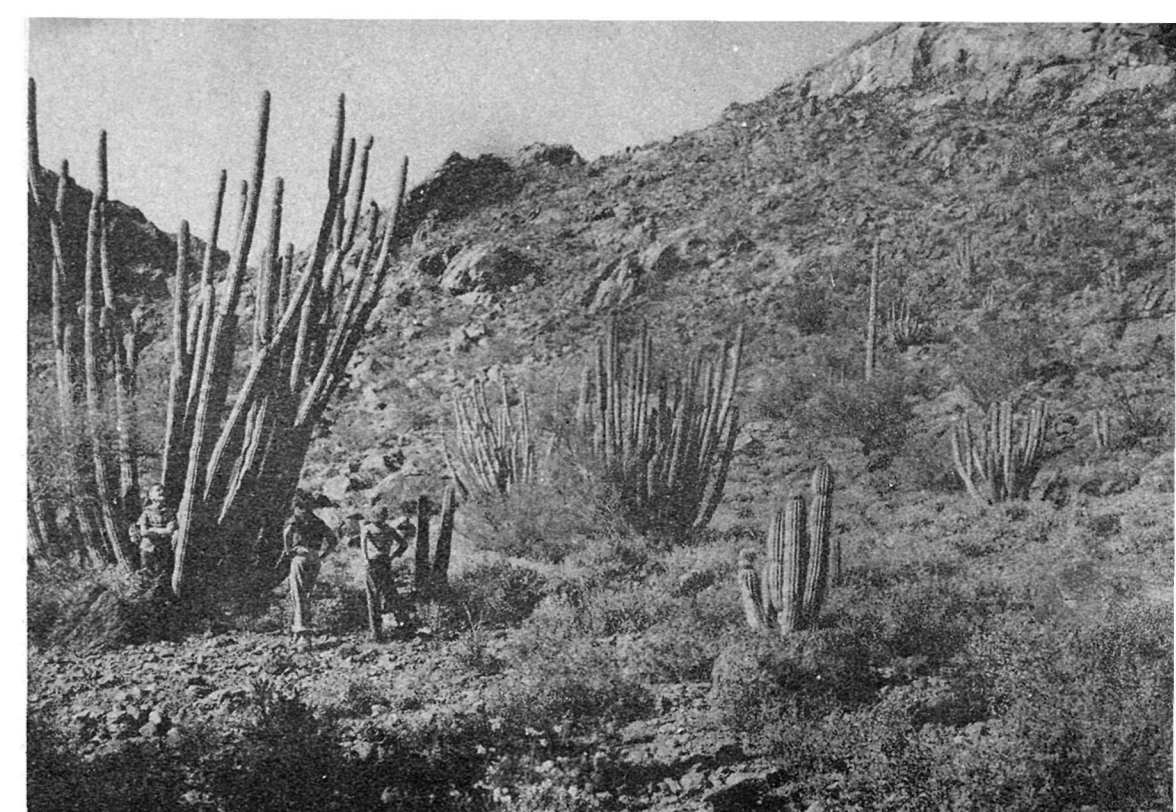
Blossom of Organ Pipe Cactus



for others, of which the White-winged Dove, the Pyrrhuloxia, and the Arizona Cardinal are examples, summertime is best. Many, such as the Gambel Quail and the noisy Cactus Wren, are year-around residents.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument offers an unbelievable variety of habitat conditions, each particularly suited to some form of animal life. From the moist fern-clad cliffs at Dripping Springs and the rocky stream banks at Alamo Canyon to the dusty creosote-bush flats of La Abra Plain and from the sandy washes of the Sonoyta Hills to the wind-swept crests of the Ajo Mountains there are great differences in moisture, exposure, and temperature conditions, all of which have a bearing on the plant and animal life to be found. This difference accounts in a measure for the biological wealth of this part of the arboreal desert.

In addition to the many varieties of small animals which are characteristic of the Sonoran Desert, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, with its relatively inaccessible mountain ranges and its sweeping stretches of brush-covered plain, provides a haven for many small droves of the desert Wild Hog or javalina (have-ah-leen'-ah); and remnants of the once abundant bands of Desert Bighorns, the majestic wild sheep of the Southwest, range in higher elevations. Antelope are occasionally seen, while deer, four subspecies of which occur in the monument, are fairly numerous.



