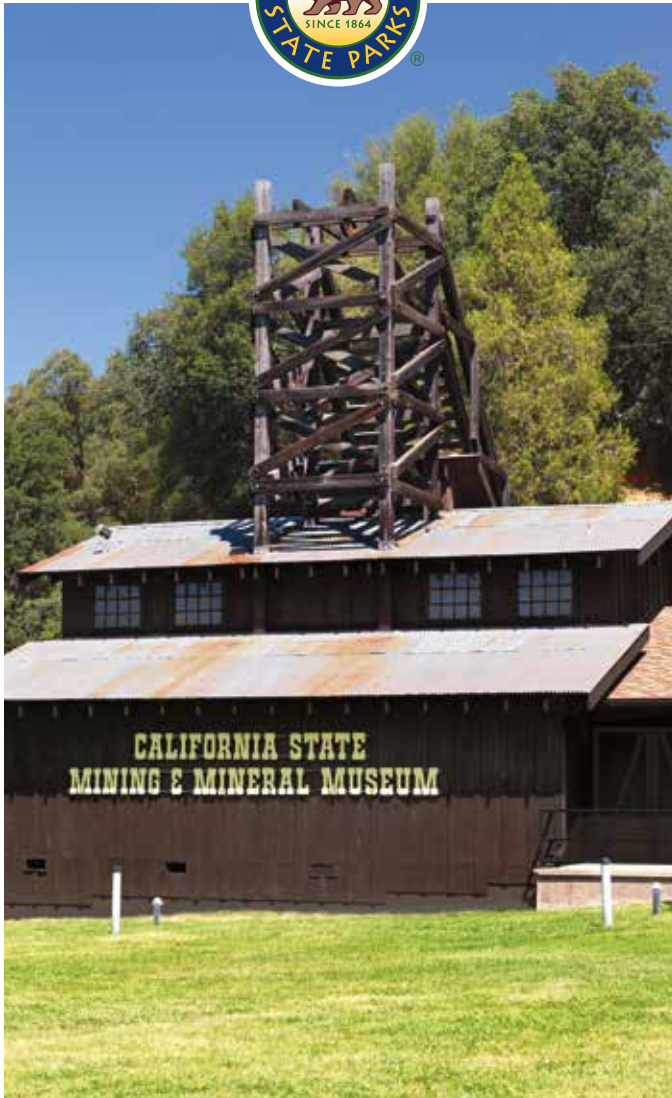


# California State Mining and Mineral Museum



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks 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 **(209) 742-7625**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

**California State  
Mining and Mineral Museum**  
5005 Fairgrounds Rd., Mariposa, CA 95338  
(209) 742-7625

© 2010 California State Parks (Rev. 2017)

*The specimens in today's  
collection include a  
gracefully curved sheet  
of natural copper,  
a platinum nugget, gold,  
precious gems, rocks,  
and mineral crystals from  
every continent on Earth.*



**The California State Mining and Mineral Museum, situated along Highway 49 in the historic gold-rush town of Mariposa,** houses, displays, and interprets the official California State Mineral Collection.

The museum, located at the Mariposa County fairgrounds, is dedicated to teaching the visiting public about the importance of mining and minerals to California's history, environment, economy, and future.

The collection began in 1880; since then, visitors and researchers have been dazzled by the many exceptional specimens of California's gemstones and minerals—such as gold, silver, copper, and platinum—in the museum. The remarkable items on display include original mining artifacts and historical documents, precious mineral and gem specimens from all over the world, minerals that glow in the dark, and even several “outer space” rocks (meteorites).

### **CALIFORNIA MINING HISTORY**

Only small mining operations preceded California's 1848 gold discovery in Coloma. Gems (precious or semi-precious stones) such as turquoise, garnets, and even diamonds had been found in Amador, Butte, El Dorado, Nevada, and Trinity counties. Silver, copper, mercury, and other minerals had previously been mined in California.



*Mining for minerals*

News of the 1848 gold discovery brought about 100,000 would-be millionaires from all over the world. Thinking that gold lay around underfoot, some had planned to fill their pockets and return home wealthy. Many gave up after realizing that not even a lot of hard work could make them rich overnight.

### **California State Mining Bureau**

In 1880 State legislators established the California State Mining Bureau. A vital service offered by the new agency was classifying and identifying minerals found anywhere in California. Before long, the new bureau was inundated with specimens submitted for identification from all over the world.

Henry G. Hanks, the first California State Mineralogist, was hired to examine and classify specimens submitted to the Mining Bureau. Hanks was directed to make his findings available for scientific and educational purposes.

### **A Home for the Collection**

The State's initial collection—1,327 specimens donated by the California State Geological Society—was first displayed in the State Mining Bureau's San Francisco offices. Ore specimens and donations were constantly added. Between 1880 and 1983, the collection moved five times. The Ferry Building on the Embarcadero housed the collection until 1983 when building renovations forced yet another move.



