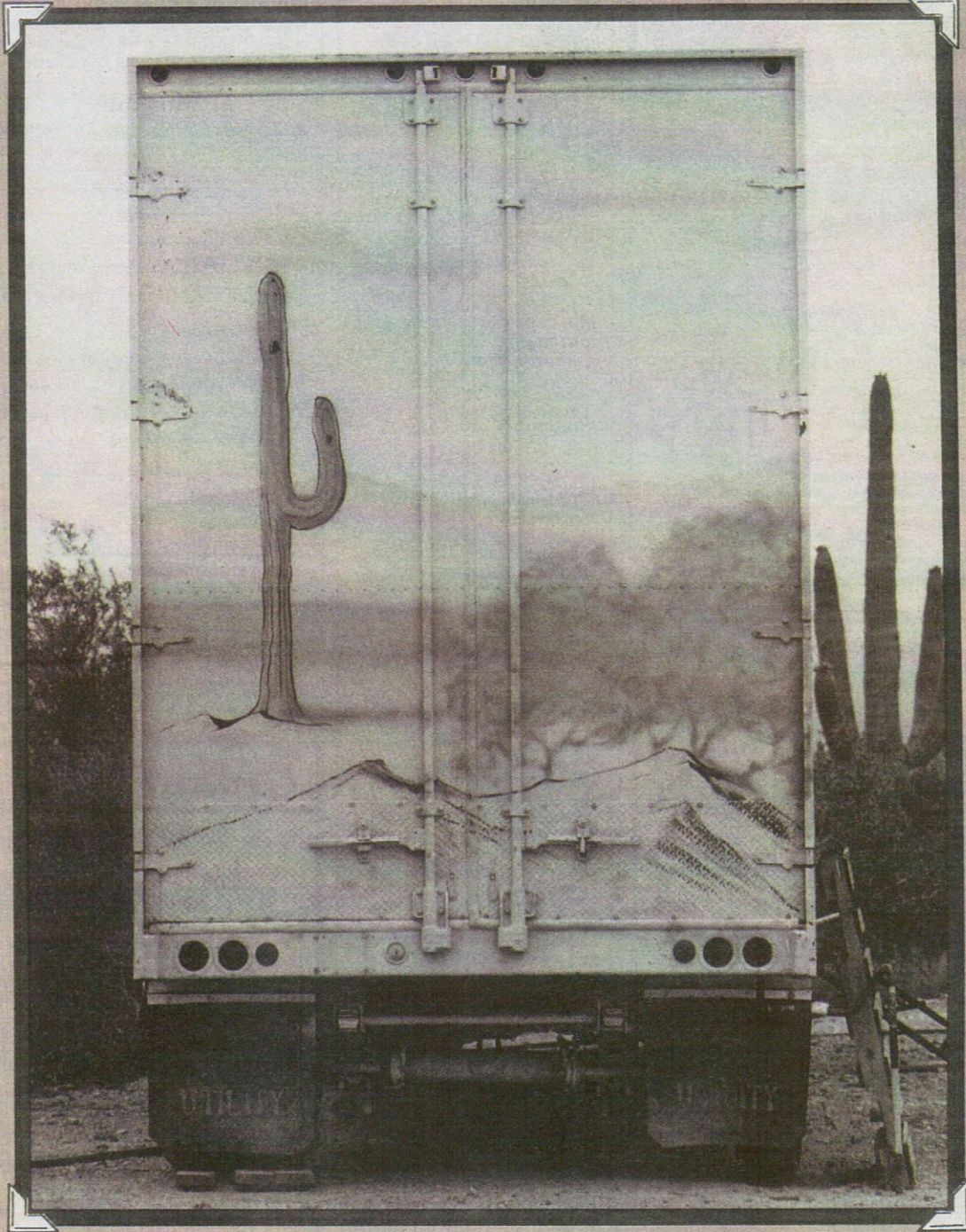


TROPIC

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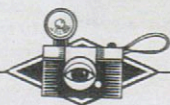
MY SUMMER VACATION

We Knew The West Was Wild, But This Is Ridiculous.

A Photo Essay By Michael Carlebach

AMERICAN STUDIES

We Knew The West Was Wild, But This Is Ridiculous.



Doesn't anyone take summer vacations anymore, or is it just us?

We're not talking about jetting to Gstaad, or even picking up a chartered cruise in the Virgins. We mean a *real* summer vacation, circa 1956 — tossing some bags in the back of a Chevrolet and rolling down the road until by God! you've seen the USA.

