

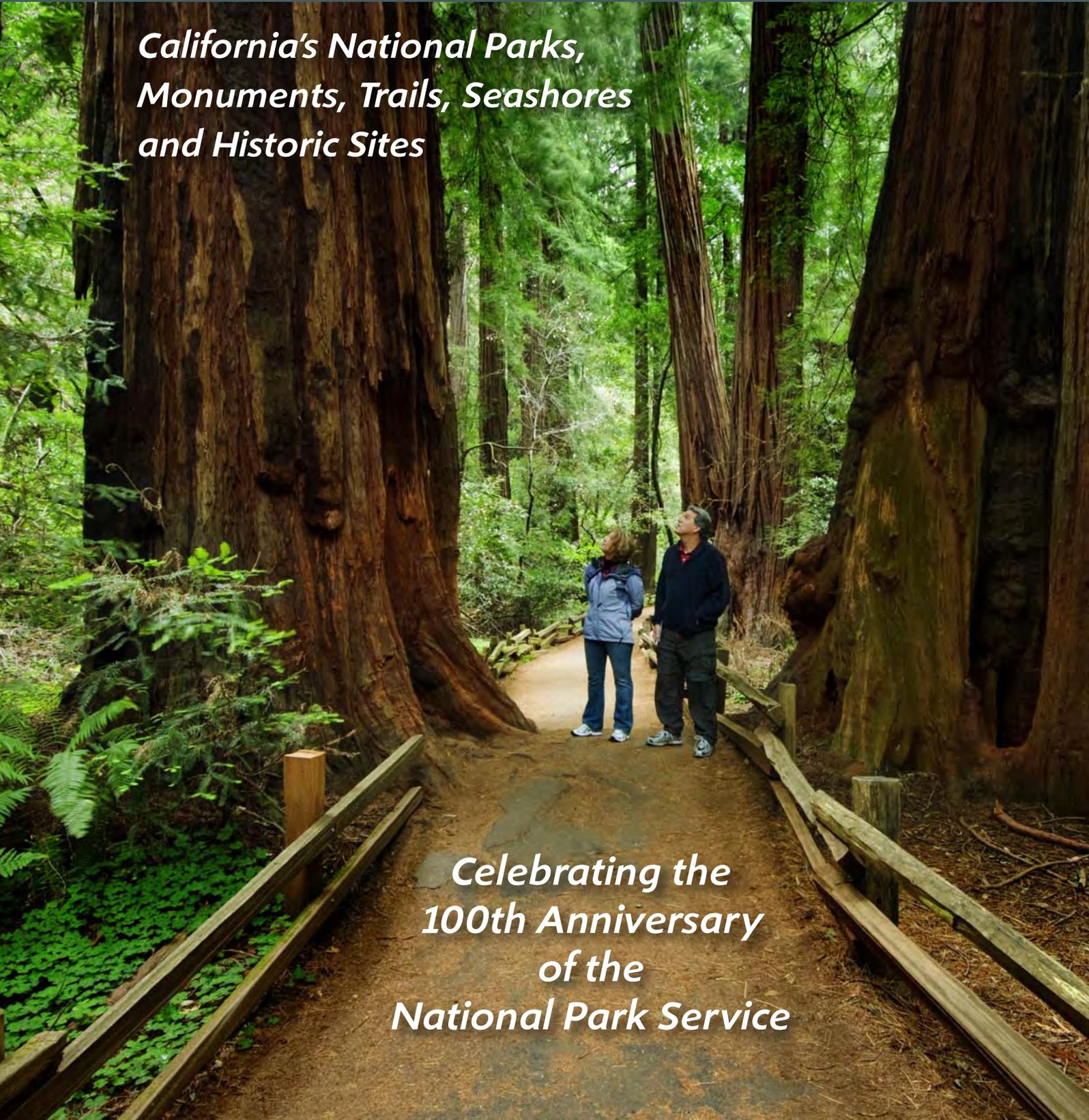
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA TRAVEL WRITERS



TRAVEL

FEATURES AND PHOTOS

*California's National Parks,
Monuments, Trails, Seashores
and Historic Sites*



*Celebrating the
100th Anniversary
of the
National Park Service*

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A Glittering Nugget of California's Past: The Empire Mine in the Sierra Foothills

Other versions of this article appeared in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and Sierra Alive in 2015.

