

# Summary: Life in the Goldfields

## Mining Gold

Gold is a valuable natural resource because it is rare. The region near Sutter's Mill was one of the few places in the world where people found gold in large amounts. The goldfields of California included the rivers and mountains of the Sierra Nevada.

Gold forms deep in the Earth. When erosion wears away soil, gold nuggets can wash into rivers and streams. Since gold is heavier than sand or gravel, early miners used a technology called panning. They swirled water and sand in a pan and then poured out the sand, leaving the heavier gold on the bottom. Within a few years, miners took most of the gold from the streams and rivers.

To get more gold, miners dug deeper into the earth. They used the technology of hydraulic mining. Jets of water were used to wash away hillsides to uncover gold. Miners also used gunpowder to blast away rock and soil. They cut down trees to build mine shafts. They dug tunnels. The miners hurt forests, flooded farmland, and later poisoned water. The gold rush damaged land and lives.

## Life in Mining Camps

Life in the goldfields was tough. Many miners worked from sunup to sundown. They might find gold, but not enough to make them rich. When work was done, there were few places to buy food. Early miners often lived in tents on their claims. Some claims were just ten feet wide. There were no police to stop quarrels. Fires could also spread quickly.

Immigrant miners and Indians faced discrimination. An unjust law, called the Foreign Miners' Tax of 1850, forced immigrants to pay \$20 a month to mine. That was a great deal of money then. Discrimination also forced the Chinese and many others to set up their own separate camps.

Over time, camp life changed. People built cabins and houses. The camps grew into towns with shops, restaurants, and gathering places. Some camps published newspapers. Much of what we know about camp life comes from old newspapers, journals, and letters.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**technology** *noun*, the use of tools and scientific knowledge to get things done

**hydraulic mining** *noun*, the use of hoses with jets of water to uncover gold from hillsides

**discrimination** *noun*, the unfair treatment of people because they are members of a certain group



### After You Read

**REVIEW** What were three technologies the early gold miners used? Highlight sentences that explain the ways in which people mined for gold.

**REVIEW** What are some ways people today know about life in mining camps? Underline the sentences that tell our sources of information.