

# TREKS *FOR* DOCENTS *(only)*

*By Bert Hall*

The purpose of this document is to share some of the interesting walks and archeological points of interest in and around Bridgeport. If you have any comments, additions or corrections to the treks, please let me know so I can update the documents. Also, if you have any questions or there is something you would like to explore further (or want me to), I would be happy to pursue it with you.

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## **Trek #1** (About 1.6 miles each way.)

If you would like to visit an old miner's camp, I have a beauty for you. Take the Buttermilk Bend trail past the State Park boundary sign to where the trail is completely washed out. You now have two alternatives: Go high (left) which is possible but somewhat steep and risky, or go right down to the rocks then immediately back up to rejoin the trail on the other side of the wash. (The trail now becomes rough and indistinct, having been washed out during the flood of 1997.) About 1/4 mile past the wash look to the left for a rather indistinct plateau about 10 - 15 feet above the trail and about 10 feet in. If you look closely enough you will see some stone steps heading right up to the plateau. I have placed a "duck" or stones-on-a-stone three yards left of the trail to mark the spot. Climb up to the plateau and you will see extensive stonework some 40 to 50 feet long paralleling the trail. Try to guess who or how many people lived within these foundations. (Or was it a corral?)

## **Trek #1.5**

If you aren't tired yet, keep going upstream on the trail (or what is left of it, as you will have to scramble over some debris that was placed there by the flood of '97), for about 1/4 mile and you will come to a steel cable stretched across the river. Remnants of it continue on up the gully from the north anchorage to the top of the canyon where some coils of it can be seen at the edge of the meadow there. (Ask Chuck what kind of a hike this is. Don't even think about doing it.) An easier way to the top of the cables is to follow Buttermilk Bend Road out across an open meadow to the edge of the canyon. (See Trek #4.) We have been told that a dig called China Mine existed somewhere in this area although I have been unable to locate it. The cable could have been used by the mine, or it could have been used characteristically to pull boulders out of the river to get at the gold, or it may have been used to build the wing dam that must have existed in the narrows to feed the ditch which is now the Buttermilk Bend trail...take your pick.

## **Trek #2** (About 1/3 mile.)

On May 15, 1877 Charles J. Cole claimed water rights on the South Yuba about 1 1/4 miles above Bridgeport, and dug a ditch down the south side of the river to Bridgeport for mining, manufacturing and irrigation purposes. Portions of this ditch are clearly visible from the Buttermilk Bend trail. It continues downstream about 30 feet above the Kneebone Beach trail and terminates where Pleasant Valley Road now cuts through it.

Below this ditch and alongside the Kneebone Beach trail one can observe what appears to be old stone foundations, but which upon closer examination prove to be a part of a ditch that probably fed the Kneebone resort or was perhaps used even earlier by gold miners. Stop at the old concrete cooler just before the beach. Turn around and head back down the trail for 115 yards to where an *old* road branches off to the left uphill. (If poison oak is your friend, there is an old dump off to the left in the bushes full of tin cans, etc.) Follow the road for about 95 yards or paces to where it curves to the right, and at the top of the curve go directly left off the road and up the hill alongside the ravine for about 50 feet. You will find yourself standing on an old dam which was probably a holding pond for water that fed the lower ditch. This is on private property and the owner is 'park friendly', but asks that we not continue on up the road beyond this point. A ditch took water from Kentucky Creek about a mile and a half from the top of the ravine and fed water into the ravine to feed the pond. The origin of this ditch is just below the Kentucky Creek waterfalls that are visible from Pleasant Valley Road.

## **Trek #2.1** (About 1/2 mile)

The truly adventurous can follow Cole's ditch upstream up to about the middle of Buttermilk Bend where it becomes impossible to follow any further. Watch for poison oak and some rather difficult areas that have washed out or are along steep terrain. It provides access to a secondary beach on the flat above Kneebone Beach.

