

Columbia State Historic Park



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation 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.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at the phone number below. To receive this publication in an alternate format, write to the Communications Office at the following address.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Discover the many states of California.™

Columbia State Historic Park

11255 Jackson Street

Columbia, CA 95310

(209) 588-9128

*Columbia, once known
as the “Gem of the
Southern Mines,” is a living
gold rush town featuring
the largest collection
of gold rush-era brick
buildings in California.*



Amidst the rugged, rocky oak woodlands of the Sierra Nevada foothills lies **Columbia State Historic Park**, a living historic town

featuring the state's largest collection of gold rush-era brick buildings. The search for gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills offered hope and, for a fortunate few, riches. It drew prospectors from all over the world and of every nationality, including California Indians. Besides digging and panning for gold, they bought, sold and traded to try to make their fortune. The authentic mid-nineteenth century backdrop of Columbia remains today to tell the colorful stories of these miners and merchants.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

For thousands of years, Indian people resided in the valleys, foothills and mountains of Central California. The Central Sierra Miwok lived in the Columbia area. Traditional Miwok culture was sensitive to the land and changing seasons, which sustained and guided their daily activities. Large, multi-family villages were located

Lithograph of Columbia ca. 1855 by Towle and Leavitt. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

in clearings near oak groves and dependable water sources. Acorns were a major part of their diet, supplemented by fish, birds, deer, small game, insects and native plants. Evidence of camps and grinding rocks can still be seen in or near oak groves.

The native people's way of life was drastically altered when newcomers to the area introduced diseases and increased warfare in the region. In spite of the devastating epidemic of 1833, and abuses and deaths suffered in the gold rush, the descendants of native Miwok and Yokuts Indian people survive today.

Columbia's Beginning

On March 27, 1850, a group of prospectors discovered gold here. Passing through this area, Dr. Thaddeus Hildreth, his brother George, John Walker and others were caught in a rainstorm. While drying out their gear, Walker decided to try his luck in the nearby gulch. Within six weeks his findings

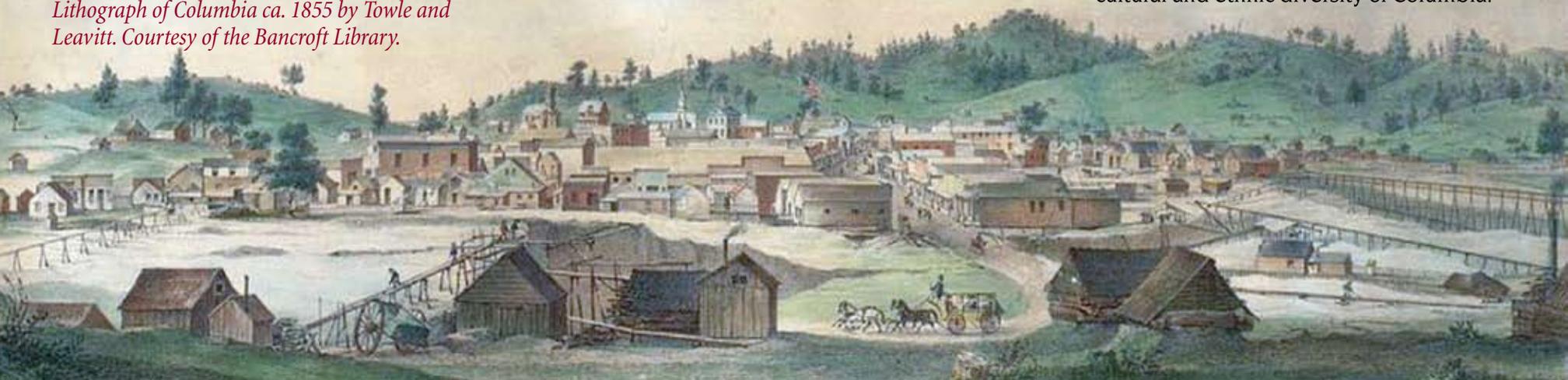


Chinese resident of Columbia (ca. 1890)

attracted thousands of miners. Their crowded camp of log cabins and canvas tents, known as Hildreth's Diggings, was formally renamed Columbia on April 29, 1850. By 1852 more than 150 stores, shops, saloons and other business enterprises were operating in Columbia. The town also boasted three churches, a meeting hall, a Masonic Lodge and a branch of the Sons of Temperance.

