

# South Yuba River State Park



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(530) 432-2546**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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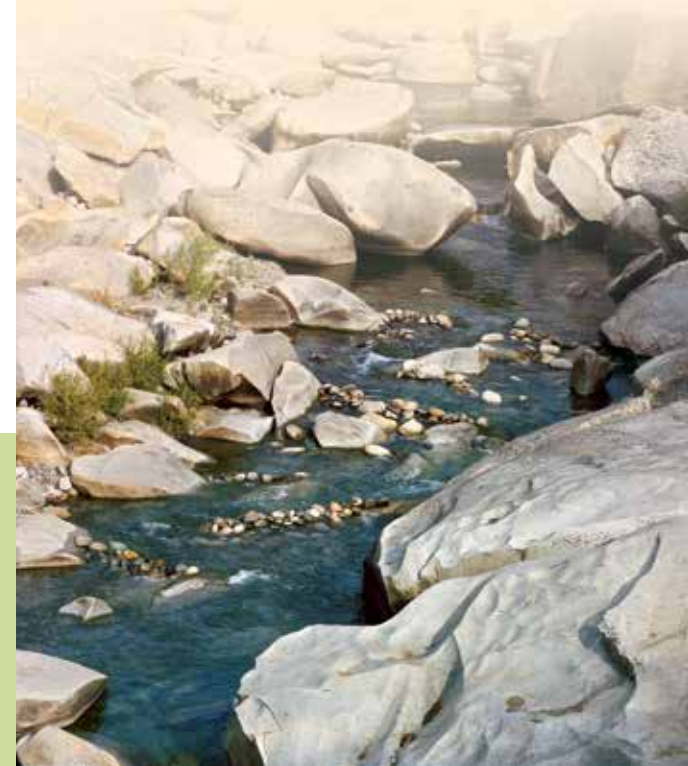
### South Yuba River State Park

17660 Pleasant Valley Road

Penn Valley, CA 95946

(530) 432-2546

*Steep, rugged canyons  
hide a richness of  
historic sites and  
a turquoise green  
river that knows few  
bounds—South Yuba  
River State Park is as  
exciting as the gold that  
still glimmers along  
its riverbanks.*



**In the depths of the South Yuba River Canyon**, visitors to South Yuba River State Park will find a wealth of wonder and discovery. This long, narrow patchwork of lands is a treasure trove of history that includes classic bridges, toll crossings, and trails leading to historic gold rush mine sites.

Add to that the canyon's stunning scenery, the clear, cold river tumbling between massive granite ledges, and many inviting places to play, and you have something to please just about everyone.

The climate varies depending on elevation, but is generally mild, with hot, dry summers. October to May can be cold and rainy.

## **PARK HISTORY**

### **Native People**

The Northern Maidu people—also known as Nisenan—may have migrated to the northern Sierra about 2,500 years ago. As with other hunter-gatherer groups, the Nisenan people's lives revolved around the changing seasons. Their lands provided them with free-running water, plentiful game and plant foods, and the basic materials needed to create homes, tools, and finely crafted baskets.

European contact brought a halt to the well-established Maidu way of life. With the discovery of gold in 1848 came devastating diseases and loss of the people's traditional resources. Settlers seeking land for grazing and lumber for construction simply took over the available resources. In the process they polluted the river with mining debris

and cut down many trees, including the oaks that provided food and shelter materials for the Maidu. Today, Nisenan descendants work with other Maidu groups to obtain federal tribal status, to increase youth educational opportunities, and to develop forest management programs to reestablish the forest's natural diversity.

### **Gold along the South Fork**

In June 1848 gold was discovered near Rose's Bar, just downstream from Bridgeport. Merchant John Rose, the first European settler to build a permanent structure in Nevada County, sold placer mining supplies; by 1850 Rose's Bar swarmed with more than 2,000 miners. Two or three miles from Rose's Bar, Parks' Bar—by far the richest of all the Yuba River gravel bars—was named for David Parks, who brought his family to the gold fields.

### **The Kneebone Family**

Hard work, generosity, and enterprise brought prominence to the pioneer Kneebone family. Andrew Reed Kneebone came to the U.S. in 1871 from Cornwall, England. On his family's 400-acre farm in the Spenceville area, Andrew learned to handle large teams of horses and mules. Andrew's future wife, Victoria Marie Cole, grew up on a farm near Bridgeport. The Cole family occupied a large farmhouse, where

they collected tolls for use of the covered bridge.