### **Trek #3** (About 1/4 mile.)

Go south on Pleasant valley road past Kentucky creek 0.4 mile to where there is a break in the fence and an old road is clearly visible. This road was recently cleared by a crew from Washington and is quite walkable. After about 1/4 mile you will arrive at a large water tank that is fed from a spring further up the gully. If you follow the gully uphill (steep and full of poison oak) you will arrive at the source, which is an old "coyote" hole that has been plugged up with a 3" pvc pipe coming out of it and continuing down to the tank. This eventually is the pipe that can be seen crossing Kentucky Creek just below the restroom downstream from the cemetery, and feeds the lawn sprinkler by the old ranch house.

### **Trek #4** - Buttermilk Bend Road

While this hike is actually outside SYRSP, the view of the river and the canyon in general are well worth this fairly easy walk. This is private property for the most part so govern yourselves accordingly.

Drive up Pleasant Valley Road just past French Corral Creek and there is a road on the right (once named Buttermilk Bend Road). There used to be a house here that burned in the 49er fire. You must climb over a locked gate then take a sharp right along a stone wall and follow the road. It crosses open fields in a gentle climb passing through a cattle fence and eventually reaching another cattle fence just below an old pond. At this point I believe the old road continues past the left side of the pond and on down to French Corral, but have not walked it. Instead, the road (which I believe is currently a fire break) takes a right and after a few short steeper hills breaks out into the open where the road to the west of Slide Mine Road on the French Corral Topographical map becomes clearly visible. (I will call this Sluice Tunnel Road.) The view of the South Yuba canyon and the Excelsior Ditch across the way is breathtaking. Also for you radio buffs, the NULAIID repeater is visible on one of the mountain tops across the canyon. The road continues on up the hill following the crest, and eventually hits Sluice Tunnel Road. Turn left and the road merges with Slide Mine Road just above a pond. Continue left across the dam and Pleasant Valley Road is about a mile away at French Corral. Turn right on Sluice Tunnel Road to begin Trek #4A.

#### **Trek #4A - Sluice Tunnel Road**

*This is private property and the caretaker does not like trespassers. Permission should be sought before taking this hike.*

Follow Sluice Tunnel Road down toward the river to a hairpin turn to the left where a large pile of tailings is clearly visible. On the left two iron posts define what was once a gate. Take a right here on an old road and in about thirty yards you will be at the entrance of a tunnel that once carried tailings from the hydraulic mines in French Corral to the South Yuba. This is one of three such drains, each lower than the other as the diggings got deeper, and I suspect this is the latest and deepest, but have been unable to locate the others. Continue on down to the river to a flat area next to a lovely pool where there is a picnic table awaiting the lunch you have just earned, and will need for the climb back out, for although the road is in good shape it is a long hard pull back up the canyon wall, about 900 feet from the river to the top.

#### **Trek #4B - Slide Mine Road**

*This is private property and the caretaker does not like trespassers. Permission should be sought before taking this hike.*

Slide Mine Road is relatively new and in good shape. Like the Sluice Tunnel Road, it is a long hard pull back up from the river. Follow the road toward the river and as it first turns right to parallel the river for awhile, keep a sharp eye on the right for a small (one foot square) concrete pad with four bolts sticking out of it. This is at the entrance to what is most likely an old drift mine or possibly just a tunnel seeking the ancient Yuba gravel beds. This is so because unlike the sluice tunnel the tailings have been carried away, and also many core samples are visible just inside the entrance.

Watch closely along the way for stone work that supported old roads here and there all over this side of the canyon. Also at this point a road across the river should come into view that goes down to Starvation Bar. There are some buildings there and signs of active mining are visible. Continue down the road another 500 vertical feet onto a flat, and the Slide Mine comes into view. The adit is well preserved and a concrete pad near the entrance

probably supported the stamp mill that was used. The river and Starvation Bar are approximately another 400 vertical feet farther down the canyon wall where Owl Creek can be seen emptying into the South Yuba across the way.

While the road and footing are particularly good, this is a long steep trek in relatively unfriendly territory. It is well worth the effort, however if you are successful in gaining permission.

