

# There's still gold in them thar hills

By Howard Huntington  
of the Daily Courier

No matter how long it's languished in the mud, gold shines instantly when exposed. "It says, 'Take me home with you!'" quips Randy Hinke, a longtime prospector.

Mel Shaw will testify that, after 20 years of recreational gold-panning, he still finds it an adventure.

Start emptying your pan "and pretty soon you'll have a few little bright shiny colors there in the bottom," says Shaw, president of the Josephine County Historical Society. "That's exciting."

Unless you're a serious miner using it as a prospecting tool, however, you have to pan just for the fun of it, because a good day usually will produce only about \$12 or \$13 in gold, according to Hinke.

"People enjoy being out," he says, "and they enjoy the thrill of discovery and suffer from the agony of defeat at times. That's the way it is."

Here's how to get started.

## BASIC EQUIPMENT

Plastic or metal gold pan. Prices range from a little under \$3 to \$13. Pans now come with ridges that help capture gold.

However, anything solid enough to hold water, dirt and gravel will suffice

Garden hand trowel

Tweezers

Small magnet

Magnifying glass

Small container such as a pill bottle with a screw or snap top, or a plastic 35mm film canister with a snap top.

Hand towel

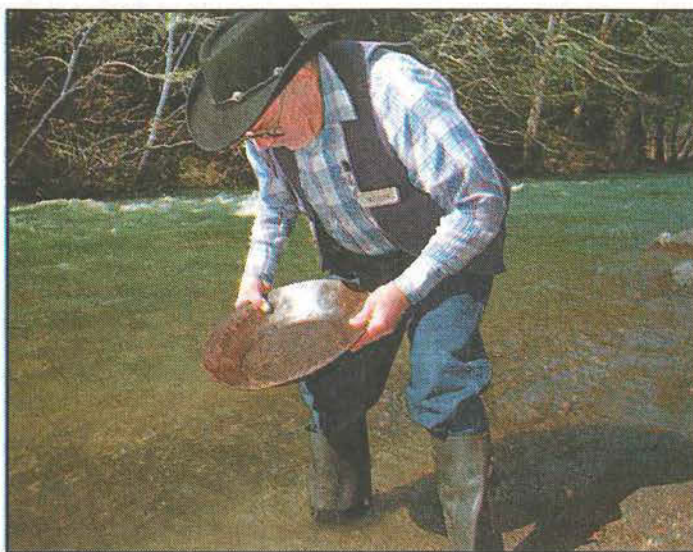
Waders

## HOW TO PAN

Fill the pan about half to two-thirds full with soil, gravel and small rocks from the stream bank or channel.

Submerge the pan, break up lumps of clay and discard stones.

Still holding the pan level underwater, with one hand on each side rotate it halfway back and forth rapidly to wash out



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Mel Shaw finds it all but impossible to resist a promising stream.

the clay and concentrate heavy material at the bottom.

Keep the pan underwater, tilt it forward, away from you, and lower it slightly. Rotate and shake it to let sand and gravel dribble out the front. Push out top material and large chunks of rock with your thumbs.

Repeat the previous two steps several times until a deposit of fine-grained dark material overlain by a smaller layer of

flat sheets.

## WHERE TO PAN

*It didn't take the Good Lord long to create all the gold that we have on this earth, but it seems that the Devil has spent a good deal of his time in finding places to hide it.*

— Sourdough Gazette

You may be surprised to learn that some of the best hunting is in areas mined before, such as lower Grave Creek, the Applegate River, Galice Creek, Sucker Creek and Althouse Creek.

"There was a mentality in the old days where they would pass the small stuff through and take the big stuff — the quick-and-easy gold," Hinke explains. Other gold slipped past some miners simply because their sluice boxes weren't working properly.

Concentrate your panning at the roots of water grasses, in narrow crevices in bedrock and in loose gravel on the inside bends of waterways. Other suggestions include the downstream sides of boulders or other obstructions in the water, and places where streams have overflowed.

Many public lands are open to panning, including all parts of national forests, except wilderness areas such as the Kalmiopsis and wild sections of wild-and-scenic rivers such as the Rogue in the Siskiyou National Forest.

Panning is also OK almost everywhere on property owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management. Mining claims, however, are off-limits without the claim holder's permission, and not all claims are well posted.

For more information, call the Forest Service, 471-6500; or the BLM, 479-7244.

Also, Josephine County has set aside a short section of Coyote Creek for panning.

to remove most of the black sand, then pick up the gold with tweezers.

Gold may also take the shape of wire-like fragments, feather-shaped crystals, lumps or nuggets.

Watch out for "fool's gold" — pyrite, which actually looks more like brass on closer examination and changes shape when rotated in the sun. Mica also looks deceptively like gold, but usually floats, washing easily over the top of the pan, and breaks fairly easily into thin,

For more information, call the Forestry Department, 474-5291. Panning — but not dredging — is also allowed at all county parks, many of which border the Rogue River and other waterways. For more details, call the Parks Department, 474-5285.

## PANNING EVENTS

You can pan for gold right here in Grants Pass during the Josephine County Fair, Aug. 17 through Aug. 20 at the fairgrounds, 1451 Fairgrounds Road.

Started in 1928 and carried on all these years by a mining group called the Josephine County Sourdoughs, "Sourdough Gulch" offers everyone a chance to go for the gold in a simulated pond in the Covered Arena. The fee is \$3 per person.

You're guaranteed to take home "a little bit of the color," plus a certificate of proof, if you request it.

The accompanying display of mining artifacts takes you all the way back to the 1850s. This year's show will also feature a demonstration of rock-crushing and processing to produce a bar of gold.

Although Sourdough Gulch attracts some 500 people of all ages each year, its future is in doubt. The Historical Society has stepped in as a co-sponsor and needs volunteers to help out at the fair. For more information, call the society, 479-7827.

"I talked to people who knew about Sourdough Gulch and had been coming there for years on their own to gold-pan, and they were back again with their children because they enjoyed it so much," says Rose Scott, executive director of the society.

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Randy Hinke  
longtime prospector



light material remains at the bottom of the pan.

Take the pan with the residue and some water out of the stream. Rotate the pan in a circular motion and watch carefully. The water will separate lighter from heavier material, including gold. It should lag behind other materials on the bottom of the pan.

Stop the rotation. With luck, you'll see a few flecks of gold in the dark material on the bottom of the pan.

Carefully drain the water and let the black sand and the gold dry. Use a magnet