Andrew and Victoria's son Alfred and his wife Lucy took over the ranch and made many changes at Bridgeport. By 1926 Alfred and Lucy had developed the extremely popular Bridgeport Swim Resort—several cottages and a dance pavilion—about ¼-mile upriver from the covered bridge near the swimming hole. At about the same time they built a small grocery store and a gas station.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Kneebone family shared their good fortune. The large numbers of people who had begun to arrive in the area hoping to make a living panning for gold needed shelter, so Alfred and Lucy rented out the resort's vacation cottages. However, when hydraulic placer mining was resumed upriver at about the same time, fouling the river with debris, the Kneebone resort went out of business.

Victoria Kneebone died in 1930, and

Andrew died in 1934. They and other relatives are interred in the Kneebone Family Cemetery, which is cared for by their descendants.

### **The River Crossings**

With activity on both sides of the river, safe crossings were vital. Ferries came



*Andrew Kneebone and family, ca. 1903*



first, made by either overturning wagons and connecting them to form barges, or by refitting wagons to travel across water. The Point Defiance Ferry was located near today's Bridgeport, the Jones Bar Ferry was near today's Highway 49 Bridge, and the ferry at Edwards Crossing was near Illinois Bar.

Early bridge crossings include the 1895 Purdon Crossing Bridge and the 1905 Edwards Crossing Bridge, both in use today, and the 1921 Highway 49 Bridge, a graceful concrete arch that is perfect for watching the river.

At Jones Bar, four bridges have spanned the location, though none have survived the ravages of time and the river.

### **Bridgeport Covered Bridge**

By far the best-known bridge in the area is the Bridgeport Covered Bridge. In 1850 Virginian David I. Wood settled his family near the South Fork of the Yuba River, establishing a sawmill at Forest City and



*Bridgeport Covered Bridge*

a store at French Corral. Six years later, he and some associates formed the Virginia Turnpike Company to facilitate travel and commerce between Marysville and Virginia City, Nevada, and to collect tolls for use of the roads. Flooding during the winter of 1861-62 had destroyed five bridges across the river. In 1862 Wood oversaw the construction of the Bridgeport Covered Bridge, built with Douglas-fir trusses and wrought-iron rods and covered in sugar pine shakes. Originally 251 feet long, the bridge became 229 feet long after removal of the weather wings at each end. Marking the route favored by gold miners crossing the river, today the graceful curve of its wooden arch is visible from both the interior and exterior, making it a highly favored subject for photographers. This beautiful bridge is the longest single-span wooden covered bridge in existence.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The deep, rugged canyons of South Yuba River State Park host a rich variety of wildlife. Black bears seek plant foods, insects, and even carrion; coyotes and mountain lions hunt deer and small game. The park is a bird-watcher's paradise, with raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds among the winged residents. The most impressive season at the park is spring, when snowmelt roars over massive granite boulders and spectacular displays of wildflowers grace the riverbanks and secluded waterfalls. The canyon sides are covered in black oaks, gray pine, and Douglas-fir.



*Buttermilk Bend wildflower trail*

### **RECREATION**

Please visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or call the park at (530) 432-2546 for updates on park events or conditions.

**Wildflowers**—On Saturdays and Sundays from early March through mid-May, free guided walks through magnificent displays of wildflowers begin at 11 a.m. Bring drinking water. Pets are not permitted on the walks.

**Swimming**—Swimming is best from midsummer through fall, when the sun warms the river and its flows are at lower, safer levels. Swimming is not recommended in cold, fast-moving water. No lifeguards are on duty, so swim at your own risk and use flotation devices.

**Bird Watching**—Bring binoculars and comfortable walking shoes for year-round guided bird walks. Canyon wrens, spotted towhees, American dippers, acorn woodpeckers, black phoebes, and ruby-crowned sparrows may be seen here.

**Hiking**—More than a dozen trails vary from “very easy” through “easy” (Virginia Turnpike Loop, Old Flume). The 2.8-mile Point Defiance Loop at Bridgeport Crossing is “moderate,” and Missouri Bar is rated “strenuous.” The easy one-mile, one-way Buttermilk Bend Trail offers spectacular spring wildflower walks.

**Gold Panning**—Modern-day gold seekers can play out the story of the gold rush using only bare hands and shallow gold pans. Visitors may keep any gold they find.

**Fishing**—Fishing is safer after the spring runoff has subsided and the river level drops. Anglers age 16 or over must carry a valid California fishing license. For fishing regulations, visit [www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov).

**River Watching**—Watch the river’s power or its calm serenity from the bank or the Highway 49 Bridge and the Purdon and Edwards Crossing bridges.

