

# South Yuba River State 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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### South Yuba River State Park

17660 Pleasant Valley Road

Penn Valley, CA 95946

(530) 432-2546 or 273-3884

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*Steep, rugged  
canyons hide a  
richness of historic  
sites and a turquoise  
green river that knows  
few bounds—South  
Yuba River State Park  
is as exciting as the  
gold that still glimmers  
along its riverbanks.*



**In the depths of the South Yuba River Canyon**, visitors to South Yuba River State Park will find a wealth of wonder and discovery. This long, narrow patchwork of lands is a treasure trove of history that includes classic bridges, toll crossings, and trails leading to historic gold rush mine sites. Add to that the canyon's stunning scenery, the clear, cold river tumbling between massive granite ledges, and many inviting places to play, and you have something to please just about everyone.

The climate varies depending on elevation, but is generally mild, with hot, dry summers. October to May can be cold and rainy.

## **PARK HISTORY**

### **Native People**

The Northern Maidu people—also known as Nisenan—may have migrated to the northern Sierra about 2,500 years ago. As with other hunter-gatherer groups, the Nisenan people's lives revolved around the changing seasons. Their lands provided them with free-running water, plentiful game and plant foods, and the basic materials needed to create homes, tools and finely crafted baskets.

European contact brought a halt to the well-established Maidu way of life. With the discovery of gold in 1848 came devastating diseases and loss of the people's traditional resources. Settlers seeking land for grazing and lumber for construction simply took over the available resources. In the process

they polluted the river with mining debris and cut down many trees, including the oaks that provided food and shelter materials for the Maidu. Today, Nisenan descendants work with other Maidu groups to obtain federal tribal status, to increase youth educational opportunities, and to develop forest management programs to reestablish the forest's natural diversity.

### **Gold along the South Fork**

In June 1848 gold was discovered near Rose's Bar, just downstream from Bridgeport. Merchant John Rose, the first European settler to build a permanent structure in Nevada County, sold placer mining supplies; by 1850 Rose's Bar swarmed with more than 2,000 miners. Two or three miles from Rose's Bar, Parks' Bar—by far the richest of all the Yuba River gravel bars—was named for David Parks, who brought his family to the gold fields.

### **The Kneebone Family**

Hard work, generosity and enterprise brought prominence to the pioneer Kneebone family. Andrew Reed Kneebone came to the U.S. in 1871 from Cornwall, England. On his family's 400-acre farm in the Spenceville area, Andrew learned to handle large teams of horses and mules. Andrew's future wife, Victoria Marie Cole, grew up on a farm near Bridgeport. The Cole

family occupied a large farmhouse, where they collected tolls for use of the covered bridge.

Andrew and Victoria's son Alfred and his wife Lucy took over the ranch and made many changes at Bridgeport. By 1926 Alfred and Lucy had developed the extremely popular Bridgeport Swim Resort—several cottages and a dance pavilion—about 1/4-mile upriver from the covered bridge near the swimming hole. At about the same time they built a small grocery store and a gas station.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Kneebone family shared their good fortune. The large numbers of people who had begun to arrive in the area hoping to make a living panning for gold needed shelter, so Alfred and Lucy rented out the resort's vacation cottages. However, when hydraulic placer mining was resumed upriver at about the same time, fouling the river with debris, the Kneebone resort went out of business.

Victoria Kneebone died in 1930, and Andrew died in 1934. They and other relatives are interred in the Kneebone Family Cemetery, which is cared for by their descendants.

**The River Crossings**  
With activity on both sides of the river,



*Andrew Kneebone and family, ca. 1903*



safe crossings were vital. Ferries came first, made by either overturning wagons and connecting them to form barges, or by refitting wagons to travel across water. The Point Defiance Ferry was located near today's Bridgeport, the Jones Bar Ferry was near today's Highway 49 Bridge, and the ferry at Edward's Crossing was near Illinois Bar.

Early bridge crossings include the 1895 Purdon Crossing Bridge and the 1905 Edward's Crossing Bridge, both in use today, and the 1921 Highway 49 Bridge, a graceful concrete arch that is perfect for watching the river.

At Jones Bar, four bridges have spanned the location, though none have survived the ravages of time and the river.

