

## **My Introduction to Gold Prospecting**

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Around 1978, I was introduced to prospecting by my brother-in-law, Jerry. My family and I were living in the Southern California community of Lakewood, and we made the long drive to the Sacramento area to visit my in-laws.

I was in the US Coast Guard at the time and money was tight. I was looking for a hobby that wouldn't cost me much to pursue. Jerry suggested that I learn how to prospect and he was just the one who would teach me; after all, he had gold pans and a sluice box and needed someone to shovel gravel. Jerry had just the spot for me to learn this ancient and highly-respected art form of using a sluice box. He had a secret prospecting site that just happened to be on the North Fork of the American River outside of Auburn.

We drove to a parking lot near the river and he unloaded his car of all the wonderful equipment, including a sluice box, buckets, shovels, picks and gold pans. Then we started to hike to the secret location about a mile upstream and then up a small tributary to the river.

We stopped at a large tailing pile next to the stream that was below an old mining location. I don't recall the exact spot anymore, but I remember digging into the tailing pile while Jerry set up the sluice box. Soon I was hauling bucket after bucket of dirt and rocks to Jerry so he could run them through the sluice box. I think I must have filled the buckets for several hours while Jerry sat in the shade and kept feeding the sluice. I remember it was a hot summer day and we didn't bring any food or water, but that was okay since we were going to find gold.

At the end of the day, Jerry showed me how to clean out the sluice box and then how to pan out the concentrates. As we finished panning, there it was—a little tiny smile of gold in the bottom of the pan. I think it might have amounted to maybe 1/2-gram or so, but we had found gold and I was hooked. We packed up all our tools and made the hike back to the car. On the drive back to his house, Jerry asked if I wanted to buy the sluice box and gold pans. I think this was his idea all along, and I agreed to purchase them. I don't recall how much I paid and I don't recall splitting the gold we found that day either, but I became a prospector and had my own equipment.

On my way home I had time to think about where I could prospect in Southern California. Do you know what the rivers are like in the Long Beach area? I hadn't really thought about it before, but down there, they are concrete drainages primarily made to divert water from streets in the summer and raging torrents when it does rain during the winter.

After arriving home, I started to explore by riding my bike along the trails along the concrete rivers. There weren't any gravel benches, but I did find that where the concrete ended, the mud flats began. Possibly I could find gold at that spot?



*The author still has those coins recovered on from his first gold prospecting adventure.*

I had two young sons (Jeffrey and Jason) who could ride bicycles, so we could all ride to the potential prospecting site and they could help carry the buckets, shovel and pans, while I carried the sluice box. Off we went, several miles to get to the mud flat. When we arrived, I set the sluice up in the concrete river just so the trickle of water would wash the mud through the box. I shoveled mud from just below where the concrete ended. I carried the buckets to the sluice box and let the boys feed the mud into the sluice. (This was a time when finding discarded drug needles was not as common as today. I wouldn't be willing to try this now.) As the boys processed the mud, they started to find coins—lots of coins. Pretty soon we had to find something to put all the coins in, so we used one of our buckets.

At the end of the day we had recovered about 25 pounds of coins. They were mostly pennies, but there were a lot of larger denominations too. I even found gold; the gold was on an old mercury dime where someone had attached a gold loop to hang it on a necklace.

I used most of the large denomination coins to purchase a really nice metal detector that I used for years to find more coins and artifacts. The pennies I still have—and I have lugged them around the world during all my military transfers. The metal detector has been upgraded over the years and now I have a Pulse Induction unit that I use to find gold nuggets. The sluice box and gold pans I originally had are relegated to show pieces in my barn, right next to the 19-pound can of pennies.