### **HISTORIC SITES AND BRIDGES**

**Bridgeport Mining Camp (ca. 1850)**—Mining camp, stage stop, and ranch, it yielded some of the richest placer gold found anywhere.

**Hoyt Crossing (ca. 1850)**—This historic fording spot is near the Hoyt Crossing Trail at Highway 49 Crossing.

**Virginia Turnpike (1853-1901)**—Some features of this 14-mile toll road can be seen today, including portions of two stone walls that may have been built to discourage drivers from avoiding payment of tolls.

**Illinois Crossing (1854)**—A ferry operated here before the Edwards Crossing Bridge was built.

#### **Bridgeport Covered Bridge**

**(1862)**—River access is easy near here.

**Purdon Crossing Bridge (1895)**—In this unique half-through truss support system, the bridge’s deck lies roughly halfway between the top and bottom chords (supports), which allowed greater clearance under flood conditions.

#### **Edwards Crossing Bridge (1904)**—

This 114-foot span is considered a “sister” to the 1905 Gault Bridge in Nevada City.



*Highway 49 Bridge*

**Highway 49 Bridge (1921)**—This “rainbow-arch” cement bridge offers a grand viewpoint and easy access to the water.

### **DITCHES AND FLUMES**

Water power was necessary to bring the gold to light, so the miners dug a series of ditches directing creek and river water. In order to power the nozzles of the monitors that washed away gravels and exposed the gold, miners used gravity to direct water from higher (or intake) to lower (or output) elevations. Wherever ditches could not be dug, they built wooden flumes—long box-like structures to direct water flow.

The Excelsior Ditch, completed in 1859, has seen years of multiple uses—first as a ditch, later carrying irrigation water. Today, this well-constructed flume, with ramps leading to Rush Creek, carries people along the Independence Trail.





## INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Docents lead natural, cultural, and historical activities at Bridgeport throughout the year. On spring weekends, guided wildflower walks take place. A history station and gold-panning demonstrations are offered during summer weekends. The Bridgeport Fall Festival is held every year in late October. Guided bird walks are offered year-round. Visitors can always tour the historic barn, which houses eleven Gold-Rush-era wagons and a hay press.



*Gold panning*

Call (530) 432-2546, or visit the website [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) to schedule a school group tour, private tour, or receive event schedule information.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

There are two accessible parking spaces located at the Bridgeport Covered Bridge parking lot and four accessible parking spaces at the Bridgeport North parking lot.

**Trails**—The 2.21 mile Independence Trail enables wheelchair users to experience the adventure of this special park. Trailhead (with parking and an accessible non-flush restroom) is located off Highway 49, one mile south of the first bridge, north of Nevada City.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Poison oak: avoid this native three-leafed plant that causes a serious rash.
- Hikers should be in good condition for the trails they plan to hike. Drinking water is available at the Bridgeport Visitor Center.
- Gold-panning is allowed on South Yuba River public lands. Use your hands and gold pans only.
- No alcoholic beverages or glass containers of any kind.
- Dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet. Except for service animals, no dogs are allowed on Family Beach downstream from the covered bridge.
- There is no camping in the park.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.

- Fires and barbecues are not permitted.
- Firearms are not permitted.
- Respect private property—stay on trails.
- No diving. No lifeguards are on duty.
- There is no cell phone service in South Yuba Canyon.
- Please do not leave valuables in vehicles.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park  
23579 North Bloomfield Road  
Nevada City 95959 (530) 265-2740
- Empire Mine State Historic Park  
10791 E. Empire St., Grass Valley 95945  
(530) 273-8522

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization.  
For information, contact  
South Yuba River Park Association  
17660 Pleasant Valley Road  
Penn Valley, CA 95946  
[www.southyubariverstatepark.org](http://www.southyubariverstatepark.org)

