



Above: Rich Krimm says mining is a great workout. **Below:** Gold is found in every U.S. state. Check with the Bureau of Land Management state office to avoid claim jumping.

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“We spend an hour or hour and a half having fun, then grab our gold and run.”—Rich Krimm

A new Gold Rush is sweeping the nation. Armed with picks and pans, buckets and gold-sorting sluices called high-bankers, and even floating dredges (imagine a supercharged, catamaran-mounted shop vacuum with a hose big enough to swallow your fist), modern prospectors are finding fun, adventure, and gold around the country.

It doesn't hurt that gold spent 2008 trading above \$800 per ounce. But likely the biggest driver is a generation of active Baby Boomers who expect more from their vacations or retirement than a beach chair or a game of bingo.

With the bearing of the world's most cheerful drill instructor, Rich Krimm of Castro Valley, Calif., says digging gravel and feeding the gold sorting machines are a great workout.

“We sleep very well at night,” Krimm says. “Work the gravel bar for a day. You could be a marathon runner or a triathlete, you'll still feel it. It works different muscles.”

Outdoor fun. A few yards away, Gerry and Laurie Dahlund of Martinez, Calif., say they've spent many vacations at a long list of prospecting sites around the West.

“I don't fish, I don't hunt, but I like to be outside,” says Gerry. “This gives me a chance to be here, a reason to be outdoors.” Adds Laurie, “It's more fun than going to a gym.”

After Gary Price of Apache Junction, Ariz. lost an arm to a botched carpal tunnel operation, his wife encouraged him to find a hobby.

Right: The Klamath River, home to waves of miners in the 1850s, is a hotspot for modern prospectors, too.



“Prospecting is one of the few things where a grown man can play in the dirt and it's socially acceptable,” he chuckles. “Mining sure ain't paying the bills, but it's a lot of fun. And for a desert rat to get to play in the water, that's pretty cool.”

A day's work for Price includes chipping away at a sandbar, collecting dirt from the bottom of a flood deposit. Using a classifier—like an industrial-strength sandbox sifter—he separates rocks and gravel from the paydirt. Then he washes the sifted sand through his high-banker, which catches the heavy gold while letting lighter sediments float by. He found a good streak: seven 5-gallon buckets' worth of dirt yielded about a pennyweight of gold—one-twentieth of an ounce.

From the site of the first U.S. gold strike in North Carolina to the rich rivers of Alaska, finding gold is a matter of physics. There are some things about gold you can count on, says McCracken, who's written five books on mining.

Gold weighs 20 times more than water and about six times more than most minerals and other metals. That means gold will fall to the bottom of a river wherever the water starts losing energy. The downstream sides of boulders, areas where rivers widen, and the insides of river bends are great places to find gold. Nuggets fall into cracks in bedrock; flakes, flecks, and specks drift down to the lowest layer of flood deposits.

The trick is not looking at a river the way it runs today, winding in its banks. It's imagining the river during the raging floods that



Above: Elizabeth Sears wears a ring made from gold and a garnet mined by her husband Leonard. **Below:** Miner Gary Price feeds his high-banker.

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Above: Huge floods in 1955, 1964, and 1997 flushed new deposits of gold into the Klamath River. **Right:** Connie Krimm says she enjoys running the machines.



scour the hillsides and drag gold down from upland veins, swirling in torrents of dirt and debris, recharging rivers that miners have worked for generations. It's envisioning the line of gold that traces the floodplain, not today's channel. That's where the "luck" is.

"The learning curve is slow, but learning is as much fun as getting the gold," says Krimm.

Learning starts on Saturday morning for a group of prospectors in Happy Camp's Lion's Club hall. Several are Happy Camp locals simmering with gold fever.

A prospector from Georgia wants to try his hand in the West. A Floridian who's prospected commercially on and off for 30 years is hoping his new bride catches gold fever, too. A pair of buddies from Las Vegas is taking time off from building custom motorcycles to try a new adventure.

McCracken delivers a half-day lesson on geology, prospecting rules, and club etiquette to an enthusiastic group of New 49ers from



around the country. In a couple of hours, they'll sample a claim and determine the most promising site to mine. On Sunday, they'll team up to harvest its hidden treasure.

"By the end of the weekend, you will know more than most prospectors think they know," he promises. "We don't sell the gold. We find it together and develop it together. Then we'll clean it up and split it into equal shares."

Join the club. Weekend adventures are a great way for new prospectors to learn the ropes, says McCracken. A \$100-per-year membership in his club allows members to spend a week working their choice of 60 miles of claims along the Klamath. A \$2,500, transferable lifetime membership offers unlimited camping and mining on club claims.

Many New 49ers, like Leonard Sears of Mountain Home, Idaho, also belong to the Gold Prospectors Association of America (GPAA) and Lost Dutchman's Mining Asso-

Left: A dredge sucks up sediments and flushes them over a set of riffles that catch gold. **Above:** Leonard Sears pans a sample in the Klamath.