

Flamingo Nests in the Coyote Mountains?

Fossils of extinct flamingos (*Phoenicopterus* sp.) have been reported in Anza Borrego State Park by Jefferson (2005), mainly in the Hueso Formation and Ocotillo Conglomerate. Recently, structures resembling modern flamingo nests have been observed in the mudstones and siltstones of the Imperial Group, in the Domelands area of the Coyote Mountains. The structures appear to rise out of tidal flat deposits in which are found fossil sand dollars. Modern flamingos build columnar nests from mud, which rise from tidal flats or shallow lagoons, which affords the nests some protection from predation. Five million years ago, when these sediments were deposited, the Baja California microplate would have just begun its northern journey, so would have been at least several hundred kilometers farther south, on the western margin of what Jefferson calls the Imperial Sea. Two species of flamingos are reported to be present in Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge as occasional visitors to the area. (USFWS, 1993)

Background

In April 2006, I was led to the Domelands area of the northwestern Coyote Mountains, in western Imperial County at the behest of Dave Bloom, who had seen peculiar structures in the Imperial Group. He had previously taken several geologists (including at least one from the U.S.G.S.) to the area, and only received such comments as "Weird!" From the description he gave me, I was somewhat predisposed to consider a groundwater geochemical origin, perhaps along the lines of tufa towers (cf. Mono Lake) or even subaqueous hydrothermal vents, such as white smokers.

After a 1.75-mile hike from the edge of the Coyote Mountains Wilderness Area, we reached the structures in question. What I saw was not quite what I had imagined.



Now



5 Ma ?

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