



# ZOOM

## IN ON THE USA

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### American gold rushes

The May issue of *Zoom in on the USA* tells you about two great 19th century gold rushes, one in California and the other in Alaska. As you can see below, this time exercises come early - the first is already on this page. And there are more on p.4, as usual. Please have a look at the glossary, where the "gold" vocabulary is provided.



*This undated photo from Newmont Mining Corporation shows gold nuggets and bars  
A Photo © AP Images*

#### Exercise 1

Read the texts on pages 2 and 3 and put the headings below in the appropriate places in each text:

text on p. 2: a/ The World of Forty-Niners, b/ The Man Who Changed California, c/ Unequal Competition,  
d/ Pros of Living Close, e/ Harder and Harder to Get, f/ Political situation

text on p. 3: a/ True Heroes, b/ More Precious Than Gold, c/ Value of Advice, d/ A Ton to Carry,  
e/ Different Goals

## California gold rush: 1848-1855



Reenacting history - riders and wagons of the Sesquicentennial Wagon Train pass Lake Camanche, traveling west on Camanche North Parkway, Saturday, June 26, 1999 Photo © AP Images

... (1)

San Francisco was a sleepy town of about 800 inhabitants when one May morning in 1848 Samuel Brennan, a publisher and merchant, changed its fate forever when he walked the city's streets crying "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!" while holding a vial of gold in his hand as proof. He had heard tales that there was gold near the fork of the American and Sacramento Rivers and decided to spread the news with the hope of making good money by opening stores with all the provisions and equipment prospective gold-seekers would need. That is, everything they would need except for luck, for luck cannot be bought ...

... (2)

Migration to California began quickly in response to Brennan's announcement. First, the local inhabitants began panning and digging around the rivers, then as the news spread people from near and far began to arrive by land and sea, and the California Gold Rush began in earnest.

... (3)

The beginning of the Gold Rush came just after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe, which ended the war between Mexico and the United States and ceded the territory of California to the United States. However, the establishment of law and government in the territory did not come for some time, making the territory wild and lawless. It was not until September 1850 that California adopted the U.S. Constitution and became the 31st state.

... (4)

A great number of gold seekers arrived to California in 1849. They were called "Forty-Niners." Their world was a men's world, where a woman was a rare sight. Women were so few that once, upon hearing that a calico dress was hanging from a wagon, a group of miners supposedly went to the wagon shouting "Fetch her out, fetch her out!" A distressed immigrant explained to them that the dress belonged to his wife and

that she was sick inside the wagon. But, the group still insisted that he "fetch her out." It turned out that there was nothing to worry about. They just wanted to see her, listen to her voice and touch her dress. They even collected \$250 in gold for the couple when the man told them they had been robbed. Whether the story is true, we don't know, but the famous American author Mark Twain recounted it in his "Roughing It and the Innocents at Home."

...(5)

A combination of luck and hard work defined whether the gold-seekers of the day became rich or headed home empty-handed. George Goddard, an English civil engineer, commented on this fact when he said "... everything is inverted in this country - the man who makes the most money is the hardest-working laborer while the man of education has nothing but to enter an unequal competition with the laborer..." (from "The Land of the Glittering Dreams" website: [www.glittering.com](http://www.glittering.com))

...(6)

