#### United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

### National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms* Type all entries—complete applicable sections

N/A

### 1. Name

historic

\_\_\_\_\_

and/or common Earth Figures of California-Arizona Colorado River Basin

### 2. Location

# 3. Classification

	Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
	district	public	occupied	agriculture	museum
	building(s)	private	<u> </u>	commercial	park
	structure	X both	work in progress	educational	private residence
	site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	entertainment	reiigious
	object	in process	X_ yes: restricted	government	scientific
X	Thematic Group	being considered	<u>x_</u> yes: unrestricted	industriai	transportation
	Group	Already mostly pub	li <u>c_</u> no(varies by s	sit <del>e) x</del> military (1)	<u></u>

### 4. Owner of Property

	Multiple Ownership:	· ·	
name	Principally: U.S. Dept. of	Interior; Bureau of	Land Management (owners
	are indicated on individual	forms).	
street & number	(Appropriate BLM offices ar		forms. Other owners
	are shown on individual for	ms.)	
city, town	v	icinity of	state

### 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bureau of Land Management offices; county courthouses

street & number

See individual forms.

city, town

state

etate

# 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

National Register of Historic Places: Sites E-18, E-26 <u>title California Historic Landmarks 101:E18</u> has this property been determined elegible? \_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_ no Chiefly Imperial Valley College Museum (El Centro, Ca.); also Univ. of California date Riverside, and the county museums of San Bernardino federal \_\_\_\_\_state \_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_ local and San Diego Counties. Spiritual Lands Inventory, Native American Heritage Commisdepository for survey records Offices of above. sion, State of California, Sacramento.

city, town (Names indicate location of surveying agencies)

California

### 7. Description

Condition:       varies	Check one _x unaitered _X altered		(Per information current as of ) December, 1982.
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#### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The principal survey of the earth figures in this nomination was conducted by the Imperial Valley College Barker Museum (El Centro, CA) under Museum Director Jay von Werlhof, Professor of Archaeology and Art History. The work began in 1978 and was carried out over a four-year period on the ground and through aerial survey by Professor von Werlhof, Sherilee von Werlhof, Harry Casey, Peggy Keldson, and Karen and Ray Wilcox. Working in close association with the Museum survey was Boma Johnson, Archaeologist with the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Yuma District (Yuma, AZ). Data and record coordination was conducted by Dorothy Gray and Hartley Gurney on behalf of the Native American Heritage Commission of the State of California, under a grant from the Skaggs Foundation. The survey group found and recorded many previously unrecorded sites and also revisited sites previously noted by other individuals, e.g., Rogers. Site records and field notes from the survey are in the custody of Imperial Valley College Barker Museum, Boma Johnson (some portion) and the state-associated archaeological clearinghouses in the respective counties (the latter also have site reports for sites recorded by earlier surveyors), the Native American Heritage Commission, 1400 Tenth Street, Room 109, Sacramento, California 95814, and Dorothy Gray, 762 Edgewood Lane, Los Altos, California 94022, (415) 948-6206. The survey method included many systematic overflights of the area for purposes of discovery, photography, and confirmation of location (of sites reported by ground observers). The method also included literature search of Rogers and other earlier observers, search of site records at state-associated clearinghouses, and systematic on-the-ground surveying. The sites, by nature, exist on the surface of the ground and thus no excavating was utilized.

The elements in this thematic group consist of large figures on the ground surface, usually on mesa tops, bordering the Colorado River and the area it has historically flooded. The figures are in darkened areas of "desert pavement". This desert pavement is a surface condition created by the formation of "desert varnish", a darkening of surface rocks by complex solar-mineral-biological interaction now being studied by scientists. The process of formation is very slow and may take thousands of years to darken rock in a given area. (Many of the current studies of desert varnish are discussed in Johnson and Solari.) The figures were created in almost all instances by removal of the surface layer of darkened rock to expose a lighter subsurface of earth material. The contrast between the lighter, exposed area and the darker, surrounding desert pavement creates the image. In most instances the figures are very shallow, i.e., a few inches, but can be over a foot deep at center. Because of their great size or faintness, the figures in many instances are best seen from the air.

