



# California State Parks

## Video Transcript



### ***Hiking the Monroe Ridge Trail at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park***

Good morning. Welcome to Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park. My name is Ranger Jim Pence, and today we're going to be walking on the Monroe Ridge Trail and the Monument Trail. We have two trails. One of the trails starts right here behind this restroom, and it's about a half-mile loop trail that takes you right up to the Marshall Monument itself. The other trail we're going to be on today is the Monroe Ridge Trail. It's one of the newer trails in the park. It's a little bit longer, and you gain a little bit more elevation, but you walk along this ridge up behind us here, and we will go through some areas historic in the park—mining ditches, which have been converted into irrigation ditches, and then also some mining activity, that was done by James Monroe, in the area. Again, one trail is much higher than the other, so once you get up on top you've got a beautiful panoramic view of Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park and Coloma itself.

Here we are at the trailhead—the beginning of the Marshall Monument Trail. This trail is located right behind the museum, right at the parking area to the picnic area. This trail is a half-mile trail, and it takes you right up to the Marshall Monument. It's a little bit steep, there is a little bit of elevation gained, but once you get up to a certain elevation, then it just kind of flattens out and you wind up right at the monument before you know it. So let's go ahead and start up this trail. It's a beautiful day; we're going to take a little walk and warm up.

Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park has different eras of acquisition. During the 1940s, during the WPA, workers came in and built the cobblestone fire pits that you see here, along with very nice picnic tables, probably made out of redwood, and they stand to this day. It's different eras, I guess you'd say, of park development. Where we're going is the original park, which was dedicated in 1890, and that's the Marshall Monument itself. On the way, you'll see all kinds of different picnic areas that were built in the '40s.

Okay, we're a couple hundred yards up the trail, and if you look on either side of me, we've got a ditch running right through the middle of the trail. During the gold discovery, and in the hunt for placer gold, miners used water to mine with, so they could mine using gold pans and not have to "dry mine" as they called it. So ditches were actually developed in the early days to deliver water from higher elevations to the mining sites. Now this ditch goes through and it probably ends somewhere and is out of service, but it was probably used at one time to mine and then later turned into agricultural supply.

This is one of the many native bunchgrasses that we have in the park. At one time these grasses were growing all over the place and were probably in areas where you'd see a lot of

## California State Parks Video Transcript

### Hiking the Monroe Ridge Trail at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park

this Himalayan blackberry, which is an introduced species. It would be replaced by natural grasses growing in the area. But because this blackberry grows so fast, it can outdo and outgrow the grass and shade it.

We are at the active irrigation ditch. This was at one time used as a mining ditch to deliver water to a lot of the mining operations that required water for placer mining. Right now it's being used as an irrigation ditch for farms in the Lotus area, which was called old Union Town. It's a sister city to Coloma and is just down the road a little bit, or downstream from this ditch. It's used and still has water in it—it's been used to deliver water for over a hundred years.

Okay, let's continue up the trail. We're going to kind of even out here, level out a little bit and before you know it, we'll be at the Marshall Monument.

This is a highlight for me—this time of year during the fall, when you look up in these mountains, you see the beautiful toyon berries or Christmas berries as they're called that are blooming or fruiting out. Also, the trees are just a beautiful color. The many black oaks that we have in the area have all changed color, and the trees are golden yellow. It's a beautiful time of year and not very crowded up here.

If you look in the area that we're at, you can notice a lot of oak trees in the area, a lot of hardwood forest. At one time this was solid ponderosa, virgin ponderosa pine forest, probably 10 times to 15 times larger than the ponderosa that you see in this area. When this area was dedicated in 1890, none of this vegetation was here. All these trees have grown since 1890 and are second- and third-generation growth. So imagine a monstrous forest that at one time was here—exactly what James Marshall was looking for, and John Sutter, to produce lumber for Sutter's Fort. So we'll continue on. It's real close. You can almost see it.

Okay, here we are, a half-mile later—it didn't take very long. We came up from the visitor's center, all the way up to the Marshall Monument. The Marshall Monument is California State Park System's oldest landmark. It was dedicated in 1890 and now is James Marshall's grave. He died in 1885. It's up on top of this little hill here, and it overlooks the beautiful Coloma Valley. It's nice and quiet this time of year. Beautiful trees—all the oaks are golden with color and dropping their leaves. It's a beautiful time of year to be at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park.