### **Trek #5**

While this hike is actually outside SYRSP, and a very short one, it is an interesting find. Also, this is private property for the most part so govern yourselves accordingly.

Drive up Pleasant Valley Road a short way past French Corral Creek and turn left on what is the termination of the old Rice's Crossing Road. Keep a lookout on the left and notice some of the stonework that outlined a portion of the Virginia Turnpike. You will soon pass two metal gates on the right and shortly arrive at a drain or gully crossing the road. An old road (visible on the French Corral topo map) turns off to the right, and this is the place to park. Look to the left about 100 feet down the gully and there is a pond there, held by an old dam which is fed by "Negro" spring. Blackberry bushes and cattails are filling the pond which makes it difficult to see immediately. On April 4, 1875 Charles Smith claimed the water rights to this spring "... a 1/4 mile west of the Grade House..." which was owned by Smith. Just as the old Rice's Crossing Road makes a sharp turn at the dam, so did an old road which was probably an early route of the Virginia Turnpike. In fact, it was labeled the "old road" in an 1856 hand drawn map. It is easy to find just below the dam on the left and it continues down and around the point to terminate on Pleasant Valley Road just above Smith's house. The portion of the road to the right of the dam is not as immediately obvious, but parallels Rice's Crossing Road for a short distance, then heads down hill to Pleasant Valley Road and the Visitors Center, and terminates just above the SYRSP boundary sign where the current Pleasant Valley Road cuts into it. This old road is the one you have seen high up the canyon wall looking west from pleasant Valley Road when you cross French Corral Creek, and wondered what it was. Now you know.

While this is not exactly a trek, it is an interesting archeological find. Stand on the North side of Pleasant Valley Road where the drain (see above) crosses it the remnants of a watering trough are visible. Directly across the road, partially buried by the newer section of Pleasant Valley Road, there was a three story house owned by Smith called the "Grade House" where travelers could board themselves and their horses for the night. Some of the foundation is still quite visible while the northern side of it is now under the current Pleasant Valley Road.

Apparently Smith was a bit of a shyster because as part of his bill he would put out hay for the horses in the evening, then later at night after the travelers went to bed he would retrieve it. As the story goes he was caught, but I haven't heard the consequences, although it probably wasn't pretty.

Just downhill from Smith's house another ditch is visible. On May 12, 1877 Caleb Cooley claimed water rights on French Corral Ravine "...about a half mile up the road from Smith's house..." and brought water down to Bridgeport using this ditch . It was also used by Captain Coffey on his claim, and by the Virginia Turnpike company to put down dust.

## **Trek #6**

The following is taken from studies of the Virginia Turnpike and while not specifically outlined as a trek provides for some very interesting hiking. Throughout this narrative the term "topo map" refers to the topographical map "French Corral, California".

The original Virginia Turnpike began at the Anthony House formerly situated near the Lake Wildwood dam. The LWW development has covered up the beginnings of this road, but it appears to have followed today's Pleasant Valley Road for the most part as far as Piper Lane (across the road from Bitney Springs road). In fact, a part of it can be seen directly across Pleasant Valley Road from the Williams Ranch school. Evidence of the turnpike here are remnants of the stone walls that are so prevalent near the covered bridge. Traveling North from the school several pieces of the wall can be found along the East side of Pleasant Valley Road as one approaches Piper Lane on the left. (One might speculate that the remains of an old stone building further down the road on the right could be the site of Rose's

corral.) Turn left on Piper Lane then bear right at the fork, (about 200 yards) on Delmar Way, then right at the next fork on Nomad Way, and continue to within about 150 yards of a gate at the end. Park here and continue on foot past the gate, then bear left on a road that passes a small trailer (in sight) and you are on the old turnpike road. (Watch out for an apparent fork to the left which goes downhill to a hunter's blind.) This is private property, but the owners seem friendly enough to our studies-

The old road follows the left side of the ridge, eventually meeting the South Yuba River bluff about 1/4 mile above the confluence of the South and main Yuba rivers. As the road approaches the bluff it is badly eroded into a deep gully then turns left abruptly and follows the South Yuba around the corner heading southwest toward Englebright. The road disappears into the Yuba at this point having been eroded away by the reservoir.