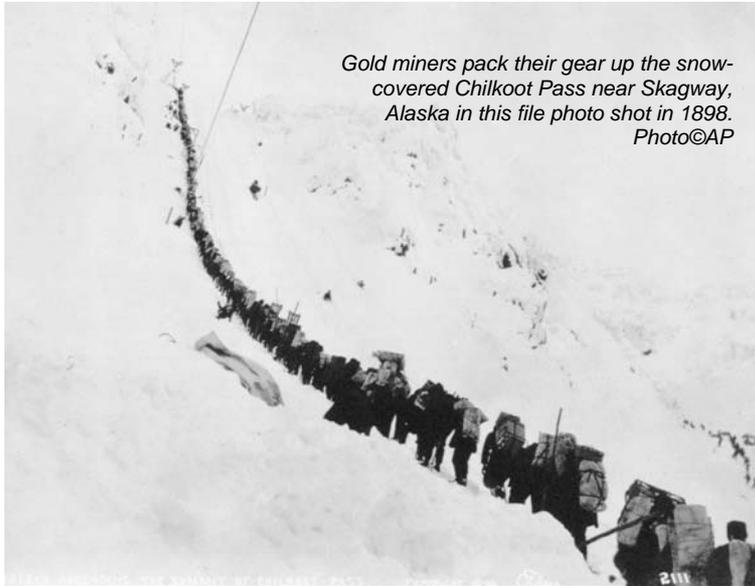
At the beginning it was relatively easy to retrieve gold. Panning rivers and streams was the most-widely applied method. Prospectors "staked" a claim of an area they were working on and what they found there was theirs, but as soon as they left the claim, it was free to be staked again. Some people really struck it lucky finding up to thousands of dollars worth of gold daily. Later, when the easily accessible gold was all gone, hydraulic mining took its place. It consisted in directing a powerful stream of water at gravel to separate it from the gold with which it was mixed. Special sluices were constructed for transporting water, gravel and gold. The precious metal - the heaviest of them all - remained at the bottom and could then be easily collected. Other technologies came into use with time, including "hard-rock" (or quartz rock) mining, dredging and quartz crushing. With new arrivals and the gold resources shrinking, it was harder and harder to earn a lot of money. With time, it was indeed impossible to go about the business single-handedly. Companies were established and only those who owned them made real profits. The California Gold Rush eventually came to an end, but the state of California was never the same again.

Text by AIRC Krakow



The Castle Mountain open-pit mine near Ivanpah, Calif. Traces left by mining on the environment Photo © AP Images





Gold miners pack their gear up the snow-covered Chilkoot Pass near Skagway, Alaska in this file photo shot in 1898. Photo©AP

... (1)

George Washington Carmack, his wife Kate, a native of the Tagish First Nation people, and other members of her family made a discovery that changed the lives of thousands of Americans at the turn of the 20th century. It happened one day in 1896 when they were fishing for salmon in the Klondike River (on the border of Alaska and Canada in the Yukon territory) and Robert Henderson, a prospector looking for gold in the area, told them: "Go to Rabbit Creek and look for gold there." They acted on the advice and did indeed find gold! Unfortunately for Robert Henderson, by the time he learned about the find, all the creeks rich in gold had already been claimed. Rabbit Creek was later appropriately renamed Bonanza.

... (2)

When George Carmack's party returned to San Francisco in July 1897, the news of gold exploded and swept the country as fast as was possible at the time. The American economy was in bad shape as the depression of the 1890s had left many without jobs and some in extreme poverty. Hence, the news of gold poured hope into many hearts. Men and women of various occupations began to get ready to head north and search for gold. However, this was no easy or inexpensive venture. Given the harsh weather conditions in the Yukon territory, the "stampeders" - as the gold seekers were called - had to, by law, have a supply of provisions and equipment including a tent, warm clothes and boots, tools and kitchen utensils, medicines and food that would last them a year in the harsh Arctic conditions. In weight the luggage amounted to about a ton. Staple food included flour, bacon, butter, beans, condensed milk, sugar, tea, coffee, vegetables, salt, corn meal, pepper and mustard. Without these provisions a stampeder faced no chance of surviving, and Canada's Northwest Mounted Police, a unit which held guardianship over the territory, saw to it that the stampeder complied with the regulation. Nevertheless, it was not a rare thing for a gold-seeker to lose all his possessions in the violent rapids of the Klondike River during the last leg of the journey to the gold fields of Dawson.

... (3)

Having made their crossing aboard anything that could float all the way from Seattle or San Francisco, the gold-seekers landed in Alaska. One hundred thousand of these stampeder, three quarters of whom were Americans, then made their way on to the gold fields in hope of finding riches. Little did they know about the challenges that 500 miles of Alaskan territory separating them from the gold fields of Dawson had in store for them. Many never completed the journey. They perished in avalanches, whirlpools and rapids or simply from exhaustion and exposure to the cold. Once they were on the trail from their landing point in Alaska - Skagway or Dyea heading to Dawson, there was no turning back. They needed perseverance and faith, qualities the stampeder did not lack. Perseverance kept them going up and down the Chilkoot Pass sometimes as many as 40 times to transport their one ton of supplies on their backs. That part of the trail earned itself the name of "the meanest 32 miles in the world." And it was certainly faith that made one woman resuscitate her boyfriend when he was dug out from under an avalanche and declared dead by the rescuers. She knelt by his body and breathed air into his lungs, and according to on-lookers "suddenly, miraculously, the guy lived." (from the PBS film "Gold Forever")

...(4)

Not all stampeder were after gold. Some planned to build what we might call in modern speech "infrastructure;" that is hotels, bars, stores, and other services the gold-seekers required. There were also engineers and doctors among them. And, there were men of letters and adventurers, like the great author Jack London, who came looking for inspiration for their stories. Unfortunately, there were also conmen and bandits who striped the stampeder of their possessions or forced them to pay sky-high prices for goods or services that often did not even exist.

