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.

Bodie—a town so lawless that in 1881 it was described as “...a sea of sin, lashed by the tempests of lust and passion.”

Quote by Reverend F. M. Warrington

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (760) 647-6445. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
For information call: (800) 777-0369
(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.
711, TTY relay service

www.parks.ca.gov

Discover the many states of California.™
Spread across the landscape of a high, remote valley of the Bodie Hills, the historic gold mining town of Bodie—one of the richest gold strikes in California—was once known as the most lawless, wildest and toughest mining camp in the West. To walk the streets of this ghost town and peer into the windows of the remaining homes, businesses and sites is to be transported back to the days when Bodie was a thriving mining town.

Located northeast of Yosemite National Park, Bodie is 13 miles east of Highway 395 on S.R. 270, seven miles south of Bridgeport. The last three miles to the park are on a very rough dirt road. At an elevation of 8,375 feet, Bodie is subjected to high winds. Summer can be warm with highs in the 80s. Winter is unpredictable, with daytime temperatures reaching into the 60s and by sundown dropping below zero. Snowfall can average between three to six feet on the flat ground, with drifts up to 20 feet high.

**PARK HISTORY**

**Native People**

The Eastern Sierra Nevada region of Mono County was home to the Northern Paiute and Mono Lake Paiute Indian groups. These two groups lived in loose family units. Primarily hunter-gatherers, the Northern Paiutes subsisted by gathering native plants, hunting small game, and fishing in local streams. They migrated seasonally, following food sources. Although the Mono Lake Paiutes hunted small animals and gathered native plants and seeds, their diet was more dependent on Mono Lake, where they gathered alkali fly larvae and brine shrimp. Basket weaving was a common form of art among the Paiute tribes. The baskets, tightly woven with creative and artistic designs, were used for food gathering, storage and cooking.

The flood of miners drawn by the Bodie gold discovery pushed the Native Americans out of their traditional territory. By the early twentieth century, only five percent of the original area remained under the control of the local tribes. Food supplies dwindled as settlers clear-cut the forests for lumber and firewood, killed or displaced local wildlife, and destroyed meadow grasses by grazing livestock. As their traditional way of life was impacted, some native people adapted by working in the local towns. Paiute Indians worked at a limekiln in the Mono Lake Basin, loading the sacked lime onto flatcars for delivery to Bodie, where it was used in milling and cyanide processing of gold and silver ores. They were also employed in service jobs and as ranch hands.

**The Standard Mining Company**

As placer mining declined on the western slopes of the Sierra, gold discoveries in the high desert of the Eastern Sierras captured the attention of thousands of gold seekers. In 1859 W. S. Bodey and E. S. “Black” Taylor stumbled upon one of the richest gold strikes. The ore extracted from the Bodie Hills amounted to millions in gold and silver. Unfortunately, Bodey was not able to enjoy his discovery—he froze to death in a blizzard while returning with supplies in November 1859.

Mining in Bodie was slow in the 1860s and 1870s due to rich strikes in Aurora, Nevada and at the Comstock Mine in Virginia City. From 1863 to 1877, only a small handful of industrious miners and prospectors worked the Bodie mines. In the mid-1870s, the Bunker Hill Mine (later renamed the Standard Mining Company) made a rich strike of gold and silver ore. Almost 10,000 tons of rich ore was extracted from this mine, yielding close to $15 million in 25 years.
The Bodie Reputation
Stories of the quality and amount of gold being mined by the Standard Mining Company sparked a rush of people, and Bodie became a boomtown in 1877. By 1879 Bodie had a population of approximately 8,500 people and more than 2,000 buildings.

Chinese Settlers
Other businesses and individuals also profited from the boom. As lodging for the miners and stamp mills to process the ore were built, a need arose for a steady supply of wood to power the mills and to warm the houses, especially during severe winters. Bodie’s Chinese residents, many of whom had come from Southern China as contract laborers in 1878, used mule trains to transport wood 20 miles from the sawmills along the eastern slope of the Sierra to Bodie. By 1881 the Bodie and Benton Railroad was transporting the heavy loads of lumber from Mono Mills more efficiently.

General stores and saloons supplied the needs of the miners. More than 60 saloons and dance halls lined the streets, providing a source of relaxation and entertainment for the miners after a hard day’s work in the depths of the mines. Gunfights, stage holdups, robberies and street fights contributed to its reputation of lawlessness and the legend of the “Bad Man of Bodie.” Historians believe that the “Bad Man of Bodie” is a composite of outlaws and men like Tom Adams and Washoe Pete who contributed to the wild atmosphere of Bodie.

Bodie’s Decline
Bodie’s heyday was short-lived. The year 1881 saw the town in the grips of decline. The rich mines were depleted, and mining companies went bankrupt as the miners and business people left for more lucrative areas. By 1886 Bodie’s population had decreased to approximately 1,500 people.

Six years later a disastrous fire threatened the town, destroying a number of homes and businesses. The introduction of the cyanide process in the 1890s, and the use of electricity as a source of cheap power, made mining profitable again and boosted the town. But success was transitory—another fire in 1932 destroyed all but 10 percent of the town.

Today’s Ghost Town
Bodie faded into a ghost town during the 1940s. In 1962 the small part of the...
town that had survived the 1932 fire was designated a State Historic Park and a National Historic Landmark. What remains of the town of Bodie, preserved in a state of “arrested decay,” exists as it did when the last residents left. The interiors are maintained as they were left, still furnished and stocked with goods, providing a snapshot of the past.

This legislation withdrew the right of new patent or mineral claims on public lands of the Bodie District, and paved the way for California State Parks to purchase the mining claims of the now bankrupt Canadian mining company, preserving this unique California treasure.

**ACCESSIBLE FEATURES**

- Bodie State Historic Park is generally accessible, but the protected historic structures, uneven surfaces and high-altitude desert terrain may be a challenge for individuals with limited mobility or difficulty breathing.
- Access to window views for structures on boardwalks requires the climbing of stairs from the street.
- The Museum/Visitor Center is generally accessible, but assistance may be required at the entry ramp.
- The restroom near the parking lot is accessible.
- A captioned video on Bodie’s history is available.

Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, call the park, or visit http://access.parks.ca.gov.

In 1988 a Canadian mining company’s proposal for a large-scale open pit gold mining operation on the bluff above the townsite threatened this landmark. These actions had the potential to compromise Bodie’s historic ambiance, fragile buildings and wildlife habitat. Preservation groups, concerned citizens groups and government agencies successfully lobbied for the passage of the Bodie Protection Act of 1994.

In 1988 a Canadian mining company’s proposal for a large-scale open pit gold mining operation on the bluff above the townsite threatened this landmark. These actions had the potential to compromise Bodie’s historic ambiance, fragile buildings and wildlife habitat. Preservation groups, concerned citizens groups and government agencies successfully lobbied for the passage of the Bodie Protection Act of 1994.