

The Feather River Scenic Byway



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Tour Summary

The Feather River Byway is packed with the scenic wonders of a deep river canyon, including thundering waterfalls, brilliant fall colors, and festive wildflowers. The natural beauty, combined with the man-made wonders of powerhouses, tunnels, and train tracks snaking along the canyon sides, make this one of the more breathtaking drives in California. We begin in the city of Oroville, where luxury hotels and a casino neighbor Lake Oroville and the largest earthen dam in the United States. Then we venture into the northern gold country and Plumas County, over the lowest pass in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

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The Feather River Scenic Byway





We start our tour in Oroville. Famous in the past for gold mining, it now boasts the largest earthen dam in the United States and world-class recreation at Lake Oroville.



The Feather River Canyon was formed by nature, but man has added some spectacular structures to the area, such as tunnels that were blasted through the mountainsides, power plants that tame the river, and railroads.



The Canyon extends through Plumas County that is well known as California's fall color capital. Maples, poplars, dogwoods, oaks, and Western redbud trees are just a few of the colorful display.



Winter snow blankets the countryside in white and a variety of winter sports are enjoyed here.



Springtime comes alive in the Canyon with an assortment of wildflowers that bloom from April to early summer. Higher elevations show off blooms all summer long.



Small towns offer shops, restaurants, lodging, and tons of history in picturesque settings.



Lake Almanor in Plumas County is the largest lake, with many recreation opportunities. It is also the gateway to Lassen Volcanic National Park via the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway.



Activities abound here throughout each season. Hiking, biking, fishing, skiing, snowmobiling, birding, and gold panning are just a few of the things to do.



Railroading defines the Feather River Canyon and the Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola has an extensive collection of locomotives and rolling stock.



Train photographers find this area one of the best for shots of rolling stock amidst an expansive landscape.



Panning for gold still brings a shining reward and is one of the fun activities of the area.



Gold seeking pioneers explored the area and you can visit museums such as the Beckwourth Cabin and go on historical tours.

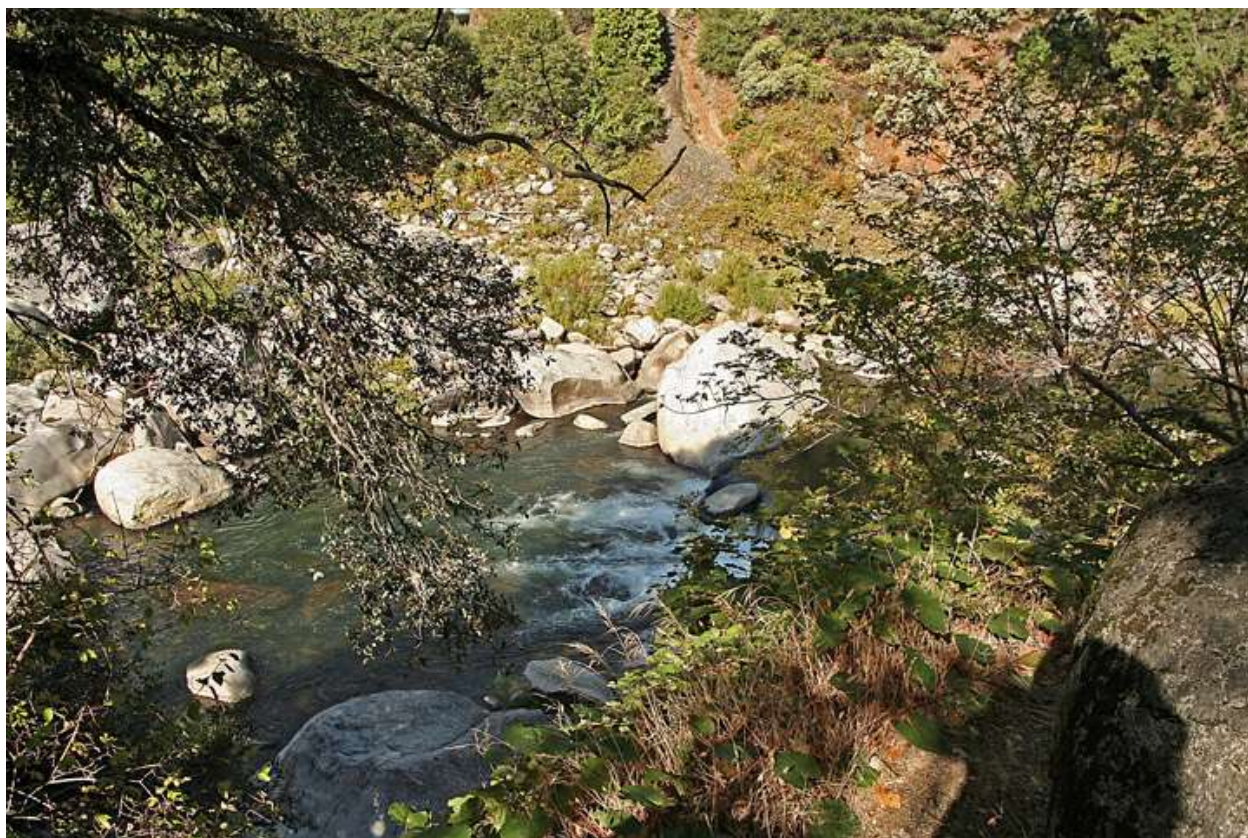
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Tips

- Use caution when using pullouts on SR 70 of the Feather River Scenic Byway, as there are no guardrails and there are extreme drop-offs.
- Also use caution when walking across Hwy 70 to enjoy the views, since there are blind curves.
- Bring chains for winter travel - just in case.
- Dress for the seasons. This is high country and winter temps are low, summer temps are high. Fall days are comfortable but cool at night.
- A camera is a must to capture the scenic beauty year-round.

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Oroville and the Feather River Canyon





The city of Oroville sits just east of the California Central Valley and west of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Here the Yuba and Feather Rivers meet to join the Sacramento. This historical city is now defined by large Lake Oroville.



Oroville means “City of Gold” and gold mining was prominent in its past. Here in present time the city has embraced the gold available in gaming and you can enjoy taking a chance at the Gold Country Casino. Slots, Table Games, Poker Parlor, and Bingo are available. This is also an 87

room hotel with several dining places including a Steak House, 24-hour Cafe, Bountiful Buffet, and Espresso Bar.



The water of Lake Oroville backs up behind Oroville's most famous site, the Oroville Dam. This is the largest and tallest earthen dam in the United States and is one of the largest dams in the world. Lake Oroville is the second largest reservoir in the state.