In Alamo Canyon the Organ Pipe Cactus covers the rocky slopes

Historical Background

Hillsides of the monument are pitted with both ancient and modern prospect holes and mines from some of which ore was taken by the Spaniards and Mexicans and by early Americans, who hauled it over the treacherous Camino del Diablo to the Pacific Coast whence, in sailing vessels, it made the long trip around Cape Horn to smelters in far-off Wales.

Although it is only now being reached by the extending tentacles of modern civilization, this isolated corner of the Southwest was the scene of considerable activity in the early Spanish pioneer period. Here passed Diaz in 1540 on his trek to the Colorado River, and here, a cen-

tury and a half later, came the intrepid Jesuit, Father Kino, to establish the San Marcel Mission at what is now the little town of Sonoyta.

In his journeys Father Kino also developed a route which later became the much-traveled but dangerous Camino del Diablo (Highway of the Devil), traces of which may still be seen in the extreme southwestern corner of the monument near Quitobaquito (Key'-tow-bah-key'-toe). This route was used by de Anza and his followers in their return to Tubac in 1776 from the founding of San Francisco. Later it was marked by the bleaching bones of men and beasts of burden which fell by the wayside from the crawling caravans of gold-seekers drawn from eastern Texas

and other southern States during the California gold rush of 1849. In 1853, this territory was purchased by the United States from Mexico because it was considered the most desirable location for a transcontinental railroad.