Somewhere between the construction of interstate highways and the transformation of the American countryside into designer jean boutiques, we've forgotten how to wander. Fortunately, Miami photographer Michael Carlebach remembered for us.

This summer, in a series of trips to the West, Carlebach—a professor at the University of Miami—hopped into a generic rental car (“There may have been a Chevrolet in there. I’m pretty sure there was a Pontiac.”) and drifted, choosing destinations based on the sound of the town names on his map. Oildale, Tombstone, Thermopolis, Bisbee, Buffalo.

It was the kind of trip Carlebach, 46, hadn't taken since he was 10. What he remembers most from the 1956 version is “the smell of the car, and the fact that I was frantic to see my first Indians and cowboys, though I can't really remember the crushing disappointment of actually seeing the non-TV version, just the anticipation of it.”

This time Carlebach went with no preconceived agenda.

“I was completely open,” he says. “I was looking for places where things were happening. Not new things. Just stuff.”

Turns out “stuff” is happening all over the country. Weird stuff. Funny stuff. American stuff. The kind of stuff Carlebach—who has just published a history of early American photojournalism for the Smithsonian—is collecting for another book called *American Studies*.

“It's much easier to get pictures if you go into the inner city,” Carlebach says. “There, things are crying out to be seen. But I want to document Middle America, to make ordinary stuff extraordinary in some way—and it's very hard work, though it happens to be work I like a lot.”

Think of this extraordinary collection of the ordinary as a series of collisions, things a man with no agenda just happened to bump into. Carlebach, meet America.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL CARLEBACH



Déjà Vu - Venice, Calif.

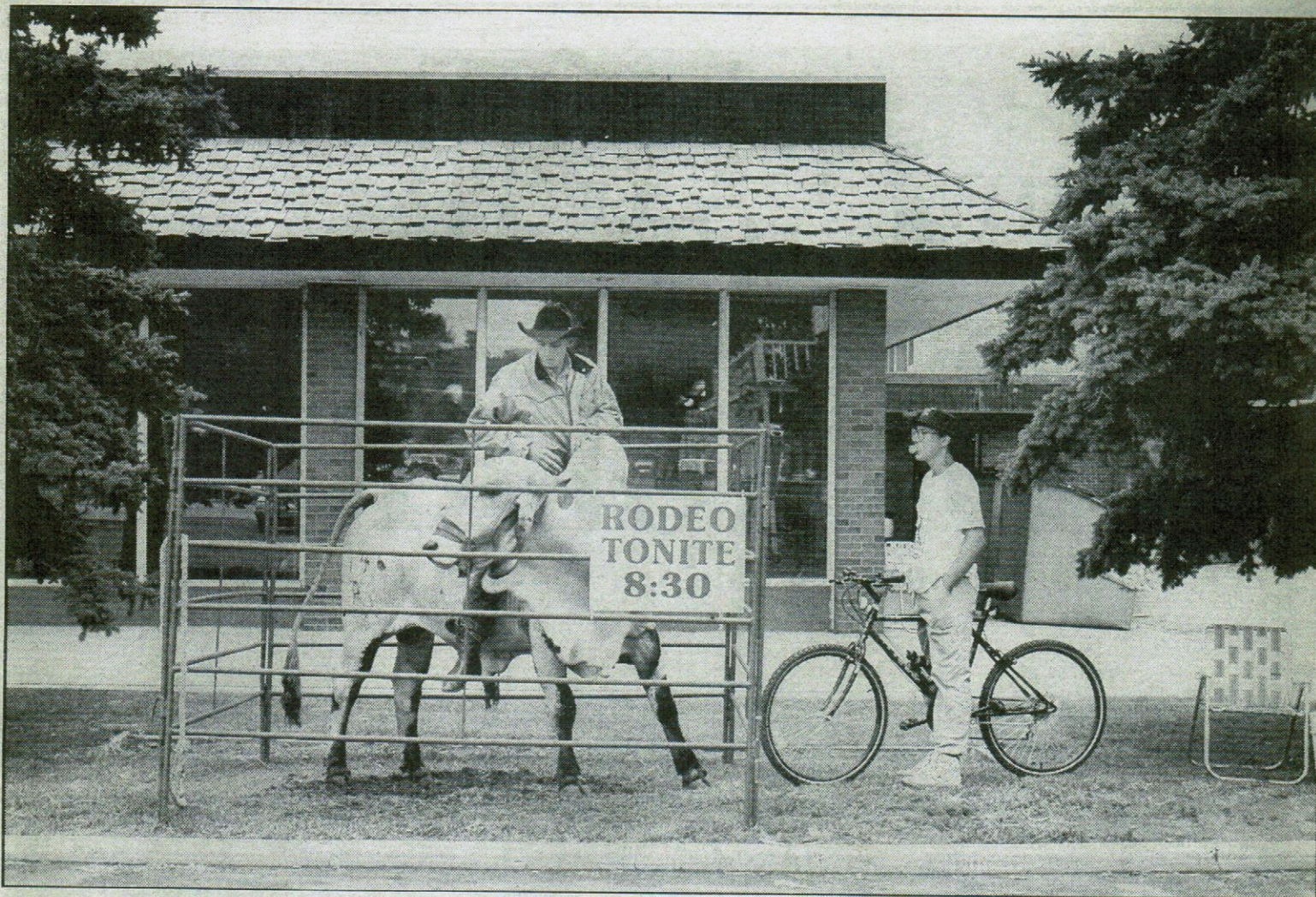
Public artist Scott Dosch builds these bikini-clad sand women every day and solicits money to feed himself and buy paint for his wall murals. This woman came by and there was an instant of recognition. Then she just went on her way. No donation.