Stop in at the Visitor Center to learn how the lake was formed, what was involved in the construction of the dam, and its part in the California State Water Project. This is a self-guided museum with a 47-foot observation tower where two high powered telescopes will help you see the panoramic view of the dam and lake. Films on local

history, state water project, Native American culture, mining, wildlife and plants are shown regularly.



Many recreation opportunities are available at the lake with houseboating being the most popular. There is boating, birding, swimming and fishing for bass. Lake Oroville has 200 RV and tent campsites, 70 with hookups. More recreational opportunities are offered at the Thermolito Forebay and Afterbay. Nearby is the Oroville State Wildlife Area, a protected wetland where hunting and bird watching is available.

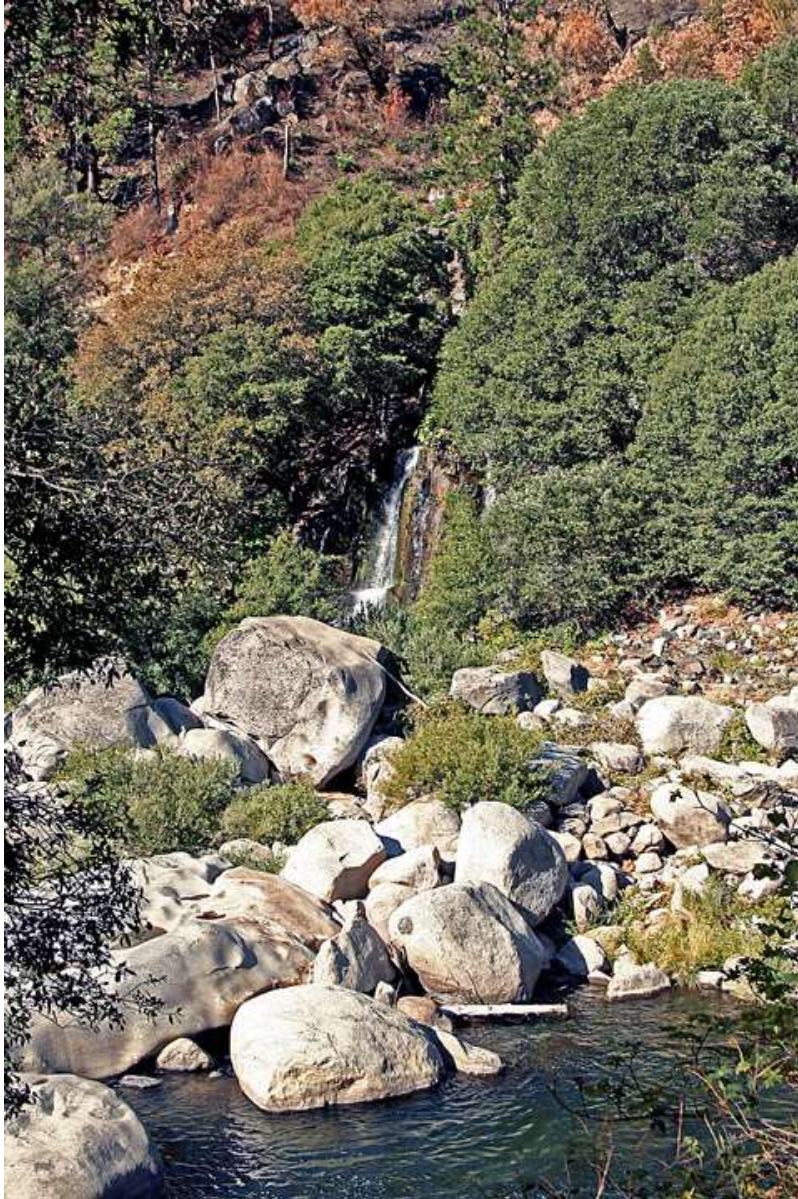


You can visit the Oroville Chinese Temple at 1500 Broderick Street open daily from noon to 4 P.M. Chinese laborers that were brought in during the gold mining and railroad days built this Temple in 1863 to serve as a place of worship for followers of the three major Chinese religions. Here devotees of Taoism, Buddhism, and

Confucianism worshiped. It now houses many artifacts such as costumes, tapestries and Chinese puppets and has a lovely memorial garden. The Oroville Chinese Temple is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



As you head up State Route 70 into the Feather River Canyon, you can't help but notice the river and the railroad. The river is a natural phenomenon that has carved the canyon gorge. The railroad, along with the highway and a variety of hydroelectric power stations, are man made. This is the Feather River National Scenic Byway.



The Byway follows the North Fork of the Feather River. In 1851 pioneer James Beckwourth opened the Beckwourth Trail

finding the lowest elevation crossing of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. State Route 70 and the railroad follow this original trail.