A Diverse Population

Miners from the nearby towns of Sonora and Jamestown were the first to arrive. Two-thirds of the miners were Mexican, but by the summer of 1850, many had left Columbia due to the exclusionary Foreign Miners Tax, which required foreign miners to pay the state \$20 a month for the privilege of mining. Like many mining towns, by 1852 Columbia had a sizeable population of Chinese, French, Irish, Italian, German and Jewish miners and merchants who contributed to the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of Columbia.





Pit placer mining, Columbia, California, ca 1860-1870

Water and Fire

Water was essential for placer mining. In a dry “diggings” like Columbia in 1850, when the seasonal rains were gone, most of the miners left. In June 1851 the Tuolumne County Water Company was formed to transport water from the Stanislaus River some 20 miles away. The company engineered and built a complex system of wooden flumes, pipes and ditches to convey the water to Columbia. Its high water rates sparked a competitor in 1854—the Columbia and Stanislaus River Water Company. This company of miners was determined to build a 60-mile aqueduct known as the Miner’s Ditch to supply water more cheaply. However, before its completion, the threat of bankruptcy

prompted the sale of the system to the Tuolumne County Water Company.

Water was also extremely important for fire protection in the booming town. Columbia’s first fire—in 1854—destroyed six city blocks, leaving the only brick building, the Donnell and Parsons store, standing at the corner of Main and Washington Streets. After the fire, a company called the New England Water Company constructed seven cisterns beneath the streets of Columbia to hold water for domestic and fire fighting use. A square lid to one of these cisterns may be seen today in front of the firehouse on State Street. The town was quickly rebuilt using locally-produced red brick. In 1857 another fire struck Columbia’s

downtown, leaving only brick buildings with thick walls and iron shutters intact.

Mining

With improved water delivery to Columbia, miners began to employ more efficient mining methods in their quest for gold. In some places, open pit placer mining operations removed more than 60 feet of dirt and washed it through a system of sluices to remove the gold. Using water power, the miners hoisted gravel from deep placer deposits to higher ground, where it could be processed using

hydraulic methods. The result of their efforts left expansive limestone formations, visible today below the main parking lot. The diggings were enormously productive, at times averaging \$100,000 or more per week.

Columbia, “Gem of the Southern Mines”

By 1853 Columbia was one of the largest cities in California, with an estimated population of 25,000 to 30,000. Between 1850 and the early 1900s, as much as \$150 million in gold was mined here. Gold from Columbia helped to finance the United States government and the Union Army during the Civil War. As mining dwindled in the late 1860s, Columbia began to decline. Miners tore down the vacated buildings and mined vacant lots in search of gold in the crevices of the limestone bedrock on which the town was built.

Today

While Columbia never became a ghost town, by the 1940s the buildings had deteriorated to the point that many were considered unsafe. When

Columbia became a state park in 1945, restoration efforts began on the 150-year-old structures to capture and preserve their historic value. Today Columbia State Historic Park contains the largest single collection of existing gold rush-era structures. These 19th-century buildings continue to tell the stories of Columbia’s enterprising miners and merchants.



