I n 1858, Dr. William Blake recoded the shoreline of an ancient lake in the Imperial Valley while completing a rail- road survey. He noted a discoloration of the rock along the western shore at around 40 feet above sea level. He named it Lake Cahuilla, though early writers also called it Blake’s Sea.

According to a 1965 article written by Pat Laddus, Con- gress authorized a series of surveys in 1843 to discover a practical railroad route to the Pacific.

A topographic engineer, named Lt. K. Williamson, led the southern expedition, and Professor William B. Blake of New York served as geologist. Professor Blake was the first to explain the origin of the Salton Sink. As the survey party moved from the San Gorgonio Pass to the Coachella Valley, Blake noticed the mark of the an- cient sea along the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains. The ancient shoreline mark, measured at 42 feet above sea level, is visible at many places. He traced the ancient history of the fresh-water lake and gave it its name.

The deposits are still visible today as you drive up High- way 86 at the north end of the Salton Sea. They look like a line of discol- oration along the rocks and are some- times compared to a battlefield. Up close the discoloration looks like a lake coral or some kind of marine growth. In actuality, the deposits are what is called tufa—solids, a form of lime- stone left behind on the rocks that look like a line in the rock along the shoreline. All of this is left behind on the rocks that you are walking along Highway 86. The line was created by a process called Travertine Point.

The most notable de- posit area is called Travertine Point.

What is travertine

Geothermally heated hot- springs sometimes produce calcium carbonate deposits known as travertine. This is a sedimentary lime- stone rock. Travertine exists in white, tan, cream-colored, and even rusty varieties. It is often found at the mouth of a hot spring or in a limestone cave. It is strong, it can form stalactites and sta- lagonites. The most well-known formation in the United States is Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park. For centuries travertine has been used as a building material. From the archives of the Cal- ifornia in Rome to the lobby walls of the Savoy Tower in Chicago, travertine has been used after a手术ed treatment, often confused with marble.

The main source of travertine has been Tivoli, Italy, where the stone gets its name. Here, the deposits are hun- dred feet deep. The stone is lighter than granite or marble and is easy to quarry.

Travertine Point

Native Americans migrat- ed seasonally between the mountains and the lake. Campsites and villages were located along the shore. Peo- ple caught fish and turtles and hunted birds. When the lake started to dry the people followed the receding shore- line. Archaeological sites have been found between 40 feet above sea level and 210 feet below sea level. As the lake receded it also left its mark in the tufa clearly seen on the western side of Imperial

MAP: Map of Ancient Lake Cahuilla. ABOVE LEFT: Archaeological exca- vations at Travertine Point in 1958. IMPERIAL COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS. FAR LEFT: Tufa on a rock from Travertine Point. BOTTOM: Tufa line that can be seen from High- way 86 at the north end of the Salton Sea. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL FIELD