### **Bridgeport Covered Bridge**

By far the best-known bridge in the area is the Bridgeport Covered Bridge. In 1850 Virginian David I. Wood settled his family near the South Fork of the Yuba River,



*Bridgeport Covered Bridge*

establishing a sawmill at Forest City and a store at French Corral. Six years later, he and some associates formed the Virginia Turnpike Company to facilitate travel and commerce between Marysville and Virginia City, Nevada, and to collect tolls for use of the roads. Flooding during the winter of 1861-62 had destroyed five bridges across the river. In 1862 Wood oversaw the construction of the Bridgeport Covered Bridge, built with Douglas-fir trusses and wrought-iron rods and covered in sugar pine shakes. Originally 251 feet long, the bridge became 229 feet long after removal of the weather wings at each end. Marking the route favored by gold miners crossing the river, today the graceful curve of its wooden arch is visible from both the interior and exterior, making it a highly favored subject for photographers. This beautiful bridge is thought to be the longest single-span covered bridge in existence.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The deep, rugged canyons of South Yuba River State Park host a rich variety of wildlife. Black bears seek plant foods, insects and even carrion; coyotes and mountain lions hunt deer and small game. The park is a bird-watcher's paradise, with raptors, waterfowl and songbirds among the winged residents. The most impressive season at the park is spring, when snowmelt roars over massive granite boulders and spectacular displays of wildflowers grace the riverbanks and secluded waterfalls. The canyon sides are covered in black oaks, gray pine and Douglas-fir.



*Buttermilk Bend wildflower trail*

### **RECREATION**

Please visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or call the park at (530) 423-2546 for updates on park events or conditions.

**Wildflowers**—On Saturdays and Sundays from early March through mid-May, free guided walks through magnificent displays of wildflowers begin at 11 a.m. Bring drinking water. Pets are not permitted on the walks.

**Swimming**—Swimming is best from midsummer through fall, when the sun warms the river and its flows are at lower, safer levels. Swimming is not recommended in cold, fast-moving water. No lifeguards are on duty, so swim at your own risk and use flotation devices. To swim at the Family Beach area, take the trailhead (parking and restroom nearby) that begins at the Bridgeport Covered Bridge.

**Bird Watching**—Bring binoculars and comfortable walking shoes for spring and fall guided bird walks. Canyon wrens, spotted towhees, American dippers, acorn

woodpeckers, black phoebes and ruby-crowned sparrows may be seen here.

**Hiking**—More than a dozen trails vary from “very easy” (the totally accessible South Yuba Independence Trail), through “easy” (Virginia Turnpike Loop, Old Flume). The 2.8-mile Point Defiance Loop at Jones Bar is “moderate,” and Missouri Bar is rated “strenuous.” The easy one-mile Buttermilk Bend Trail offers spectacular spring wildflower walks.

**Gold Panning**—Modern-day gold seekers can play out the story of the gold rush using only bare hands and shallow gold pans. Visitors may keep any gold they find.

**Fishing**—Fishing is safer after the spring runoff has subsided and the river level drops. Anglers age 16 or over must carry a valid California fishing license. For fishing regulations, visit [www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov).

**River Watching**—Watch the river's power or its calm serenity from the bank or the Highway 49 Bridge and the Purdon and Edwards Crossing bridges.

**Living History Days**—Held the last Sunday of each October, these events feature wagon rides and demonstrations of pioneer life.

## HISTORIC SITES AND BRIDGES

**Bridgeport Mining Camp (ca. 1850)**—Mining camp, stage stop and ranch, it yielded some of the richest placer gold found anywhere.

**Hoyt Crossing (ca. 1850)**—This historic fording spot is near the Hoyt Crossing Trail at Highway 49 Crossing.

**Virginia Turnpike (1853-1901)**—Some features of this 14-mile toll road can be seen today, including portions of two stone walls that may have been built to discourage drivers from avoiding payment of tolls.

**Illinois Crossing (1854)**—A ferry operated here before the Edwards Crossing Bridge was built.

**Bridgeport Covered Bridge (1862)**—River access is easy near here.

**Purdon Crossing Bridge (1895)**—In this unique half-through truss support system, the bridge's deck lies roughly halfway between the top and bottom chords (supports), which allowed greater clearance under flood conditions.