About 1/4 mile farther SW downstream from the confluence is the site of a bridge, no longer visible on the south side due to the reservoir. Referring to the topo map, on the north side of the Yuba a finger of land points WSW ending in a distinct gully or drainage which is the site of the bridge's northern abutment. Some stone work that appears to be an old abutment is visible here but needs to be verified. We are told that a road continued upstream to meet the Rice's Crossing Road.<sup>1</sup> [ This is a future trek.] The route then may have been across the Yuba at the old bridge, then upstream to Rice's Crossing, then back across and continuing up to the top of the hill where a turn to the right through a gate goes down to the Point Defiance campground, a turn to the left continues on to French Corral, and straight ahead goes down to meet Pleasant Valley Road just above Bridgeport.

Across Kentucky Creek from the Kneebone cemetery there is a gate barring an old road that follows along the south side of the South Yuba eventually dropping down into the river and out of sight. This road is newer than the one from Piper Hill, and one might guess that they connected at one time to provide access to a newer bridge at Bridgeport, a much faster route. Also of

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<sup>1</sup>This according to Everett Smith, a Maidu descendent who has roamed throughout the area in his earlier years and has a recollection of the old bridge abutments.



interest here are the abutments of an old bridge across Kentucky creek just above the current bridge, probably a part of this road.

While the present Rice's Crossing Road to French Corral is indeed old, it was preceded at various places by older sections of road. Traveling up the road from Point Defiance and continuing straight across Rice's Crossing Road a short section of old road curves around the hill and again meets Rice's Crossing Road just opposite an old foundation which we call the 'Cranston house', although there were previous owners.

### **Trek #7**

Drive up the new Rice's Crossing Road to the top to the saddle, and notice two iron gates on the left. The rightmost gate guards a road that heads down to Point Defiance, but also forks to the left just inside the gate onto a barely used road.<sup>2</sup> This road continues up the mountain and ends after climbing perhaps a quarter of a mile. From this point you must work your way zig-zag fashion to the top of the mountain, a little steep but not a bad hike. At the top there is not only a view of the upper end of Englebright, but also of the Bridgeport area, an ideal spot to have your picnic lunch. The mountain top here is relatively open meadow with occasional oak trees and boulders. This landscape continues westerly along the ridge for about half a mile before dropping abruptly and steeply through serious brush and poison oak to the Point Defiance campground. This last leg is a very difficult hike and not much fun...not recommended.

### **Trek #8 - Hoyts Crossing trail**

From the trail head at the 49 crossing to the SYRP boundary is .66 miles (3494 feet). Pay attention to the trail as there are several well-worn side trails that go down to the river along the way. At .76 miles (another 526 feet) you will encounter the Delta claim marker which is on the Hoyt

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<sup>2</sup> About a hundred yards down this road a new trail heads off to the left and continues down to the covered bridge.

crossing road<sup>3</sup>. Follow the road to the right where it ends high up on the river bank. Look carefully directly across the river and the south abutments can be seen. At .80 miles (another 230 feet) there are some interesting old foundations uphill on the left (through brush) that indicate a settlement of some kind. At .89 miles (another 460 feet) you have arrived at "Pan's Pool", a wide spot in the river on BLM land that is very popular. Clothing (and gender) seems to be optional here.

Should you cross the river here there are some interesting archeological finds. directly across and at the beginning of the canyon wall are the remains of two old camps, one of which was rather extensive and well engineered. This was Pan's camp. Continuing downstream river left, you will run into a tunnel through solid granite which was used to divert the river so miners could get at the gold in the river bed. (There must have been a bunch of it!) You have probably heard this referred to as "the miner's tunnel", aptly enough. This is also accessible via the Independence Trail which is evident in the following paragraph.