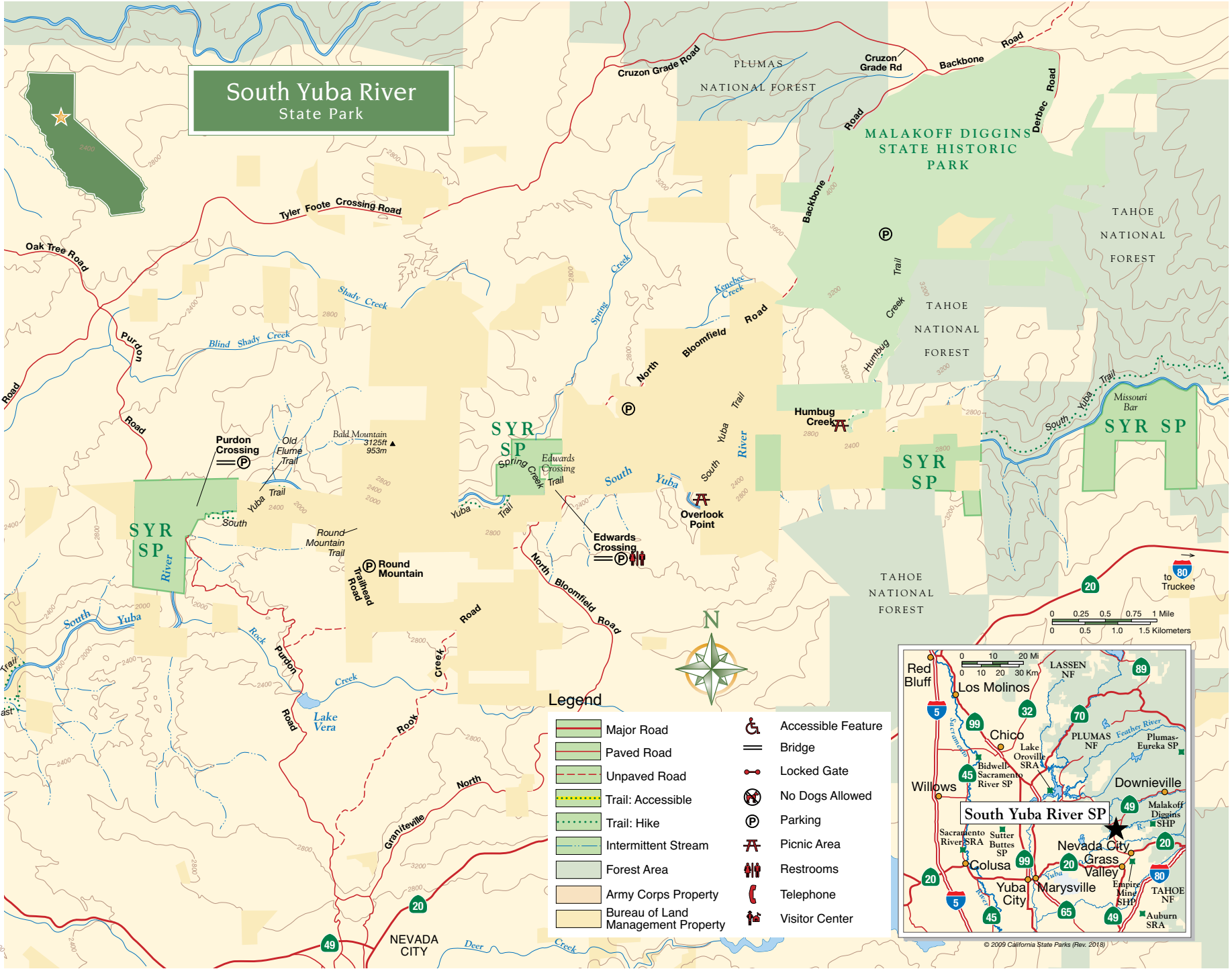


# South Yuba River State Park

### BRIDGEPORT VISITORS CENTER AREA

This inset map provides a detailed view of the Bridgeport Visitors Center area. It shows the South Yuba River flowing through the center, with the Bridgeport Covered Bridge crossing it. Key landmarks include the Kneebone Cemetery, the Barn, and the Virginia Turnpike (Service Road). Several trails are marked, including the Point Defiance Loop Trail, Cemetery Loop Trail, Buttermilk Bend Trail, and Kneebone Beach Trail (noted as Summer Only). The map also shows the location of the North San Juan and the Middle Yuba River. A scale bar indicates distances in feet (0, 250, 500, 750) and meters (0, 100, 200). A small map of California in the top right corner highlights the park's location with a star.

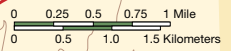




**South Yuba River State Park**

**Legend**

- |  |                                    |  |                    |
|--|------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
|  | Major Road                         |  | Accessible Feature |
|  | Paved Road                         |  | Bridge             |
|  | Unpaved Road                       |  | Locked Gate        |
|  | Trail: Accessible                  |  | No Dogs Allowed    |
|  | Trail: Hike                        |  | Parking            |
|  | Intermittent Stream                |  | Picnic Area        |
|  | Forest Area                        |  | Restrooms          |
|  | Army Corps Property                |  | Telephone          |
|  | Bureau of Land Management Property |  | Visitor Center     |



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