The Monument

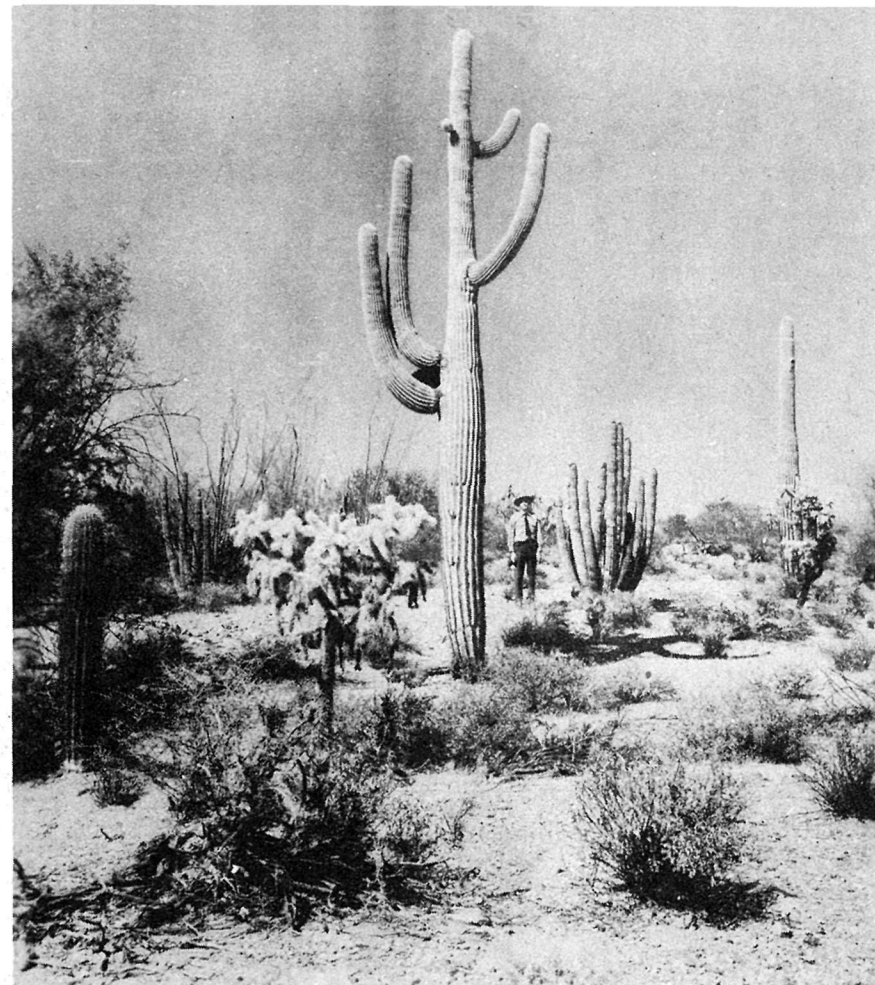
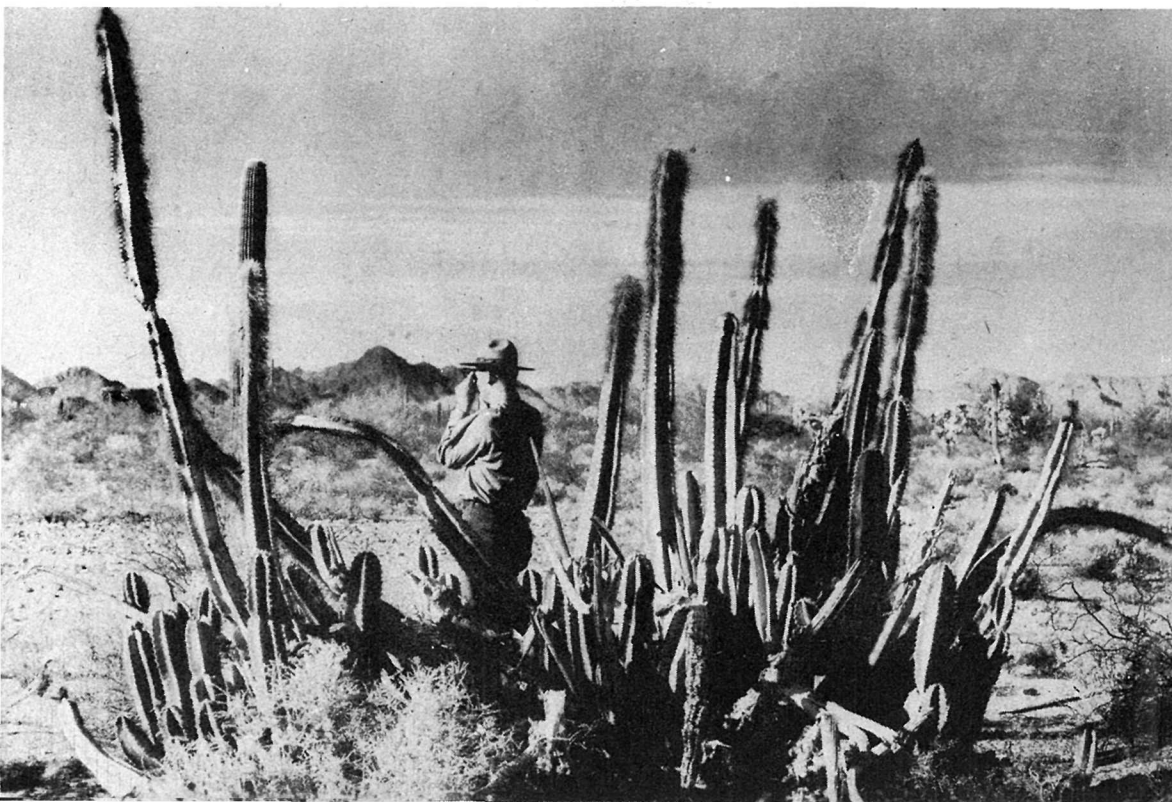
Largest of the national monuments in Arizona, this desert reserve includes 328,162 acres, or approximately 516 square miles, of rolling hills, mountain range, and alluvial plain. To preserve one of the most spectacular portions of the rapidly dwindling area of the Sonoran Desert the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 13, 1937. Since that time, a portion of the bounda-

ries has been fenced, a monument headquarters site selected, and a well drilled.

Tourists crossing southern Arizona on U. S. Highway No. 80 may readily reach Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument with relatively little extra mileage by leaving U. S. Highway No. 80 at Tucson and going west via Sells and the Papago Indian Reservation. Twelve miles east of Ajo, the Sonoyta-Rocky Point Highway into Mexico takes the traveler into and across the national monument. From Ajo it is 45 miles, via State Highway No. 85, to Gila Bend, on U. S. 80. East-bound travel simply reverses the route.

