

Columbia 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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Discover the many states of California.™

Columbia State Historic Park

11255 Jackson Street

Columbia, CA 95310

(209) 588-9128

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Columbia, once known as the "Gem of the Southern Mines," is a living gold rush town featuring the largest collection of gold-rush-era brick buildings in California.



Amidst the rugged oak woodlands of the Sierra Nevada foothills lies Columbia State Historic Park—once a busy, brawling gold rush town. The search for gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills offered hope and, for a fortunate few, riches. It drew prospectors from all over the world and of every nationality, including California Indians. Besides digging and panning for gold, they bought, sold and traded to try to make their fortunes. The authentic mid-nineteenth century backdrop of Columbia remains today to tell the colorful stories of these miners and merchants.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

For thousands of years, Indian people resided in the valleys, foothills and mountains of Central California. The Central Sierra Miwok lived in the Columbia area. Traditional Miwok culture was sensitive to the land and changing seasons, which sustained and guided their daily activities. Large, multi-family villages were located in clearings near oak groves and dependable water sources. Acorns were a major part of their

diet, supplemented by fish, birds, deer, small game, insects and native plants. Evidence of camps and grinding rocks can still be seen in or near oak groves.

The native people's way of life was drastically altered when newcomers to the area introduced diseases and increased warfare in the region. Despite the devastating malaria epidemic of 1833 and abuses and deaths suffered during the gold rush, the descendants of native Miwok and Yokuts Indian people survive today.

Columbia's Beginning

On March 27, 1850, a group of prospectors discovered gold here. Passing through this area, Dr. Thaddeus Hildreth, his brother George, John Walker and others were caught in a rainstorm. While drying out their gear, Walker decided to try his luck in the nearby gulch. Within six weeks his findings attracted thousands of miners. Their crowded camp of log cabins and canvas tents, known as Hildreth's Diggings, was formally renamed



Chinese resident of Columbia (ca. 1890)

"Columbia" on April 29, 1850. By 1852 more than 150 stores, shops, saloons and other business enterprises were operating in Columbia.

The town also had three churches, a meeting hall, a Masonic Lodge and a branch of the Sons of Temperance.

A Diverse Population

Miners from the nearby towns of Sonora and Jamestown were the first to arrive. Two-thirds of the miners were Mexican, but by the summer of 1850, many had left Columbia due to the exclusionary Foreign Miner's Tax, which required foreign-born miners to pay the state \$20 a month for the privilege of mining. Like many mining towns, by 1852 Columbia had a sizeable population of Chinese, French, Irish, Italian, German and Jewish miners and merchants who contributed to the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of Columbia.

*Lithograph of Columbia (ca. 1855)
by Towle and Leavitt.
Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.*





Pit placer mining, Columbia (ca. 1860-1870)

Water and Fire

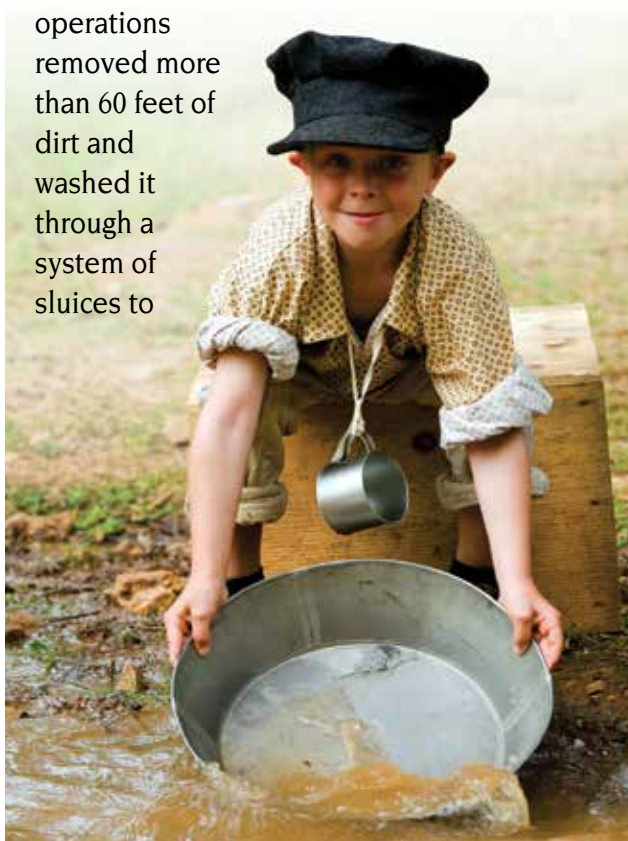
Water was essential for placer mining. In a dry “diggins” like Columbia in 1850, when the seasonal rains were gone most of the miners left. In June 1851 the Tuolumne County Water Company was formed to transport water from the Stanislaus River about 20 miles away. The company engineered and built a complex system of wooden flumes, pipes and ditches to convey river water to Columbia. Its high water rates sparked a competitor in 1854—the Columbia and Stanislaus River Water Company. This company of miners was determined to build a 60-mile aqueduct known as the Miner’s Ditch to supply water more cheaply. However, before its completion, the threat of bankruptcy prompted the sale of the system to the Tuolumne County Water Company.

