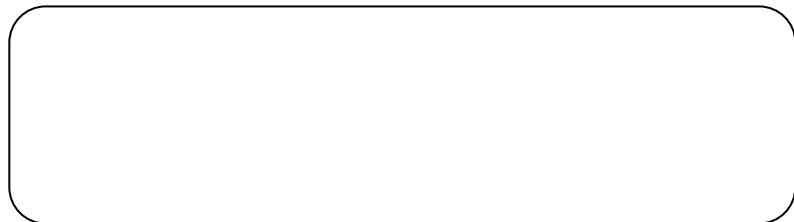


# Drywasher's Gazette

May 2026

Send Exchange Bulletins to:  
Valley Prospectors  
PO Box 2923  
San Bernardino, CA 92406-2923  
valleyprospectors49@gmail.com



Web Site: [www.valleyprospectors.org](http://www.valleyprospectors.org)  
Email: valleyprospectors49@gmail.com  
Next Meeting – Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> – Details Inside

## Mission and Code of Ethics

Valley Prospectors Inc. is a non-profit educational organization dedicated *To promote Gold Prospecting as a healthy family activity.*

## A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

General Membership Meeting is held the first Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm at the Elks Lodge in San Bernardino, CA.

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## Changes May be Coming for Mining Claims on U.S. Forest Land

For the first time since the 1970s the U.S. Forestry Service has proposed sweeping changes to how mining on public land is managed. The main impact would be to the submission of Plans of Operations and trying to bring U.S.F.S. Rules in line with rules the BLM follows. This is happening in conjunction with the Federal Executive Branch's push to open public lands to commercial mining of minerals by large corporations.



More alarmingly, the

new rules exclude activities that include educational and recreational activities. Education related to teaching others to mine for gold is explicitly cited as a main reason for the prohibition. Membership fees and donations are also deemed as "support for the authorized officer to find that the activities are not reasonably incident to mining" in the published rule change proposal submitted to the Federal Register for publication. This would devastate the tradition of gold prospecting clubs. Even paleontological fossil digs by small rockhound groups would be forbidden under these rule changes.

It was critical to speak up to your federal elected officials, but to date, only 455 comments from the public have been recorded in relation to the proposed rule change prior to the deadline on April 21, 2026. Of those, only 69 referenced gold mining activities. Several noted this would destroy gold mining related tourism in Colorado and California, impacting the economic well-being of many small towns. One comment from Colorado really hit the mark, "As a materials scientist, I am keenly aware of the difference between industrial chemical processing and the simple gravitational separation of native gold. Small-scale panning and sluicing do not contribute to the heavy metal loads identified in 303(d) listings. This rule would essentially ban hobby prospecting on many public lands through "paperwork attrition."

More Info:

Rule Change Proposal 2026-03364 (91 FR 8316)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/20/2026-03364/locatable-minerals>

Public Comments Recorder on the Rule Change:

<https://www.regulations.gov/document/FS-2018-0052-0182/comment>

U.S. Forestry Statement <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/natural-resources/geology/minerals/locatable-minerals/current-revisions>



