UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC Cow Camp
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER Not applicable
CITY, TOWN Joshua Tree National Monument
VICINITY OF Twentynine Palms
STATE California
COUNTY San Bernardino

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY BUILDING(S)
—— DISTRICT
—— STRUCTURE
—— SITE
—— OBJECT
OWNERSHIP PUBLIC
—— PRIVATE
—— BOTH
—— PUBLIC ACQUISITION
—— IN PROCESS
—— BEING CONSIDERED
STATUS OCCUPIED
—— UNOCCUPIED
—— WORK IN PROGRESS
—— OCCUPIED
—— RESTRICTED
—— UNRESTRICTED
—— NO
—— ACCESSIBLE
—— IN ACCESSIBLE
PRESENT USE AGRICULTURE
—— COMMERCIAL
—— EDUCATIONAL
—— ENTERTAINMENT
—— GOVERNMENT
—— INDUSTRIAL
—— MILITARY
—— TRANSPORTATION
—— LOCAL
—— OTHER
—— MUSEUM
—— PARK
—— PRIVATE RESIDENCE
—— RELIGIOUS
—— SCIENTIFIC
—— OTHER:

4 AGENCY
REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)
National Park Service - Western Region Office
STREET & NUMBER
850 Golden Gate Avenue - Box 36063
CITY, TOWN San Francisco
STATE California (94102)

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
San Bernardino County Recorder's Office
STREET & NUMBER
172 West Third Street
CITY, TOWN San Bernardino
STATE California (92405)

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
DATE
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE
Cow Camp lies in a valley amid rocky, boulder-strewn hills in Joshua Tree National Monument. The site became important because of the existence of a natural pond fed by a spring here in an otherwise arid high desert. Historically, there were an undetermined number of small buildings—at least three and probably more—but there remains today the ruins of only one, and of that one there is only a crumbling rubble chimney and the stone outline of a foundation.

Late in its history, William F. Keys erected here a concrete dam, 22 feet high, 800 feet long, and about 18 inches thick, to increase the quantity of water available here for running cattle. The dam, dating probably from the 1920s, is intact, in good condition, and basically unaltered.

The only other remains are those of an old well lined with rock.
SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

—PREHISTORIC
—1400-1499
—1500-1599
—1600-1699
—1700-1799
—1800-1899
—1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
- ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
- AGRICULTURE
- ARCHITECTURE
- ART
- COMMERCIAL
- COMMUNICATIONS
- CONSERVATION
- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CONSERVATION
- ECONOMICS
- EDUCATION
- ENGINEERING
- EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
- INDUSTRY
- INVENTION
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- LAW
- LITERATURE
- MILITARY
- MUSIC
- PHILOSOPHY
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- RELIGION
- SCIENCE
- SCULPTURE
- SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
- THEATER
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES 1880s-1920s

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Cow Camp is of local historical significance under the category of agriculture in the specific sense of livestock raising, and to be even more specific, livestock rustling. Cow Camp was developed as the camp of a gang of cattle rustlers who, having stolen cattle belonging to others, used this site to hide them while changing brands with a running iron. Cow Camp was headquarters of a notorious gang of local outlaws.

The above statement of historical significance is based on the following data:

William and James (Jim) McHaney, brothers from Davis County, Missouri, came to this region in southern California during the 1870s. Initially they went into the cattle business with headquarters at Seven Palms in the Coachella Valley. At the age of 20 Bill became the first settler at the Oasis of Mara (Twentynine Palms) in 1879. He befriended and learned much from Indians in the area, and as his brother turned increasingly to illegal activity, Bill went his own way and became part time prospector.

Jim McHaney associated with an ex-convict named Charley Martin who had served 16 years in prison after shooting two men at San Jacinto, the brothers Charley and Willie Button, Ike Chestnut and George Severs. These men constituted the "McHaney Gang", which apparently stole cattle and horses in Arizona to sell in California, and vice versa. Because of its natural pond in an otherwise arid high desert, the gang developed Cow Camp as their hideout, or at least one of their hideouts, and there changed the brands on their stolen stock before attempting to market it. There may have been a couple of cabins at this location before they took it over—it may have been a legitimate camp for cattlemen for a few years before the outlaws came—and the McHaney Gang apparently built more.

Cow Camp was active as an outlaw headquarters during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Three prospectors who camped nearby in 1893 discovered their horses missing one morning, and traced them into the McHaney camp. Confronted there by a bearded rider holding a Colt revolver aimed at them, Frank Diebold asked about the horses and was told by the gunman, "You didn't lose any horses." Diebold started to describe the animals they had lost, and the man with the revolver repeated what he had said in an even more menacing tone. Diebold decided a third warning might be in the form of a bullet so conceded, "No, I guess I didn't!"

About the same time the McHaney Gang murdered the discoverer of the rich Desert Queen Mine located nearby, and Jim McHaney took over the mine for awhile before losing it to a bank. In 1894, he apparently sold his cattle interests to George Myers, which may have brought outlaw activity at Cow Camp to a close, turning it to legitimate purposes. During the 1920s, William F. Keys, who had inherited Bill McHaney's ranch holdings and developed other property of his own in the region, took over Cow Camp and used it as a line camp for legitimate stock raising. Keys built the dam to increase the amount of water available at Cow Camp.

Jim McHaney eventually attempted to counterfeit twenty dollar gold coins out of lead plated with gold, was caught by Treasury agents and sent to prison for 17 years. Charlie and Willie Button apparently died in a bar-room brawl. The fate of the other outlaws is unknown.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
Fact File, Joshua Tree National Monument Library

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 80
UTM REFERENCES
A [1,1] 517,712.00 3,716.617.00 - B [1,1] 517,713.00 3,716.615.00
ZONE EASTING 5.0 NORTING 1,60
C [1,1] 517,615.70 3,716.615.00 - D [1,1] 517,614.70 3,716.615.00
ZONE EASTING 10 NORTING 0
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
The boundary is a rectangle with the longer axis running in a northeast-southwest direction, the corners of the rectangle indicated by the above UTM references.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE
Gordon Chappell Regional Historian (Revision of 1971 form by F. Ross Holland, Jr.)
ORGANIZATION
National Park Service - Western Region Office
STREET & NUMBER
450 Golden Gate Avenue - Box 36063
CITY OR TOWN
San Francisco
STATE
California (94102)

CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION
YES X NO. NO
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE
TITLE Deputy Assistant Secretary
DATE SEP 5 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST: KEPT OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE 10/29/75
DATE 10/24/75
Ruins of cabin at Cow Camp -- a rubble stone fireplace and miscellaneous debris
NAME

HISTORIC
Cow Camp

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

CITY, TOWN
Joshua Tree National Monument

VICINITY OF
Twentynine Palms

COUNTY
San Bernardino

STATE
California

PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT
National Park Service photo

DATE OF PHOTO
February 1973

NEGATIVE FILED AT
Joshua Tree National Monument

Twentynine Palms, California

IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Ruins of old rock-lined well at Cow Camp
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSURE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Cow Camp

2 LOCATION
CITY, TOWN
Joshua Tree National Monument
VICINITY OF
Twentynine Palms
COUNTY
San Bernardino
STATE
California

3 PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT National Park Service photo
DATE OF PHOTO February 1973
NEGATIVE FILED AT
Joshua Tree National Monument
Twentynine Palms, California

4 IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Part of dam erected by William F. Keys at Cow Camp