

OTHER THINGS TO DO/PLACES TO VISIT

THE SOUTHERN MINES

Background - While gold was discovered just east of Sacramento, the early gold miners continued to expand their search for the “mother lode” (or ultimate source) for the free gold found in the streams and rivers flowing westerly from the Sierra Nevada mountains. When they encountered existing claims or didn’t find “pay dirt”, they moved onto other streams and staked new claims. Ultimately, the Mother Lode extended 200 miles from the towns of Downieville in the north to Mariposa in the south. Today, Highway 49 follows a route between these two towns, and along the way, visits a number of small towns. Some towns have shed their original charm while others have stayed relatively unchanged. This daytrip will visit some of them.

The Tour - From the Convention Hotels, head westerly on I Street and follow the signs to I-5/Highway 99 south. After a half mile, exit onto US-50/I-80 and follow the signs for San Francisco/Fresno/South Lake Tahoe. Stay to the left onto I-80/Highway 50 toward South Lake Tahoe. A mile east, keep left at the fork on Highway 50 east toward Placerville and South Lake Tahoe. About 3.5 miles up the road, take Exit 9 onto Highway 16/Howe Avenue. At the bottom of the ramp, turn right onto Howe Road. Stay on Highway 16 by turning left at the traffic signal at the first street onto Folsom Boulevard. Stay on Highway 16 and make a slight right onto Jackson Road. Continue on Highway 16 for about 30 miles. When you reach Highway 49, turn left/south toward the town of Jackson.

About 2.5 miles south, turn left onto Old California 49 toward the towns of Amador City and Sutter Creek. [Amador City](#) is small and typical of the unchanged towns in the area but doesn’t have many “attractions”. Continue a couple of miles south to the town of [Sutter Creek](#). Sometimes-busy Highway 49 bypasses Sutter Creek which gives the town a slower pace. There are numerous antique shops, galleries, and places for lunch. It is easy to spend an hour or more exploring the shops in this charming town. Sutter Creek was named after John Sutter, who sent a party to the area in 1846 in search of timber. Sutter logged this area for a while before returning to his fort in Sacramento. Two years later, he sent James Marshall to Coloma to build a sawmill. It was during the construction of that mill that Marshall discovered gold.

Continuing south on Old California 49 will take you back to State Highway 49 where you can turn left onto southbound Highway 49. Stay on Highway 49 and bypass the town of Jackson (typical of the more built-up Gold Rush towns) to the town of [Mokelumne Hill](#), about 8 miles south. The “downtown” is east of Highway 49 (turn left on Main Street) and is another unchanged and interesting town.

Back on Highway 49, continue south about 20 miles to [Angels Camp](#) (the location for the “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”, an 1865 short story by Mark Twain, his first great success as a writer). At the south end of town, turn east/left onto Highway 4. After 4.7 miles, turn right onto Parrots Ferry Road. About 10 miles further south will take you to the town of [Columbia](#). Columbia is a State Historical Park and the town's old Gold Rush-era business district has been preserved with shops, restaurants and two hotels. Visitors have the chance to time-travel to the 1850s, imagining life when gold miners rubbed shoulders with businessmen and the other residents in Columbia. Visitors can experience a bygone era watching proprietors in period clothing conduct business in the style of yesterday. There are also opportunities to ride a 100-year-old stagecoach and pan for gold.

To return back to Sacramento, continue south on Highway 49 about 5.5 miles to just south of the town of Sonora and then turn right/west onto Highway 108. Highway 108 west will become Highway 120/108 after the turnoff to Yosemite; continue west on Highway 120 through the towns of Oakdale and Escalon to Manteca where you can get onto Highway 99 north which will take you back to Sacramento. It will take about 2 hours to get back to Sacramento from Sonora.

Time Allowance - It will take about 4.5 hours of driving to follow this daytrip. Add an allowance for lunch, exploring the little towns in the area, etc. To make for a shorter daytrip, turn right/south from Highway 49 onto Highway 26 in Mokelumne Hill which will take you to Highway 12 westerly to Highway 99. Highway 99 will take you to back to Sacramento. This option will trim the drive time to around 3 hours.

Note - *These directions are fairly general. You should carry a good map and/or GPS.*