

Gold Mining in Nevada County

The California Gold Rush..... Eureka! Discovery of gold in 1848 carried California's name around the globe. Men came from the East, from England, Germany, Chile, China, and all around the world.

By the mid-1850s, an estimated 120,000 miners were at work in California. For the most part, prospectors found little romance in the Gold Rush; mining was hard, dirty work. Prices were high, living conditions bad. Few miners struck it rich and most of the profits went to merchants and suppliers.

By 1873, the number of California miners had dwindled to 30,000. Mining was becoming more of a business, less of an adventure. Wealthy mine owners built large hardrock and hydraulic mines that employed hundreds of men.

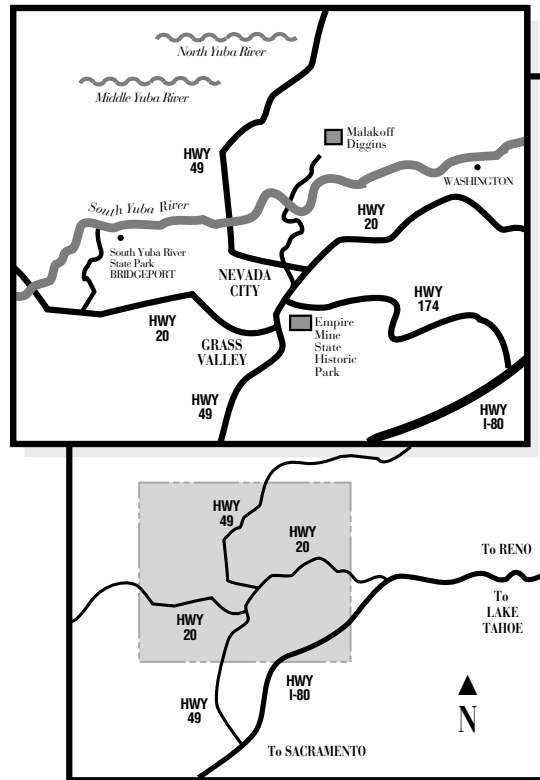
The rich underground mines of Grass Valley made it the richest mining community in California. Even during the Depression of the 1930s, Grass Valley thrived because of its mining-based economy.

The business districts and Victorian neighborhoods of Grass Valley and Nevada City grew from this early mining heritage, and these historical treasures are carefully protected today.

Grass Valley and Nevada City offer a range of gold mining history unequalled elsewhere in the Gold Country. All of the different mining techniques are explained and there are numerous exhibits of mining gear and memorabilia. And if you'd like to try your hand at recreational gold panning, you can still find color in Nevada County rivers!

This brochure offers a brief summary of the various mining-related attractions in Nevada County. For a more in-depth look, pick up brochures and other printed materials at the parks and museums.

We are proud to share Nevada County's golden heritage with you. Please enjoy our mining attractions!



*Published as a visitor service of the
Joint Chambers of Commerce of Nevada County*

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Design by Brook Design Group

Revised January, 2005

GOLD MINING HISTORY of Nevada County

Legends, Attractions & Points of Interest



Grass Valley

★ North Star Mining Museum and Pelton Wheel Exhibit

Operated by the Nevada County Historical Society, this museum (California Historic Landmark No. 843) has been recognized as the most complete hardrock mining museum in California.

The museum is located in an 1895 stone building, once the powerhouse for the North Star Mine. Outside is a small creekside park for picnics and relaxation.

Attractions include a 30-foot Pelton Wheel, the world's largest, built by A.D. Foote in 1895, a Man Skip that carried miners down into the mines and a Cornish Pump that was used to remove water from mine shafts. An assay room, blacksmith shop, stamp mill and dynamite-packing machine are among the numerous exhibits.

Located at the end of Mill Street, near McCourtney and Allison Ranch roads, the museum is open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 1 through Oct. 15 and by special appointment. There is no admission charge; donations are welcome.

For information, call (530) 273-4255.