*River watching at the Old Highway 49 bridge*

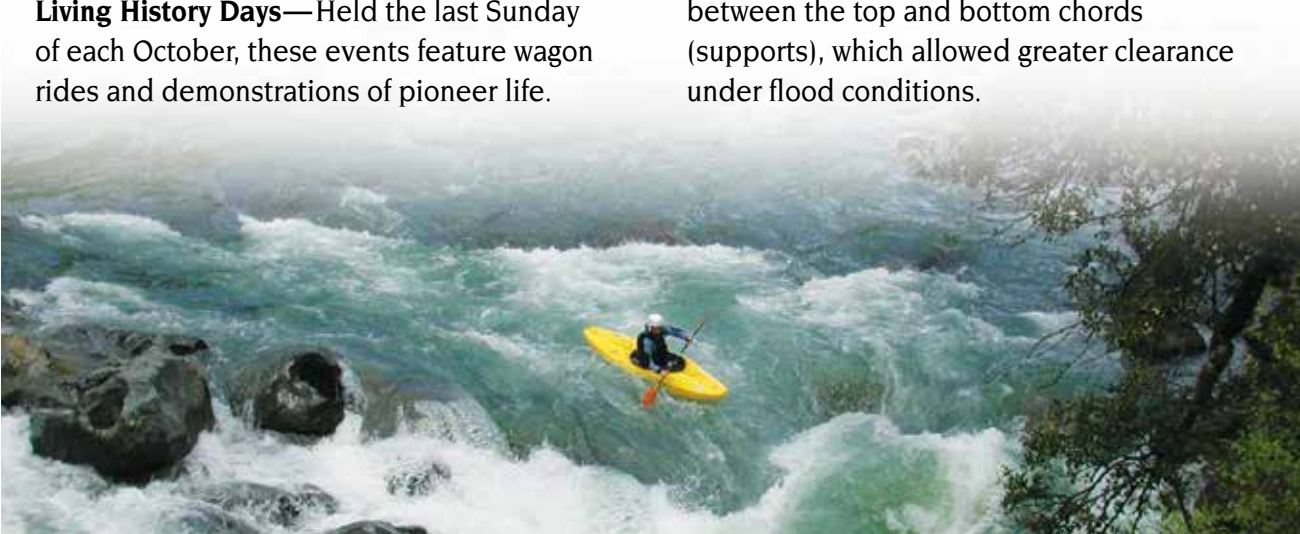
**Edwards Crossing Bridge (1904)**—This 114-foot span is considered a “sister” to the 1905 Gault Bridge in Nevada City.

**Old Highway 49 Bridge (1921)**—This “rainbow-arch” cement bridge offers a grand viewpoint and easy access to the water.

## DITCHES AND FLUMES

Water power was necessary to bring the gold to light, so the miners dug a series of ditches directing creek and river water. In order to power the nozzles of the monitors that washed away gravels and exposed the gold, miners used gravity to direct water from higher (or intake) to lower (or output) elevations. Wherever ditches could not be dug, they built wooden flumes—long box-like structures to direct water flow.

The Excelsior Ditch, completed in 1859, has seen years of multiple uses—first as a ditch, later carrying irrigation water. Today this





well-constructed flume, with ramps leading to Rush Creek, carries people of all abilities along the Independence Trail.

### INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Docents lead natural, cultural and historical activities at Bridgeport throughout the year. On spring weekends, guided wildflower walks take place. A history station and gold-panning demonstrations are offered during summer weekends. The Bridgeport Fall Festival is the last Sunday in October. Guided bird walks are offered in the spring and fall. Visitors can always tour the historic barn, which houses eleven Gold-Rush-era wagons and a hay press.

Call (530) 432-2546 for event schedule information, to make appointments for

group or school group tours, and to learn degrees of difficulty of various trails.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Access the park from Edward's Crossing, Purdon Crossing, Highway 49 and Bridgeport.

**Trails**—The 2.21-mile Independence Trail enables wheelchair users to experience the adventure of this special park. Trailhead (with parking and an accessible non-flush restroom) is located off Highway 49, one mile south of the first bridge north of Nevada City.

