

Hydraulic mining leaves colorful scar on state park near Nevada City

Publisher's note: *Lucy D'Mot is making it her mission to visit the 70 state parks slated for closure next year.*

By Lucy D'Mot, Sacramento Bee

Mother Nature would take many millennia to create the likes of the huge, colorful cliffs at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park, 11 miles north of Nevada City.

These sheer bluffs were carved in just a few decades by streams of water shot from powerful cannons, washing away piles of dirt and gravel.

Gold miners used hydraulic mining, employing flumes and ditch systems, as they eroded and sifted the soil for the precious ore. As much as 100,000 tons of gravel per day would disappear. Entire mountains were lost.

The mining companies built a 7,847-foot tunnel that went right through the bedrock to serve as a drain.

Farms along the south Yuba River were flooded and destroyed. Silt flowed all the way to San Francisco Bay, impairing navigation on the Sacramento River and parts of the bay. River channels closed to steamboat traffic.

But because residents prospered from mining operations, they simply built their levees higher to hold off floodwaters.

Read the whole story