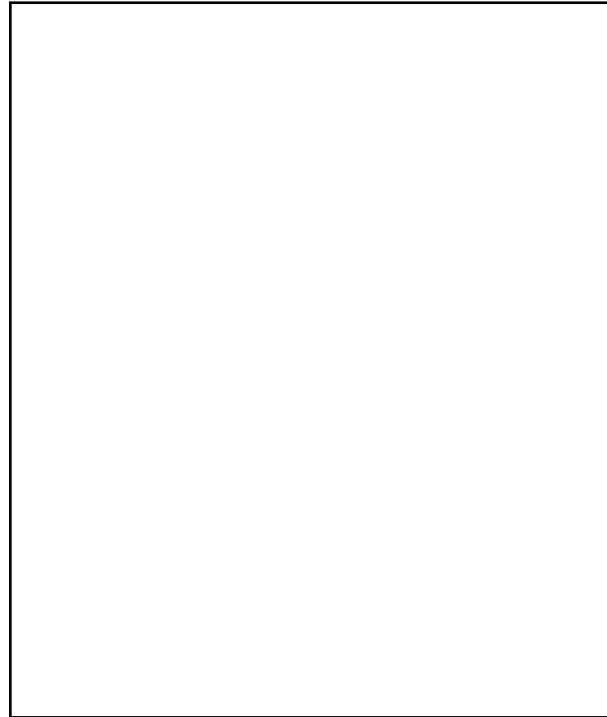
Empire Mine State Historic Park

This 800-acre state park tells the story of hardrock gold mining. Hardrock miners worked in vertical or inclined shafts deep beneath the earth's surface. Gold was found in drifts or "shoots" of quartz.

The Empire Mine operated from 1850-1956, producing some 5.8 million ounces of gold from 367 miles of underground shafts.

Visitors may look down and explore parts of the main shaft of the richest gold mine in California history, tour the mine yard and buildings and stroll the formal gardens surrounding the impressive stone home where the wealthy mine owner once lived.

The State of California purchased the Empire Mine properties in 1975 for \$1.2 million. The park has since been undergoing a gradual restoration with an emphasis on preserving the mine's historic integrity.



Tours and mining movies are offered by park rangers (call for schedules) and Living History Days are hosted regularly by the volunteer Empire Mine Park Association.

Open daily, the park is located at 10791 East Empire Street in Grass Valley, one mile southeast of the Golden Center Freeway. For information, call (530) 273-8522.

★ Gold Mining Historic Markers

1. Gold Quartz Discovery Site. This is where George McKnight discovered gold in Grass Valley in October, 1850 and where California quartz gold mining began. Jenkins Street and Hocking Avenue.
2. Hardrock Gold Mining. An estimated \$500 million in gold has been mined within a one-mile radius of this historic marker. Near the creek in Memorial Park.
3. Red Ledge Stamp Mill. This three-stamp mill was donated to the city of Grass Valley by the Red Ledge Mine near the little town of Washington. It was dedi-

cated in honor of the "Cousin Jack" Cornish miners who came to Grass Valley.

Corner of Main and Auburn streets.

Bridgeport South Yuba River State Park

California's first river corridor state park stretches for 20 miles from Bridgeport to the north of Penn Valley to Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park northeast of Nevada City. The visitor center at Bridgeport is open daily noon-4 in summer and Thursdays through Sundays noon- 4 the rest of the year.

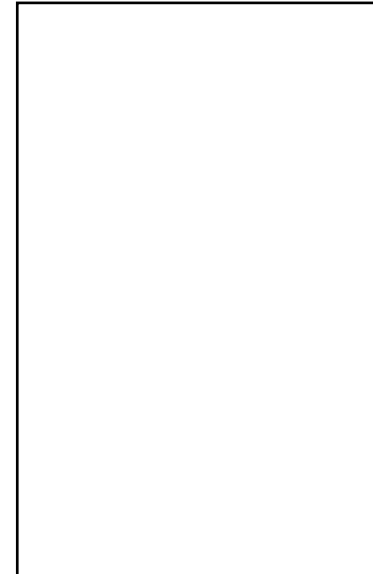
Bridgeport visitors will see the longest single-span covered bridge of its type in the United States. A state and national historic landmark, the bridge was built in 1862 and reduced from its original length of 251 feet to 229 feet as part of a 1971 restoration.

The Bridgeport area is a good location for recreational gold panning. On summer weekends (Sat-Sun, 1 p.m., June through October), gold panning demonstrations are offered.

Near Nevada City, the state park includes the Independence Trail, a unique wheelchair accessible trail that follows the alignment of a historic mining canal flume through the river canyon. Independence Trail is accessed from Highway 49 just south of the South Yuba River.

State park visitors also can enjoy swimming, hiking, beautiful wildflowers, and exploring the trails leading to such historic mining sites as the Miner's Tunnel and Jones Bar. Docent-led history, nature and gold-panning tours are also offered at selected times throughout the year.