## ✦ BLM Confirms Mining Claim Access Exception ✦ Mojave OHV Trail Closures Update

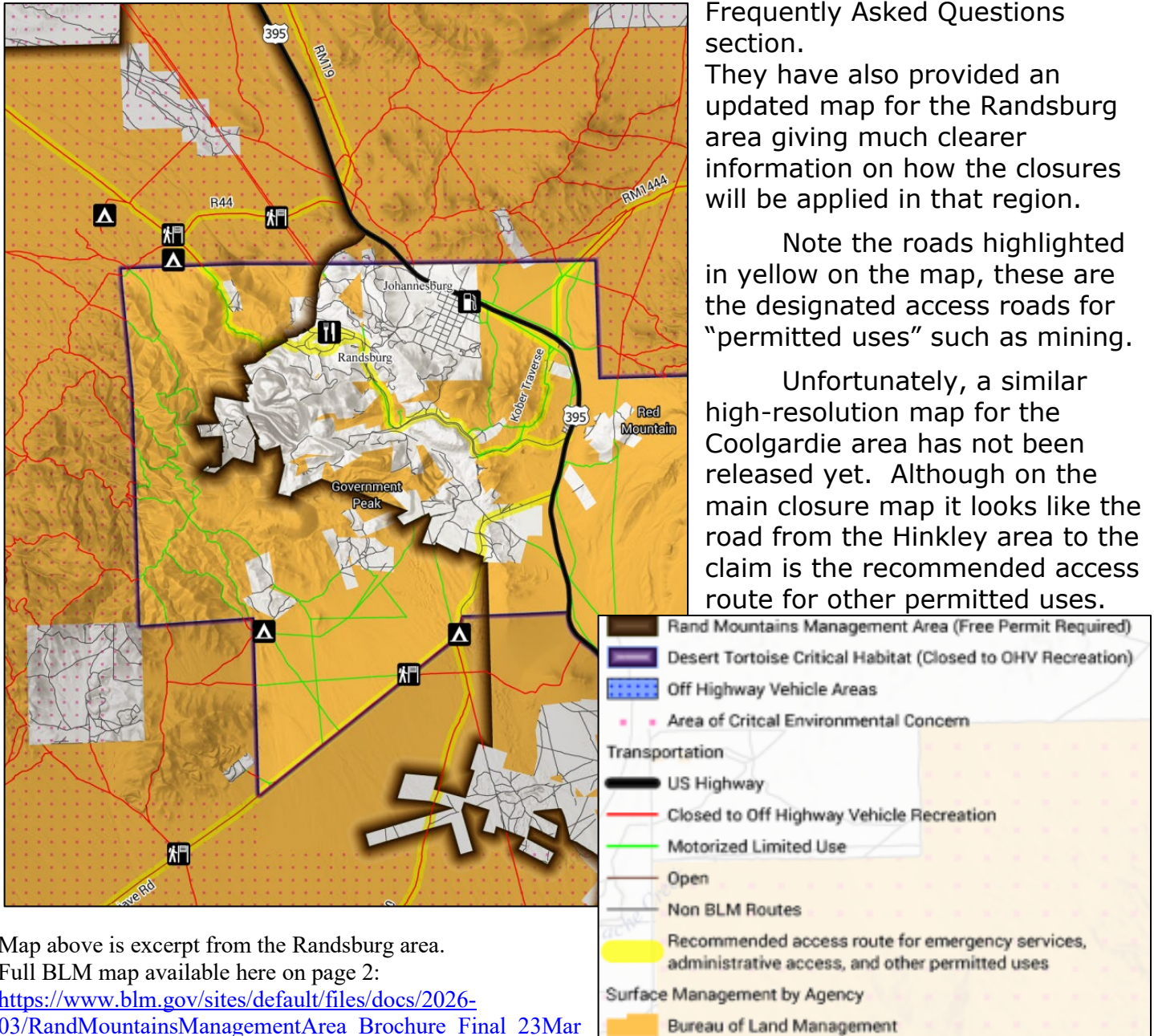
The BLM website has finally been updated after the Court ordered OHV closures and it confirms that mining claim access is an exception to the restrictions in the

Frequently Asked Questions section.

They have also provided an updated map for the Randsburg area giving much clearer information on how the closures will be applied in that region.

Note the roads highlighted in yellow on the map, these are the designated access roads for "permitted uses" such as mining.

Unfortunately, a similar high-resolution map for the Coolgardie area has not been released yet. Although on the main closure map it looks like the road from the Hinkley area to the claim is the recommended access route for other permitted uses.



## Steeped in Stories: The History of California's Gold—From Tunnels to Towns

### *Part 1: The Kentucky Mine—Sierra County Magnetic Mine*

By: Andrea Frost

#### **Forest and River's Secret**

California's history is wonderful and exciting. Even small hidden corners are rife with fantastical facts and meandering mysteries. Sierra County is a relatively small region in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Northern California, including the North Yuba River corridor, where Sierra City would later be.

Sierra City, with a current population of 235 at an elevation of 4,147 feet, is just an hour and a half away from the famous Donner Pass (elevation 7,056 feet). This little county has evidence of human occupation going back 5,000 years. Ancient petroglyphs show that Native Americans have traveled the region for centuries and across generations. The Sierra Valley was part of the Washoe tribal area, and the Miwok tribe lived here.

The region did not see significant occupation until the Gold Rush in 1849. Gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in 1848, and the second and most famous gold rush began. California joined the United States on September 9, 1850, as the 31st state. Both before and after California became a state, the North Yuba River corridor saw prospectors using sluices, pans, and rockers along streams and river branches to work placer deposits.

By 1850, the prospectors needed shelter and a trading hub for their work along the river. This need for survival and the region's geography led to the formation of Sierra City as a reactionary boomtown. Avalanches, fires, and intense and brutal winters that destroyed the town multiple times often affected the region. The residents rebuilt every time.

