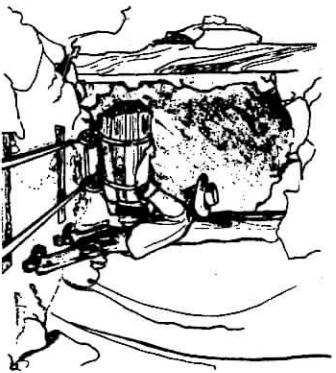


11. Metzger Mine (9.0 Miles)

Follow an 800-foot trail to the mine entrance.

After most of the placer sites were staked, gold-bearing quartz veins were discovered in the hills to the north and down through Jacoby Gulch to the east. The vein the miners followed when they dug this underground horizontal passage, or hardrock drift, is still visible above the mine entrance.



down through Lower Holcomb connecting with the "new" toll road in Cajon Pass. Soon after, a wagon hauled in a four-ton boiler to power the first quartz mill. The trip took 27 days from Los Angeles to Holcomb Valley.

Lode claims could not be worked without heavy machinery, so a wagon road became essential. The miners pledged \$1,500 and a road was cut by Jed Van Dusen

12. Gold Mountain (10.8 Miles)

also known as "Lucky Baldwin" Mine

Watch for the crumbling wooden structure on the right or south side of the road—this is an ore bin, built in 1945, a more recent attempt to make Gold Mountain profitable.

The last major gold discovery occurred in 1873 when Barney and Charley Carter were enroute to the Rose Mine. While camped on the north shore of Baldwin Lake, Barney went to inspect the "shiny stuff" in the quartz ledge immediately above their camp. His brief exploration led to a mountain of gold ore! Elias J. "Lucky" Baldwin purchased "Carters' Quartz Hill" for \$30,000.

By 1876, Baldwin had 180 men working his mine and a 40-stamp mill was in place. The concrete footings can be seen to the west. The site of a large mill and cyanide processing plant was added in 1899. The mill was in operation as late as 1923.

In the fall of 1875, William F. Holcomb returned once more to the Valley, a visit inspired by sentimentality and curiosity. Bill witnessed the death throes of the mining camps, the final and futile last search for more gold. Before long nature would creep back, reclaiming the land. The clapboard villages were abandoned, leaving only decaying ghost towns. Holcomb could never have guessed that when he shouldered his rifle to hunt bear in 1860, he would precipitate the largest Gold Rush in Southern California.



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GOLD BERRY TRAIL



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Welcome to the historic gold country of San Bernardino National Forest. This route takes you through the now tranquil