Weather

The town is located at an elevation of 2,100 feet. Summer days are usually hot, with temperatures sometimes reaching into the 100s. Winters can be rainy, with snow at times. Evenings cool down quickly so layered clothing is recommended. Columbia State Historic Park is four miles north of Sonora. From Highway 49, turn east on Parrotts Ferry Road, and follow the signs to the park.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- The main streets of Columbia are mostly level, but shops and structures are on raised boardwalks.
- Assistance is usually available to open historic doors and cross high thresholds or to reach sales items and counters. Most merchants have portable ramps available by request; look for window signs indicating availability.
- Assistance may be needed at the Columbia Museum entry or along the sloped boardwalk to it.
- Accessible parking is designated in lots near Columbia and Jackson Streets, at Main and Jackson Streets, at the Lower Lot at Columbia and Washington Streets, and at the Old Columbia Schoolhouse.
- Accessible restrooms are at the Lower Lot, the Jack Douglass Saloon and at the Old Columbia Schoolhouse, behind the museum.
- There is an accessible trail from Washington Street to the lower parking lot restrooms.



Classroom in the historic schoolhouse

PLEASE REMEMBER

Businesses are generally open between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Restaurants, saloons, hotels and the theatre stay open later. Park exhibits and businesses are closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas days.

PUBLIC TOURS

Free town tours led by docents and staff are offered every Saturday and Sunday at 11 a.m. The approximately one-hour tour begins at the museum. Ask about additional programs at the museum desk.

LIVING HISTORY EVENTS

During Columbia's Gold Rush Days, docents in period attire lead programs and offer hands-on activities throughout the park. Many special exhibits are open. This unique event is offered from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the second Saturday of each month.

Come visit a replica of the original tent town of 1852, and interact with miners, businessmen and artisans portrayed by costumed docents and staff during Columbia Diggins, held the first weekend in June each year.

In addition to the park-sponsored events, there are many other special events offered throughout the year by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, park concessionaires and community groups.

For more information on park events, refer to www.columbiacalifornia.com.

SPECIAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS

School groups are welcome any time at Columbia, and there is no charge for admission or parking. The park's many concessionaires offer special programs to enhance your visit. Please contact the businesses individually, or refer to the above website.

Park staff and volunteers offer a special 2-hour museum and schoolhouse program. Here children are invited to take a step back into the past and fill the seat of a 19th-century student. These programs are very popular and fill quickly. For more information, contact the park at (209) 588-9128.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Calaveras Big Trees State Park, 4 miles NE of Arnold on Hwy. 4, (209) 795-2334
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, Jamestown on 5th Ave., 3 blocks off Hwy. 108, (209) 984-3953



Stagecoach rides down main street

Columbia
State Historic Park

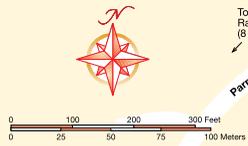
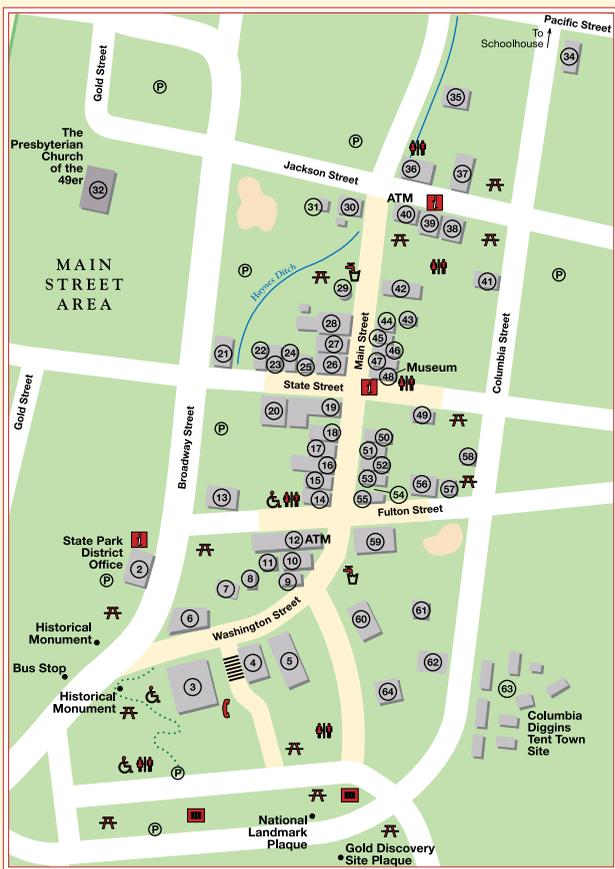
Key to Detailed Map

