Searching for Gold

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| In the early days of 1848 and 1849, it was not uncommon for a miner to dig $2000 of gold a day. But the average miner might have been lucky to find $10 per day.  As time went on the easy gold was all found. Although some made it rich, most of the others were lucky if they made enough to eat. After 1852 most of the surface gold was mined, panning for gold was no longer profitable.  This picture shows a 49er with his mule and supplies. Thousands of miners died on the journey or in the diggings. Many died from disease, or from accidents such as drowning in a river. |

Housing

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| Most miners lived in tents and cooked their food over an open fire. Meals were usually beans, bacon or local game cooked over an open fire.  Most camps and mining towns were canvas tents or wooden buildings. Fires were very common. Many camps and towns were completely destroyed by fire. Some several times.  Heavy rain and snow during the winter months made for very difficult living and mining conditions. Most miners spent the winter in San Francisco or some mining town.  Sickness and colds were common from sleeping on cold, damp ground. The food was not very nutritious resulting in generally poor health. Scurvy was common from lack of fruits and vegetables. Sanitation was poor and miners seldom bathed or washed their clothes. | |  | |

Cost of Living

The success of finding gold drove up prices for everything. While the average worker might make $6 to $10 per day, food and supplies could cost much more than.

Many people spent 6 months earnings, or more, getting to California. When they arrived, they could not afford basic supplies.

Here are several prices lists of goods from 1849 (Source: Library of Congress).

EARLY CALIFORNIA PRICES

Delano's "Life on the Plains and at the Diggings," gives the following as the prices paid at Lassen's Ranch, on September 17, 1849:

Flour, per 100 pounds .......... $50.00

Fresh beef, per 100 pounds .......... 35.00

Pork, .......... 75.00

Sugar, .......... 50.00

Cheese, per pound .......... 1.50

H. A. Harrison, in a letter to the "Baltimore Clipper," dated San Francisco, February 3, 1849, gives the following price-list:

Beef, per quarter .......... $20.00

Fresh Pork, per pound .......... .25

Butter, per pound .......... 1.00

Cheese, per pound .......... 1.00

Ham, per pound .......... 1.00

Flour, per barrel .......... 18.00

Pork, per barrel .......... $35 to 40.00

Coffee, per pound .......... .16

Rice, per pound .......... .10

Teas, per pound .......... .60 cents to 1.00

Board, per week .......... 12.00

Labor, per day .......... $6 to 10.00

Wood, per cord .......... 20.00

Brick, per thousand .......... $50 to 80.00

Lumber, per thousand .......... 150.00

 William D. Wilson, writing to the "St. Joseph Valley Register," on February 21, 1849, gives the following schedule of prices at Sutter's Fort:

Flour, per barrel .......... $30 to $40.00

Salt Pork, per barrel .......... 110 to 150.00

Salt Beef, .......... 45 to 75.00

Molasses,.......... 30 to 40.00

Salt Salmon .......... 40 to 50.00

Beans, per pound .......... .20

Potatoes, .......... .14

Coffee, .......... 20 cents to .33    
Sugar, .......... 20 cents to .30

Rice, .......... 20 cents to .30

Boots, per pair .......... $20 to 25.00

Shoes,.......... 3 to 12.00  B

lankets .......... 40 to 100.00

Transportation by river from San Francisco to Sacramento, he says, was $6 per one hundred pounds. From Sacramento to the mines by team at the rate of $10 for every twenty-five miles.

John H. Miller, writing to the "St. Joseph Valley Register," October 6, 1849, gives the following prices at Weberville, 60 miles from Sacramento:

Wagons .......... $40 to $80.00

Oxen, per yoke .......... 50 to 150.00

Mules, each .......... 90 to 150.00

Board, per meal, $1.50, or per week .......... 21.00

Beef, per pound .......... 40 cents to .75

Salt Pork, per pound .......... 40 cents to .75

Flour, per pound .......... 25 cents to .30

Sugar, per pound .......... 30 cents to .50

Molasses, per gallon .......... $2 to 4.00

Mining Cradles .......... $20 to 60.00

Mining Pans .......... $4 to 8.00