For information, call (530) 432-2546.



Nevada City

Miners Foundry

Today, Miners Foundry Cultural Center is a community and performing arts center, hosting more than 200 events per year. Its stone walls and massive timbers provide a unique and historic setting.

The foundry dates to 1856 and for many years provided metal and steel fabrication for the local mines. The first Pelton Wheel, a Nevada County invention which revolutionized hydroelectric power production, was built at the foundry in 1879.

In its earliest days the foundry was known as the Nevada Iron and Brass Foundry and Machine Shop. It became known as Miners Foundry in 1907 and operated until 1965. From 1974 to 1989, the foundry was home to the American Victorian Museum.

Guests may enjoy historic artifacts exhibited throughout the foundry. Many of the displays are described in a printed self-guided tour to the foundry available at the entry.

Miners Foundry is located at 325 Spring Street in Nevada City. For information on exhibits and programs call (530) 265-5040.

Firehouse Museum

Firehouse No. 1 is perhaps the most-photographed building in Nevada City. It was built in 1861 to house Nevada Hose Company No. 1 and has been a museum since 1947.

The museum, operated by the Nevada County Historical Society, offers a limited look at mining and more extensive relics of the Donner Party, Nisenan and Maidu Indians, pioneer clothing and furnishings, and a complete altar from a Chinese Joss House (temple) that was at one time located in Grass Valley's Chinatown.

Located at 214 Main Street, the Firehouse Museum is open daily, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the summer. For winter hours and other information, call (530) 265-5468.

Gold Mining Lore

Cornish Heritage. At one time, 75 percent of Grass Valley residents were of Cornish heritage. Today, there are four and five generations of Cornish families living here. Cornish miners followed mining opportunities from Cornwall, England to Grass Valley. The biggest influx was from 1860-1895.

Cousin Jack/Cousin Jenny. Introduced by Cornish miners, these terms have become part of the local vocabulary. Helping others find jobs, Cornish miners introduced them as "my Cousin Jack." The female "Cousin Jenny" soon became part of the tradition.

Highgrading. This term was used to describe the illegal taking of gold for personal use by hardrock miners. Highgrading was difficult because miners showered after taking off their "diggers" and putting on their street clothes. Personal belongings and lunch buckets were frequently searched by mine watchmen.

Pasties. This traditional Cornish food item is still a luncheon favorite at several specialty shops in the Grass Valley-Nevada City area. Original Cornish pasties were made of beef and potatoes. Today's pies include a broad range of ingredients.

Tommyknockers. According to the lore and superstitions of Cornish miners, Tommyknockers are little characters who live deep in the mines. They have been said to make funny noises as a way to protect miners from impending dangers.

Good as Gold. The following are the top 12 gold-producing counties in California since the Gold Rush. Each of those listed produced more than \$100,000,000 in gold from 1848-1965.

Nevada.....	\$440,000,000
Amador.....	\$200,000,000
Tuolumne.....	\$190,000,000
Butte	\$150,000,000
Calaveras.....	\$150,000,000
Sierra	\$150,000,000
Yuba	\$145,000,000
Sacramento.....	\$135,000,000
Placer.....	\$120,000,000
El Dorado.....	\$110,000,000
Plumas	\$105,000,000
Siskiyou	\$100,000,000

Source: The California Division of Mines and Geology

Deer Creek Miners Trail

This trail, built by the Nevada City Rotary Club, offers a short walk along Deer Creek near the downtown historic district.

Printed guides to the trail are located in a small kiosk at the trailhead located beside the Broad Street freeway off-ramp. The brochure lists six stations along the trail and describes what it was like to prospect for gold in early-day Nevada City.



★ Gold Mining Historic Markers

1. National Landmark Town. This marker, dedicated in 1985 when the city was named to the National Register of Historic Places, recognizes Nevada City "as the largest and best-preserved historical downtown district in California Gold Country." Located in Calanan Park at Union and Broad streets.

2. Ott's Assay Office. An assay performed here by J. J. Ott in 1859 led to the famous Comstock Lode in the state of Nevada. A national and Nevada County landmark. Located at the foot of Main Street.

3. Pelton Wheel and Five-Stamp Mill. The mill was built in 1893 and used to crush ore at the Fortuna Mine. The Pelton Wheel was used in the Pacific Gas & Electric Drum Division from 1928-1987 and donated by PG&E to Nevada City in 1987. Located at the foot of Main Street.