During the California Gold Rush, miners were said to have declared, "There's gold in them thar hills." One hundred and sixty-five years later, there are still plenty of reasons to head for the Sierra foothills.

The California Gold Rush put California on the map and the Empire Mine in Grass Valley offers a glimpse into the bygone days of gold mining and the arduous underground life the miners led as they dug the prized nuggets from the mine's crevices.

One of the largest and richest gold mines in California, the Empire produced 5.8 million ounces of gold during its years of operation from 1850 to 1956. The mine, now a State Historic Park and on the National Register of Historical Places, welcomes visitors every day except Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Visitors can peer down into the depths of a mineshaft, tour the elegant mine owner's cottage and walk through the mine yard, filled with all sizes and shapes of mining equipment. On living history days, volunteers in period costumes bring the park to life, allowing visitors to experience a working day at the mine. You can watch a blacksmith at work and chat with characters from the mine's colorful past, including volunteers representing the mine owners, the Bourn family.

In the Visitor's Center and Mining Museum, you can view a scale model of the underground mine and its 367 miles of shafts. A button activates a taped narrative about each of the mine's many shafts, with cued lighting that comes on to highlight each part of the model as it is being explained.

With the sepia-toned photographs of miners and their life underground, you don't need much imagination to visualize the Cornish



miners with their lunches of pasties and tea, poking and prodding the rich gold from the depths—nearly 11,000 feet—as they toiled in the dark.

The park's 856 acres include many hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. The lush and well-maintained grounds can also be reserved for weddings and receptions from spring to fall, but tend to get booked, so plan to reserve early.

The mine offers activities and fun during all four seasons. In spring, the rose garden below the Bourn cottage comes alive with the fragrance and beauty of nearly one-thousand specimen roses that date to the 1300s, with even the most modern roses developed prior to 1929.

During the summer, the yearly Miner's Picnic includes food, games, and entertainment in addition to the mine's living history events. Fall brings bright red and orange leaves and fresh, crisp weather perfect for strolling through the grounds.

And for the holidays, the park lets you step back into the past as volunteers in period costumes greet you and offer hot cider and cookies in the decorated Bourn cottage. Or have a chat with Santa in the historic clubhouse.

For more detailed information, go to EmpireMine.org or Parks.ca.gov (and search for the Empire Mine).

While you're in the area, plan to visit the South Yuba River, where all the gold panning excitement began. Pan for gold and view a historic covered bridge at Bridgeport, take a wildflower hike in the spring, or swim in the sparkling, fresh water at one of the four historic bridges in the summer.

Enjoy miles of hiking trails, including the nation's only wheelchair-accessible wilderness trail, the Independence Trail. For all the information on where to access the river, go to SouthYubaRiverStatePark.org.

Both Grass Valley and nearby Nevada City trace their histories back to the Gold Rush and historical buildings from that era line the main streets. In 1985, the National Register of Historic Places named Nevada City as "the largest and best preserved historical downtown district in the California Gold Country."

Eight individual buildings are also listed on the register, including the Nevada

Theater, which opened in 1865 and featured many famous historical figures including Mark Twain, Jack London, and Emma Nevada. In addition to historical buildings and landmarks, both Nevada City and Grass Valley offer music, theater, and excellent restaurants.

So head for the hills and enjoy a step back in time, spectacular natural beauty, and lots of present time fun.



IF YOU GO

Grass Valley and Nevada City are located in the foothills of the Sierras, two-and-a-half hours east of the San Francisco Bay area.

Empire Mine State Historic Park, 10791 East Empire Street, Grass Valley, CA (530) 273-8522. Adults, \$7, children 6-16, \$3, under 6, free.

For accommodations, choose from Bed and Breakfast inns, motels and nearby camping:

NevadaCityChamber.com

For a full events calendar, visit GoNevadaCounty.com/Events

*Empire Mine in Grass Valley
Courtesy California State Parks, 2015*

Bourne Cottage at the mine



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*“One’s destination is never a place,
but rather a new way of looking at things.”*

—Henry Miller