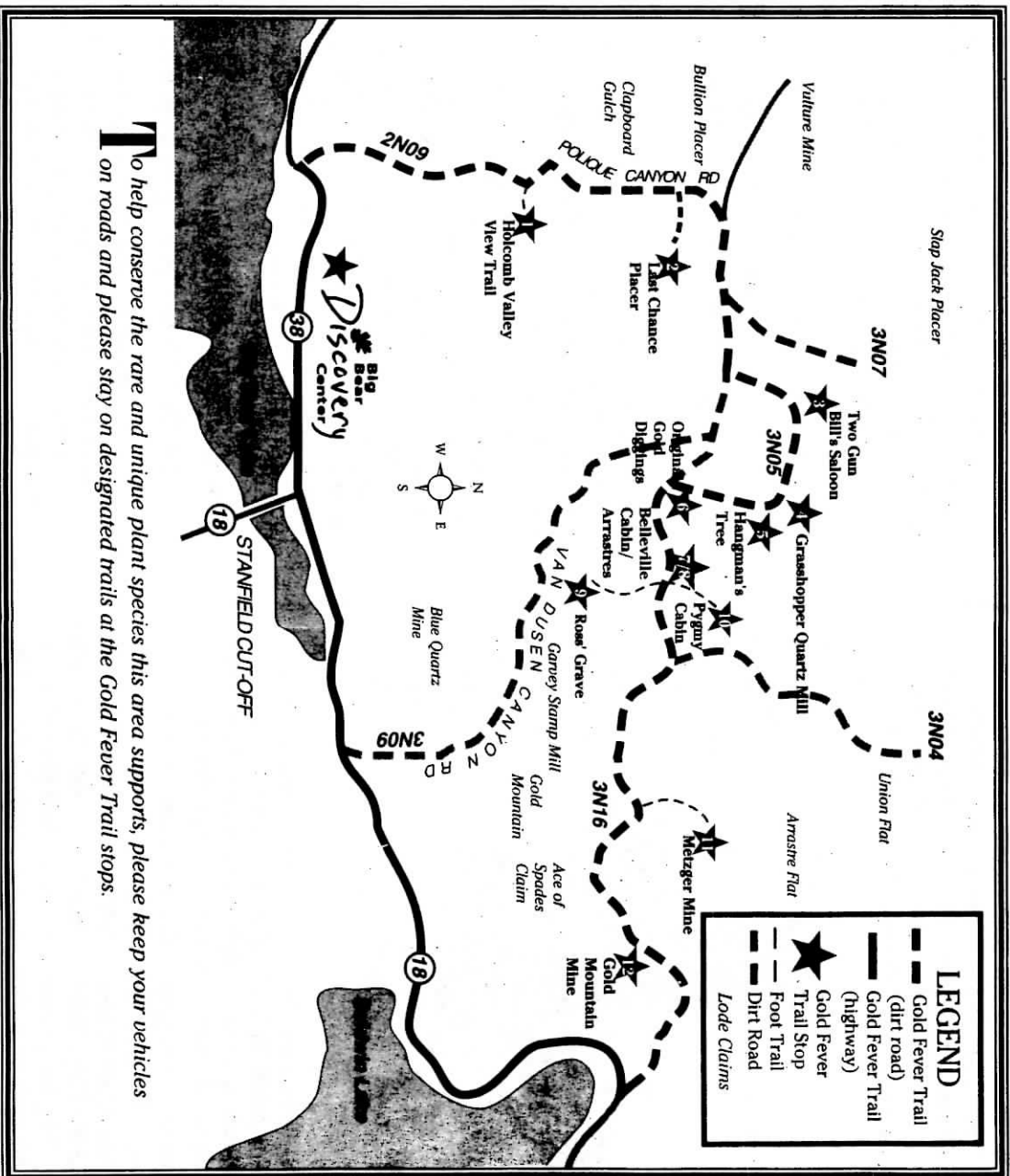
Holcomb Valley that was once thriving with activity during the gold rush of the 1860s.

At 12 selected markers you are invited to get out of your vehicle and walk to the sites described in this brochure.

This area supports a number of rare and unique species and their special habitats. Please keep your vehicles or bicycles on designated roads and use the parking areas at numbered stops. When walking to historical sites off the road, please stay on the trail. Your attention and care while in Holcomb Valley will help ensure the survival of the area's special plants.

Set your trip odometer to "0" as you leave from the front gate of the Big Bear Discovery Center. Mileage shown at each stop is the distance from the Center. Turn right onto HWY 38, drive 0.8 mile and turn right on Poilque Canyon Road - 2N09. The tour is 10.9 miles over **dirt roads**, and 8.6 miles back to the Discovery Center via HWY 38. Allow 3 hours for the nearly 20 mile round-trip.

William F. Holcomb left Iowa in 1850 and went west to seek his fortune in the mining camps of Northern California. Discouraged by poor luck, he drifted southward. Intrigued by rumors of a small gold discovery in the San Bernardino Mountains, Holcomb left Los Angeles in November of 1859, joining up with others, and camped in the aptly named Starvation Flats (on the south side of Stanfield Cutoff in Big Bear Valley).



To help conserve the rare and unique plant species this area supports, please keep your vehicles on roads and please stay on designated trails at the Gold Fever Trail stops.