4. Calanan Park Monitor and Drill Core. This hydraulic mining monitor used pressurized water to wash away hillsides in the quest for gold. The shaft drill core represents hardrock mining. It came from Grass Valley's Idaho-Maryland Mine in the 1930s. Located in Calanan Park.

Gold Mining Methods

California gold is generally found in two kinds of deposits, lode and placer. The lode deposit is usually deeply buried quartz gold that is mined with hardrock techniques. Placer deposits originated in lodes but have been moved over the centuries by erosion and weathering. They are mined by panning, sluicing or dredging.

Panning. *This is the simplest mining method and one that conjures images of the Gold Rush. Prospectors dig into stream beds and swirl sand and gravel from their pans. The heavier gold stays at the bottom of the pan.*

Sluicing. *Wet, ore-bearing gravels are shoveled into these long boxes. Sieves and riffles separate gold from the other materials. The Long Tom and Rocking the Cradle were variations of the sluice.*

Dredging. *Gas-powered dredges are still seen along the rivers of the Gold Country. Miners vacuum sand and gravels from pockets along the river bottom. Gold is separated by screening, jiggling and washing.*

Hydraulic Mining. *Outlawed since 1884, this was a destructive mining method in which entire hillsides were washed away with highly-pressurized water.*

Hardrock Mining. *Gold-bearing quartz is mined in vertical or inclined shafts deep beneath the earth's surface. This was Nevada County's most profitable and longest-lasting method of mining.*

Outlying Areas

Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park

This 3,000-acre state historic park tells the story of hydraulic gold mining. Gold was discovered here in 1851, hydraulic mining began about 1853 and lasted until 1884.

Hydraulic miners used highly-pressurized water to move an estimated 41 million cubic yards of earth, leaving an open pit more than a mile long and 600 feet deep. The stark walls of Malakoff Diggins stand in memory of hydraulic mining.

Major water systems, including reservoirs and flumes, were constructed by mining companies to bring water to the hydraulic diggings, and many of these systems are used today to supply water to local communities.

In the 1860s and 1870s, hydraulic mine tailings clogged streams and rivers, destroyed farmlands and caused flooding in the valley. After a lengthy legal battle, the hydraulic era ended Jan. 7, 1884 when Judge Lorenzo Sawyer issued a permanent injunction against dumping mine tailings into the Yuba River.

Today, visitors can inspect the diggings and the restored Gold Rush village of North Bloomfield at the center of the park. The town offers a museum and numerous mining exhibits. There are campfire programs and guided history walks in summer. The park includes a wooded 30-site campground, several walk-in camp sites and a group camp.

Malakoff Diggins is open daily year around (except for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day). The museum is open 10-4 daily in the summer and 11-4 weekends after Labor Day until Memorial Day. Call ahead for town tour times and other information, (530) 265-2740.

★ Gold Mining Historic Marker

1. Alpha and Omega Hydraulic Diggings. Located 18 miles east of Nevada City, just off Scenic Highway 20, is the Alpha-Omega Overlook rest stop. At this location, California Historic Landmark No. 628-9 notes the Alpha and Omega Hydraulic Diggings, which are seen to the north.

Alpha and Omega, towns a mile apart, were settled in the 1850s. In fact, world-famous opera star Emma Nevada was born in the town of Alpha. Some mining continued at Omega until 1949.

Today, the towns are gone but the nearby hydraulic diggings are visible reminders of their history.

How to Pan for Gold

Try Your Luck

If you know where to look, it's not hard to find gold in Nevada County rivers.

Some of the most accessible gold panning locations are on the South Yuba River at Bridgeport, Edwards Crossing and Washington, and on the Middle Yuba River at Oregon Creek. These are public stretches of river so you don't have to worry about claimjumping.

You'll need a 12-inch or 18-inch gold pan (available at local shops), a small shovel, bucket, spoon, pocketknife and a small vial for your gold flakes.

Dig in old mine tailings, at turns in the river, around tree roots and at the upstream ends of gravel bars where heavy gold may settle.

Swirl water, sand and gravel in a tilted gold pan, slowly washing materials over the edge. Be patient, keep at it until you are down to black sand and, hopefully, gold.

Gold has a color all its own. You will be able to tell it from the brassier-looking pyrite, or Fool's Gold. Mica is another common substance which has some glitter but breaks down upon touch.