**Beach/Shore Access**—There is river access to Rush Creek, but there is no fishing here. Located on Pleasant Valley Road between Highway 20 and Highway 49, one parking space near the Bridgeport Covered Bridge is van-accessible.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Poison oak: avoid this native three-leaved plant that causes a serious rash.
- Hikers should be in good condition for the trails they plan to hike. Drinking water is available at the Bridgeport Ranger Station.
- Pay attention to the locations of restrooms.
- Gold-panning is allowed on South Yuba River public lands. Use your hands and gold pans only.
- No alcoholic beverages or glass containers.
- Dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet. Except for service animals, no dogs are allowed on Family Beach downstream from the covered bridge.
- There is no camping in the park.
- Natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be removed or altered.

- Fires are not permitted.
- Firearms are not permitted.
- Respect private property—stay on trails.
- No diving. No lifeguards are on duty.

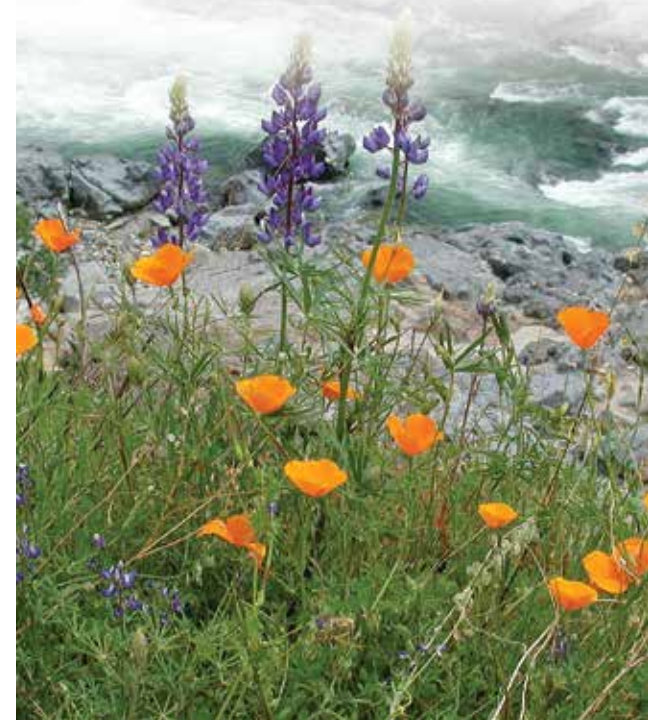
### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park, 16 miles NE of Nevada City on N. Bloomfield Rd., (530) 265-2740, 273-3884
- Empire Mine State Historic Park, 10791 E. Empire St., Grass Valley (530) 273-8522

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For information, contact South Yuba River Park Association, 17660 Pleasant Valley Road, Penn Valley, CA 95946 (530) 432-2546 [www.southyubariverstatepark.org](http://www.southyubariverstatepark.org)

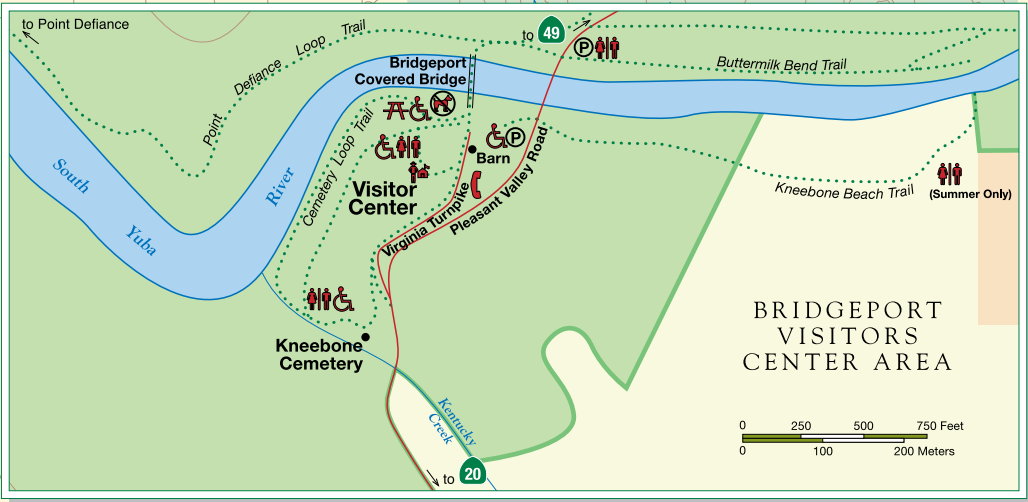


*Visitor on Independence Trail*





# South Yuba River State Park



## BRIDGEPORT VISITOR CENTER AREA