**TRUTH -
Venice, Calif.**

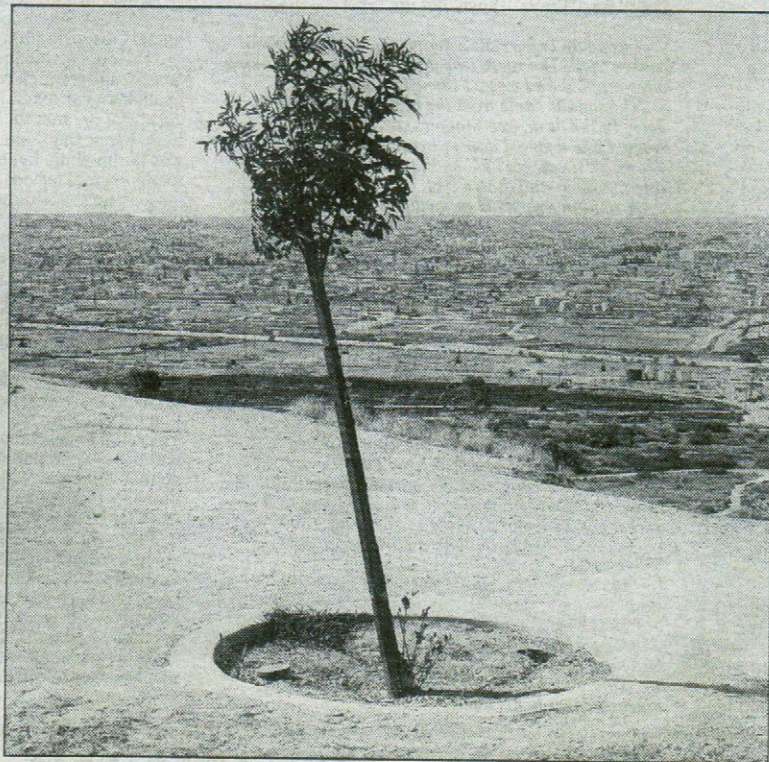
There are lots of murals in Venice. This one stretched across the entire building. As I walked by, this guy stuck his head out. Just for an instant. I only noticed TRUTH after I developed the picture. At first I was excited, then I realized that the guy probably sticks his head out for all the photographers.





**Rodeo Tonite -
Cody, Wyo.**

This was set up in front of the Holiday Inn right on the main drag. The guy on the bull is a rodeo clown, paid to sit on the bull all day to advertise the rodeo. The bull must be the oldest bull they can find. He just stood there for hours, chewing his cud. But then, so did the kid with the bike.