When you look at James Marshall on his gravestone, you'll notice he's pointing. He's pointing right to the area in the tailrace of the sawmill where he discovered gold on January 24, 1848, and he's got the gold in his hand to prove that spot was where he found it.

Okay, we've done the easy part. Now, this is the half-mile Marshall Monument Trail. We're going to walk right across the parking lot here, and we're going to pick up the Monroe Ridge Trail. It's about a three-mile walk. Right across this ridge up behind us are beautiful views, some test mining that James Monroe did when he lived here, and some beautiful sites.

Here we are at a landmark of the living kind, very historic. This is an olive tree that was planted by James Marshall, and it's right here on the corner of the parking lot of the Marshall Monument. So, when you come up, make sure you get a look at this. You can drive right up to it, as with the monument, and visit the spot. This one actually has olives on it.

**California State Parks Video Transcript**  
**Hiking the Monroe Ridge Trail at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park**

All right, from this location, which is right here at the Marshall Monument parking lot, we're going to walk right over to this Monroe Ridge Trail. It's fairly easily marked so you can find it, and we're going to walk right up there where that Steller's jay is sitting there.

Like most state parks and areas that are protected, we have a lot of animals that are in the park. One of those animals includes mountain lions. They are here to hunt on other animals that are in the park. Very rare, in fact I've never seen one in the park, but there have been some sightings of mountain lions here, so we always suggest if you come up on the park trails, that you bring somebody with you. Of course, dogs are not allowed on the trails. So we always suggest just another person to walk along with you.

We have this beautiful spring area with beautiful ferns in the area. This building that you see here is an original wellhead for Coloma's water supply, basically. This is the area that fed Coloma, and we have a nice spring here. It was piped and distributed through town.

Okay, we've gone about a half-mile up the Monroe Ridge Trail and we're looking down on James Marshall's Monument here, with beautiful Mount Murphy in the background. What a beautiful time of year—it's the fall in the Coloma Valley. The trees are changing. You've got Christmas berries and all kinds of stuff all over the place. A very nice viewshed from here.

Here we are. We've reached the top of the Monroe Ridge. We broke the ridge. Behind me is Lotus, once known as Union Town. In front of me is the south fork of the American River, or Coloma Valley, and we're going to start heading downhill now. We're going to see some different views. We're going to be on the other side of the ridge so we'll be looking right down on the community of Lotus and see all kinds of neat stuff.

All right, we've broken the ridge. We're now on the north side of the Monroe Ridge. Things are a lot cooler here on this side. You see a lot of moisture. We've got a lot of vegetation—mosses and things—growing in this beautiful black oak forest. This area has traditionally been burned by the state park system. You can see we've got a lot of non-natives growing in here, a lot of the scotch broom—this spiny stuff was an imported plant and we're trying to eradicate it. So we're constantly doing burn programs to try to knock this stuff out, to keep this forest nice and healthy and properly disbursed all through here.

Okay, here we are. We're right up on top of the ridge still and this location is an open pit mine of some sort. We think it was dug by the Monroe Family—possibly Jim Monroe in his search for hard rock mining. Of course, Coloma is known for placer gold—gold that was in the river. Some of that mining activity did take place outside the river, but nothing really up here on the ridge as far as we know. It wasn't a real good gold strike and was probably abandoned after a while. But if you look around on the ground here, you'll notice there's lots of quartz—lots of big chunks of quartz—and, of course, gold is associated with that quartz. So it was a good attempt and he might have found some gold here. I really don't know. It's unknown.

We've got a beautiful native plant—it's manzanita and it grows very well down here. Of course, it's really dangerous in fire situations but this is something that has been here quite a while and is a native. It just feels like steel when you touch this—it's really cold and very, very hard wood.

**California State Parks Video Transcript**  
**Hiking the Monroe Ridge Trail at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park**

Okay, here we are. We've walked three and a half miles. We've done the entire Monroe Ridge Trail from start to finish. But right now, we're in the Monroe Orchard, and standing right here was the home site of the Gooch and Monroe family. At one time, a large two-story house here, a thriving orchard with all kinds of fruit and produce for sale to the hungry miners that were in the area. They did so well that the Monroes ended up owning most of Coloma.

Right in front of me is the North Beach parking lot where you can park your car and start this trail. But we always suggest coming right to the museum where you can pick up a park brochure and trail map, which will give you a better idea of where you're walking.

So I thank you for coming. My name is Jim Pence. I'm a park ranger here at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park, and we look forward to your visit.

Running Time: 13:24  
© California State Parks, 2004