The technique of removal of desert pavement to create the figures has given rise to the misnomer "intaglios" to describe the figures. The term is an Italian one for removal of a darker surface to create a design in crafts work, e.g., cameos. Another term used is "geoglyph", i.e., earth figures.

Some of the figures were created by alignment of darkened rocks. In several instances both techniques were used at the same site or in combination in one figure.

The figures vary considerably in form: representational, linear, curvilinear, geometrical, amorphous. They also vary considerably in size. The largest figures are hundreds of feet in extent; the longest rock alignment is  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. Other figures are as small as several meters in extent.

While stylistic similarities are present among many of the figures, e.g., anthropomorphic stick figures, there is wide divergence in stylistic form. Some of the figures are relatively simple in execution, while others are highly articulated.

### 8. Significance

16001699	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agriculture architecture art commerce communications		Iandscape architectur iaw iiterature miiitary music phiiosophy politics/government	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify) cul tural
Specific dates	Not Known	Builder/Architect N/A		

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Archaeology - prehistoric: The figures occur in an area inhabited by various Yumanspeaking peoples including Mojaves, Yumas, Halchidomas, Maricopas, as well as Cocopas, Pimas, and Kamias (Johnson and Solari; Evans; Harner; Bean) in historic times. The figures were created by the indigenous people of the area at an unknown time (or times) in the past, possibly several thousand years ago. This distant time of origin is suggested by the fact that desert varnish is visibly forming on surfaces newly exposed when the figures were made (Johnson and Solari; Hayden). Artifacts found in association with several figures also suggest such age (Johnson and Solari; Malcolm). Ethnographic reports also indicate that some number of the figures predate the presence of the Indian tribes living in the area in historic times, i.e., they stated that the figures were in place when their ancestors came to the area (Rogers, 1939). Some figures are probably, however, comparatively recent, e.g., the Pilot Knob Horse (Site M-4) might have to be after Spanish introduction of the horse to the Southwest. It appears that creation of the figures thus extended over a long period. They offer an important and unique opportunity for interdisciplinary study as to age and as to relationship to petroglyphs, pottery figures, and other archaeological material.

Art: The figures are an extremely rare and important form of artistic expression. Figures formed by removal of earth matter are rare worldwide. Such have been recorded in Australia, New Caledonia, and Peru (Heizer) and in the chalk cliffs of England (Severy). Of the foregoing only those at Nazca, Peru, are formed in desert pavement. This method is necessarily limited by the relatively rare occurrence of desert varnish. In North America, desert varnish figures are reported in Mexico (Hayden), California's Panamint and Death Valleys (Von Werlhof; Davis), and in Arizona far east of the Colorado River (Johnson and Solari). The thematic group herein nominated contains a markedly greater number of figures in closer proximity and of greater variety than has been reported elsewhere in the United States. As artistic achievement, the thematic group figures are extraordinary. The larger figures could not be seen in their totality on ground level by those who made them. The images were thus created to be totally visible only from high in the air. This evidences an extraordinary degree of artistic imagination, conceptualization, and artistic competency. While some of the figures are relatively simple in design, others such as the Parker Rattlesnake (E-26), the Pilot Knob Horse (M-4) and the Quail (L-5) are highly developed and singularly beautiful. The great variety of the figures precludes analysis of their styles at present (von Werlhof).

<u>Cultural</u>: While some ethnographic data indicates that the figures were created by Indian peoples predating the ancestors of present Indians (Rogers, 1939; Bourke), information from present tribes indicates the sites are of cultural significance to contemporary Indians as areas of "guardians" (Weldon Johnson re E series) or as commemorating a struggle between hero figures and evil forces (Boma Johnson, 1981). The names of these figures and the details of these stories vary among the tribes in the area but may relate to the repeated pattern of two anthropomorphic figures occurring together at various sites, as noted on individual site forms attached. Numerous theories have been advanced as to the overall cultural significance of the figures: resource-related, travel-related, religiousceremonial, astronomical, territorial-marking, event-commemoration, or depiction of stories.