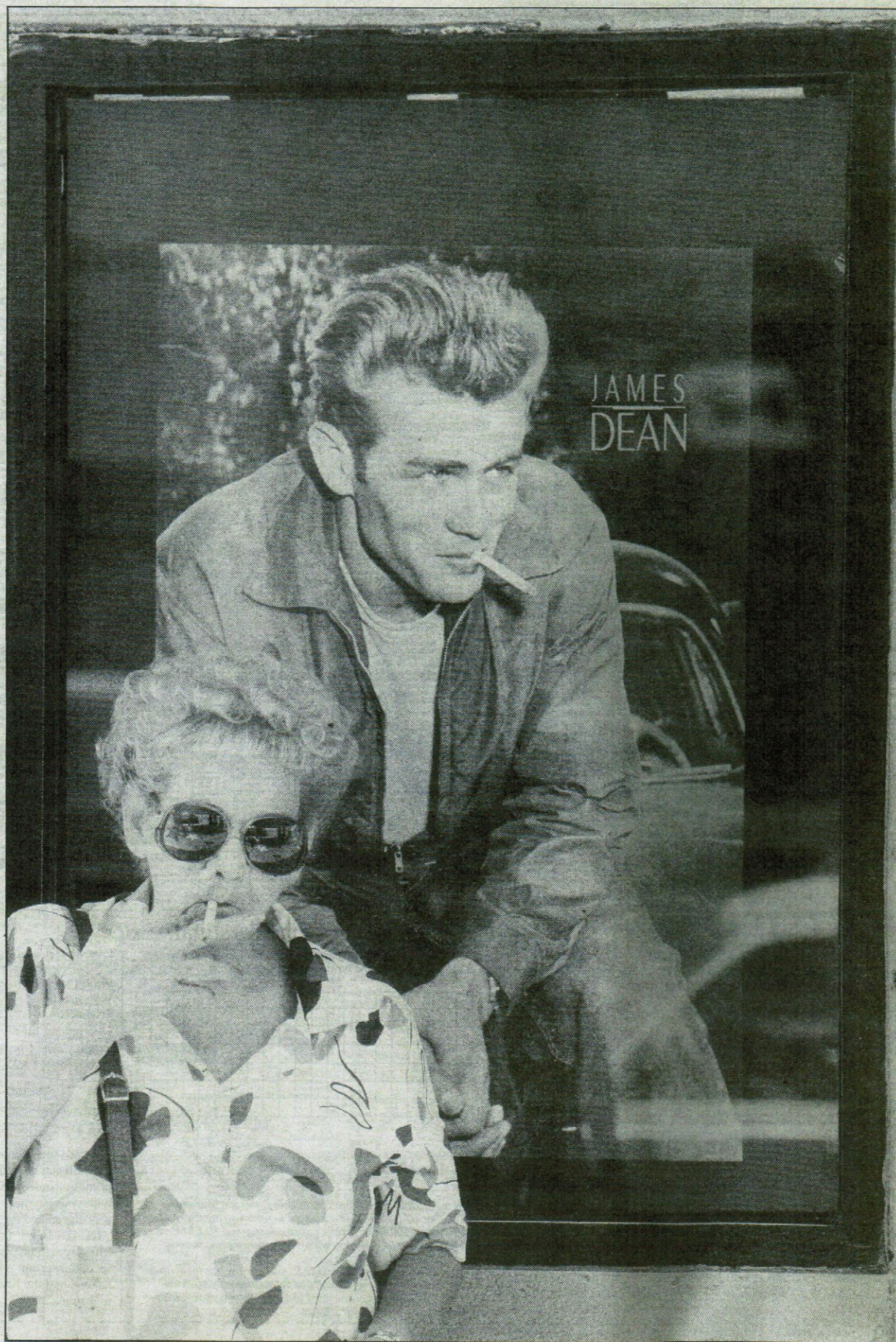
**Public Park -
Oildale, Calif.**

I drove out past Bakersfield because I wanted to see what a town named Oildale would look like. It was beyond anything I could have imagined: a wasteland of mostly nonworking oil wells with big, high fences and armed guards everywhere. I'd never seen such compelling ugliness, but there was no way to capture it. I drove up on a bluff and here was this little park overlooking the town. It was on Panorama Drive.

