Modern Aggregate Gravel and Gold Mining in the Lower Yuba River with Field Evidence of the Historic Gold Mining Operations

This field trip will be highlighted by a tour of active surface mining operations in and immediately adjacent to the historic Yuba Goldfields. Upstream hydraulic mining with high-pressure monitors blasted away at river cliffs, exposing gold nuggets and releasing over one billion cubic yards of tailings (averaging 22 feet thick). Massive dredges ripped placer gold flakes from gravels buried dozens of feet below the surface. Currently, sand and gravel are California’s most valuable industrial minerals, and voluminous deposits in the Lower Yuba River are desperately needed for a construction industry lacking adequate supplies. Placer gold is still collected in the surface mining process. The field trip will include modern extraction and reclamation activities, as well as a visit to a restoration project for salmonid habitat and flood control.

The lunch stop, Hammon Grove Park in Yuba County, California, provides a view into the rich past of Yuba County’s gold mining history. Encompassing just over 40 acres, Hammon Grove sits where Long Bar was located – an historic town that once flourished but has since been buried under the thick layers of hydraulic mining debris. The land and topographic features are a remnant of Wendell P. Hammon’s vast gold dredging operation, which originally contained 10,000+ acres. Search for forensic clues that are still visible in the park, such as the tell-tale signs of the quartz mining operation of days past. Extensive water canals traverse the park property and lead to the mine tailings brought forth from deep underground sediments. A one-mile hiking trail follows the circumference of the park, allowing visitors an opportunity to experience the essence of the Yuba County foothills.

Closed-toe shoes are suggested for minor walking on potentially uneven ground near Yuba River. Bring hats and sunscreen, although cooler temps and rain are possible in late October.