The old road leading up out of the river on this side is pretty well eroded, nothing but a trail remaining, but it continues up for about 711 feet and hits the lower end of Augustine Road which is no longer maintained for vehicular traffic. (Some four-wheelers still make it, however.) Take a left on the road uphill and it will intersect Independence Trail East in another 500 feet. Turn right on Independence Trail and it is another 2.1 miles (11,216 feet) to Highway 49.

### **Trek #8B - Miner's Tunnel Dam**

Standing on the upriver end of the miner's tunnel, look straight across the river (North) and you are looking at the dam site which diverted the river through the tunnel so the river could be mined. If you walk straight across, you will first encounter two large iron bars imbedded in the rocks on the tunnel side of the river (river left). Continue across the river and the first large boulder has four iron bars imbedded in it which have been ground flat by the river and time. The next boulder in this line has two more imbedded

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<sup>3</sup>The road is quite open and walkable, and the view of the canyon from near the top is breathtaking.

bars which are also ground off. All of these bars sites are in a straight line across the river to the tunnel entrance and were used to hold very large timbers and stones which comprised the dam<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>An example of this kind of dam exists above Purdon crossing, called "China dam" by the locals, which was a diversion dam for the flume to the New Rome power plant.

## **The Ditches of Bridgeport**

*This document is intended as a record of the various ditches, miners' and otherwise, which are located in and around Bridgeport. Some are documented while others are lost to history, the early miners being rather careless in their documentation, preferring to establish their rights with a weapon. Some of these ditches are on private land, and permission from the owners should be obtained before exploring them. Bert Hall, Docent*

### **Kentucky Creek Ditches**

There is a white board fence that runs from the Visitor's Center toward Pleasant Valley Road and terminates at a large fig tree. Turn your back to the fence, take a few steps to the right, look across the Pleasant Valley Road and observe a ditch running up the embankment that terminates at a small concrete footing. Closer examination reveals a funnel-shaped corrugated iron sheet on the right of the footing. This "funnel" is the terminus of a ditch that took water from Kentucky Creek about 3,000 feet upstream near a curve known as "Arrastre Bend"<sup>1</sup> to the Kneebones. At one time <sup>2</sup> a flume carried water from this footing over the farm, probably for mining purposes. Later, sometime around the turn of the century, it was routed beneath Pleasant Valley Road and used for irrigation purposes. It terminated in a small stone trap located at the foot of a large mulberry tree in the field adjacent to the Visitor's Center. Looking out across the field from the Visitor's Center, close examination reveals the dim outline of a shallow ditch running across the field that was used for the irrigation.

The dam at Arrastre Bend was originally built by Charles J. Cole together with C. Booth and Andrew Johnson on January 10, 1856. They claimed the water rights on Kentucky Creek and dug a 3000 foot ditch down the West side of the creek to a flat on the South Yuba for mining purposes. The remnants of this ditch and the dam are clearly visible from the creek bed, but are mostly on private land and also very difficult to approach due to the wild blackberries and poison oak.

### **Buttermilk Bend**

On June 7, 1877 Caleb Cooley claimed the water rights on the South Yuba River about 1 1/2 miles above Bridgeport, and dug a ditch 2 feet wide and 2 feet deep down the north side of the river to Bridgeport for irrigation and mining purposes. This is now the Buttermilk Bend trail. This ditch goes all the way to Englebright where it is lost in a large stand of blackberry bushes. Later, in 1877, water taken from French Corral creek was also carried down to Bridgeport using a portion of this ditch.

### **Negro Spring Ditch**

On April 4, 1875 Charles Smith claimed the water rights to "Negro Spring" 1/4 mile [uphill and to the] west of the "Grade House" owned by Smith. While his water rights claim doesn't specify, Smith probably used the water at the Grade House<sup>3</sup> where he maintained a stable for stock that was moving through. There is an old dam at Negro Spring and the dim remnants of a ditch headed toward Bridgeport are visible, but lost in

erosion on the steep sides of the canyon. There is also about 1/4 mile of 3/4" galvanized pipe heading from the dam toward Bridgeport obviously from a more recent era. This is all on private land.

