



# California's Gold Country

You're going to take a trip back in time...to the mid-1800's, when this small slice of earth was the center of worldwide attention: The Gold Rush! The Mother Lode! California or Bust!

You'll see nearly a dozen historic towns, including the centerpiece of the area: Columbia, "The Gem of the Southern Mines."

Driving Highway 49 through lovely foothills, you'll learn about the Mother Lode and various mining techniques. You'll see Gold Rush architecture, mining equipment and artifacts. And you'll meet some very interesting historical characters.

Because of California's year-round pleasant weather, you can enjoy the Gold Country at any time of the year. The best times to visit are April-May and September-October when it's less crowded and the temperatures are superb.

Stay—and enjoy—as long as you can. In one day, you can catch the highlights. In two days, you'll begin to get the feel of what the Gold Rush must have been like. In three or more days, you'll smell the roses and appreciate the diversity that the area has to offer.

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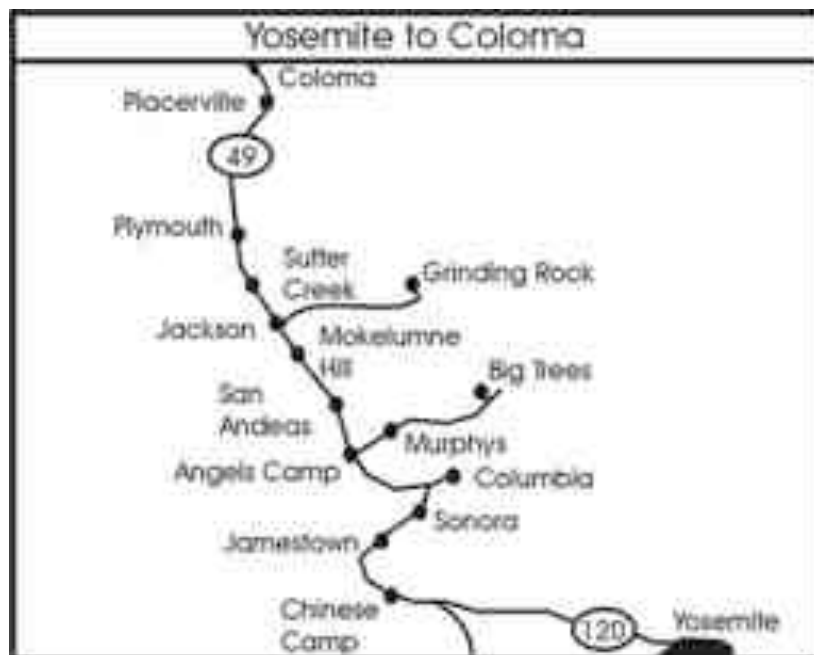
Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West

by the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California*,  
*Seven Perfect Days in Arizona* and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*

*We've chosen two days as the length of this tour. But we've also identified other things to do along the way, in case you choose to stay longer. They're labeled as "Additional Attractions." With careful management of your time, you may be able to fit some of them into your two-day tour.*

*You'll notice that this issue of Pathfinder Newsletter is longer than most. That's because the Gold Country is not just a series of attractions to see; it's primarily a geographic area that oozes with interesting history that begs to be told.*

We view this two-day tour of the Gold Country as the extension of a visit to Yosemite National Park. That's why the tour runs south to north. It could just as easily start where the Gold Rush began: in Coloma. If you choose to drive southward, we suggest you top off your vacation by exploring the splendors of Yosemite. (See the Summer 2011 *Pathfinder Newsletter*, "Yosemite: Everyone's Favorite," at [www.traveltheamericanwest.com](http://www.traveltheamericanwest.com).)



Here's a caution based upon our personal experience: In the Gold Country, we're like cats on a beach, wanting to stop and explore every road, every town, every structure, every thing. We've found that it takes a lot of discipline to pass by many things so appealing. Of course you may have interests that differ from ours and you should feel free to deviate from our suggestions. Exploring is great fun.

We've selected eight towns for out-of-the-car visits that should give you a well-rounded experience of the Gold Country. They are: Jamestown, Sonora, Columbia, Murphys, San Andreas, Sutter Creek, Placerville and Coloma. We'll tell you about others as you drive through or past them. If you have even a little interest in museums, we recommend //several along the way that will help make the past seem more real.

## **A Little Background About the Gold Country**

Historians tell us that there were once 536 mining towns in the Gold Country. They ranged in elevations from roughly 700 feet to 2,500 feet (213 to 762 meters). Remnants of more than 200 gold towns remain, and we'll see some of the prominent ones today.

The term "Mother Lode" refers to the series of gold-bearing "source veins" that were deposited along this stretch 65 million years ago when the Sierras were thrust upward and molten gold was forced through fissures to the surface of the earth. Technically, the Mother Lode, also known as the Southern Mines District, stretches 135 miles (217 km) south from Auburn to Coarsegold, while the area north of Auburn is known as the Northern Mines district.

Over time, erosion carried flecks of the surface gold from the "source veins" into the streams where it lay awaiting discovery in 1848 by James Marshall, and by thousands of prospectors who would descend upon the area soon after. Some of the flecks, usually called "gold dust," gathered at bends in the streams, and downstream from rapids, to form gold nuggets.

At first, gold was so plentiful that the miners merely "panned for gold" (they scooped gravel and sand from the streams into a tin pan and swirled-out everything until only the heavier gold flecks and nuggets remained). However, with more than 300,000 men working the goldfields, it didn't take long for the streams to be panned-out, and new methods were needed in order to get to the deeper gold.

Next came rockers, sluices and long toms, wooden contraptions into which the miners shoveled stream gravels. Essentially the same technique as panning but on a larger scale, water was forced through these devices to wash away the gravel and dirt, again leaving gold behind. On a still larger scale were the barge dredges that floated on dammed-up sections of stream and scooped up everything down to bedrock.

When the easily reached gold was gone, the miners went after it with a vengeance by channeling water from higher elevations through ditches and wooden flumes (troughs) to a hose and nozzle, called a "monitor." This way they could wash whole hillsides into sluices where the gold could be gathered.

After individuals and teams of miners had uncovered most of the surface gold, mining companies were formed to drill shafts deep underground to find and follow the veins. But the high cost of extraction from underground mines ended most gold mining in California by the early 1940's.