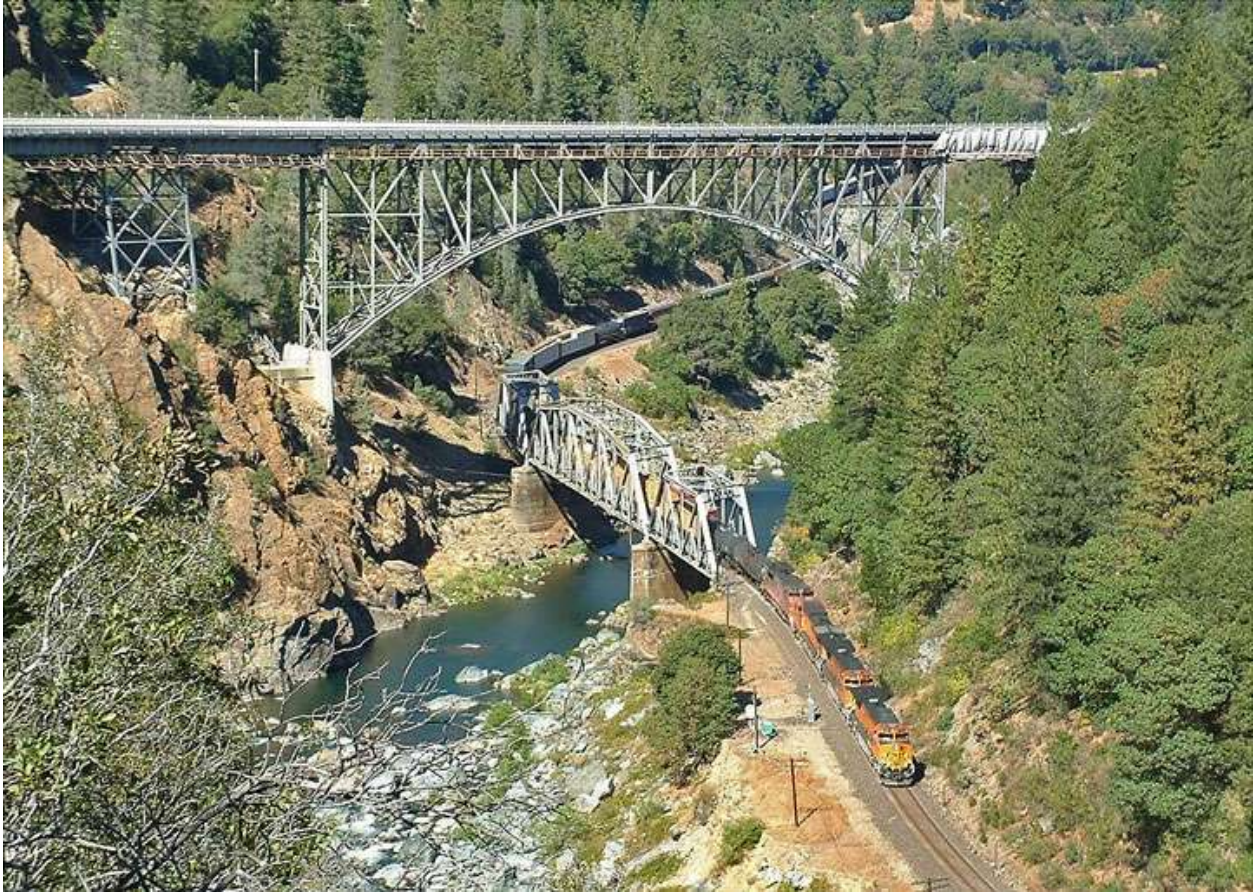
This is a scenic driving tour through three distinct ecosystems starting in the Sacramento Valley and reaching up to thick forests and huge rock formations and then onto wide open spaces in the Great Basin. There are many scenic stops along the way for photographs.



Seven hydroelectric powerhouses built in the early 20th century harness the power of the river. They are referred to as the “stairway of power” as they ascend up the canyon.



You will drive through three tunnels that were blasted through the mountainsides during construction of the highway.



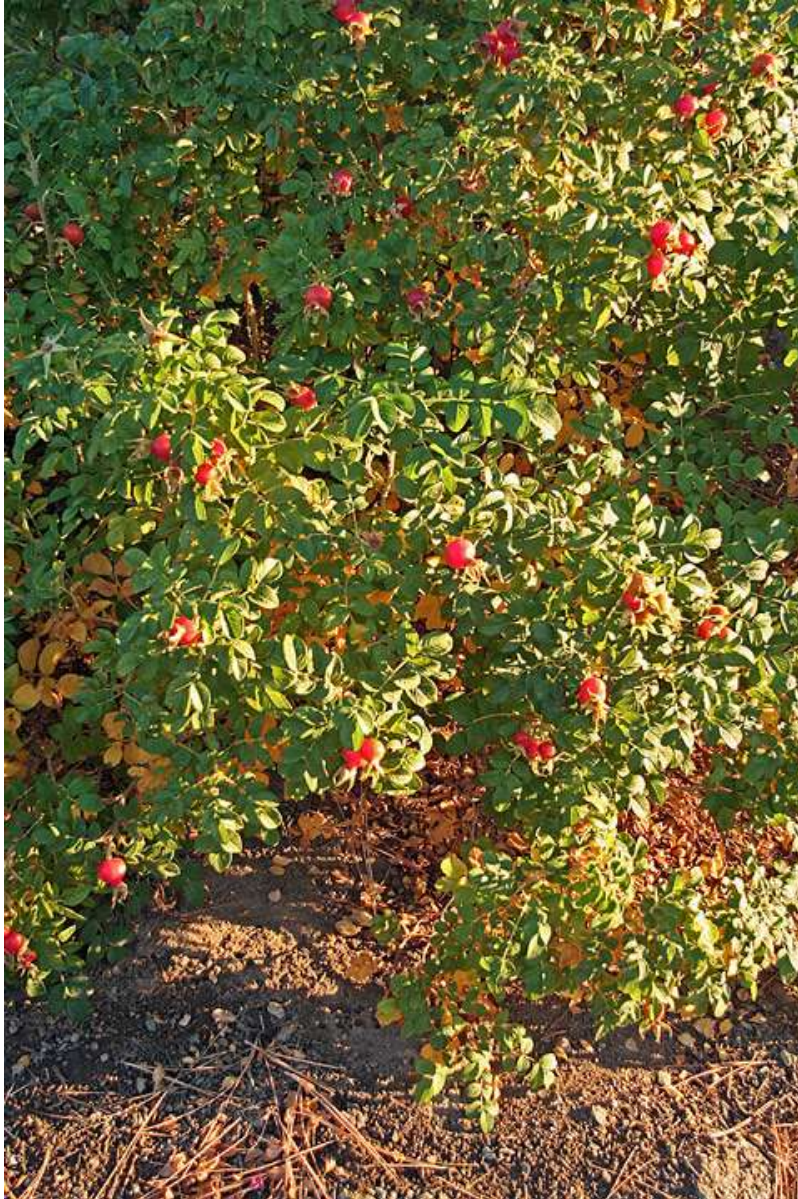
The highway and the railroad perform their own special dance through the canyon, sometimes crossing over each other. The most famous of these places is at Pulga where the highway arch bridge crosses over the lower railroad truss bridge above the swiftly flowing river.



Fall is one of the best times to travel the Feather River National Scenic Byway. The colors of the season stand out against the mountain evergreens. You are now in Plumas County known as the "Autumn Capitol of California."



Quaking Aspen and Black Cottonwood turn on their showy, bright yellow leaves and can be found along riverbanks, lake shores, and wet meadows.



Other fall trees and shrubs that you will see are the reds of Mountain Dogwood and Indian Rhubarb, yellow Willow, and the rich

browns and yellows of Black Oak. Service Berry, Snowberry, and Western Redbud contribute to the color palate of the season.



Enjoy the crisp autumn air by hiking numerous trails. You can pick up the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail that runs from Canada to Mexico at the town of Belden. The area gives you opportunities for day

hikes to week long treks. A free copy of the Plumas County Hiking Guide is available from the Visitors Bureau (800) 326-2247 or check with the Plumas National Forest (530) 283-2050.



Fall isn't the only colorful time to visit. A springtime tour will show you roadside blooms that last into summer months.



