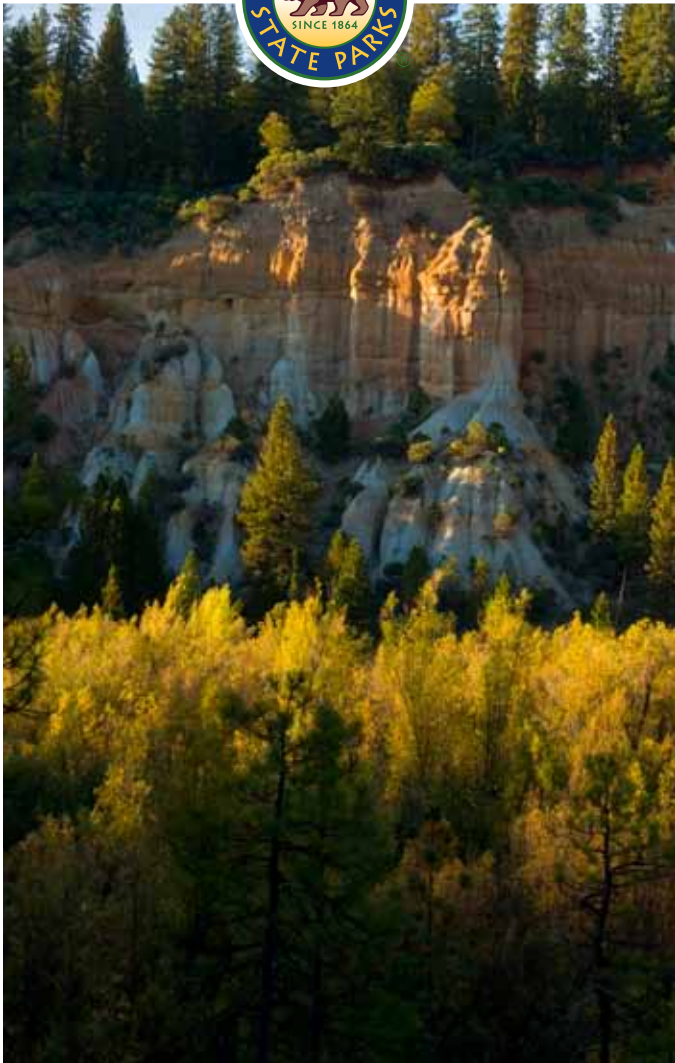


Malakoff Diggins

State Historic Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park

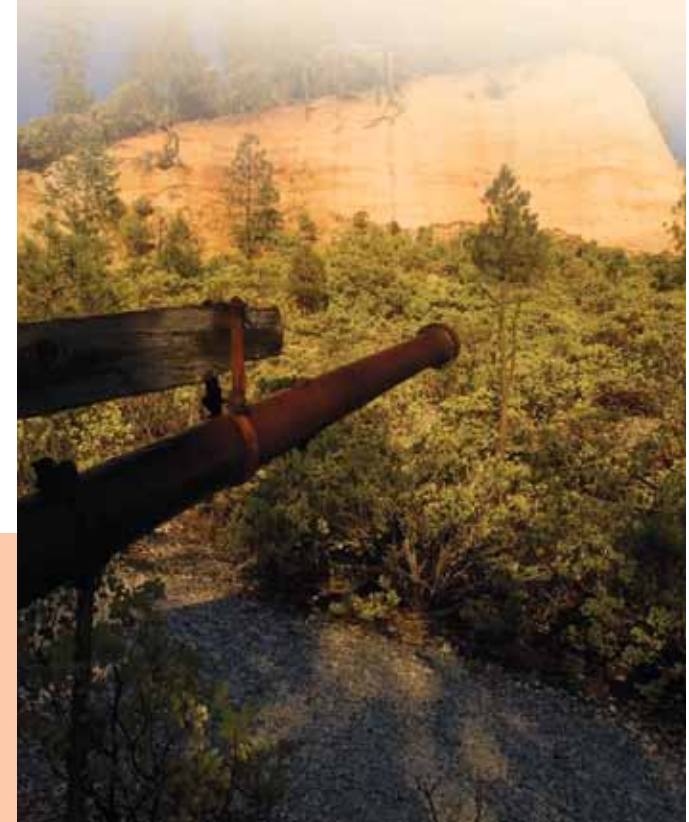
23579 North Bloomfield Road

Nevada City, CA 95959

(530) 265-2740

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*At Malakoff Diggins,
the world's largest
hydraulic gold mine
devastated the
pristine landscape—
leading to the first
environmental law
enacted in the nation.*