Water was also extremely important for fire protection in the booming town. Columbia’s first fire—in 1854—destroyed six city blocks, leaving the only brick building, the Donnell and Parsons store, standing at the corner

of Main and Washington streets. After the fire, a company called the New England Water Company constructed seven cisterns beneath the streets of Columbia to hold water for domestic and fire-fighting use. A square lid to one of these cisterns may be seen today in front of the firehouse on State Street. The town was quickly rebuilt using locally produced red brick. In 1857 another fire struck Columbia’s downtown, leaving only brick buildings with thick walls and iron shutters intact.

Mining

With improved water delivery to Columbia, miners began to employ more efficient mining methods in their quest for gold. In some places, open pit placer mining operations removed more than 60 feet of dirt and washed it through a system of sluices to



remove the gold. Using water power, the miners hoisted gravel from deep placer deposits to higher ground, where it could be processed using hydraulic methods. The result of their efforts left expansive limestone formations, visible today below the main parking lot. The diggings were enormously productive, at times averaging \$100,000 or more per week.

Columbia, “Gem of the Southern Mines”

By 1853, Columbia was one of the largest cities in California, with an estimated population of 25,000 to 30,000. Between 1850 and the early 1900s, as much as \$150 million in gold was mined here. Gold from Columbia helped to finance the United States government and the Union Army during the Civil War. As mining dwindled in the late 1860s, Columbia began to decline. Miners tore down the vacated buildings and mined vacant lots in search of gold in the crevices of the limestone bedrock on which the town was built.

Today

While Columbia never became a ghost town, by the 1940s the buildings had deteriorated to the point that many were considered unsafe. When Columbia became a state park in 1945, restoration efforts began on the 150-year-old structures to capture and preserve their historic value. Today Columbia State Historic Park contains the state’s largest collection of gold-rush-era structures. These 19th-century buildings continue to tell the stories of Columbia’s enterprising miners and merchants.



Classroom in the historic schoolhouse

Weather

The town is located at an elevation of 2,100 feet. Summer days are usually hot, with temperatures sometimes reaching into the 100s. Winters can be rainy, with snow at times.

- An accessible trail leads from Washington Street to the lower parking lot restrooms.

PLEASE REMEMBER

Businesses are generally open between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Restaurants, saloons, hotels and the theatre stay open later. Park exhibits and businesses are closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas days.

PUBLIC TOURS

Free town tours led by docents and staff are offered on weekends at 11 a.m. The tour begins at the museum and takes about an hour. Ask about additional programs at the museum desk.

LIVING HISTORY EVENTS

During Columbia's Gold Rush Days, docents in period attire lead programs and offer hands-on activities throughout the park. Many special exhibits are open. This unique event is offered from 1 to 4 p.m. on the second Saturday of each month.

Come visit a replica of the original tent town of 1852, and interact with miners, businessmen and artisans portrayed by costumed docents and staff during Columbia Diggings, held annually the weekend after Memorial Day.

Many other special events are offered throughout the year by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, park concessionaires and community groups. For more information, visit www.columbiacalifornia.com.

SPECIAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS

School groups are welcome at Columbia, and there is no charge for admission or parking.

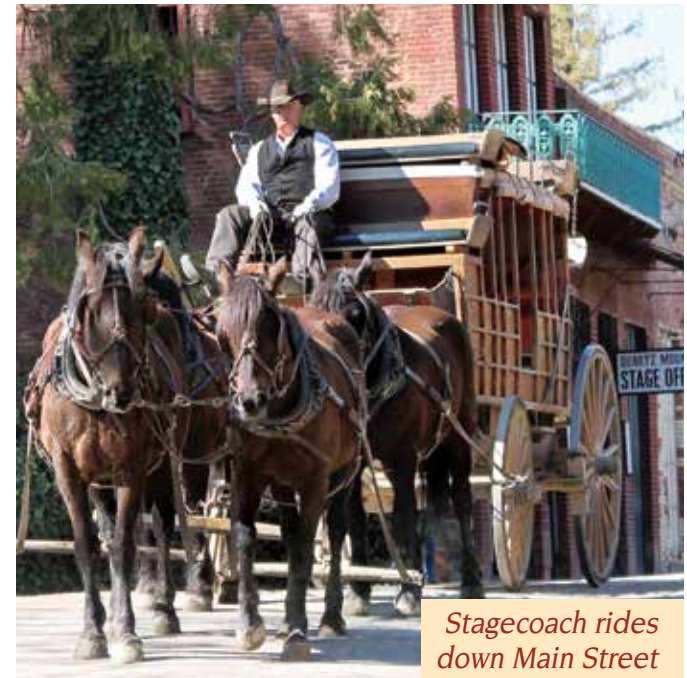
The park's many concessionaires offer special programs to enhance your visit. Please contact the businesses individually or refer to the Chamber website.

Park staff and volunteers offer a special two-hour museum and schoolhouse program. Children are invited to step into the past to fill the seats of 19th-century students. For information, call (209) 588-9128.

The park also participates in the California State Parks PORTS program, bringing the story of gold mining to classrooms throughout the state via the internet. Details may be found at <http://ports.parks.ca.gov>.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Calaveras Big Trees State Park, 1170 East Hwy. 4, Arnold 95223 (209) 795-2334
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, one mile south on 5th Ave. off Hwy. 108 Jamestown 95327 (209) 984-3953



Stagecoach rides down Main Street

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- The main streets of Columbia are mostly level, but shops and structures are on raised boardwalks.
- Assistance is usually available to open historic doors and cross high thresholds or to reach sales items and counters. Most merchants have portable ramps available by request; look for window signs indicating availability.
- Assistance may be needed at the Columbia Museum entry or along its sloped boardwalk.
- Accessible parking is designated in lots near Columbia and Jackson streets, at Main and Jackson streets, at the Lower Lot at Columbia and Washington streets, and at the Old Columbia Schoolhouse.
- Accessible restrooms are at the Lower Lot, the Jack Douglass Saloon and at the Old Columbia Schoolhouse, behind the museum.

