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THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD

in California's Sierra Nevada foothills southeast of Sacramento in 1848 inspired a horde of fortune hunters to "go west, young man" in an attempt to cash in on the shiny nuggets. These adventurers became known as 49ers, and the small towns that grew in their wake were infamous for the freewheeling lifestyle of the individuals who inhabited them. Even Mark Twain made a visit to the area in 1865, during which he scripted his famous short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

California's Gold Country is a golfer's bonanza in the Sierra Nevada foothills

BY ROBERT KAUFMAN

That Twain tale is brought to life each year (May) at the Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee (the "U.S. Open" for frog jumping), where, in 1986, the legendary Rosie the Ribeter leaped her way into the Frog Hop of Fame with a world-record three-jump distance of 21 feet, 5.75 inches.

If you prefer using your flatstick skills for making putts of that length, don't forget your golf clubs. Gold Country is widely known for outdoor adventure, wine tasting, culinary indulgences and exploring quaint towns sporting frontier



Below: The Golf Club at Copper Valley, designed by Carter Morrish.





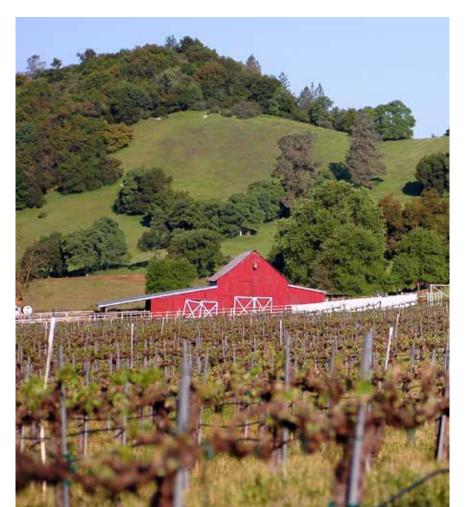
Above: Historic downtown Angels Camp. Below: Chatom Vineyards.

storefronts and wood-plank sidewalks. Though this gilded region may not pop on the radar like California's higher-profile golf destinations such as Palm Springs or Monterey, the mother lode lays claim to a glittering lineup of courses to push the needle on the golf junket meter.

Golf Prospecting

In 1996, the town of Copperopolis (named after another precious metal that aided the Civil War effort) joined the golf trail when the tees opened at the Carter Morrish-designed Golf Club at Copper Valley (formerly Saddle Creek GC). Planted on a serene hillside landscape below the Sierra snow line and above the Central Valley fog, the 6,826-yard layout takes superb advantage of the natural land elevation changes that open views to Half Dome in Yosemite National Park from the 10th and 17th greens. Plus, with no adjacent fairways and real estate set far enough back from the safe play zone, golfers are able to benefit from a secluded playing experience.

Forecasting a rising demand for country-style living from people looking





The influence of Mark Twain's famous short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" can't be missed at Greenhorn Creek.







Above: A view of the Golf Club at Copper Valley.

Below: Renner Winery.



to escape the San Francisco Bay Area (two and a half hours west), modern-day prospectors CV Development Partners, LLC, purchased the Golf Club at Copper Valley in November 2018, along with the entire 900-acre master-planned community, and have ambitious plans to enhance the development for members and guests, including adding new restaurants, shops, an amphitheater and a hotel around the Disneyesque town square.

Cruising east approximately 15 twisty, country-road miles, Angels Camp is one of the most picturesque Gold Country towns, with boutique shops, a bakery, restaurants, a wonderful carriage and wagon museum, and visual reminders (statues, plaques, posters, photographs) everywhere highlighting the influence of frogs on the destination. There are also hints of Twain's brief visit to the historic gold mining town, one of which is a bronze statue of the wordsmith sitting on a bench at the entrance of the clubhouse at Greenhorn Creek Resort. Home to a Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed 18-hole championship course that also opened in 1996, this 6,749-yard layout requires accuracy over distance throughout sloping fairways.

For the academic golfers, Greenhorn Creek is an ideal Gold Country golf adventure, with a cluster of period artifacts preserved around the field of play, including remnants of a Chinese oven on the par-5 fourth hole and a rock wall splitting the same fairway. The lake on holes five, six and seven was originally a drainage area where Chinese miners toiled for gold in the 1860s and 1870s, and the 12th green sitting atop the Tuff Nut Mine was one of several shafts weaving underground around Angels Camp. The tee box at the plunging par-3 13th offers a view of Greenhorn Creek's picture hole and a likely writing spot for Twain while gazing at panoramic views of the surrounding foothills and New Melones Lake.

If ever there was a perfect venue for buddy trips, Greenhorn Creek broke the mold on lodging options with the Caddy Shack. Just steps away from the ninth fairway, this laidback dwelling contains five bedrooms to accommodate up to 12 guests, a 55-inch HD TV, fully equipped kitchen and a private fenced yard with an outdoor grill and horseshoe pit.



The atmosphere in the village of Murphys offers a welcome reprieve from hooks and shanks of the area's many golf courses.

The unincorporated village of Murphys, accentuated by galleries, inns, chichi boutiques and upscale eateries, is a welcome reprieve from hooks and shanks.

Wine & Shine

Continuing further into the foothills along Highway 4, the unincorporated village of Murphys, accentuated by galleries, inns, chichi boutiques and upscale eateries, is a welcome reprieve from hooks and shanks. Take a walk along Main Street while sampling any of the two-dozen tasting rooms representing most of the area's family-owned wineries. The big kid in the wine

district, Ironstone Winery, requires a quick five-minute drive but is well worth the detour for its superb collection and to lay eyes on Gold Country's crown jewel, the world's largest (44 pounds) chunk of crystalline gold, unearthed in Jamestown, California, the day after Christmas in 1992.

The vino roster may steal the spotlight, but the gift of hops can be savored at the congenial Murphys Pourhouse, the town's lone and lively (I stumbled into Trivia Night) taproom serving a rotating menu of 16 craft beers. Too bad I was driving solo.

The forward ascent into the Sierra Nevada continues to the 4.000-foot elevated town of Arnold, home base for the golden trail's last golf outpost, Sequoia Woods Country Club. It is situated just before crossing paths with Calaveras Big Trees State Park and Bear Valley Resort. If you catch the right climate window on the calendar, a golf/ski combo day would be a brilliant bonus nugget on a Gold Country itinerary.

Had Twain been around long enough for a stroll around these golden links, he may have thought twice before musing that "golf is a good walk spoiled." GT