As the majestic Sierra Nevada mountain range eroded over eons, ancestral rivers carried and deposited gold along their riverbeds. Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park preserves and interprets the 1850s-1880s hydraulic mining era, when gold seekers combed the Sierra foothills and washed away whole mountains looking for the precious metal.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

The park lies within the territory of the Hill Nisenan. Nisenan territory once extended from the lower reaches of the Yuba, American and Feather Rivers to the east bank of the Sacramento River and up to the 10,000-foot Sierra crest.

The Hill Nisenan lived in multi-family villages or in extended-family hamlets. Several hamlets might be grouped together under one leader in the largest village. Villages were located below 3,000 feet elevation, in small valleys and open canyons. The families stayed in these villages during the winter, but spread to smaller camps—often at higher elevations in rough terrain—from spring through fall to collect and hunt food.

The Nisenan's first contact with the Spanish came in 1808, when General Gabriel Moraga passed through the Nisenan territory. The great malaria epidemic of 1833 wiped out many of the Hill Nisenan. The final blow to Nisenan culture came with the 1848 gold rush, when miners overran their territory, bringing new diseases and disrupting Nisenan harvest patterns.



North Bloomfield hydraulic miners

The surviving Nisenan, known as the Southern Maidu in the region of Nevada County, are seeking federal tribal recognition as they preserve their ancestral heritage.

Miners Find Gold

Gold panning in Sierra streambeds quickly exhausted the readily available gold in the water. Miners sifted through stream deposits of sand and gravel—a process called placer mining—looking for gold.

Placer mining began here in 1852 after a rich gold deposit was found in Humbug Creek, near the South Yuba River. Each placer miner staked claim to a 30- by 40-foot section of ground. They would scoop and sieve gravel, dirt and water from a running creek or river into flat-bottomed pans. They agitated this

mixture (known as alluvial deposits), then poured off the water. The heavier gold, if present, would gleam as flakes or nuggets in the bottom of the pans.

A town called Humbug soon sprang up to house the miners. They began devising more efficient methods to separate more gold from larger amounts of ore. These methods included long, slanted sluice boxes or “rockers.” Miners added liquid mercury (also called quicksilver), which created a gold-mercury amalgam that settled to the bottom of the devices while water, sand and gravel ran off. Some mercury was inevitably lost from the sluice and flowed downstream with the sediments, but the miners were fairly efficient at using and re-using the valuable mercury to aid in the recovery and concentration of gold.

In 1852, a French miner named Anthony Chabot bypassed the need for ditches and flumes by hooking up a canvas hose and



High-pressure monitors wash gold from rock at the pit.

directing the water flow at the ore supply. When a man named Edward Mattison increased the water pressure by adding a nozzle to the hose, hydraulic mining was born. Discarded dirt and gravel ore, called tailings, usually ended up piled on the stream bank or washed downstream as silt.

In 1858, the town of Humbug expanded around the former sites of Lake City, Relief Hill and North Columbia. Humbug became known as North Bloomfield Township and included a sawmill, saloons and breweries. Many Chinese immigrants labored in the gold mines and grew vegetables for the town's residents.

Some miners became discouraged at the small return in gold for the amount of effort they had expended; they left to try their luck at richer pickings in Nevada.

In 1866, French immigrant Julius Poquillion bought and consolidated many abandoned claims until he had amassed 1,535 acres. Poquillon then convinced a group of San Francisco financiers to invest in large-scale hydraulic gold mining, forming the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company.