1. Holcomb View Trail (3.2 miles)

Park and follow the Pacific Crest Trail 250 feet east to the view of Holcomb Valley.



Bill, being a fine marksman, was hired by other prospectors to hunt bear for its meat. One hunting trip led him up Polique Canyon, and when he reached the ridge line he looked northward and saw a beautiful little valley two miles distant. The party back at Starvation Flats later named this Holcomb's Valley.

The following day Bill and Ben Choteau, his Cherokee companion, wounded a "monster grizzly." They followed the blood trail across a quartz ledge which caught Bill's attention. Three days later they returned to take hunks of the quartz down to Caribou Creek where they intended to test the samples. While washing the rock in the creek, they were delighted to find the stream bed shimmering with gold washed down from the ridges above them! The news spread rapidly and by July of 1860 the valley was swarming with prospectors.

2. Last Chance Placer (4.8 miles)



Drive in 200 feet to a split rail fence around a mining pit.
Placer mining is a simple technique where gold is separated from sand or gravel with water. The miners worked the ground at this site down to bedrock.

Once pay dirt (black sand) was found, it was transported by horse and cart or in sacks on burros' backs, to be "sluiced

in the rockers." These crude gravel washers were located near hand-built earthen "snow ponds" where runoff supplied the water they needed. One such pond is northeast of the pit, 0.25 mile up the gulch.

The mounds, or "tailings" you see are the dirt and rocks removed from the mine after it was worked for gold. The prospectors were in search of the mother lode—the source of the gold—which has never been found.

3. Two Gun Bill's Saloon (5.8 miles)

Hike in 100 yards to the scattered remnants of this historic log structure.



For many years strangers were told that this was the site of the famous saloon, dance hall and bordello. The "white lie" was repeated so often that even locals began to believe it. But the real Two Gun Bill's Saloon was due west 1.5 miles at the southeast corner of the juncture of 3N16 and 3N12. The remains resting here are of a very big cabin that was occupied as late as the 1930's.

4. Jonathan Tibbetts' Grasshopper Quartz Mill (6.3 miles)

Walk 300 yards past sand mounds to the remains of a water pump.

Located in the "center of activity" was a high piece of ground known as "Chinamen's Knoll." Here Tibbetts operated a 5-stamp mill powered by a Pico Steam Engine. Heavy iron heads rose and fell rhythmically, pulverizing gold ore from the John Bull mines. The sand mound is old tailings.

5. Hangman's Tree (6.5 miles)

Look for a tree surrounded by rail fence next to road.

As miners and prospectors came to seek their fortune, outlaws, claim jumpers, gamblers, and other trouble makers followed close behind. In late August, 1861, the valley was taken over by an organized band of horse thieves from Salt Lake City, known as Button's Gang. The gangs' domination was so complete they simply commandeered any cabin they wanted and appropriated any supplies or equipment they fancied.

An estimated 50 murders were committed in the first two years of the discovery of Holcomb Valley. For example, "Hell Roaring Johnson" was shot when he tried to fix the first election in the valley.

Some outlaws evaded justice, but those who didn't met their Maker on Hangman's Tree.

For many years, this juniper tree was mistaken to be the famous

Hangman's Tree, the symbol of law and justice in the turbulent Holcomb Valley. (The original Hangman's Tree is now believed to be a stump 100 feet east of Belleville Cabin). Nevertheless, you can look up and imagine the scene when as many as four outlaws were hanged at once from the branches of a large tree.



6. Original Gold Diggings (6.8 miles)

Look in the meadow (the stream is not usually visible).

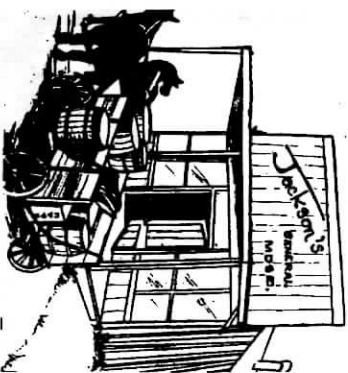
In this field Bill Holcomb made his original discovery. "Pannin' and diggin'" along the intermittent seasonal stream yielded some of the purest gold ever recovered in California.