Flowers you might see include clarkia, bush monkey flower, dogwood, California poppy, and the colorful western redbud tree.



Activities don't stop during winter months. With the Byway route being a lower elevation than other Sierra Nevada mountain passes, it allows for easier winter travels and spectacular scenery.



Winter sports are very popular and you can go snowmobiling, sledding, skiing, ice skating, and snowshoeing. The longboard ski races are held at the Eureka Bowl in Plumas-Eureka State Park on Gold Highway on the third Sunday of the months January, February, and March. Participants dress up in historical or outlandish outfits. There is also sled dog racing at Chester and Lake Davis.



Summer months are popular for lake activities such as jet skiing, swimming, sail boating, and kayaking on calm waters. With hundreds of lakes and streams and beautiful mountain roads, this is a summer travel paradise.

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Towns and Lakes





In the town of Greenville you can take the self-guided four-block walking tour of the main street. You will see 21 historic structures with architecture and artifacts from the 1800s. At each site there are interpretive signs and photographs that correspond to the free tour guide brochure and map that is available from the Plumas County Visitors Bureau at www.plumascounty.org or call (800) 326-2247.



Lake Almanor is the largest lake in Plumas County with 52 miles of shoreline. The lake is situated at an elevation of 4,500 feet and is the place where the Cascade Mountain Range and the Sierra Nevada Range meet. The north fork of the Feather River flows into the lake and is popular with fly fishermen.



Views north of the lake show 10,457 foot Lassen Peak in Lassen Volcanic National Park. At this active volcano park there are belching mud pots, steaming vents, and smelly sulphur springs. Lassen Volcano erupted last in 1921.



The Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway begins at the southern end of the lake and involves routes on both the west and east sides of the lake. It then continues up Route 89 to Lassen Volcanic National Park. This has

been a national park since 1916 and you can view hydrothermal activity right from the Park road. Hiking trails take you through sections named Bumpass Hell and Devastated Area to see what has occurred since the volcano's last eruption. You can also climb to the top of Lassen Peak on a five-mile trek. Maps are available at the Park entrance. The Park has a vehicle fee and campgrounds fees.



Lake Almanor has many campgrounds, Rv parks, and resorts along its 52 miles of shoreline. Summer months are busy with camping, golfing, fishing, swimming, boating, waterskiing, sailing, and jet skiing.

You can also bike or hike the Lake Almanor Recreation Trail along the lake's west shore.



In any season the lake attracts a variety of waterfowl and migratory birds. You may see a flock of white pelicans floating and fishing on the lake. Many ducks nest along its shores and this is a prime birding area.



Quincy, located on Route 70/89 heading east, is the Plumas County seat. In downtown the historic buildings hold gift stores, antiques, clothing, garden décor, restaurants and cafes. The impressive four-story courthouse on Main Street is the county's dominant historical structure.



Take the self-guided historic walking tour that begins at the Plumas County Museum located behind the County Courthouse at 500 Jackson Street. A free guide map is available at the museum. On your walk you will see the 1878 Variel Home next to the museum and can tour both it and the County Courthouse. Guided group tours can be arranged with a reservation from the Museum at 530-283-6320.



Exhibits in the museum include Maidu Indian basketry, pioneer artifacts, agricultural displays, and the history of logging, gold mining, and the railroad. It is open year round from Tuesday through Saturday from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. Guided group tours can be arranged in advance at 530-283-6320.



Graeagle is a former lumber town in the Mohawk Valley and the little identical red buildings in town once housed lumber workers. Now visitors can shop in the gift shops that occupy the buildings. Arts and crafts fairs are held during summer months and a grand 4th of July celebration takes place at Mill Pond.



The Mill Pond sits in the middle of town and was once the pond associated with the lumber mills. Now it is a quiet place to sit

and rest, picnic, or take a swim. There are restaurants, lodges, inns, and resorts in this idyllic setting.



The area near Graeagle is the Lakes Basin Recreation Area and dozens of lakes sit amidst the surrounding mountains. Gold Lake, a serene, mirror like pond on County Road A14 known as Gold Highway, is one of the largest with waters formed from glaciers. Pine forests stretch up the mountainsides to the tree line and you can hike, fish, horseback ride, and enjoy winter sports in this recreation area.



The Sierra Buttes, a group of jagged and craggy peaks are viewable from Gold Lake Highway and from lakes in the area. There is a hiking trail to the top of the peaks that reach 8,600 feet.



The Plumas-Eureka State Park is five miles from Graeagle on Gold Lake Highway. This museum is located at the base of Eureka Peak where more than \$25 million in gold was mined during the 1880s. This indoor-outdoor museum will show the rigors of hard rock mining as it was in that time. A miner's boarding house and home,

blacksmith shop, and the five-story Mohawk Stamp Mill is here. It is open 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. seven days a week, from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The Museum is then open on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday through the last weekend in September. Admission is free. Camping is available with reservations at 1-800-444-7275.

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Lots of Things To Do





Bird watching is one of the most popular activities of this area and if you are a birder you are bound to see a variety at any time of the year. Approximately 300 species utilize the natural habitat. Antelope Lake on County Road 112 north of Greenville, and Lake Davis north of Portola, are designated Watchable Wildlife Sites. Along with waterfowl, raptors, songbirds, and

woodpeckers you may see deer, fox, bobcat, bear, coyotes, mountain lion, skunks, beaver, and racoons.



Many migratory bird species such as greater white-fronted geese, gadwalls, pintails, and western grebes arrive in fall on the many waterways and are easily viewable from roads and trails.



During spring many ducks and Western and Clark's grebes nest on lakes and ponds and raise a family. The grebes build large floating nests on the lakes after performing an amazing dance atop the water in their courtship ritual.



Large bodies of water like Lake Almanor attract flocks of white pelicans that like to feed on lake fish. Large wading birds such as great egrets and great blue herons can be spotted in many locations. Be sure to check out Sierra Valley, east of Portola, that is designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society.



As you drive the Feather River National Scenic Byway keep an eye out for ospreys and eagles that like to perch high in forest trees along the Canyon where they search for food in the river below.

The Plumas Audubon Society has a free

birding guide available at 530-283-0455 or
from the Plumas County Visitors Bureau at
www.plumascounty.org 1-800-326-2247.



With thousands of miles of streams and an abundance of lakes, fishing is ideal in the Feather River watershed. Native rainbow trout, as well as brook and brown trout, catfish, bluegill, kokanee and King salmon are found.

Fishing guide services are available in towns or check the Fishing Report at www.plumascounty.org for locations.