#### **Digging Deeper**

Three years after Sierra City was founded in 1853, the loose placer gold deposits were dwindling. Experienced prospectors realized that gold was locked in quartz veins inside the mountains, leading to the formation of many mining companies, including the Kentucky Consolidated Mining Company. This company opened the Kentucky Mine just outside Sierra City.

Unlike placer (loose) deposits of gold rolling around and hiding in the river, load deposits required tunnels, drilling, ore hauling, and ore crushing for the extraction of gold. The solution to crushing quartz ore with gold veins was building a stamp mill. A stamp mill works as you might expect. Heavy 'feet' are raised and dropped over the ore being processed, using gravity to break apart the rock for the next extraction step. The action of crushing ore with a stamp was extremely loud and very disruptive to the surroundings. I will cover the stamp mill's function and environmental impact in a future post. The Kentucky Mine had a five-stamp mill by the 1860s.

The rise of load mining and stamp mills led to the decline of individual prospectors and a shift towards corporate-style mining. The mining corporations required more capital, long-term planning, and extensive labor coordination to operate. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mining in Sierra County grew to include over 500 stamp mills. The Kentucky Mine operated a ten-stamp mill by 1888, contributing a small portion to the total number of mills in the region.

#### **Confident Growth**

The increase from five to ten stamps in 1888 showed that the mine was producing enough gold to justify doubling the stamp mill's processing capacity. This growth showed sustained ore quality and enough profit to attract investors for major upgrades. The miners who worked were also skilled enough to operate and maintain the complex machinery and ore extraction process to make a profit.

The Kentucky Mine used the most up-to-date mining technology and techniques to extract gold from the quartz ore. Harnessing the power of a waterfall farther up the mountain, the mine operated a water wheel to keep the blacksmith bellows hot. Gathering the water and leading it down the mountain in increasingly narrower pipes used the power of gravity to turn the Pelton wheel. The Pelton wheel is known for its efficiency in harnessing water power for operations. I will share a video of the blacksmith Pelton wheel in action in a paid post about my tour of the mine.

Efficiency was key in mining operations. To be the most efficient, the Kentucky mine had tracks for ore carts, leveraged the Pelton Wheel for power, forged and fixed tools onsite with a blacksmith just outside the mine entrance, and addressed any maintenance needs as soon as possible to keep the operations smooth and unhindered. The Kentucky mine was a self-contained industrial ecosystem focused on crushing as much quartz ore as possible in the shortest amount of time.

**Cont. on Page 5**

# Drywasher's Gazette

## Steeped in Stories: The History of California's Gold—From Tunnels to Towns

### Part 1: The Kentucky Mine—Sierra County Magnetic Mine

Cont.

Speed and quantity of ore processed were key to getting enough gold to keep the mine running and earn a profit. Approximately 1,000 tons of quartz ore were needed to find one ounce of gold at the mine.

#### Downward Cycle

The decline of a mine rarely happens suddenly; it is instead a gradual fading as the ore yields less and less, miners leave for better opportunities, and profits hit rock bottom. Between the fluctuation of gold prices and ore quality, the Kentucky Mine would have periods of reduced activity, sometimes dormancy. Like other mines in the area, the Kentucky Mine would open and close repeatedly, and ownership changed hands.

During these "down times," the mining equipment would sit idle, waiting for the next time a miner needed it. Though the gear was in active use, it still required minimal maintenance, ensuring it would be ready for the next rise in activity.

Though the periods when the mine slowed or stopped production are often boring, there are stories hidden within about the workers who stayed, those who left to find better or more profitable work, and the workers who would return to the mine later. Every miner who worked at the Kentucky Mine had generational knowledge of mining that they could use, teach, and share with other mines, families, or new workers. You could say that this knowledge was worth its weight in gold.

#### The Loeffler Revival

The Kentucky Mine got another chance to shine in 1920 when Emil Loeffler became the new owner and worked to revive it. Instead of just restoring the old system exactly, Loeffler adapted.

The Loefflers salvaged equipment from other mines in the area that had ceased operations. One of the biggest items needing attention was the rundown mill, which was worked on and rebuilt between 1928 and 1933. The Pelton water wheel mentioned before was a Loeffler upgrade to the existing system. They also began using compressed-air drilling systems to extract quartz ore from the mountain.

The mine, as it stands today, is a refurbished version of the Loeffler mine, a hybrid artifact that combines 19th-century mining traditions with 20th-century improvisation. During World War II, the mine was still operating, even though gold mining was discouraged.

Though the mine did not close for operations until 1953, tragedy struck in 1944, leading to the slow and seemingly final decline of the Kentucky Mine. Emil's son, Adolph "Dutch" Loeffler, was working in the mine when a tunnel collapse led to Adolph's death. After the family tragedy, they worked the mine sporadically until 1953, when mining ceased permanently at the location.