The last great hardrock mine to close in California, in the year 1956, was Grass Valley's Empire Mine. It reached a depth of 11,000 feet (over two miles deep) and had 360 miles of tunnels! In 107 years of operation, the Empire Mine produced \$70 million in gold.

Lumping it all together, at \$16 an ounce, the Gold Rush resulted in the extraction of approximately \$2 billion in gold from Coarsegold to Vinton. At today's valuation, that's more than \$50 billion!

By the way, we assume that you've made the connection by now: prospectors of the Gold Rush of 1849 were dubbed "49ers," and most of this tour we'll be driving on...Highway 49.

## Day One

Today, you'll visit the historic gold towns of Jamestown, Sonora, Columbia and Murphys. And you'll have the opportunity to also see two Additional Attractions.

### **Chinese Camp**

Just a few miles after leaving Highway 120 and entering Highway 49, the first gold town you'll come to is Chinese Camp. There's not much to see here, even though some 5,000 gold-seekers from China lived and worked in these diggings. So we suggest that you drive on by.

Founded in 1849, Chinese Camp became the largest Chinese settlement outside of Asia. Most Chinese gravitated here after being expelled from other diggings by Caucasians, but they worked hard and discovered several major veins in the area. In September 1856 a disagreement between two rival tongs resulted in a 2,100-person rumble; four deaths and a few dozen wounded resulted. The reason casualties were so low is that few guns were used and the law broke it up.

### **Jamestown**

Six miles (9.7 km) beyond Chinese Camp, you'll come to Jamestown. We suggest that you turn right onto Main Street, find a parking place, and take a walk up and down the short street. Feast your eyes on these wonderful false-front stores, overhanging balconies and boardwalks.

Referred to locally as "Jimtown," this is one of the first camps founded in the Gold Country and is best known for its Old West ambiance and the discovery of a 75-pound (34 kg) gold nugget in August of 1848. The Jamestown area really boomed with underground hardrock mining in the late 1890's. More recently, in 1984, after a construction crew repaired a damaged sewer pipe on Main Street and dug up several small nuggets, the town was inundated with gold seekers for several days.

### ***Additional Attraction: Railtown 1897 State Historic Park***

Here, you'll learn about the importance of railroading in the Gold Country, see authentic railroad equipment and facilities, and maybe even take a train ride. The Park is immediately to the right as you leave Jamestown's Main Street and head north on Highway 49.

Railtown features lots of steam engines and preserved railroad cars, and displays the original roundhouse and workshops of the Sierra Railway, which began shuttling supplies between the San Joaquin Valley and the foothills in 1897. It also offers a steam train ride through the foothills, which we found to be great fun. Railtown's locomotives and railcars were used in more than 200 films, TV shows and commercials between 1917 and 2003.

Open daily from 9:30am-4:30pm, April through October, and 10am-3pm, November through March; corner Fifth Ave. & Reservoir Road, PO Box 1250, Jamestown 95327; 209-984-3953; [www.csrnf.org/railtown](http://www.csrnf.org/railtown) .

### **Sonora**

Follow the Columbia State Park and Angels Camp signs to our second stop, Sonora, just three miles (4.8 km) north of Jamestown.

Sonora has a much different “feel” than Jamestown. This is a bustling place of 5,000 residents that offers a full range of facilities, including hospitals and shopping centers (in the newer, East Sonora). It was once an important provisioning center for the Gold Country and is today both a commercial center for the area and the seat of government for Tuolumne County. (Pronounced “twallo-mee.”)

After entering Old Sonora on Hwy 49/Stockton St., turn left onto Washington St. and find a place to park (on Washington or on one of the side streets). Similar to Jamestown, we suggest that you walk six blocks north on Washington from Stockton to Elkin St. Here, you’ll see a mix of old and newer architectural styles, but the general ambiance is decidedly Gold Country. You may even find a boutique, gallery or specialty shop that catches your eye. We particularly liked the volcanic stone planters in **Garden Fresh Flowers and Yard Art** at 27 S. Washington.

Along the way, you’ll notice that Old Sonora is positioned in a pretty, narrow valley, which has as its centerpiece the striking red **St. James Episcopal Church**, located at the “V” just beyond Elkin St. The church is a much-photographed beauty whose image is often seen in Gold Country publications. (See the photograph on page 1.) Built in 1860, it’s considered by many to be the most attractive frame structure in the Mother Lode, and it still serves an active congregation.

Directly across the street from the church is another red beauty, the **Street-Morgan Mansion**. It’s a Queen Anne style Victorian built in 1896, and today houses business offices.

Miners from Sonora, Mexico settled here in 1848 (hence the name). After the newly formed California Legislature levied a \$20 per month tax on “foreign” miners (about \$200 today), some bigoted and greedy “gringos” started stealing the Mexicans’ diggings. Although 2,000 Mexicans were forced to leave, some stayed in the area and became outlaws; many robberies, beatings and killings were attributed to them. We’ll tell you about one of those outlaws, Joaquin Murieta, as you drive through Mokelumne Hill.

### **Columbia State Historic Park**

Now for the centerpiece of our day. (See the photograph on page 1.)

From Sonora, continue north on Highway 49 about two miles (3 km) to Parrot’s Ferry Road and follow the brown Columbia State Park signs another two miles to the parking lot. From there, you’ll walk into vehicle-free Columbia.

The park never closes; most businesses are open daily 10am to 5pm; 11255 Jackson St., Columbia 95310; 209-588-9128; [www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=552](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=552).

The 273-acre (110 h) Columbia State Historic Park, at 2,143 feet (653 m) above sea level, is the top attraction in the Mother Lode, drawing more than a half million visitors each year. It’s devoted to showing what a real Gold Country town of the 1850’s looked and felt like. With mostly original buildings, it’s the best-preserved town in the Mother Lode. Here, more than anywhere else, you’ll experience the authentic atmosphere of California’s Gold Rush days.

Assuming you’d like to have lunch before or after our walking tour, we thought it would be good to point out your restaurant choices now; all are within two blocks of each other. **Columbia Kate’s Teahouse**, at Columbia and State, serves scones, salads and sandwiches. **Bart’s Black Skillet**, at the corner of Main and State Streets, serves American fare. It was formerly a saloon established in 1850. The **Jack Douglass Saloon**, at the corner of Main and Fulton Streets, and

**Brown's Coffee Shop**, next to Towle & Leavitt at the corner of Main and State Streets, both serve sandwiches. The **City Hotel Restaurant**, on Main Street between State and Jackson, is a bit fancier and serves American and French cuisine. **El Jardin** (Mexican) and **Billy Whiskers** (Italian) sit side-by-side on Parrot's Ferry/Broadway at State Street. **Devon's Delectables**, just East of Main on State Street, is a bakery and café that serves sandwiches, salads and quiche. (See the next map for street locations.)