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#### CONTINUATION SHEET 2.

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Some of these theories are partially supported by ethnographic data, e.g., Weldon Johnson re Mojave travel, territorial-marking, ceremonial. (Johnson and Solari summarize most of the theories and cite their proponents.) As with the question of age, the figures represent an important opportunity for research and scholarly study, in addition to their cultural importance to present day Indian people (von Werlhof, 1982). Contemporary Indians have been understandably reluctant to disclose details of what is essentially very private cultural information (informant: Charles Lamb, Director of Colorado River Indian Tribes Museum). The cultural significance of the figures has led to their being included in the Sacred Lands Inventory of the Native American Heritage Commission of the State of California pursuant to State of California Public Resources Code Section 5097.9 et seq.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached list.

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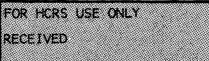
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CONTINUATION SHEET 2.A ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE

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CONTINUATION SHEET 3-B ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

- 9. Major Bibliographical References, Continued.
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### National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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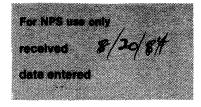
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Multiple Resource Area Thematic Group

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withdurw	11.	Chocolate Drop Figure,	N-1 Substantive Review	Keeper	
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Brim	12.	Coyote Valley Site, P-15		Keeper	
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B- IA	13.	Dancing Shaman Group, E-5	Substantive Review	Keeper	
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	16.	Hook Figure, E-45		Keeper	
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SF there are	17.	Lake Havasu Site., D-10	Substantive Review	Keeper	
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-5-6	18.	Limekiln Wash Figure,		Keeper	
		E-15		Attest	
BLI	19.	Little Bird and 1,000	Substantiva Review	Keeper	
		Seats, E-4a, E-4b		Attest	
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Mr m	23.	North Cargo Muchacho, L-3	Substanting Howley	Keeper	
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$b^{2-\mu}$	24.	Ocotillo Wells 322B, P-13	••	Keeper	
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Pirns	25.	Ogilby Site A, L-6	ubstantive Review	Keeper	
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	26.	Palo Verde Circles and		Keeper	
		Arrow, G-4		Attest	
Brm	27.	Park Moabi Site, D-11 🤫	ubstantiva Review	Keeper	
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7.1 2	28.	Parker Rattlesnake, E-26		Keeper	
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$\mathcal{Y}_{I_{I_{J_{i}}}}$	29.	Pilot Knob Anthropomorphic	c Antonautica Hovlew	Keeper	
		Figure, M-1		Attest	
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		Figure, M-8		Attest	

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Multiple Resource Area Thematic Group

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pen):	2. Pilot Knob 18, M-6	Keeper
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BANY	3. Pilot Knob Lizard, M-2 Subutentive Rovies	Keeper
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s EM	4. Pilot Knob Ring, M-3	Keeper
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BEM	5. Pinto Wash, P-17	Keeper
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WE IN	6. Quail, The, L-5	Keeper
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	Tree wash Dance Pattern, Substantive Review E-9	Attest
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Multiple Resource Area Thematic Group

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ý, p'	42.	Ripley Giants, F-4		Keeper	
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Min.	43.	Ripley Lizard, F-1	Substantive Neview	Keeper	
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B. 22	44.	Running Man, L-1		Keeper	
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1	45.	Sidewinder Road Figure,	Bubstantitor Seview	Keeper	
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53. Singer Element 1-G,	0-7 Substantive Review	Keeper
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برون <sup>»</sup> 63. Singer Element R-1,	0-18 Jubstantive Review	Keeper
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g-aluan 64. Site D-3		Keeper
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65. Site D-4 <b>4-5BR-1076</b> (EA)	informative Review	for Keeper yronne B. Atewart
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66. Site D-6	E/OWNER-OBJECTIO	W Keeper Jurnu H. Starak
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68. Site D-12		Keepe <b>r</b>
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