Columbia
State Historic Park

KEY TO DETAILED MAP

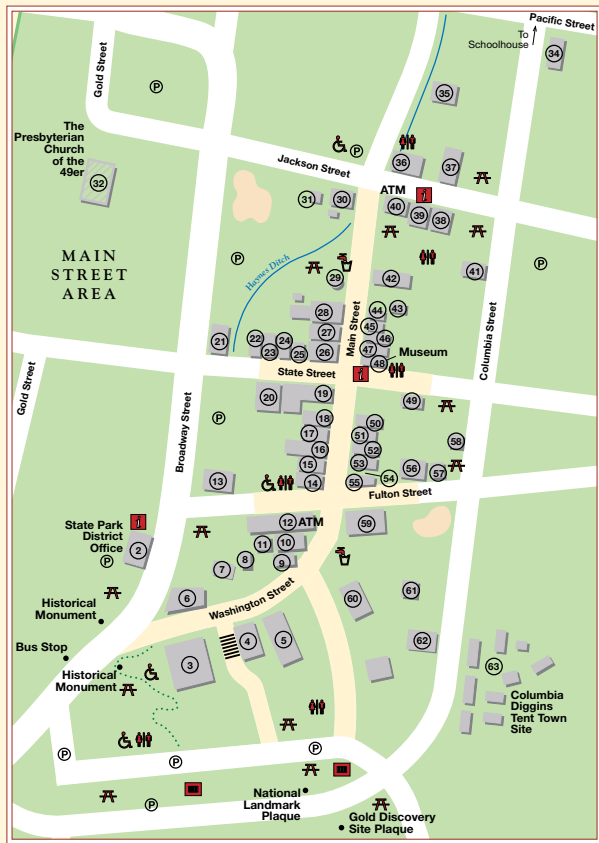
- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ① St. Anne's Catholic Church | ②③ Dentist's Office Exhibit | ④⑤ Ebler's Leather and Saddle Emporium |
| ⑥ State Parks District Office | ⑦⑧ Chinese Store Exhibit | ⑨⑩ Chinese Store Exhibit |
| ⑪ Fallon Hotel/Theatre/Ice Cream Parlor | ⑫⑬ Bowling Saloon Exhibit | ⑭⑮ Knapp Store—Columbia Museum |
| ⑯ Columbia Gazette Newspaper Office | ⑰⑱ Knapp Store—Columbia Museum | ⑲⑳ Livery Stable Exhibit |
| ⑳ Eagle Cotage/Park Office | ㉑⑳ Parrot's Blacksmith Shop | ㉒㉓ Fancy Dry Goods & Clothing Store |
| ㉒ Masonic Hall Exhibit | ㉔㉕ Historic Barber Shop Location—Kamice's Photographic Establishment | ㉖㉗ Franklin-Wolfe Variety Store—Columbia Booksellers & Stationers |
| ㉘ Miners Cabin Interpretive Site | ㉘㉙ Garden Courtyard—Candle Dipping | ㉚㉛ Tibbits House Exhibit |
| ㉚ Old Building Foundation | ㉜㉝ Tibbits House Exhibit | ㉞㉟ Martinez House Exhibit & Garden |
| ㉜ Wells Fargo Exhibit | ㉞㉟ Koch Cabin | ㊱㊲ Pioneer Emporium |
| ㉝ Stage Office—Quartz Mountain Stage Line | ㊱㊲ Wagon Barn | ㊳㊴ Matelot Gulch Gold Panning |
| ㉞ Assay Office Exhibit | ㊳㊴ Pioneer Emporium | ㊵㊶ Miners Cabin in the Rocks Exhibit |
| ㉟ D.O. Mills Building—Umpqua Bank | ㊵㊶ Matelot Gulch Gold Panning | ㊷㊸ Mining Equipment Exhibit |
| ㊱ Konrad's Garage—Seven Sisters Candle and Soap Works | ㊷㊸ Mining Equipment Exhibit | ㊹ Columbia Diggins Tent Town Site |
| ㊲ Jack Douglass Saloon, Food & Beverages | ㊹㊺ Firehouse Columbia Engine Company #1 | |
| ㊳ Soderer & Marshall, North—Justice Court Exhibit | ㊺㊻ Wilson-McConnell House | |
| ㊴ Columbia Candy Kitchen | | |
| ㊵ Native Sons of the Golden West Exhibit | | |
| ㊶ Meyer's Building—Columbia Men's Emporium | | |
| ㊷ Columbia House Restaurant | | |
| ㊸ Angelo's Hall | | |
| ㊹ Odd Fellows Historic Building | | |
| ㊺ Firehouse Tuolumne Engine Company #1 | | |

*Historic misspelling from an 1855 lithograph of Columbia's important buildings.

Legend

- Streets
- Pedestrian-Only Streets
- Trail
- Fence
- Limestone Outcrops
- Accessible Feature
- Barbecue Pits
- Drinking Water
- Information
- Gate
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Stairs
- Park Building
- Non-Park Building

This park is supported in part by a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact:
Friends of Columbia State Historic Park
P. O. Box 367 • Columbia, CA 95310
www.friendsofcolumbiashp.org



This map depicts California State Parks facilities and two historic churches—St. Anne's Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church of the 49er. Other buildings within the National Historic Landmark District are either privately owned or not open to the public.