Following is a brief history of Columbia. It will help prepare you for what you're going to see during the walking tour. We give you a fair amount of detail here, because Columbia provides an outstanding example of what happened throughout the Gold Country.

### **"Gem of the Southern Mines"**

It all started in March 1850 when a five-person prospecting party led by a physician from Maine, Thaddeus Hildreth, spent a rainy night here on the way to known gold diggings. The following morning, after learning from Mexicans that there was gold in the area, John Walker, one of the five, decided to give panning a try while the party's clothes and blankets were drying out. He found "color" in his first pan and each person in the party was soon earning more than \$100 per day (as compared with an average wage of \$2 per day in the Eastern States).

The word spread rapidly, of course, and within three weeks 6,000 miners had moved into "Hildreth's Diggings" to share the wealth. One of them, a Francis Avent, found \$640 in gold his first day, \$380 his second day and about \$200 per day until the streams dried up in June.

Like Thaddeus Hildreth, most people heading to the gold fields arrived in California by sea. There were two ocean routes: one, 18,000 miles (29,000 km) by sea around the tip of South America into San Francisco; the other was much shorter but required crossing Panama or Nicaragua by boat and mule (this was more than 60 years before the Panama Canal). Some Americans traveled to California in wagons via one of two overland routes. Whether by sea or land, the voyage took between four and eight months and was fraught with hazards. Owing to the great number of miners and the fact that the surface gold was quickly mined out, relatively few who made such arduous journeys struck it rich.

And it wasn't only Americans who flocked to the gold fields in California. There were, of course, the Chinese and Mexicans whom we mentioned earlier. Large numbers of people followed them from England, Ireland, Germany, France, Italy, Chile, the Hawaiian Islands, and Australia. This was, indeed, a worldwide gold rush.

After the streams dried up in June 1850, they stayed that way for six months, until the Sierra snows began melting and the water runoff again filled the stream beds. That long dry period was a problem, of course, because placer mining requires water to wash the dirt from gold.

Since the Columbia Basin had no natural, continually running streams, the miners had to create them. So when the water dried up again in June of 1851, 160 shareholder-miners banded together to form the Toulumne County Water Company. During the following six months, they created 20 miles (32 km) of ditches and flumes that would carry water from the South Fork of the Stanislaus River to Columbia.

With a steady supply of water, Columbia became a year-round gold camp of bonanza proportions, until the easy gold ran out in about 1861.

Then, pocket mining and hydraulic mining became important means of gold extraction. Gold had accumulated in numerous depressions of the underlying limestone rock, and miners who located those pockets got very rich. Next came a very destructive method called hydraulic mining in which water was forced through hoses under high pressure and used to loosen the soil down to bedrock.

After that, underground hard-rock quartz mining continued but was not very successful, so most of the town's inhabitants drifted away to other diggings.

It's hard to imagine now, but by 1852 Columbia had more than 150 businesses serving its 4,000 to 5,000 residents. Included were 30 saloons and restaurants, four hotels, four banks, seven boarding houses, 21 grocery stores, eight carpenter shops, three drug stores, numerous doctor, dentist and legal offices, and many other establishments of all kinds. When families arrived, the town added churches, schools, libraries and theaters.

By 1854, Columbia had grown to be the fifth largest city in California, with between 15,000 and 20,000 inhabitants. That was the year of the first major fire; it was so all-consuming that not one building from that year remains today. Rebuilding began immediately and was finished quickly. A few structures were made of brick.

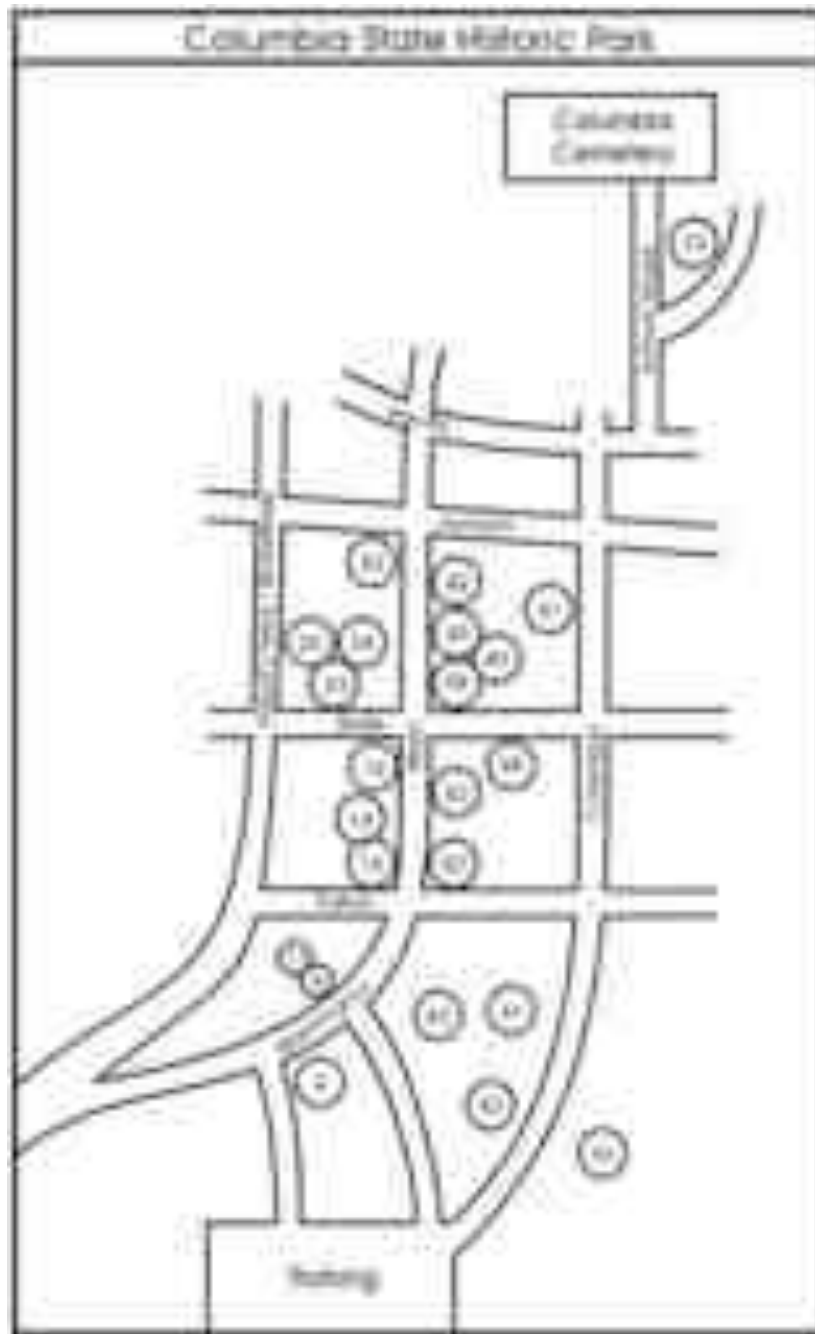
When a second major fire destroyed 13 city blocks in 1857, only the brick buildings survived. Among them were: Knapp's General Store (the current Information Center/Museum), the Odd Fellows Building, and the D.O. Mills Bank Building. That fire was all the inhabitants needed to convince them that the second rebuilding should be of brick structures with iron doors and shutters. Half of the buildings you see today date from the late 1850s, the most prominent ones being the Wells Fargo building and the Fallon and City Hotels. The town also purchased pumpers for the two firehouses, and dug cisterns underground to provide a ready source of water to fight future fires.