Anglers will thrill to the prospects for a good catch in the streams and river. Stream fishing opens in late April and closes in November. Lake fishing is open year round. Check the current California Department of Fish and Game regulations for specific dates and catch limits.



Whitewater enthusiasts flock to the middle and north fork of the Feather River for a stimulating paddle. Sections of the river are Class II rapids and beginners or people with moderate paddling experience can navigate the North Fork of the river from Highway 89 near Greenville to Twain.



Flows are regulated by the power stations with releases on the North Fork of the Feather River occurring during summer and fall weekends. These flows create intermediate to advanced runs at Rock Creek downstream from Belden.

Expert kayakers can tackle the Wild and Scenic Zone of the Middle Fork of the

Feather River just below the town of La Porte.

Information on paddling these stretches can be found by contacting the American Whitewater Association at 530-343-1871 or www.americanwhitewater.org.



Along with kayaking you can try river rafting. There are outfitters in the towns who can take you on a guided rafting tour and the season runs from January to early May depending on the flow. Summer flow releases give the opportunity to experience float tubing or floating on air mattresses on the calmer upper reaches of the river.



For a different kind of activity you can try your hand at gold panning. The Plumas Eureka State Park on Gold Lake Highway offers supervised panning on the Jamison Creek in the summer. The Golden Caribou Mining Association in Caribou offers summer vacationing memberships and make available their mining claims as well

as providing training. Contact them at 530-283-5141. Experienced gold panners can access gold anywhere on public national forest land that is not staked as a claim.



Visiting the area in winter opens up winter sports activities such as ice skating on area lakes. Skiing is available at the Eureka Bowl in the Plumas-Eureka State Park with a vertical lift of 675 feet rising from 5,500 feet to an elevation of 6,175 feet. The Park is located off Gold Lake Highway and Johnsville Road (County Road A-14). For skiing information contact

www.plumasskiclub.org or call 530-283-6345.

You can also ski at Stover Mountain outside of Chester with eight runs accessed by a rope tow. Snowboarders are also welcome here. Take Highway 36 to Forest road 316A. Call 530-258-3987 or email stovermountain@aol.com for more information.



There are hundreds of miles of trails for snowmobilers to try out and there are maintained warming huts and staging areas. Contact the Plumas National Forest at 530-283-2050 for trail information. Good locations exist at Bucks Lake, 17 miles southwest of Quincy, La Porte via Highway 20 and County Road E-21, and the Almanor

Basin near Chester. Snowmobile tours are offered by outfitters in the Chester-Lake Almanor area.



Another fun activity, and a good way to get around in winter, is by snowshoes. Cross country skiing, snowboarding, and sledding are also available. Sled dog racing occurs

at Chester near Lake Almanor and at Lake Davis.

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Tracks, Trestles, Tunnels and Trains





The Feather River area is a railroad buff's and photographer's paradise. As you travel through the Feather River National Scenic Byway you will most likely see tracks, trains, tunnels, and trestles.



The Western Pacific Railroad began laying track along the Feather River Canyon in 1905. The line not only crossed the river in places but was blasted through the granite cliffs making tunnels. The line was finished in 1909.



There are two places where the train tracks and the roadway cross over each other. One is at Tobin where a good pullout is located. Here a train crosses a bridge above the road bridge.



At Pulga things are the opposite way around with the highway bridge high above the railroad bridge over the river.



A great view of one of the many trestles along the line is the Rock Creek Trestle near Cresta. These are favorite spots for rail fans and photographers.



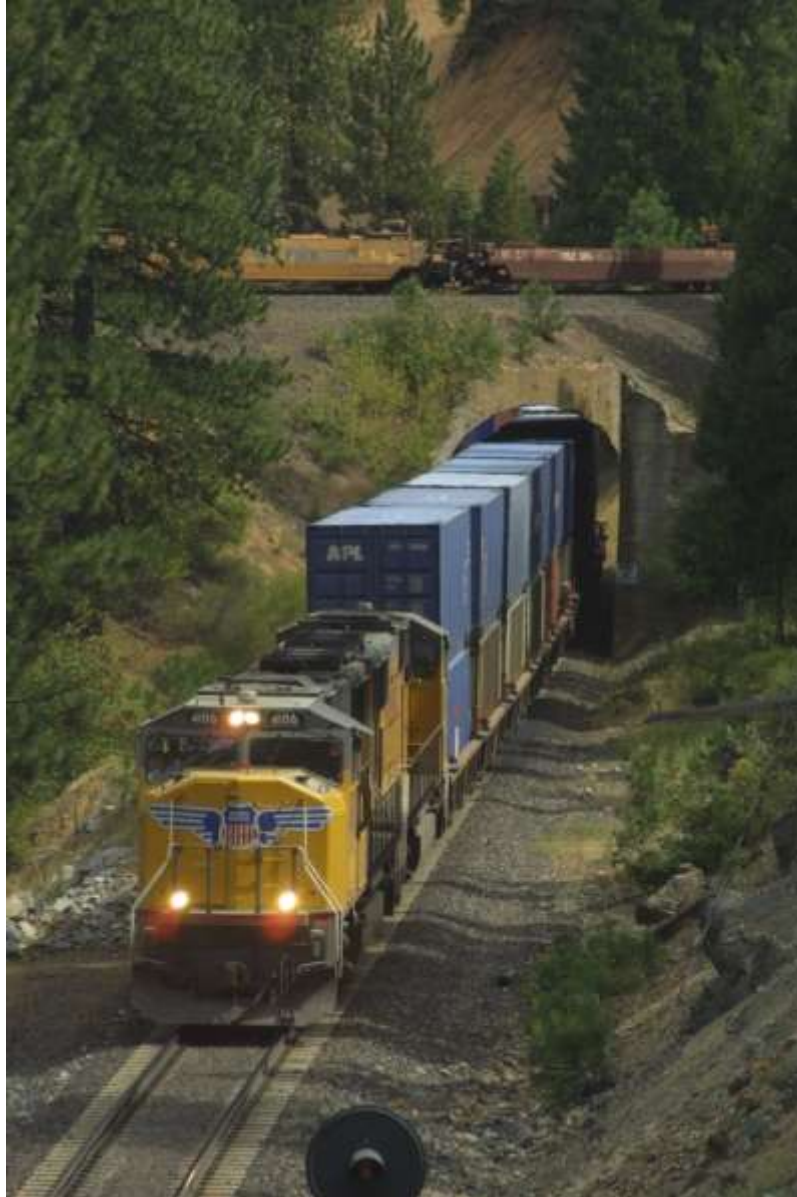
Here the Union Pacific, that replaced the Western Pacific, runs a train pulled by a steam locomotive along the route at Cresta on the Feather River Scenic Byway.