### **Cole's Ditch**

On May 15, 1877 Charles J. Cole claimed water rights on the South Yuba about 1 1/4 miles above Bridgeport, and dug a ditch down the south side of the river to Bridgeport for mining, manufacturing and irrigation purposes. Portions of this ditch are clearly visible from the Buttermilk Bend trail. It continues down past Kneebone Beach and terminates where Pleasant Valley Road now cuts through it. Another ditch follows alongside the Kneebone Beach trail below Cole's ditch, but since no record of it has been found its source and use are not known.

### **Pleasant Valley Road Ditch**

So named for lack of a better description, this ancient ditch runs along the east side of Pleasant Valley Road, beginning at a small dam on Rapp Ravine Creek about 200 yards downstream from Bitney Springs Road. It runs for about 0.8 mile and disappears in a meadow just above "Robber's Rock"<sup>4</sup> curve where Pleasant Valley Road cuts through it. Its originator and use are lost to history. This is all on private land.

### **Excelsior Ditch**

The Excelsior Ditch can be seen high up on the walls of the canyon across the river from the Buttermilk Bend trail. This seventeen mile long ditch was dug by the Excelsior Water Company in 1859 and took water from the South Yuba River about four miles below Purdon Crossing, conveying it to a point just below where the dam at Lake Wildwood is now located. The New China ditch carried it from there to the Smartsville area for a total of 25 miles. There were many flumes along these ditches where water was sold to the miners. The wheelchair-accessable Independence Trail now occupies a large portion of the ditch between Augustine Road and Rush Creek. A rather complete history of this ditch is available.

### **"Deadfalls" Ditch**

On May 12, 1877 Caleb Cooley claimed water rights on French Corral Ravine "...about a half mile up the road from [Charles] Smith's house" and brought water down to Bridgeport using a ditch which was also used by Captain Coffey on his claim, and by the Virginia Turnpike company to put down dust. Smith's house (also known as the Grade House) was located where the Negro Spring drain crosses Pleasant Valley Road, 1.2 miles north of Bridgeport or about a half mile below the French Corral Creek bridge. This water had also been used since 1862 by a Captain Coffey for his gold claim, and by the Virginia Turnpike Company for "...laying the dust on their road." While greatly eroded, the ditch is visible below the site of Smith's house. Since Pleasant Valley Road is directly in the path of the ditch downhill from the site of the Smith house, it indicates

that the Virginia Turnpike utilized a different route out of the South Yuba canyon at least as late as 1877. This is all on private land.

### **Kneebone Pond Ditch**

There is a small dam at the bottom of a ravine just above Kneebone Beach where the old resort was located. This is on private property and the owner is 'park friendly', but asks that we not continue on up the road beyond this point. At the head of this ravine an old ditch follows the contour of the hills for a mile and a half to a point high up on Kentucky Creek. This was probably a water supply for the resort.

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<sup>1</sup>While it was called an arrastre, a dam is only a part of an arrastre. The dam diverted water to power a horizontal water wheel that dragged heavy stones which ground ore into fine particles to facilitate gold removal. Arrastre's originated in Mexico where burros, walking in a never-ending circle, were used instead of water power.

<sup>2</sup>The original Virginia Turnpike crossed a bridge over Kentucky Creek about thirty yards upstream from today's Kentucky Creek bridge and took a short turn into the walls of the turnpike as we see them today. The concrete abutments are intact but covered with blackberry bushes and difficult to get to. Stone walls of the original road can be seen across the road from the cemetery above where Pleasant Valley Road now cuts through it. Consequently there was no road under the flume at the time, the height being necessary only for the pressure needed for mining purposes.

<sup>3</sup>See **Deadfalls Ditch** above, for the Grade House location..

<sup>4</sup>Robber's Rock was so named because a stage coach was once robbed at this curve and the thieves hid behind the rock in order to waylay it. The rock is located 0.8 mile south of Bridgeport on the left of a sharp curve on Pleasant Valley Road.