As for the buildings you'll see shortly, there are four reasons why, today, we're able to enjoy and be educated by this wonderful memorial to the California Gold Rush: First, most of Main Street was rebuilt in 1857 of sturdy, fireproof brick. Second, a small group of original citizens decided to make Columbia their permanent home, thereby preventing significant damage by vandals. Third, movie companies and tourists found Columbia attractive beginning in the 1920's and 1930's, helping to spur a preservation movement. And fourth, the long-term preservation of Columbia was assured when the town became a State Historic Park on July 15, 1945 and the State began to acquire and renovate the buildings.

So what was the "bottom line" of all this gold mining activity? Columbia's miners sifted through every inch of soil at least twice and produced \$87 million in gold from two square-miles (5 sk) of earth, equivalent to \$2 billion in today's dollars!

Now, let's tour the town.

We suggest that you head first to the Information Center-Columbia Museum at the corner of Main and State Streets. Here, you can look over the interesting photos and artifacts, and ask for a copy of the walking tour brochure titled, "Columbia State Historic Park." It has been out of print for at least three years, so we developed and offer the following walking tour in case the brochure is not available when you visit.



In about two hours, Columbia can be enjoyed on either of two levels. You can stroll around town, casually enjoy its ambiance, and explore its 22 shops—as we did during our first visit. Or you can use the town’s walking tour, or ours, and look more closely at some of the exhibits that have been set up by the State Park for your edification. The locations of the exhibits that we recommend are shown in detail on the walking tour brochure and are approximated on the following map.

A few exhibits have docents. At other exhibits, you’ll look through windows and have the opportunity to push speaker buttons to learn more about what you see. At still others, you’ll walk



right in and see things up close. Always, the idea is to give you a feel for what life was like at the height of California's gold mining period. A few sites are not exhibits, per se, but are well worth a look.

Of the 63 sites, we particularly recommend the following:

- # 4 - Columbia Gazette
- # 9 - Wells Fargo Exhibit
- # 11 - Assay Office Exhibit
- # 14 - Jack Douglass Saloon
- # 15 - J.C. Miller Carpenter and Joiner
- # 18 - Justice Court Exhibit
- # 22 - Firehouse Toulumne Engine Company (look for Papeete)
- # 23 - Drug Store Exhibit
- # 24 - Dentist's Office Exhibit
- # 30 - California Store Exhibit
- # 33 - Old Columbia Schoolhouse and Exhibit (and the Columbia Cemetery)
- # 41 - Jail
- # 42 - Firehouse Columbia Engine Company (look for Monumental & Citizen #1)
- # 45 - Butcher Shop Exhibit
- # 46 - Chinese Store Exhibit
- # 48 - Information Center and Museum
- # 49 - Livery Stable Exhibit
- # 50 - Parrott's Blacksmith Shop
- # 55 - Tibbit's House Exhibit
- # 60 - Hidden Treasure Gold Mine Panning (during summer)
- # 61 - Miners Cabin in the Rocks Exhibit
- # 62 - Mining Equipment Exhibit
- # 63 - Columbia Diggin's Tent Town Site

### **Mark Twain and the Birth of His Famous Frog Story**

After you're done enjoying Columbia, return to Highway 49 and head north again.

Four and a half miles (7.2 km) from where you'll reenter Highway 49, you'll come to Jackass Hill. Look for the "Mark Twain Cabin" sign, and turn into the driveway on your right. The cabin is a replica, but you may find it of interest.

Mark Twain, wrote his first short story, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* in a cabin on Jackass hill. The story was published in the *New York Saturday Press* on November 18, 1865. It made Twain instantly famous and he went on to write 28 books, becoming the greatest humorist of 19th Century American literature.

The story is about Angels Camp resident Jim Smiley, who trained a frog to jump so he could win bets; but he was one-upped by a stranger who loaded the frog with buckshot when Smiley wasn't looking. No nudge would budge the frog, named Daniel Webster. Smiley discovered the

treachery after he'd paid his \$40 loss, the stranger had departed, and the buckshot came pouring out when he turned the frog upside down.

Why Mark Twain wrote *Jumping Frog* on Jackass Hill is also an interesting story...he was hiding from the law!

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Twain grew up in Hannibal, Missouri, became a licensed riverboat pilot on the Mississippi, and moved to the Nevada goldfields at the beginning of the Civil War at age 26. By the way, his pen name is the riverboat pilot's term for water that's two fathoms (12 feet/3.6 m) deep.

Twain worked as a reporter on the *Territorial Enterprise* newspaper in Virginia City, Nevada where he became fast friends with Steve Gillis. While they were together in San Francisco, Gillis conked a bartender on the head during a brawl and was jailed. Twain signed a \$500 personal bond and Gillis was released.