*Junior Rangers earn their badges.*

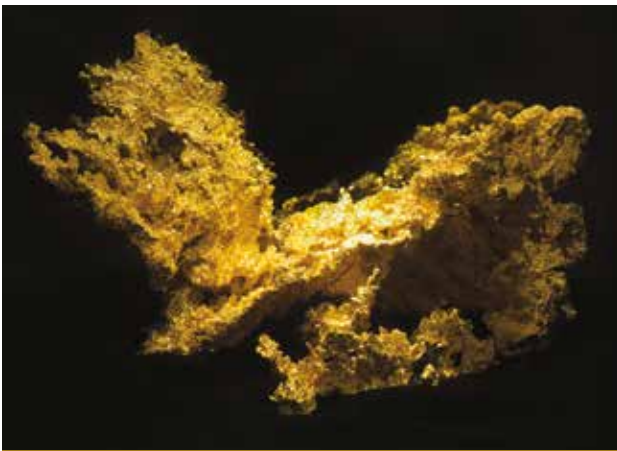
The Mariposa County Board of Supervisors requested that the specimens be moved to the town of Mariposa; in July 1983, the entire collection was packed and moved to a temporary location in the old Mariposa County Jail. The more valuable specimens were stored in a bank vault in Mariposa.

The collection was finally moved to its new home at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds in 1986, and the former Mining Council Building became the main exhibit area. The museum was transferred to California State Parks in 1999. At present, California State Mining and Mineral Museum is the only state park without any associated land.

### **The Collection Today**

The museum collection has grown tenfold since its beginning and holds over 13,000 specimens, with about 350 rotating on display at any one time. Original historical documents include a map of John C. Frémont's Mexican





### The Fricot Nugget

The legendary Fricot (*free-co*) Nugget—weighing 13.8 pounds—is the largest remaining intact mass of crystalline gold dating back to the California gold rush. The specimen of gold crystallized when hot gold-bearing quartz veinlets cooled in softer slate and schist rock.

This rare specimen was discovered in a mud pocket deep in the Grit Mine, near the American River's middle fork, by William Russell Davis in August of 1864. In 1865, Grass Valley resident Jules Fricot purchased it from Davis and displayed it at the 1878 Paris Exposition. The nugget then spent more than 65 years stored in Fricot's safe deposit box. In 1930, Fricot's daughter donated the unique specimen to the Museum's collection.

land grant, as well as early California State Mining Bureau reports. Minerals and gemstones on display range from exhibit quality to research samples. Specimens on loan from other collections are also shown throughout the building.

Adjoining the building, a re-created “old mining tunnel,” complete with support timbers and “workers,” interprets the experience of hard-rock miners. In the mining gallery, displays include a full-size windlass (a hand-cranked device that lowered a bucket on a rope to remove mining debris), an ore cart, and a working scale model of a stamp mill, which pounds and crushes ore to extract minerals within it.

### Benitoite, the Official State Gemstone

In 1906, benitoite (*ben-ee-toe-ite*)—an extremely rare stone whose crystals are typically blue—was discovered at the Benitoite Gem Mine in San Benito County. The mine, which is now closed, was the world's only source of gem-quality stones. When displayed under short-wave ultraviolet light, the stone glows vivid, fluorescent blue.

### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Free children's activities include the Junior Ranger program. School and group tours focusing on geology, rocks, minerals, and gold rush and mining history are available by reservation.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

- The annual gem and mineral show in April has exhibits, speakers, children's activities, and vendors.
- During the Mariposa County Fair on Labor Day weekend, the museum presents free mineral-related activities and crafts for children.
- The museum shop sells jewelry, mineral art and specimens, and books on rocks, minerals, mining, gold prospecting, and

California history. Proceeds support the park's nonprofit association, which funds educational and interpretive programs.



*Benitoite: California State gemstone*

Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Scovil

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The museum exhibits and the gift shop are accessible. Help is available to reach items on top shelves. Designated accessible parking is available, or passengers may be dropped off at the entrance. Some persons may need assistance on the entry ramp.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

For current information, call the park in advance at (209) 742-7625 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Wassama Round House State Historic Park  
Road 628, Ahwanee 93601  
(209) 742-7625 Information
- Columbia State Historic Park  
11255 Jackson St., Columbia 95310  
(209) 532-3184
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park  
Highway 108 at 5th Avenue  
Jamestown 95327 (209) 984-3953

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact  
California State Mining and Mineral Museum Association P.O. Box 687, Mariposa, CA 95338  
<http://camineralmuseum.org>



Photos courtesy of Jeffrey Scovil



# CA State Mining and Mineral Museum

MARIPOSA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS



## Legend

- Gate
- Non-Park Building
- Park Building
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Tunnel

© 2010 California State Parks (Rev. 2017)

