

Drought brings gold prospectors back to life

By Scott Gold, Los Angeles Times

David Fiori, waist-deep in the chilly Kern River, braced against the current, stabbed a shovel into the ancient silt between his feet and tossed the muck downstream. His eyes, though, wandered to a potential prize – a spot on the opposite bank of the river.

To the uninitiated, it looked like just another leafy bend in the 165-mile-long Kern, which carries the snowmelt of the Sierra Nevada toward the sea. But prospectors have had a different sort of perspective in this stretch of California for a long time.

On the other side of the river, Fiori noted, the crystalline water roiled and turned white because it splashed over a cluster of underwater boulders. It's the sort of geological quirk that abruptly slows the current, causing heavier elements to settle into the muck of the riverbed – namely, gold.

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