

## Episode Two

### **Panning for Gold**

Gold panning was the easiest and cheapest way for a '49er to mine for gold. A prospector would stake his claim along a stream and pan the dirt and gravel for tiny nuggets and flakes of the shiny metal. This type of loose gold is called placer gold. And that's where Placerville got its name!

A gold pan was typically made of tin or iron, with a flat bottom and gently slanting sides. The pan was simple to use -- and pretty versatile. A miner could also use the pan to wash a shirt, feed his mule or fry bacon.

Panning is based upon the simple principle that gold is seven times heavier than other rocks. When a miner filled his pan with dirt and shook it around in water, the gold would sink to the bottom. After a lot of shaking the lighter rocks were washed away and only the gold remained. The miner put his gold in a small leather sack called a poke.

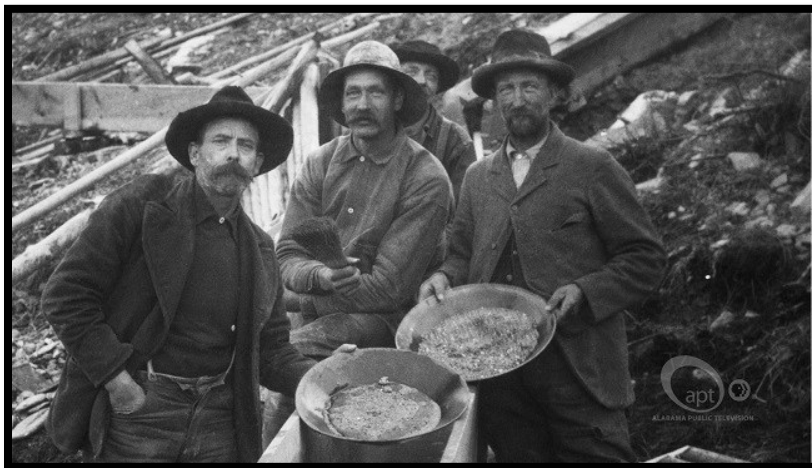
Panning was an extremely slow mining method. On a typical day an experienced prospector could wash about 50 pans of pay dirt from his claim.

People still pan for gold today. *But mostly for fun!*





The "*Batea*" was the first gold pan. It was made of wood by the Mayan Indian civilization hundreds of years ago. The '49ers used virtually anything as a gold pan: broken shovel blades, frying pans... even cow horns!



In August 1869, a 109 pound gold nugget was found in the California Mother Lode. It sold for \$21,673. Today it would be worth more than \$3 million!

## Vocabulary

- **Placer gold:** Loose gold on the bottom of a river or stream.
- **Claim:** A piece of land prospectors mine just for themselves.
- **Pay dirt:** Dirt and rock that has lots of gold.
- **49er:** The miners who came to California in 1849.

## Think About It... Please write down a few of your thoughts:

- Describe an invention would you make to get gold?
- Do you think there is still gold in California? Why?
- Do you think the Gold Rush was good thing for California and the land?

To learn more about gold panning please visit  
[www.tchistory.org/TCHISTORY/more\\_gold.htm](http://www.tchistory.org/TCHISTORY/more_gold.htm)  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold\\_panning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_panning)



If you're looking for a fun, unique summer adventure, why not try panning for gold in your own backyard? Make history come alive for your kids as they learn what it was like to be a prospector during the California Gold Rush. While you're not guaranteed to find any real gold, it's still a fun way to spend some time outdoors while getting a hands-on lesson in California history.

See the end of this activity for a few quick facts about this famous gold rush.

#### What you need

- History book that includes information on the California Gold Rush (you can also research it online)
- Shallow plastic or tin pan
- Gravel
- Stream or creek, about 6 inches deep with a good spot to sit while panning
- Sunscreen and a hat

1. Before making the trip to the creek, read about the California Gold Rush in the history book or online with your child. What caused it, and why does he think it attracted so many people? What does he think it was like to be a gold miner?
2. Travel to your chosen creek and find a good spot for panning. Have your child sit down.
3. Invite him to fill the pan  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of gravel from the stream, then submerge it deep enough so it's just under the surface of the water. Give the pan several vigorous shakes back and forth and from side to side, but not so vigorous that the material washes out of the pan.
4. Now have him switch to a gentler circular movement, so the material starts revolving in a circle. This process will cause most of the dirt and clay to dissolve and wash out of the pan. If roots and moss surface, work them over your pan with your fingers to dissolve any lumps. Pick out the larger rocks after making sure they're washed clean.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until there are only about two cups of heavier material left in your pan. This material is usually called "black sand" or "concentrate."
6. Now ask him to raise the pan completely out of the stream, leaving about an inch of water in the bottom. Have him tilt the pan slightly toward himself and swirl the water slowly in a circular motion to check the pan for nuggets and pieces that he can easily pick out by hand.
7. If you have a plastic bowl, you can use a magnet to pull away the magnetic black sand pieces. A small squeeze bottle of water can help go through the black sand as well.
8. He should be able to see the gold now if he has any. Don't be sad if it's only a few little pieces. Those pieces add up!

**Did You Know?** The California Gold Rush began on January 24, 1848, after James W. Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California, not far from Sacramento, the state's capital. Over the course of the 7-year period, about 300,000 people flocked to California in the hope of striking it rich. Early gold seekers were called forty-niners after the year they arrived, 1849.

The Gold Rush helped make San Francisco an important city. Before this period, San Francisco was just a small settlement, but as large numbers of gold seekers began arriving in California, San Francisco quickly expanded into a boomtown.