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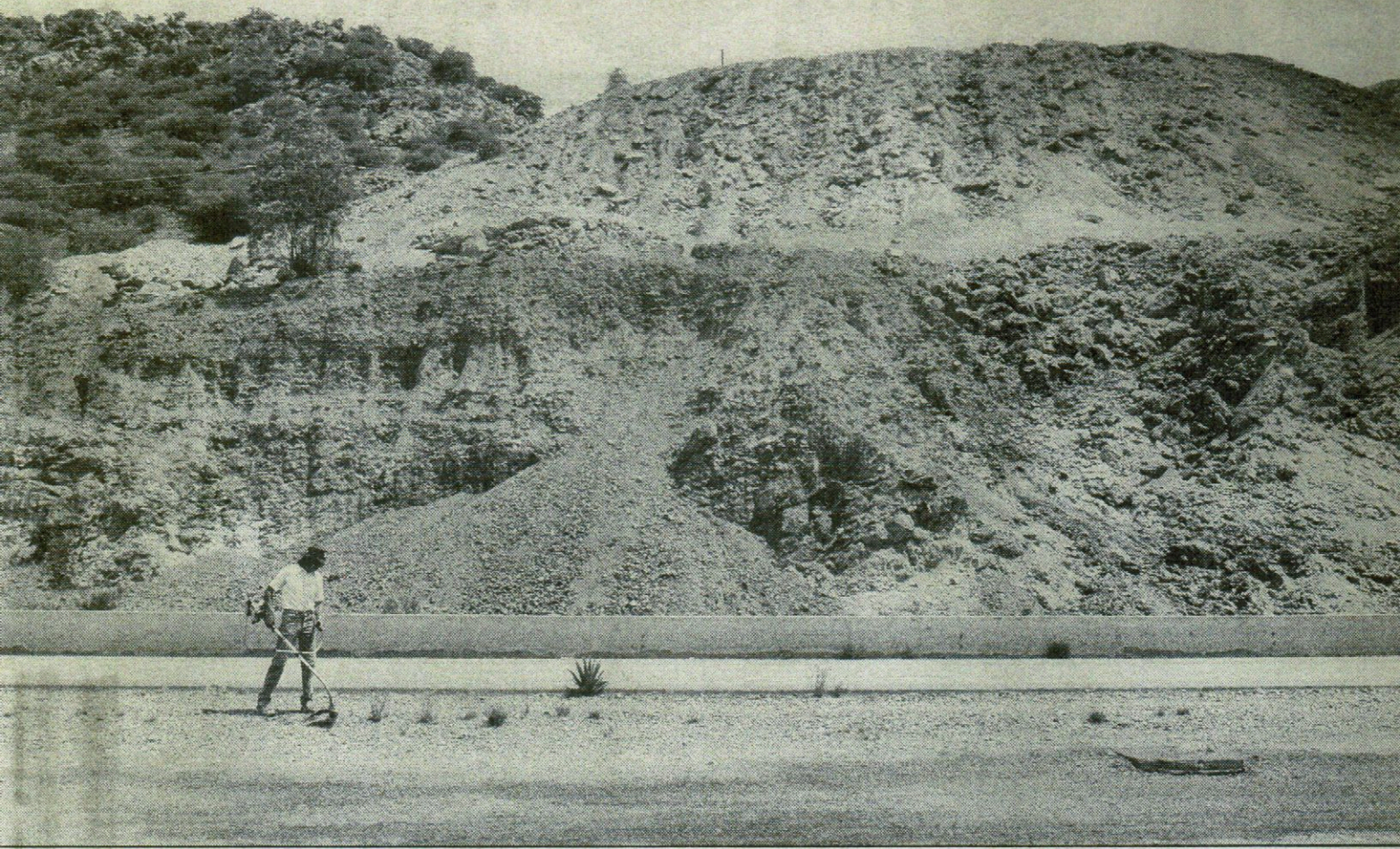


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**James Dean II -
Hollywood, Calif.**

This woman was taking a breather from the Hollywood Walk of Fame. I don't think she had any idea what was behind her. After you commune with too many famous people — walk where Clark Gable walked, put your hand in Marilyn's handprints, see how small Judy Garland's feet were — you tend to get that thousand-yard stare. Note the stars in her eyes.



**Weed Whacker -
Bisbee, Ariz.**

I'd come to see the world's largest abandoned open pit copper mine, basically an immense hole in the middle of the desert, and down at the bottom are pools of extremely black, rancid water. I'm peering into the hole when this guy came out of an Indian jewelry store behind me and started whacking weeds. I guess he figured if he let them grow, they might get out of hand.



**Tepee With Radar Dish -
Kelly, Wyo.**

We watch a lot of TV, but we want even more. We want to drain the universe of TV signals. The desire for TV is the only universal in our culture. I always wanted to make a compelling picture of a satellite dish that showed that. For years, I'd dreamed of finding one set up by a tepee. And then near Jackson, I took a road into the hills past a Gros Ventre Indian village. There were lots of tepees set up in people's back yards and I thought, could this be the place? It was. I was thrilled. I still am thrilled.