Upon learning that the bartender was close to death, Gillis skipped town and returned to Virginia City. Without the funds to pay the \$500 bond, Twain also went on the lam, heading to Jackass Hill where Gillis' two brothers were locating and digging pocket mines (rich deposits of gold in gravels or a vein).

During the three months he spent at the Gilles' cabin on Jackass Hill, from late 1864 to early 1865, Twain did no mining, but instead smoked his corn cob pipe and made notes about the people, places and events that he encountered. It was during a visit to Angels Camp, eight miles north (12.8 km), that he heard a story about a frog...and the rest is history.

Twain went on to write such famous works as *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *Prince and the Pauper* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Another writer active in the area was Bret Harte, who wrote *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. Harte's setting, Poker Flat, existed only in his imagination but it was "located" in the general vicinity of O'Byrnes Ferry, about nine miles due southwest of Jackass Hill. Harte worked for a while as a clerk in a Tuttletown store, where Mark Twain was a customer.

About four miles (6 km) beyond Tuttletown, you'll come to Carson Hill. The historical marker here reports that in 1848 the nearby Morgan Mine produced the largest gold nugget found in the Gold Country. At 195 pounds, it was valued then at \$43,000; today it would be worth about \$1 million!

### **Angels Camp**

Four miles past Carson Hill, you'll come to **Angels Camp**. At the corner of Main St. and Bird's Way, just beyond where Highway 4 meets Highway 49, you'll see the Angels Hotel on the right, with its green overhanging porch. It was the hotel's proprietor who told Mark Twain the original story that Twain made famous in *Jumping Frog*. Across the street, on your left, is a Jumping Frog monument and an historical marker.

To commemorate Twain's story and his connection to the area, a jumping frog contest is held annually at the Calaveras County Fair Grounds the third week in May. The first contest, in 1928, drew twenty-five frogs and 15,000 spectators!

Turn right/northeast on Highway 4 and drive eight miles (13 km) to Murphys.

Time permitting—it closes at 5:00pm—you may want to fit in a visit to Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys.

### ***Additional Attraction: Ironstone Vineyards***

In our opinion, a visit to Ironstone Vineyards is as good as visiting all but a few wineries in the Napa/Sonoma/Alexander/Dry Creek/Russian River Valleys. (See the *Pathfinder Newsletter* issue, “Northern California Wine Country” at [www.traveltheamericanwest.com](http://www.traveltheamericanwest.com).) The gardens are beautiful, featuring daffodils, tulips, azaleas, and marigolds. Free winery tours are available at 1:30pm Monday through Friday, and at 11:30am and 1:30pm Saturday and Sunday, starting in the tasting room. There’s an amphitheater that seats 4,000 for outdoor concerts, and an indoor music room for silent movies, weddings and dances. The winery hosts a classic automobile show in the fall; and its tasting room has a gourmet delicatessen. Ironstone also owns and displays in its vault, a 44-pound gold crystal, the largest in the world. To get there, turn left at the Murphys Hotel, right at the stop sign, and drive one mile. There is a small tasting fee.

Open daily 10am-5pm (closed Monday and Tuesday during the winter); 1894 Six Mile Road, 209-728-1251, [www.ironstonevineyards.com](http://www.ironstonevineyards.com).

### **Murphys, “Queen of the Sierra”**

One of the town’s two founding brothers, John Murphy, at 23 years of age became a millionaire in one year...without mining any gold! He did it by trading with the Miwok Indians, who brought him gold in exchange for blankets and meat. He was just one of many who came to the Gold Country and made their fortunes by supplying the miners.

Many Gold Rush-era buildings are still in use here, housing current-day shops, restaurants and wine tasting rooms. Stately elm trees arch over them and Main Street, making this an especially quaint and charming town. You might enjoy a visit to the Sierra Nevada General Store at 448 Main St.

The Murphys area is home to 3,000 people and a dozen small, mostly family-owned, wineries (plus Ironstone, of course).

*Please note that the accommodation and restaurant recommendations in this issue are based on our experiences, recommendations by locals, and/or ratings by contributors to TripAdvisor.com.*

### **Recommended Accommodations in Murphys (zip code 95247)**

- **Querencia** (B&B), P.O. Box 945, 209-728-9520, [www.querencia.ws](http://www.querencia.ws).
- **Dunbar House** (B&B), 271 Jones St., 209-758-2897; [www.dunbarhouse.com](http://www.dunbarhouse.com).
- **Murphys Inn Motel**, 76 Main St., 888-796-1800 or 209-728-1818, [www.murphysinnmotel.com](http://www.murphysinnmotel.com).
- **Murphys Suites**, 134 Main St., 877-728-2121 or 209-728-2121, [www.murphyssuites.com](http://www.murphyssuites.com).
- **The Victoria Inn** (B&B), 402 Main Street, 209-728-8933, [www.victoriainn-murphys.com](http://www.victoriainn-murphys.com).

For additional accommodations in Murphys, visit [www.visitmurphys.com](http://www.visitmurphys.com).

## Recommended Restaurants in Murphys

- **Alchemy Market**, eclectic menu, 191 Main St., 209-728-0700  
[www.alchemymarket.com](http://www.alchemymarket.com).
- **Grounds**, American, 402 Main St., 209-728-8663, [www.groundsrestaurant.com](http://www.groundsrestaurant.com).
- **Firewood**, pizza, subs, tacos, burgers, 420 Main St., 209-728-3248,  
[www.firewoodeats.com](http://www.firewoodeats.com).
- **Mineral Restaurant**, vegetarian menu, 419 Main St., 209-728-9743,  
[www.mineralrestaurant.com](http://www.mineralrestaurant.com).
- **Murphys Hotel Restaurant**, American cuisine, 457 Main Street, 262-728-3444,  
[www.murphyshotel.com](http://www.murphyshotel.com).
- **V Restaurant**, in Victoria Inn, American, 402 Main St., 262-728-8933,  
[www.victoriainn-murphys.com](http://www.victoriainn-murphys.com).

For additional restaurants in Murphys, visit [www.visitmurphys.com](http://www.visitmurphys.com).

## Day Two

Today, you'll learn about two famous California outlaws, visit a couple of outstanding museums, visit or drive through more historic Gold Country towns, and explore the site where it all began.