#### Second Chance

Even after mining stopped, the buildings and equipment were left untouched. About a decade after the last ore was wrested from the mountain, in the 1960s, the Sierra County Historical Society designated the Kentucky Mine as a uniquely valuable site for preservation. This mine's mill still contained original equipment; the mine portal, blacksmith shop, and trestle had survived; and the site told a complete story of mining for gold in California, not just a glimpse.

In 1974, using state historic preservation funds, Sierra County purchased the property from the Loeffler family and started focusing on restoration. The county focused on stabilizing structures, preserving machinery in situ (without moving it), and worked on interpreting the full mining process for future visitors.

Today, the Kentucky Mine is a living industrial museum where you can go to tour a multi-level stamp mill that still functions, the blacksmith shop at the mine entrance, ore tracks and trestle, a reconstructed miner's cabin, and museum exhibits contextualizing Sierra County and Sierra City's mining history.

#### Not Just Abandoned

There is so much that is fascinating about the Kentucky Mine. In future parts, I will cover exactly what got preserved, the impact of mining and preservation on the surrounding environment, my visit to the mine, and how I felt connected to the past miners who worked hard to find gold.



# 50<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary

VALLEY PROSPECTORS  
OF SAN BERNARDINO

2026 represents 50 years of community,  
exploration, and service for the Club.

SPECIAL NUGGET RAFFLE

5.24 Gram  
Nugget!



Members Only Raffle

Entries can be bought in person or  
by sending \$ to the Club's Zelle  
valleyprospectors49@gmail.com  
Comment: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Nugget

\$5.00  
Per Ticket

Winning Prospector will be picked at the  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Picnic Celebration in July!

**DO NOT NEED TO BE PRESENT TO WIN!**

Visiting or Working on a Club Claim or  
on a Claim the Club has Permission to Work?

**\*\*Please Read the Following\*\***

**This Applies to ALL Club Members and Their Guests.**

AS OF WEDNESDAY,

APRIL 29, 2026

GOLD IS

\$4,543.40 PER OUNCE.

\$146.07 PER GRAM.

<https://pricegold.net/>

**Hold Harmless Agreement:** Valley Prospectors and its members are not responsible or are to be held liable for injury, illness or death occurring at any club claim, function, or outing by any member or guest. Each member and their guests are responsible for properly being informed of potential hazards or risks that may occur while engaged in any activities while on club claims.

SILVER IS

\$73.21 PER OUNCE.

<https://www.apmex.com/silver-price>

**"ENTER CLAIMS AT YOUR OWN RISK"**

By requesting to be a new member or by renewing your Valley Prospector's membership you agree to abide by these terms and conditions.

# Drywasher's Gazette

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## February General Meeting Minutes

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026

President Albert Naki called the meeting to order. The meeting started at 6:18 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Steve Schubert.

**Approval of Minutes:** President Albert Naki asked for the approval of the February general meeting minutes. Lee Skillings made the motion to accept the March 3rd, 2026, general meeting minutes as published in the Drywasher's Gazette. Joe Chavez seconded the motion and the motion carried.

**Treasurer's Report:** Lorraine Frost gave the treasurer's report.

**Outing Report:** Lee Skillings gave his report on the outing. Yvonne Mack gave her report on the Ord Mountain Outing. The next outing will be held at the Hungryman Claim on May 16th, 2026. They will meet at Camp Cajon at 8:00 a.m. The First Class Miners will have their outing on April 24th through the 26th, 2026. The outing will be held at the Ord Mountains. There is a possibility the Ord Mountains camp site will be closed and other camping options were discussed. May 9th, 2026 Victor Valley Museum panning demonstration outing has been cancelled.

**Lady Luck Report:** Steve Schubert gave the Lady Luck report and this month's Lady Luck raffle will be a White Elephant raffle.

**Membership Report:** Lorraine Frost gave her report. There are currently 244 family memberships and 7 Lifetime Memberships and 1 Honorary Membership.

**Finds of the Month Report:** Everett Miller gave his report, and he also explained how the Finds of the Month worked.

**Editor Report:** Articles must be submitted to the newsletter by April 10th, 2026, according to Michelle O'Brien. Members are requested to submit articles and pictures for the newsletter.