The famous Keddie Wye, near the town of Keddie on Route 70/89, is where the last spike of the Western Pacific Railroad track was driven into the trestle at a ceremony on November 9, 1909. This signified the last transcontinental railroad built across the Sierra Nevada Mountains



The Wye, high above Spanish Creek, is the only one in the world with two legs on bridges and a closing track in a tunnel and is named after Arthur W. Keddie, the first surveyor of the route through the Feather River Canyon.



At the Williams Loop, several miles east of Quincy, the railroad track makes a continuous one mile loop at a one percent grade, crossing over itself to gain the necessary elevation. You can view the

Williams Loop at a pullout just beyond the Spring Garden bridge and you might see the front and rear cars of a train traveling in opposite directions.



At Spring Garden there is a spectacular tunnel that is 7,344 feet long. The tunnel channels through Lee Summit taking the railroad from the drainage of the North Fork of the Feather River to the Middle Fork. It

also goes through the ancient Jura River channel where workers boring the tunnel found gold.



East of the town of Blairsden off of State Route 89 is the Clio Trestle Railroad crossing over Willow Creek. This amazing structure is 1,005 feet long and sits 172 feet above the creek and the old right of way for the former narrow gauge Sierra Valley & Mohawk Railroad.



A must-see is the Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola, open daily April through October from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Here a

variety of locomotives and rolling stock are kept and refurbished by the Feather River Rail Society.



The Western Pacific 0-6-0 steam locomotive #165 is an oil burning switch engine that was built in 1919. It is one of the reconstruction projects of the Feather River Rail Society at the museum.



The museum facility is a former Western Pacific diesel shop and houses the Society's projects as well as model train displays and a gift shop.



You can have fun taking a photograph posing as a railroad worker and engineer. There are railroad artifacts and memorabilia and historic photos to view.



One of the locomotives is equipped with a rotary snow plow on the front. Snow levels over the Sierra Nevada mountain range can exceed six feet or more and equipment like this is needed to keep the tracks clear.



The museum's rolling stock consists of an assortment of diesel locomotives from different lines. The tracks in the area are now run by the Union Pacific. You will find locomotives, cabooses, freight cars, and flat cars from every era and you can climb aboard and inspect them. The museum has the Western Pacific 805-A locomotive that once pulled the famous California Zephyr.



Union Pacific Railroad constructed the Centennial locomotives the largest diesel-electric engines ever built. They actually were made up of two engines on one frame and they operated in freight service from 1969 to 1984. Thirteen of these massive machines are in museums, with one, number 6946, at the Western Pacific Railroad Museum at Portola.



A free ride in a caboose or flat car around a one mile track through the pines is a nice way to enjoy this historic museum.



The museum also offers a Run A Locomotive program for a fee where you can be an engineer for an hour and operate a diesel locomotive of your choice. Instruction is given and a qualified engineer rides along for safety. Contact the Feather River Rail Society for reservations at 530-832-4131.



Beyond Portola lies the Beckwourth Pass named for pioneer James Beckwourth, who in 1850 discovered that the Feather River was the lowest pass through the Sierras. At 5,212 feet, this is the highest pass in this

section of the Sierra Nevada range. The Chilcoot Tunnel penetrates this for 6,002 feet bringing trains through to Reno Junction and out to the desert.

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Gold Towns, Gold Mines, and History





Scenic Highway State Route 49 travels along the Yuba River through old historic gold mining settlements and abandoned gold mines. Picking up the route from Gold Lake Highway you enter Sierra County, full of forested canyons, mountain lakes, wild rivers, and old logging, ranching, and gold mining communities.

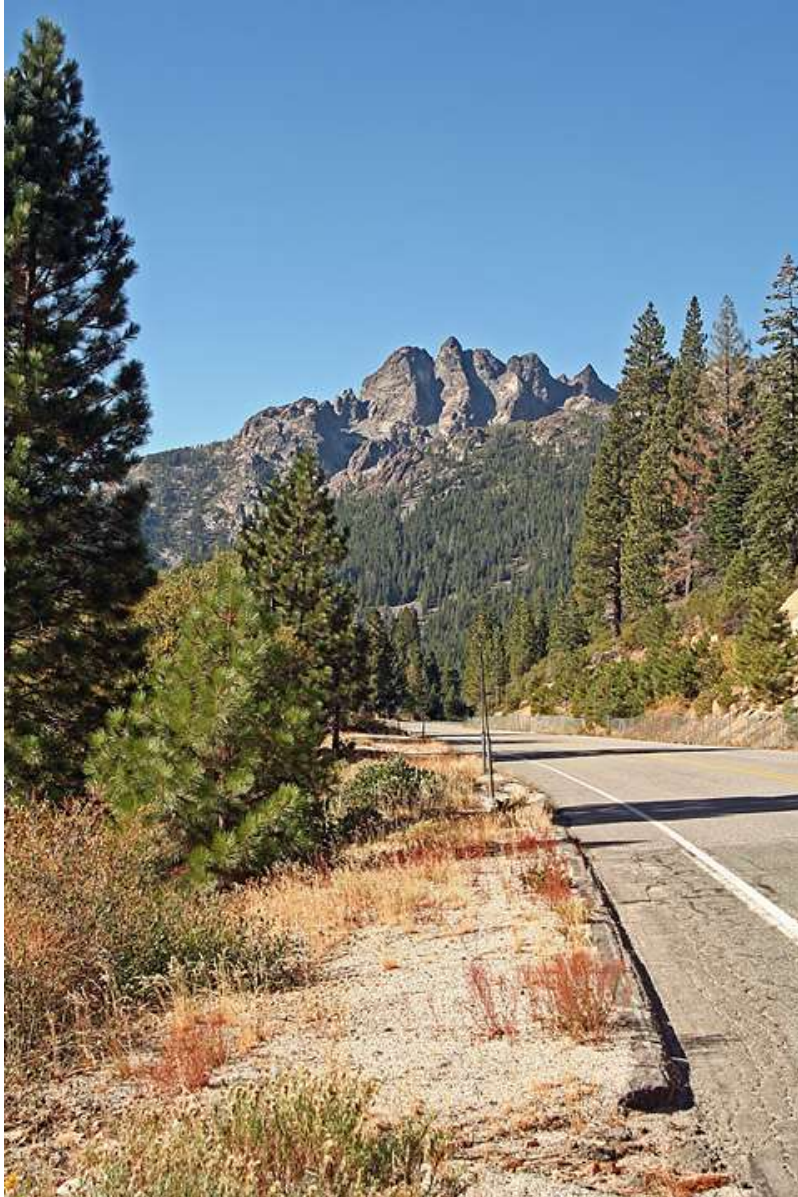


In the Sierra Buttes Lakes Basin Recreation Area there are over 40 alpine lakes and mountain trails for hiking and mountain biking. Camping, fishing, snowmobiling, kayaking, and cross country skiing are

some of the numerous activities in this serene, natural setting.