*We strongly suggest that you read ahead and plan, if possible, to be at the Marshall Gold Discovery Site in Coloma by at least 3:45pm. The full historic site can be viewed until sunset, but its very-worthwhile museum closes at 4:30.*

### **Additional Attraction: Calaveras Big Trees State Park**

If you've never seen California's amazing big trees—redwoods or sequoias—in Muir Woods, Yosemite National Park or elsewhere, here's your opportunity to do so. Drive 16 miles (26 km) beyond Murphys on Highway 4 and you'll come to the town of Arnold and **Calaveras Big Trees State Park**. The park has two groves of giant Sequoia trees, a visitor/interpretive center, and seven hiking trails from one-half mile to eight miles (.8-13 km) in length.

The park is open daily from sunrise to sunset, but the visitor center is open only from 9am-5pm daily in the summer and only on weekends during the winter; PO Box 120, Arnold 95223; 209-795-3840; [www.bigtrees.org](http://www.bigtrees.org).

### **On to San Andreas**

To be on your way, we suggest that you drive back to Angel's Camp via Highway 4, turn right, and continue north on Highway 49 for 11 miles (18 km). That will bring you to the town of San Andreas.

### **Black Bart: The Gentleman Bandit**

**San Andreas** was the gold camp where the career of Black Bart, California's most famous outlaw, came to an end. He robbed 28 stagecoaches between 1875 and 1883. Wells Fargo had

been after him for the full eight years, but he was too clever for them—until he left a clue behind as he hurriedly left his last holdup.

Black Bart had a very interesting *modus operandi*, or “M.O.” (in law enforcement jargon):

He always worked alone and on foot—never on a horse—and often on moonlit nights.

He always accosted stages where the horses were slowed on steep hills.

He always wore workman’s clothes, a soiled tan duster and a flour sack mask with eyeholes.

Known for his polite manner, Bart wanted only the strongbox and mail sacks.

He never robbed passengers or drivers, and except for one robbery, he stopped only coaches that had no armed guards. His take was smaller—guarded stages carried large gold shipments—but there was less danger of his being shot or captured.

His shotgun was always unloaded and he never injured anyone.

He sometimes left a bit of poetry, signed “Black Bart, the Po8.”

The last time was his undoing, because he left behind a handkerchief with a laundry mark that a Wells Fargo detective traced to a laundry in San Francisco. That led to the arrest of one Charles E. Bolton, born as Charles Boles 54 years earlier in rural New York. A Civil War veteran, he had come west to pan for gold, but decided that robbing stagecoaches and enjoying the gentleman’s life, the theater, and the best restaurants in San Francisco suited him more.

He pleaded guilty to his last holdup, seven miles (11 km) southeast of Angels Camp, and was sentenced to six years in San Quentin Penitentiary. He was released after four years and two months for good behavior, and apparently continued that good behavior, because he was never heard from again.

One intriguing rumor persists: because Wells Fargo no longer wanted to chase Black Bart, the company paid him \$125 a month to *not* rob its stagecoaches!

### **Calaveras County Historical Museum**

We love this museum!

It’s here that you can see the jail and jailyard where Black Bart was held, and the courtroom where he was sentenced. (The courtroom has been updated; the photograph on the wall shows what it looked like in the latter 1800’s.) The museum also has an excellent interpretive display on the Miwok Indians, an extensive collection of gold rush artifacts and memorabilia, and a sheriff’s office that looks so authentic that you expect the lawman himself to walk in at any moment.

Open daily 10am-4pm; 30 N. Main St., San Andreas 95249; 209-754-1058;

[www.calaverascohistorical.com/museum.html](http://www.calaverascohistorical.com/museum.html).

### **Joaquin Murieta: Robin Hood or Badman?**

**Mokelumne Hill**, or “Moke Hill” as the locals call it (fully pronounced moke-lum-nee), is eight miles (13 km) north of San Andreas. Founded in 1848, it grew to 15,000 miners during its Gold Rush heyday. Its most noteworthy building is the restored two-story, circa-1851 Hotel Le-ger.

We encourage you to drive in and out of this hideaway-looking town—which is apparently what it was. It’s reputed to have been the headquarters of Joaquin Murieta, whom we mentioned when we were in Sonora. Thanks to a novel written in 1854 by John Rollin Ridge, *The Life and*

*Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, he developed a larger-than-life reputation as a handsome, dashing ladies man who had Robin Hood characteristics.

Here's where fact and fiction become considerably blurred. One story has Murieta being driven out of San Andreas by greedy gringo miners. Another is that he was tied to a tree in Murphys where he was beaten, his brother killed, and his wife abused. He apparently got his revenge on the American miners, living a life of crime for the next few years—until he was captured, and his head put in a jar, pickled, and put on display.

We're certainly not intending to glorify lives of crime—their crimes did *not* pay—but California Gold Country history would be less exciting without Joaquin Murieta and Black Bart, wouldn't it?

### ***Additional Attractions: Jackson Area***

Six miles (9.6 km) farther north on Highway 49, you'll come to several attractions northeast of town that may deserve a look during a longer visit to the area. In **Kennedy Wheels City Park**, are two giant wooden wheels used after 1912 as part of a system that transported mine tailings to a reservoir. **Volcano** is a picturesque and particularly well-preserved Gold Rush town that's fun to explore. And, just north of Volcano is **Daffodil Hill**, not a town, but a four-acre (1.6 h) hillside that's crammed with thousands of planted daffodils—spectacular to see in late March. Nearby is Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park.

### **...It's Time for a Time Check and a Lunch Recommendation**

Are you going to be able to make it to the museum at the Marshall Gold Discovery Site by 3:45pm? We think you may have time to visit one of the next two Additional Attractions.

If you're in Jackson about lunchtime, we recommend **Mel and Faye's Drive In**, located on Highway 49 just north of Highway 88, 209-223-0858. If, instead, you're in Sutter Creek, we recommend **Susan's Place Wine Bar** at 15 Eureka St., one block east of Highway 49, 209-267-0945.

### ***Additional Attraction: Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park***

To get there, take Highway 88 10 miles northeast of Jackson to Pine Grove, turn left on Pine Grove-Volcano Road and drive 1-1/2 miles (2.4 km) to the second (main) entrance to the park.

This very interesting 135-acre (55 h) park is dedicated to portraying the Miwok Indian way of life. It features a reconstructed Miwok Indian village, bark houses, a large ceremonial/community roundhouse, acorn granaries, and the Chaw'se Regional Indian Museum which contains displays of baskets, jewelry, tools and other artifacts. There are also 23 campsites, and two trails, one of which is a half-mile self-guided nature trail. The park's centerpiece is a 60-foot diameter rock that spreads 7,700 square feet and contains 1,185 mortar holes and 350 two-thousand-year-old petroglyphs. The Miwok used the holes for grinding acorns and seeds into meal to make edible food. It's the largest such rock in North America. This is a beautiful and calming place to visit.