**Gold Sales Report:** Art Fairchild gave his report.

**Refreshments Report:** President Albert Naki thanked Lee Skillings for bringing the refreshments to the meeting.

**50th Anniversary Party:** Lorraine Frost gave the report. The club will hold its 50th Anniversary Party at the Big Bear Historical Museum. There'll be a chuckwagon lunch served. She said members needed to RSVP by June 30th, 2026. There'll be different activities for the members as well. The first 20 family memberships who RSVP by June 30, 2026, will receive a special gift.

**Special Raffle:** Steve Schubert said there was going to be a special raffle for the Valley Prospectors 50th Anniversary Party. The club is going to sell raffle tickets for a gold nugget that will be raffled off at the outing. Tickets are \$5 each.

**Courtesy Report:** Mary Schubert said Bural LaRue had a stroke. She also said that Greg Herring had surgery. **Club Apparel:** Mary Schubert gave her report.

**Schools Report:** Steve Schubert gave the school's report. The next school outing will be held at Newberry Springs School on May 7th, 2026, and he's looking for volunteers to help with the gold panning demonstration.

**Guests:** President Albert Naki recognized the guests who were attending the meeting.

**Program Report:** Lorraine Frost said the April Program will be presented by Lee Skillings and the program is detector maps.

President Albert Naki called for the break in the meeting and the time was 6:51 p.m. The meeting resumed at 7:11 p.m.

**Program:** President Albert Naki introduced Lee Skillings, and he showed how to use the detector maps online program. Members also discussed the proposed changes to the U.S.F.S. rules that will impact mining clubs and claim access. Requests were made to make comments on the proposed rule change.

**Name Badge Winner:** David Ader and Debbie Claffey. **Door Prize Winner:** Mark Lash.

**Treasure Finds of the Month:** 1st. Fred Borad, 2nd. Albert Naki, 3rd Lee Skillings

**Gold Finds of the Month Winners:** 1st. Brian Teeling, 2nd. Fred Borad, 3rd. Michelle O'Brien

President Albert Naki called for the meeting to be adjourned. Lee Skillings made the motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Calvin Shipley seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

# Drywasher's Gazette

## Calendar of Events

DATE	DESCRIPTION	NOTES
MAY 7	Newberry Springs School Panning Demo	Need Volunteers Contact Steve Schubert or email the club
MAY 16	Hungry Man claims outing	Meet at Camp Cajon 8 am
MAY 27	May 27 -School Program - Big Bear Museum	Contact Steve Schubert
JUN 6-7	Randsburg – 2 Burros Claim Outing - Sat-Sun	Meet at claim – See Members Only section of website for claim directions
JUL 11	July 11 – Mountaineer Days – Wrightwood – Sat only	Setup at 8 am Saturday
JUL 17-19	Miners Folly Area Camping 50th Anniversary Membership Appreciation Picnic on the 19 <sup>th</sup>	Picnic on July 19 <sup>th</sup> Held at Big Bear Historical Museum – \$15 RSVP by June 30, 2026 Nonmembers \$25
AUG 7-9	Invite from FCM to Ranger Steve Outing at Big Bear Special Event - Metal Detecting Hunt on Saturday, Aug 8 <sup>th</sup> Fri-Sun	Camp Miners Folly
AUG 15-23	Pickett III and Gold Venture – Union Flats	Northern Claims Event
SEP 12-13	Indian Gulch/Jackass 1 – Camp at Miners Folly – Sat-Sun	Meet at Miners Folly
OCT 23-25	VP Rendezvous 2026 – Ord Mtn	Campsite TBD
NOV 14	Coolgardie – Oro Rico	Meet at Starlight Donuts 8am
DEC 5	Holiday Party & Awards Event	Pinon Hills Community Center 10 am – 3 pm

*\*\* As always events are subject to last-minute change due to weather or availability. Please make sure to check the Facebook group for any last-minute updates. If you are not on Facebook, please e-mail or text another member who has access.*

### \*\*\*GENERAL MEETING REMINDER\*\*\*

You're invited to be our guest at the General membership meetings that are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm at the Elks Lodge at

2055 Elks Dr, San Bernardino, CA. **Can't make it in person? Join in via Zoom meeting.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83026668634?pwd=ZUlyUlpLK1ZOQ1R1aTJmVndJQ0tNdz09>

**Meeting ID: 830 2666 8634 Passcode: 661754 One Tap Mobile**

+16694449171,,83026668634#,,,,\*661754# US+16699006833,,83026668634#,,,,\*661754# US (San Jose)By Audio Only: • +1 669 444 9171 US

**Want to Contact the Newsletter Crew or any other Committee Member?** Check out the Directory on the Club website or e-mail [valleyprospectors49@gmail.com](mailto:valleyprospectors49@gmail.com)