Sardine Lake lies in the Lakes Basin area. Near the campground the Sand Pond Interpretive Trail features a wheelchair accessible wooden boardwalk that takes visitors past wetlands developed by a family of beavers and where a variety of birds can be seen. The fern-lined path crosses stretches of shallow, clear water where you can view trout swimming.



Sierra City is the first town you will encounter as you drive south on State Route 49. It began during the 1850s gold rush as a trading center. The Sierra Buttes Mine, north of town, was the major gold

producer of the era, taking out \$300 million in gold, including a 141 pound nugget. The town is dwarfed by the 8,600 foot Sierra Buttes and the village combines a mountain resort setting with gold rush flavor in the more than 100-year old buildings that line the narrow streets. Local businesses carry a brochure that outlines specific points of interest.



One mile east of town is the Sierra County Historical Park and Museum. This park is on the site of the Kentucky Mine, a hard-rock gold mine that was last worked in 1953. In the museum are depictions of the

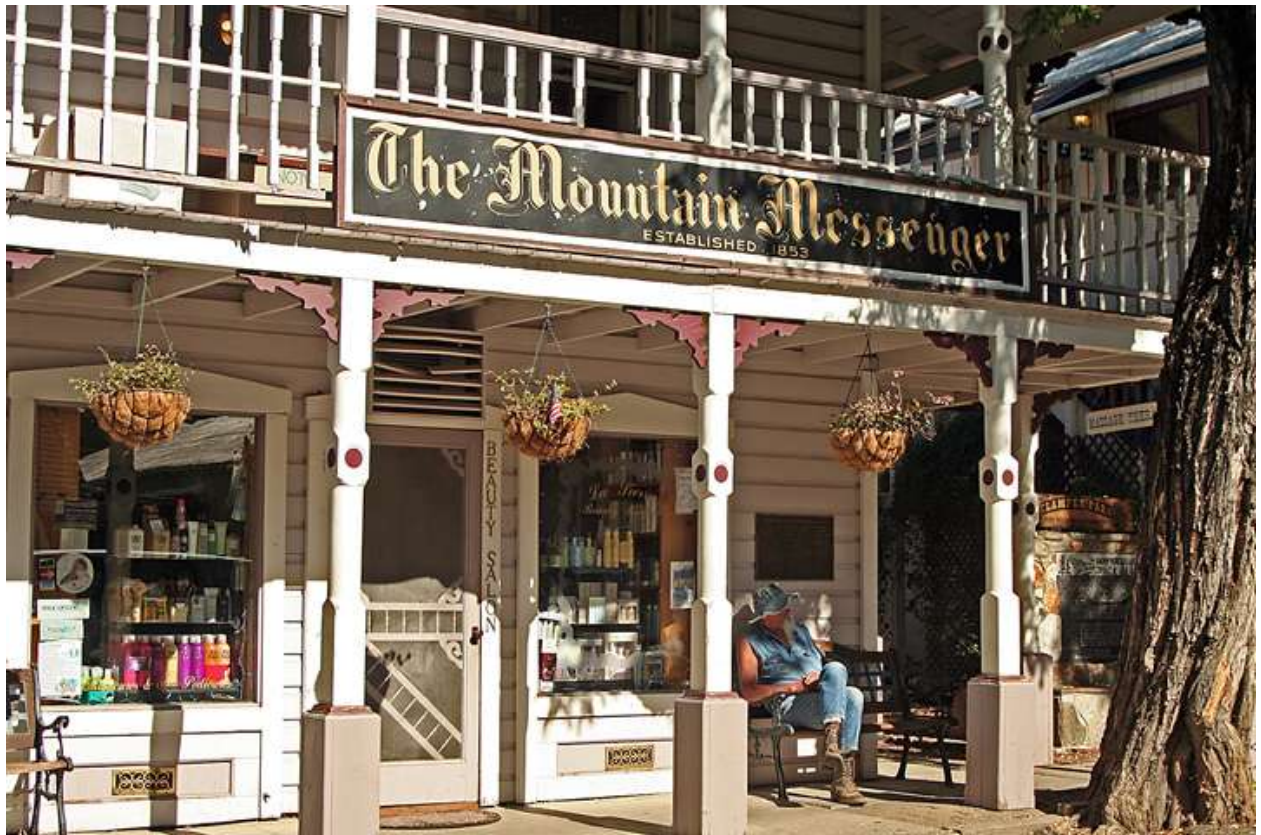
early life of Sierra County, Chinese and Maidu Indian tribal artifacts, and logging and mining equipment. There are guided tours of the mine opening, an operable 10-stamp mill, and a walk across a high wooden trestle. It is open from Memorial Day through September, Wednesday through Sunday, but only Saturday and Sunday through October. Tours are \$4.00 and general admission is \$1.00. Ages 12 and under are free.



Downieville, now the county seat of Sierra County, was once known as "The Forks" thanks to its location at the meeting of the Downie River and the North Yuba River. Later renamed for Major William Downie, the town still retains its frontier flavor with narrow streets and plank sidewalks.



While mining was the reason for the town's existence it didn't claim fame for that, but because it was the site of the lynching of a Mexican woman named Juanita, who had stabbed to death one of the miners.



Downieville was settled in 1849 and at one time was in the running to be the state capitol. Many of the mining towns disappeared after the gold rush was over, but Downieville has survived and is home to the state's oldest weekly newspaper, The Mountain Messenger, that began circulation in 1852. The newspaper building was also used as a meat market and a brewery.



Another one of the historical structures in town located on the corner of Main and Commercial Streets, is the Craycroft Building. Built in 1852 it replaced a log cabin saloon that was destroyed in the town's first big fire. This saloon had a 70-foot long bar made from a single sawed board. It was also the home of the newspaper for a while and now houses a grocery, bakery, and other shops.