...(5)

There were many heroes of the Klondike gold odyssey, but perhaps some of the greatest were the mail carriers who had to travel hundreds of miles rain or shine to deliver valuable letters and parcels. They risked their lives and overcame unimaginable hardships to uphold the motto of the day "the mail must go on." And go on it did: Ben Atwater, Ben Downing and Percy DeWolfe are just three of the exemplary mail carriers of the period. However, they would have never been able to complete their work, had it not been for their loyal helpers and often only companions on the trail: their sled dogs!

Text by AIRC Krakow



## ■ Exercise 2      Comprehension

Can you answer the following questions without referring back to the texts?

1. What was Samuel Brennan holding in his hand when he walked the streets of San Francisco crying: "Gold from the American River!"? Why did he hold it?
2. How much did the provisions that the stampedeers had to have with them going to the Klondike weigh?
3. What fish were the Carmacks trying to catch in the Klondike River?
4. What was the name given to the gold seekers who went to California in 1849?
5. What did people rename Rabbit Creek after gold was found there?
6. What did George Goddard find strange about life in America?
7. What did the stampedeers call the most difficult 32-mile part of the Chilkoot Pass?
8. Who were the only helpers and companions of mail carriers?
9. How was gold initially retrieved from the Californian rivers?
10. Why did the miners demand that the immigrant "fetch his wife out?"

## ■ Exercise 3      Expressions and proverbs with the word "gold"

Read the list of expressions and proverbs with the word "gold" and explain their meaning in your own words:

- All that glitters is not gold
- Before gold even kings take off their hats
- Gold dust blinds all eyes
- Gold is tested by fire, man by gold
- as good as gold
- golden opportunity
- golden rule
- golden age
- Golden State
- gold mine
- silence is golden
- heart of gold

## ■      **Glossary -** (in the order of appearance)

- vial - a small glass container
- panning - washing gravel in a pan to separate out gold
- cede - give up territory
- calico - printed cotton fabric
- inverted - put upside down or in the opposite position, direction, etc.
- retrieve - get something back
- prospectors - a person who is searching for mineral deposits
- stake - mark an area to claim ownership
- gravel - a loose aggregation of stones
- sluice - an artificial water channel
- dredging - scooping out mud and rubbish out of the river bed
- Tagish First Nation - a group of

## ■ Exercise 4      gold, golden & gilded

Remembering that "gold" is a valuable metal or jewelry made of it, "golden" denotes bright yellow in color or something made of gold and "gilded" means covered in a thin layer of gold, decide which word: "gold", "golden" or "gilded" you will use in these phrases or sentences:

- a/ a girl with ... hair;
- b/ he bought her a ... diamond ring;
- c/ the queen's orb was not made of ..., it was only ...;
- d/ they will celebrate their ... wedding anniversary;
- e/ ... - plated means ... (covered with a thin layer of gold);
- f/ Don't buy this ... fabric, it won't match the color of the walls.
- g/ He was very disappointed to find that the plate was not ... ; it was only ... .

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Athabaskan First Nation people that lived around Tagish Lake and Marsh Lake, in the Yukon Territory of Canada  
bonanza - a sudden increase in wealth  
venture - a risky journey or undertaking  
stampeder - a person who takes part in a sudden mass movement of people  
utensil - an article for household use  
staple - main element of something  
comply with - act in accordance with  
rapids - a fast-flowing part of a river  
float - move on the surface of water  
perseverance - continuing in spite of difficulties  
resuscitate - revive a person from unconsciousness or apparent death  
conman - a dishonest person

## Win a Prize!

MAY 2008 CONTEST

Who starred and directed the 1925 movie "The Gold Rush"?

Send the answer (with your home address) to: madridIRC@state.gov

Deadline: June 30

## Win a Prize!

The answer in the April 2008 Contest was:

- Mickey  
and/or  
Minnie -

Thank you for participating

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