In 1861 and 1862 thousands of claims were staked throughout the valley. Staking and recording a claim was easy—protecting it from someone else was often a more difficult task. One old claim paper says, "Joe Brown, takes this ground, jumpers will be shot."

7. Belleville (7.1 miles)

A lone log cabin sits in the meadow on your left (this cabin was moved to this site to represent the kind of structure once common in Holcomb Valley).



The largest gathering of prospectors settled east of the original discovery, in a rich, flat meadow. Inevitably a town sprung up, and Holcomb's memoirs tell of "Saloons, gambling dens, and bagnios of the lowest kind." On the outskirts of the haphazard town, earthen dugouts and hastily built shacks were thrown together by the miners. There was even a brewery and the infamous "Octagon House," an 8-sided saloon and dance hall, with rooms where glitter girls entertained.

For the town's first July 4th Celebration, the blacksmith's wife, Mrs. Jed Van Dusen, stitched together a flag made from the shiny skirts of the dance hall girls, and red and blue from miners'

shirts. Out of gratitude for her patriotic endeavor, the settlement was named Belleville, in honor of her pretty little daughter, Belle.

In 1861, at the peak of the gold rush, 1,500 people lived in Holcomb Valley, and Belleville missed taking the county seat from San Bernardino by a mere two votes. The population was typical of a mining town, with good men and industrious workers, balanced by degenerates and professional lawbreakers.



8. Arrastras (Gold Ore Grinder)

Walk 150 feet west of the Belleville cabin to see stone remains. Take care to protect the natural features of this meadow.

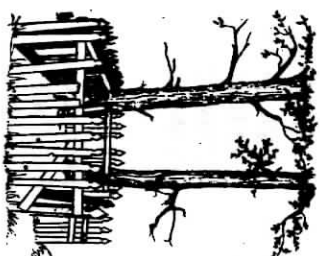
The oldest tool for recovering gold from rock was the arrastre, a wheel introduced by Mexican miners. The early arrastras consisted of a low rock wall banked around large, flat and fairly level stones. In a hole in the center was set an upright post, and on this pivoted a long horizontal beam. A donkey or mule harnessed to the end of the beam provided the power by



walking in an endless circle outside the arrastras wall. A chain bolted midway on the beam pulled a heavy drag stone. The ore was crushed between the stones. The process of grinding a single grinding quartz arrastras once dotted Holcomb Valley.

9. Ross' Grave (7.3 miles)

A 500-foot trail leads to the gravesite.



Little is known of Ross except for his name and that he was accidentally killed while cutting down a tree. Ross was buried on the spot. What made this gravesite unusual is that during those frantic days of gold fever, someone took the time to carve a picket fence to

surround the grave. Unfortunately, in recent years, vandals and souvenir hunters destroyed almost everything. However, one corner post and a few pickets can still be seen at the Big Bear Museum. The log fence was built by volunteers in 1995.

Virtually all the timber now standing in Holcomb Valley has grown back since the days when loggers with cross-cut hand saws and "yokes of six" were snaking the timber to nearby mills. Lumber and split clapboards were cut to build the boom towns of Belleville, Union, Clapboard and Doble. Heavy timbers were also milled to shore the mine shafts.

10. Pygmy Cabin Site (7.3 Miles)

Across the road from Stop #9, a winding 300-yard trail leads to the cabin remains.

There is much speculation and curiosity about the tiny old log cabin, which had a height of 6 feet at the roof peak and a door barely more than 4 feet tall. Was the roof put on before the walls got completed because winter was quickly approaching? Was the job rushed so the owner could head to the nearest stream to start panning? Or, was the builder simply short of stature?

Fire destroyed the cabin in November of 1983.