Although the cross-monument highway is the only improved road in the monument, there are numer-

The Simita or Whisker Cactus

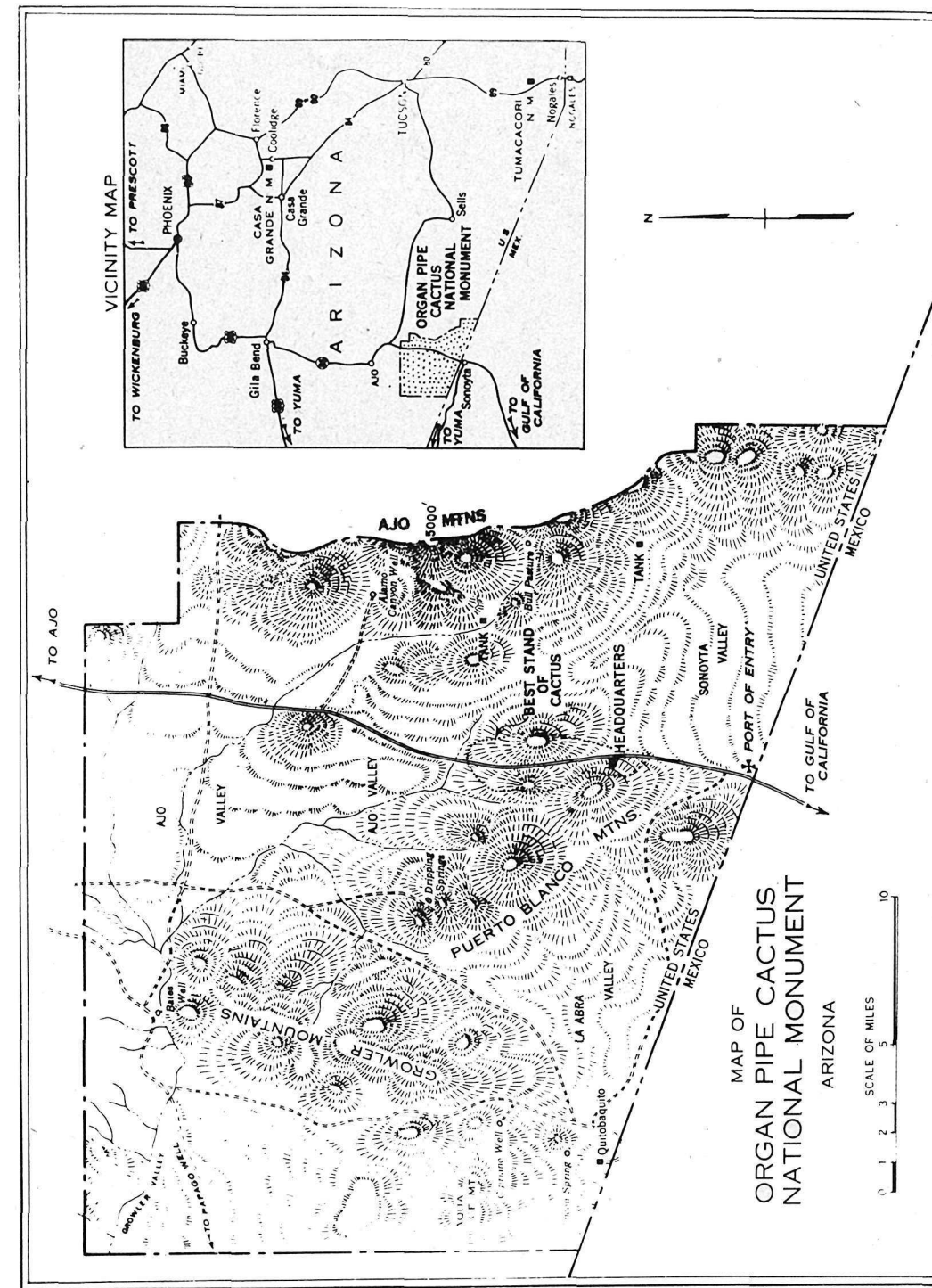


Typical Lower Sonoran Desert Vegetation

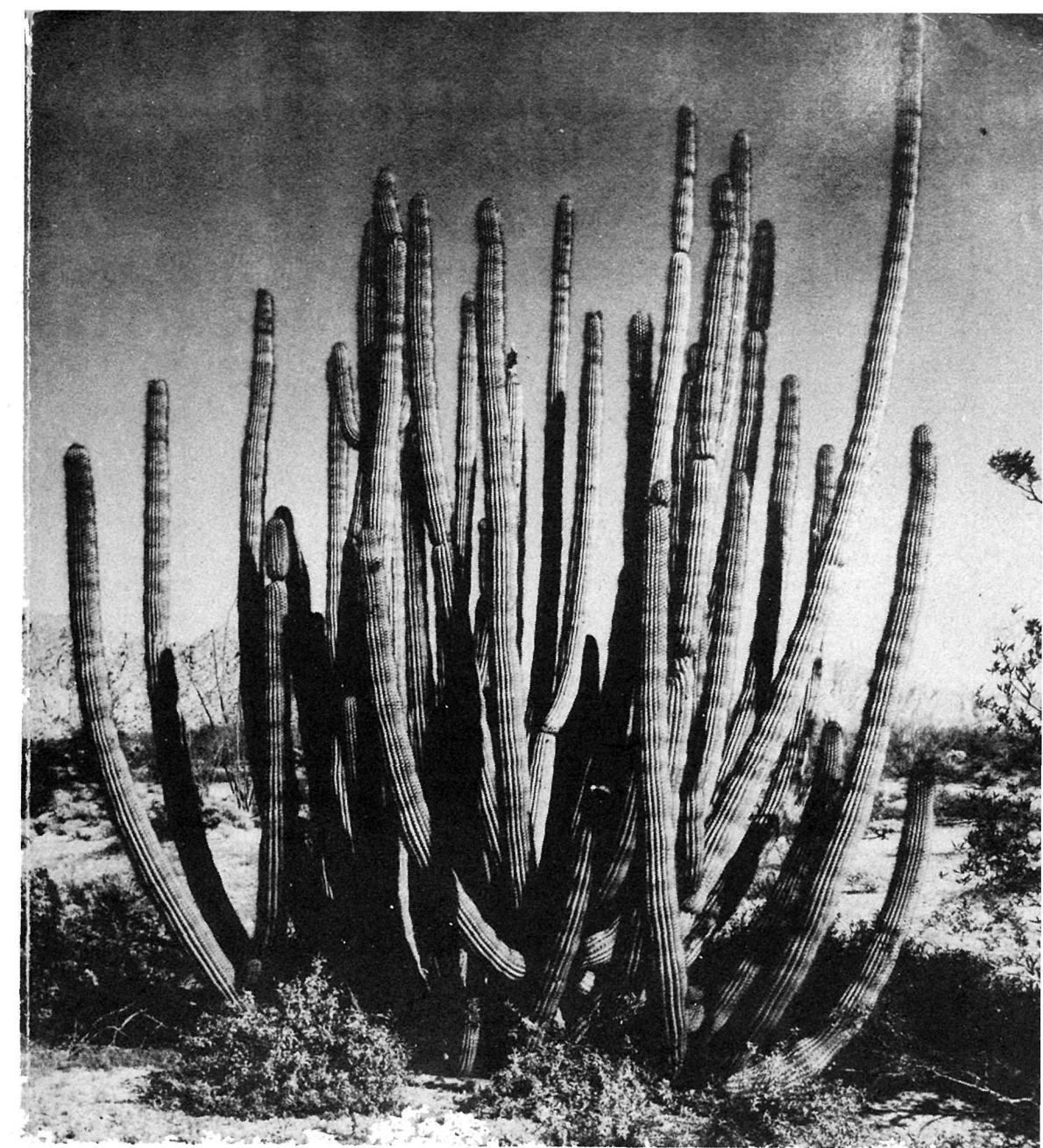
ous desert roads available to visitors accustomed to such travel. Directions may be obtained from the custodian who resides in the monument. Permission to camp in the monument must be secured from the custodian. There are no stores, hotels, camps, or service stations on the reserve, although excellent facilities of this type are at the modern cities of Ajo and Tucson. Visitors to the monument should carry sufficient supplies of gasoline and water, and, if they plan to leave the main highway, should be provided with a shovel and bumper jack as

some of the desert roads are sandy in spots.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Immediate supervision is exercised by the custodian who will furnish further details on request. Inquiries and correspondence should be addressed to the Custodian, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Box 56, Ajo, Ariz., or to the Regional Director, Region Three, National Park Service, Santa Fe, N. Mex.



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