Don't miss the little Downieville Museum on Main Street, one block east of Commercial Street. The museum is housed in a single-story structure built by Chinese immigrants in 1852. It has thick walls of mortarless schist and iron doors and shutters. The walls were made with flat rocks that were laid horizontally. These materials are what saved the building from several fires that destroyed most of the town. The building

was originally used as a Chinese grocery but gambling and opium smoking went on in the back room. That room now houses a model diorama of the pioneer town.



The museum has a collection of photographs of the early days, pioneer portraits, household items, like the wooden washing machine near the front entrance, clothing, and gold rush relics, as well as a

working stamp mill model that was built by Downieville High School students. Books on local history are available for sale. The museum is free and is open from Memorial Day through the first weekend in October from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. daily.



One of the best known gold rush towns in this northern Mother Lode section is Nevada City. Here in the fall of 1848 a few miners working along Deer Creek began a tent city that by the end of 1850 was a town of 6,000 people. Eventually population expanded to 10,000 and was California's largest city. Gold in the surrounding streams played out, and miners and their

families moved away. Today less than 3,000 folks live and work in Nevada City. You can obtain a brochure for a walking tour of the town to view the Victorian architecture from the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is located at 132 Main Street 916-265-2692.



On Broad Street near Union Street the impressive National Hotel shows off in Victorian splendor. This establishment claims to be the oldest continuously operating hotel in California. It was completed in 1857 and is a three-story brick building with a long balcony. Rooms are furnished in antiques and the hotel features a Victorian dining room and historic tavern.



Railroad fans will want to visit the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum located south of town off Highway 49 at 5 Kidder Court. Visitors are given a docent led tour of the museum, rail yard, and restoration shop. Started in 1876, the railroad was sometimes known as the “Never Comes, Never Go” railroad because service depended on the prosperity of the

mines. You will see an 1875 Baldwin engine that served in the lumber industry, as passenger and freight service and as a movie engine at Universal Studios. The museum and gift shop are run by volunteers. Summer hours run from May through October, Friday to Tuesday 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. Winter hours are from November through April on Saturday and Sunday, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. Admission is free. Call 530-470-0902 for more information.



A side trip from Nevada City, 11 miles north on Highway 49 to the Tyler Foote Road turnoff, takes you to the Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park in North Bloomfield. This is the site of California's largest hydraulic

mine. In 1853 San Francisco investors began the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company by acquiring 1500 acres in Malakoff Ravine. They built a series of ditches and flumes and reservoirs to bring water to their operation. Huge cliffs were carved by powerful streams of water to dislodge rock and gravel to get to the ore and these sights are still visible today.



The destructive hydraulic technique eroded away entire mountainsides. At the museum site there is a 7000-foot long and 3000-foot wide pit with steeply eroded sides and a small lake at the base. At one time the pit was 600 feet deep but eroded material has filled it in to a depth of 300 feet. The park also has a 7,847 foot bedrock tunnel that

had served as one of the drains. The Visitor Center, that was once a dance hall, features exhibits regarding hydraulic mining and life in the old mining town. The park is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, daily from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. and on weekends for the rest of the year.



Grass Valley is the next town and gold wasn't the first thing discovered here in 1848. It was good grass, timber, and water. Once gold was discovered in the streams, over four million dollars worth was taken in four years time and quartz gold was discovered in 1850. The town has narrow winding streets, Victorian architecture, and you can visit the Grass Valley Museum located in the Mount Saint Mary's Convent

at 410 Church Street. A Victorian parlor, music room, doctor's office, schoolroom, and 100-year old rose garden are here. The Museum is open from 12:30 P.M. to 3:30 P.M. June through September from Tuesday through Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from October through May. Call 916-272-4725 for information.



The historic Holbrooke Hotel was established in 1851 for gold rush pioneers. There are guest books in the lobby you can review that show the signatures of Presidents Ulysses S. Grant, James Garfield, Grover Cleveland, and Benjamin Harrison as well as Bret Harte and Mark Twain who visited here.



One mile east of town on State Route 49 is the Empire Mine State Historic Park, one of the deepest and richest hardrock gold mines. This mine has been in existence for over 100 years and produced 5.8 million ounces of gold before it closed in 1956. There are guided tours and living history presentations. Visit the Secret Room that is located in the Visitor Center. This room was used during the mining days to keep track

of the mine's 367 miles of underground workings. It had blacked-out windows and contained a scale model of the entire mine.



The 845-acre park contains many artifacts, the mine offices, shops, and lovely restored gardens. The entrance to the main mine shaft is open and tour guides will take you into it. Most of the abandoned shafts are now flooded. The park also has eight miles

of trails through forested back country
where you can mountain bike and
horseback ride.



William Bowers Bourn (sometimes spelled Bourne) inherited the Empire Mine in 1887 from his father. Utilizing the mining knowledge of his younger cousin, George Starr, and his own financial backing, the Empire Mine became famous for its mining technology. Bourn built the Empire Cottage here in 1898.



The Cottage is styled after estates in 19th century England. Tours of the mansion and grounds are available. You will see the huge granite walls and in the interior, redwood paneling. There is a lavish sitting room, dining area, kitchen with antique stove, and beautiful leaded glass windows that look out on the spacious gardens.



The grounds include large expansive lawns, huge redwood and other native trees as well as many that were imported from around the world. There are fountains, a reflection pool, a clubhouse where Bourn entertained, and a greenhouse. The rose garden reflects how it looked in 1905 and has more than 950 rose bushes of 56 varieties. Some of these roses are for sale at the gift shop.

The mine is open seven days a week from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M.. Admission fees are \$7.00 adults and \$3.00 children ages 6 to 16. Under 6 free.



State Route 49 reaches State Route 20. Continuing your drive west brings you to Maryville and Route 70/99, ending your Feather River tour. Thank you for joining us.

Some of the photos in this tour were made available courtesy of the following:

Plumas County Visitors Bureau

Bill Gilbert

California State Parks

American Whitewater Organization

Rail ARC Images

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Maps



Internet Link to Interactive Map

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msa=0&ll=39.998164,-120.805664&spn=2.579434,5.817261>

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Author Biography

Ruth Ann Angus is a freelance writer/photographer specializing in travel, eco-tourism, nature, agriculture, folk music, and historical articles. She has contributed thousands of photos and features to local, regional and national publications. Ruth Ann also works with the National Estuary Program, designs and guides specialized nature tours, and is the publicity director for the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival.

Visual Travel Tours by Ruth Ann Angus

Far Out Wineries Of Paso Robles
Morro Bay: A Nature Lover's Paradise
The Feather River Scenic Byway
Wine And More, California's San Simeon
To Morro Bay

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