North Bloomfield ca. 1870

The group purchased the Bowman Ranch and Rudyard Reservoir, constructed dams, and built a huge flume and ditch system to carry water to wash ore at the claim. At capacity, the resulting water power could work

100,000 tons of gravel per day at the "Diggings," making a pit. The North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company continued to expand and invest in more water supplies and hydraulic mining facilities; they built over 100 miles of canals and ditches that carried water to claim sites for hydroblasting the rock and soil.

The miners dug a 7,847-foot drainage tunnel through the bedrock from the Diggings pit to Humbug Creek in 1872. Eight vent shafts were sunk at 1,000-foot intervals along the tunnel angled toward the creek, which led to the South Yuba River. Two crews would enter each shaft and dig in opposite directions along the tunnel line. This method of tunneling shaved a year from usual tunnel methods and enabled miners to drain spent tailings into the river. Fifteen crews dug simultaneously. On November 15, 1874, the tunnel was completed at a cost of \$275,574.

In 1876, the company began using seven full-scale Craig monitors—powerful water cannons—to wash the ore free from the mountainsides and uncover the gold-laden quartz beneath. This effective method brought new prosperity and workers to North



North Bloomfield today

Bloomfield—even as mounds of spent tailings piled up in Malakoff pit or washed into the river and flowed downstream.

The company's records show expenditures of \$3 million for all of their capital improvements.

They had collected only \$3 million in gold before laws were enacted to end their hydraulic mining operation.

The Sawyer Decision

During the 1850s, concerns emerged about the tailings from hydraulic mines. Toward the end of the 1860s, as large-scale hydraulic operations got underway, the debris problem became severe. Farms along the river were flooded and destroyed. Silt traveled all the way to San Francisco Bay, impairing marine navigation of the Sacramento River and parts of the bay. River channels were closed to steamboat traffic. Because mining had contributed to valley towns' prosperity, many towns depended on the mines for sustenance. The valley inhabitants simply built their levees higher to hold off floods.

In 1875 the town of Marysville flooded. Because the town was surrounded by high levees, the floodwaters swept in and filled the area as if it were a giant bowl. Many residents lost their property or their lives.

Finally, a petition was submitted to the State Legislature requesting that laws regulating mining operations be passed. Years of skirmishes followed, both in and

out of courts. In addition to the lawsuits, injunctions and appeals, some destruction of property also took place. When the Rudyard Dam on the Yuba River failed in 1883, miners suspected the dam had been dynamited.

On January 7, 1884, after months of testimony and argument, Judge Lorenzo Sawyer handed down his decision in the case of Woodruff (a Marysville property owner) vs. the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company. In a 225-page document that described the damage caused by mining debris, Sawyer issued a permanent injunction against dumping tailings into the Yuba River. Because larger mines could not make a profit under the new restrictions, California's environmentally devastating hydraulic-mining era ended.

As a result of the Sawyer decision, North Bloomfield's population had shrunk to half by 1900. Several buildings stood empty and decaying. When the first World War began in 1914, some buildings were demolished

for their lumber. Prohibition later closed the town's saloons. The population grew during the Depression era, when former residents returned to



Water cannon display on Humbug Day

North Bloomfield's empty buildings seeking a free place to live.

When World War II started in 1941, people left to find work in other places, and more buildings were razed. By 1950, North Bloomfield's permanent residents numbered fewer than twenty.

The legacy of hydraulic gold mining can still be seen in the gouged hillsides and choked streambeds around Malakoff Diggins. Scientists are investigating the enduring effects of introduced mercury on the ecosystem—evaluating soils, native fauna, and water quality to understand the extent of biological uptake in areas affected by historical gold mining.

Becoming a State Park

In the 1960s, Nevada County locals initiated a campaign to preserve the history of North Bloomfield and hydraulic mining. The idea caught on, and Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park was created in 1965. Park visitors can see the way miners lived near the remnants of the main Malakoff mine and five other claim sites that were blasted with water to get at the gold thought to lie embedded beneath.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology and Vegetation

Sedimentary, igneous (mostly granite), metamorphic and volcanic rock surround the mined areas at Malakoff pit. The pit's steep sides are fairly barren.