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1 St. Anne's Catholic Church | 24 Dentist's Office Exhibit | 46 Chinese Store Exhibit |
| 2 State Parks District Office | 25 A. de Cosmos Daguerrean Photo Studio | 47 Bowling Saloon Exhibit |
| 3 Fallon Hotel/Theatre/Ice Cream Parlor | 26 Towle & Leavitt Dry Goods | 48 Columbia Museum—Knapp Store |
| 4 Columbia Gazette Newspaper Office | 27 Coffee House & Sweets Saloon | 49 Livery Stable Exhibit |
| 5 Eagle Cotage*/Park Office | 28 City Hotel Restaurant, Lodging & Saloon | 50 Parrott's Blacksmith Shop |
| 6 Masonic Hall Exhibit | 29 Gazebo, Flag Pole, Drinking Fountain | 51 Fancy Dry Goods & Clothing Store |
| 7 Miners Cabin Interpretive Site | 30 The California Store Exhibit at the Franco Cabin | 52 Working Barbershop |
| 8 Old Building Foundation | 31 Chicken Coop | 53 Franklin-Wolfe Variety Store |
| 9 Wells Fargo Exhibit | 32 The Presbyterian Church of the 49er | 54 Garden Courtyard—Candle Dipping |
| 10 Quartz Mountain Stage Line Ticket Office | 33 Old Columbia Schoolhouse and Exhibit | 55 Tibbits House Exhibit |
| 11 Assay Office Exhibit | 34 Aunt Sally's House & Garden | 56 Martinez House Exhibit & Garden |
| 12 D.O. Mills Building—Umpqua Bank | 35 Claverie-Chinese Store Ruins | 57 Koch Cabin |
| 13 Columbia Candle & Soap Works | 36 St. Charles Saloon | 58 Wagon Barn |
| 14 Jack Douglass Saloon, Food & Beverages | 37 Burns Cottage & Garden | 59 Pioneer Emporium & Dry Goods |
| 15 J.C. Miller Carpenter and Joiner | 38 Solari Building—The Farmer's Friend | 60 Hidden Treasure Gold Mine—Tours & Panning |
| 16 Columbia Candy Kitchen | 39 State Park Sector Office | 61 Miners Cabin in the Rocks Exhibit |
| 17 Native Sons of the Golden West Exhibit | 40 Columbia Mercantile, Provisions & Grocery | 62 Mining Equipment Exhibit |
| 18 Justice Court Exhibit | 41 Jail | 63 Columbia Diggins' Tent Town Site |
| 19 Columbia House Restaurant | 42 Firehouse Columbia Engine Company #1 | 64 Quartz Mountain Guided Trail Horse Rentals |
| 20 Angelo's Hall (managed by Columbia House) | 43 Wilson-McConnell House | |
| 21 Odd Fellows Building—Retail | 44 Wilson Store | |
| 22 Firehouse Tuolumne Engine Company #1 | 45 Butcher Shop Exhibit | |
| 23 Drug Store Exhibit | | |

*Historic misspelling from an 1855 lithograph of Columbia's important buildings.

- Legend**
- Streets
 - Pedestrian Streets
 - Trail
 - Fence
 - Limestone Outcrops
 - Accessible Feature
 - Barbecue Pits
 - Drinking Water
 - Information
 - Gate
 - Parking
 - Picnic Area
 - Restrooms
 - Telephone
 - Park Building
 - Non-Park Building

To Highway 4 (9 miles), Calaveras Big Trees SP (29 miles)



To Sonora (4 miles), Railroad 1897 SHP (8 miles)



This map depicts California State Parks facilities and two historic churches—St. Anne's Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church of the 49er. Other buildings within the National Historic Landmark District are either privately owned or not open to the public.