The park is open sunrise to sunset. The museum is open daily 11am-3pm weekdays and 10am-4pm weekends (it was closed for budgetary reasons the day we were there); 14881 Pine Grove-Volcano Rd., Pine Grove 95665; 209-296-7488; [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=553](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=553).

## **Sutter Creek to Placerville**

Next, head north to **Sutter Creek**, one of the more comely and best-preserved towns in these foothills. It's a little over four miles (6 km) north of Jackson. Like Jamestown and Sonora, it has a street full of 1890's brick and stone buildings with overhanging balconies, and is a nice place to take a stroll and browse the antique shops. We'll have more to say on John Sutter, the person for whom the town is named, when we get to Coloma. Leland Stanford—railroad magnate, California state senator, governor and founder of Stanford University in Palo Alto—got his start here when a customer in his store settled a debt with a share of the Lincoln Mine. It paid off handsomely months later when a rich vein was discovered in the mine.

Driving on, we'll pass through: quaint **Amador City** with its antique shops and standout Imperial Hotel; **Drytown**, which got its name because of its dry diggings (Columbia was also called "Drytown" for a short while); and **Plymouth**, which is known for its "gold in a bottle."

Europeans who flocked to the gold diggings first planted grapes in this area in 1850. A number of miners turned to commercial wine production in the 1890's after the "easy" gold ran out. Today, there are 50-some wineries in the Sierra foothills, 25 of which are in Amador County where Plymouth is located. Most are small and family-owned. The area is especially well known for its robust Zinfandel wines. Our favorite is produced by Montevina Winery, located just northeast of Plymouth. Montevina is owned by Sutter Home Winery in Napa Valley.

Placerville is 20 miles (32 km) to the north of Plymouth. That is where we suggest you have dinner and spend the night.

## **Placerville**

### ***Additional Attraction: El Dorado County Historical Museum***

*You may not have time for this great little museum if you intend to visit the Marshall Gold Discovery site in Coloma. You can get to it from Highway 49 by entering Highway 50 and driving south to Placerville Drive and then another two miles to the museum.*

"Snowshoe" Thompson's nine-foot-long skis are on display here, as are several John Studebaker vehicles, a Thomas Edison gramophone, equipment and artifacts from the mining, logging and agricultural industries, and historical photographs. Jim Gilbert gave us a wonderful tour of the museum. Open Wednesday to Saturday, 10am-4pm, and Sunday, 12-4; 104 Placerville Dr., Placerville 95667; 530-621-5865; [www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/Government/Museum/Exhibits.aspx](http://www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/Government/Museum/Exhibits.aspx).

### **Coloma and the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park**

Cross Highway 50 and continue north on Highway 49 for eight winding miles (13 km) to Coloma.

This is where the Gold Rush started on January 24, 1848, when James W. Marshall discovered the precious metal at Sutter's Mill.

The museum and historic buildings are open daily 10-4:30; PO Box 265, Coloma, 95613; 530-622-3470, [www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=484](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=484). The museum tells the history of the Gold Rush and of the gold discovery in Coloma. It contains interesting exhibits about Marshall and Sutter, as well as mining equipment, horse-drawn vehicles, and household articles and tools.

Then take the half-mile Gold Discovery Loop Trail to see the sawmill replica, the original mill site, the gold discovery site and the Bedrock Mortar, where the local Nisenan Indians ground acorns for their food. Also interesting are the original blacksmith shop, Mormon cabin, Wah Hop store and the Price-Thomas and Papini homes. The Monument Trail will take you past Marshall's cabin to the gold-discoverer's grave and the hilltop monument that's dedicated to him.

### **A Brief Recounting of the Gold Discovery**

Coloma was the birthplace of the Gold Rush in January 1848, and became the first successful gold camp in the foothills, booming to 4,000 residents by July of that year. Today, the town's population is less than 200, with its historic center now largely encompassed by the 280-acre (113 hectares) Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park.

The Park carries the name of the man who first discovered gold here, James W. Marshall. But the story of that significant event in history really began when John Sutter partnered with Marshall, a carpenter, to build a water-powered sawmill on the South Fork of the American River. Sutter had obtained approval from the Mexican authorities to establish an agricultural colony in Sacramento, which was then called "New Helvetia." So Marshall had traveled about 40 miles (64 km) from Sacramento to this spot, where he put his Mormon and Indian crew to work. The plan was to saw trees into boards and float them downriver to Sacramento.

Marshall made his gold discovery here in the tailrace, which is a long channel of water that paralleled the American River and brought waterpower to the sawmill. Four days later, he rode to Sacramento to share the information with Sutter. They agreed to keep it secret until the mill was finished, but Sutter bragged about it to Mexican Comandante Vallejo and to the fort's Mormon store manager, Sam Brannan. It was Brannan who spread the word in San Francisco and the Gold Rush was on. Brannan became its first millionaire (without mining any gold!)—after buying up all the picks, shovels, metal pans and boots he could find before spreading the word.

As fate would have it, neither Sutter nor Marshall benefited from the discovery. Sutter's dream colony collapsed with the Gold Rush, and neither he nor Marshall was successful at prospecting for gold. Ironically, Marshall died broke and Sutter nearly so.

### **Crime and Justice in Coloma**

Here is an anecdote about the downside of crime in Coloma:

Mickey Free was among the dishonest opportunists—including cutthroats, gamblers and pimps—who descended on the gold diggings to take advantage of the hard-working miners. But Free was more than a cut below most of them.

He and his two partners murdered some 30 miners for their stashes of gold. They chose mainly Chinese miners who worked isolated claims, viciously killed them and buried their bodies. Sheriff David Buel tracked down the murderers and Mickey Free was the first of the trio to be tried and sentenced to hang for his crimes.

Enter Jerry Craine, who was not involved in Free's crime spree. He was hanged because he loved too much, not because he killed too much. The former schoolteacher, married with children "back East," was infatuated with Susan Newman who was being pressured to marry someone else against her will. Unable to be together, they concocted their double suicide, which went awry when Craine successfully killed his lover but not himself.