Landslides and erosion have changed the profile of the pit from the days of hydraulic mining. The pit is about 6,800 feet long from southwest to northeast, and it ranges from

1,000 to 3,800 feet wide from north to south.

More than 100 feet of soil deposits have accumulated on the pit floor, transforming its raw, u-shaped surface into a flat plane. Native vegetation has grown up through the once-exposed areas.

About 3,200 forested acres in the park surround the pit, at 2,500 to 4,000 feet elevation. The second-growth ponderosa pine forest also has incense cedar, black oak, white fir and sugar pine growing on its upper slopes.

Whiteleaf manzanita is the park's most profuse woody shrub. Hillsides are covered with ceanothus, including buckbrush and deerbrush. Spectacular wildflowers bloom in the spring.

Wildlife

Nocturnal animals such as black bears, mountain lions, coyotes and bobcats roam in the dark. Black-tailed deer may be seen during the day.

The park's bird species include the dark-eyed junco, mountain chickadee, California quail, Steller's jay, black-throated gray warbler and mourning dove.





The Diggins at Malakoff hydraulic mining pit

Climate

From October through April, the western slope of the Sierra receives between 40 and 60 annual inches of rainfall. Snow is common at higher elevations. Spring, summer and fall temperatures range from the high 50s to the mid-80s.

RECREATION

Camping—Three miner’s cabins in North Bloomfield may be reserved. The 30 family campsites at Chute Hill each have tables, food lockers and fire grates. The group campsite is reservable for 9 to 60 people with no more than 18 vehicles. Reservations are recommended for weekends or summer weekdays. For camping reservations, call (800) 444-7275 or visit www.parks.ca.gov.

Swimming—Blair Lake has a small swimming section near the picnic area. No lifeguard service is available, so please use caution and swim at your own risk.

Fishing—Rainbow and brown trout may be caught in South Yuba River. Blair Lake reservoir holds black bass, bluegill and

rainbows. All anglers 16 and over must possess a valid California fishing license.

Hiking—The park has more than 20 miles of scenic foothill trails with degrees of difficulty varying from easy

to strenuous. The renowned South Yuba Trail connects to this park’s trail network.

Programs and events—Gold panning near China Garden and guided tours of historic town buildings are offered during museum hours. A Kids’ Fishing Derby is held in May, Humbug Day takes place each June, and an Ice Cream Social celebrates September. Environmental Living Programs are available to school groups. Call the park museum at (530) 265-2740 for a current schedule.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Campsite #13 and the restrooms are accessible. For accessibility updates, call (916) 445-8949 or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- South Yuba River State Park
17660 Pleasant Valley Road
Penn Valley 95946 (530) 432-2546
- Empire Mine State Historic Park
10791 E. Empire St., Grass Valley 95945
(530) 273-8522

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Dogs must be on a leash no more than six feet long and must be under control at all times. They must be confined to a tent or vehicle at night.
- All natural and cultural park features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Poison oak is present in many parts of the park. Contact can cause a serious rash.
- Disease-carrying ticks may be present. Wear long pants and check frequently for ticks.
- Black bears can smell food and toiletries stored in cars or tents. You must use the bear-resistant metal lockers for all food and scented items.
- Please check in and pay day-use fees at the park headquarters/museum in North Bloomfield. Day use includes the museum and trails, touring North Bloomfield and fishing or swimming in Blair Lake.
- Please use only marked roads and trails. Off-roading and making or using wildcat trails are not permitted within park boundaries.



Poison oak

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit association. For more information, contact Malakoff Diggins Park Association, 23579 North Bloomfield Road, Nevada City, CA 95959

- Legend**
- Major Road
 - Paved Road
 - Unpaved Road
 - Unpaved Trail
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Bureau of Land Management Property
 - Accessible Campsite
 - Accessible Feature
 - Campground
 - Campsites
 - Exhibit
 - Fishing
 - Group Campground
 - Locked Gate
 - Park Headquarters
 - Parking
 - Picnic Area
 - Restrooms
 - Swimming
 - Telephone
 - Viewpoint

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