Free and Craine were simultaneously executed on October 26, 1855 in front of a crowd of 5,000 to 10,000 people—after Craine gave a 45-minute speech on the wages of sin, and the two men sang a 10-minute duet that Craine had written the night before. Not your typical vigilante hanging depicted in the movies, is it?

### **Back to Placerville**

Next, we suggest that you return to Placerville the way you came, check into your accommodations, and have dinner. There should be time before or after dinner to look at Placerville's historic center.

#### **Accommodations** (zip code 95667)

- **Albert Shafsky House** (B&B) - 2942 Coloma St., 530-642-2776, [www.shafsky.com](http://www.shafsky.com).
- **Eden Vale Inn** (B&B), 1780 Springvale Rd., 530-621-0901, [www.edenvaleinn.com](http://www.edenvaleinn.com).
- **GlenMorey Country House** (B&B), 801 Morey Dr., 530-306-3481, [www.placervillebedandbreakfast.com](http://www.placervillebedandbreakfast.com).
- **Historic Cary House Hotel** - 300 Main St., Placerville 95667, 530-622-4271, [www.caryhouse.com](http://www.caryhouse.com).
- **National 9 Inn** - 1500 Broadway, Placerville 95667, 530-622-3884, no website-check Google.
- **The Seasons Bed & Breakfast Hotel** - 2934 Bedford Ave., 530-626-4420, [www.theseasons.net](http://www.theseasons.net).

#### **Restaurants**

- **Cafe Luna** (a favorite of ours), California cuisine, 451 Main St., Suite 8, 530-642-8669; no website-check Google.
- **Cascada**, upscale Mexican and California cuisines, 384 Main St., 530-344-7757, [www.cascadaonmainstreet.com](http://www.cascadaonmainstreet.com).
- **Heyday Café**, American, 325 Main St., 530-626-9700, [www.heydaycafe.com](http://www.heydaycafe.com)
- **Oldtown Grill**, American, best known for hamburgers, 444 Main St., 530-622-2631, no website-check Google
- **Sequoia Restaurant**, American, 643 Bee St., 530-622-5222, [www.sequoiaplacerville.com](http://www.sequoiaplacerville.com).
- **Zachery Jacques Restaurant**, French, 1821 Pleasant Valley Rd., 530-626-8045, [www.zacharyjaques.com](http://www.zacharyjaques.com).

#### **Seeing Placerville**

After dinner, take a stroll on Main Street where you'll find a 50-foot (15 m) replica bell tower that has served as the town's fire alarm since 1856, and a pleasant assortment of galleries, boutiques, and architecturally charming buildings.

Placerville's claims to fame are its earlier name, its omelet, its role in the Gold Rush and its famous mercantilists.

Its original name, "Dry Diggins," was quickly replaced by "Hang-town" after it became the first mining town in the gold country to mete out justice by lynching. And it remained Hangtown

until 1954 when it was renamed Placerville. But there is still a vestige of the old reputation hanging around—an effigy strung by a noose above the entrance to the Hangman’s Tree Tavern (305 Main St.), the site of the infamous, long-gone Hangtree.

What’s that about an omelet? The story is that a miner, who had just struck it rich, burst into a restaurant and asked what the most expensive foods were. When he was told, eggs, oysters and bacon, he exuberantly said, “Fry ‘em up.” It’s known as Hangtown Fry and it’s available in Placerville today at Chuck’s Restaurant and the Hangtown Grill.

As for Placerville’s role in the Gold Rush, some \$25 million in placer gold was discovered in the area, but its location is what determined the town’s longevity. Hangtown was a convenient entryway for prospectors traveling into the gold country from San Francisco, via Sacramento. Even more important to its economic growth and stability was that the town became the major staging point for supplies shipped over the Sierras after the Comstock Lode was discovered in Nevada in 1859. The Pony Express also passed through here from 1860 to 1861, on the way from Sacramento to Carson City, Nevada and points east.

And then there were the mercantilists. Butcher Philip Armour and wheelwright John Studebaker returned east with savings that allowed them to start a meatpacking empire and an automobile company, respectively. Collis Huntington and Mark Hopkins were able to become railroad magnates after selling vegetables and other supplies to miners. Others who made their early fortunes elsewhere in the Gold Country include Levi Strauss, George Hearst and Domingo Ghirardelli. And, of course, there’s Leland Stanford, whom we mentioned earlier.

It’s been said that although few miners got rich, most who supplied them did. With shovels, pickaxes, other basic tools and shirts priced between \$20 and \$50, a pound of butter, cheese and pork at about \$6, a bottle of ale about \$8 and a blanket at \$100, you can see why the mercantilists chose their profession: it was a lot more of a sure thing, and a lot less back-breaking. The prices were exorbitant for those days, but multiply them by ten or more for some idea of what the miners spent in today’s dollars!

One other notable person operated out of Hangtown, but his motive was not profit. “Snowshoe” Thompson was his name and he became famous in the 1850’s for carrying 80-pound (36 kg) bags of mail across the Sierra Nevada mountains in the dead of winter, to and from Genoa, Nevada—while wearing nine-foot long (2.7 m) skis that weighed 25 pounds (11 kg)! You can see those skis at the El Dorado County Historical Museum (see page 15, above).

### ***Additional Attraction: Apple Hill***

If you’re on a three-day visit to the Gold Country during the fall, you might enjoy this attraction.

This is a cluster of 40 orchards (and six wineries) that can be accessed along eight miles (13 km) of Carson Road between Placerville and Cedar Grove. The fall Harvest Festival and spring Apple and Pear Blossom Festival are fun but crowded (one-half million people in the fall!). People come for fresh apples, pears, peaches, cherries, strawberries, and plums, as well as for baked pies, strudel, apple cider, apple butter, caramel apples and natural honey. For information, contact Apple Hill Growers at PO Box 494, Camino 95709, 530-644-7692, [www.applehill.com](http://www.applehill.com).

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Bill and Celia Ginnodo are residents of Arlington Heights, Illinois. They have lived and traveled extensively in the American West, including California's Gold Country. They are the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California: A Guided Driving Tour*, *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado: A Guided Driving Tour*, and *Seven Perfect Days in Arizona: A Guided Driving Tour*, which can be seen at [www.pridepublications.com](http://www.pridepublications.com) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) (enter keyword Ginnodo).

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**Next Issue: "Oregon's Coast, Mountains, Columbia River and Wine"**