



# Gold Panning 101

*The Hanging  
Flume from  
the overlook.*



## Equipment You Will Need:

You can find these materials at your local hardware store and online.

- Black or Green Plastic Gold Pan (Plastic is easier for extraction and color makes it easier to see the gold)
- Shovel
- Geologist's pick (optional)
- Magnet
- Tweezers
- Snuffer bottle (optional for plastic pan, very helpful for metal pan)
- Small squeeze bottle of dish soap
- Classifier in size 1/4 inch (4 mesh) – optional but will save time
- Small glass vial with lid
- Rubber wading boots

## Finding a good location:

Rather than take a blind chance at finding gold, do some research on gold mining and deposits in your area. Try asking your area Division of Reclamation and Mining office, or talk with the long time locals in the area.

Once you have found some potential areas, select a spot where the water is a minimum of six inches deep, flowing just fast enough to keep muddy water from impairing your vision of your pan and a place where you can sit down comfortably. Make sure don't pan on private property. Check with your local land management agencies for mineral rights and land status information.

## Get down to business:

Place the classifier (mesh) over the gold pan and shovel gravels into it washing off and discarding the large stones. If you don't have a classifier, go to Step 1.

**Step 1.** Fill your gold pan  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of gravel and submerge it just under the surface of the water. Shake the pan several times back and forth and from side to side taking care not to wash material out of the pan. Break up any lumps of dirt as they may contain gold. The goal is to make a slurry out of all of the material in the pan. This will loosen the gold from the dirt allowing it to sink the bottom of the pan.

**Step 2.** Now that you have a good slurry, gently begin swirling the material in the pan. As you do this, the dirt and clay dissolves and will wash out of the pan. If you have larger rocks in the pan, pick them out but make sure they are washed clean – you wouldn't want to lose any gold.

Repeat Steps 1 & 2 until there are not more large rocks, roots and/or dirt clumps in your pan.

**Step 3.** With the pan still just under the water, tilt it slightly away from you and begin to swirl the water around the pan, with a slight forward tossing motion. Your goal is to slowly wash the lighter gravel and dirt out of the edge of the pan. Take your time so you don't wash the gold out of your pan.



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### Get down to business, continued:

**Step 4.** Periodically level out your pan and shake it back and forth and side to side. This will help bring the gravel and dirt to the top making it easier to wash out of the pan. It will also aide the gold and black sand sink to the bottom.

Repeat Steps 3 & 4 until there is only about one cup (or less) of heavier material left in your pan. This material is usually called black sand or concentrate.

**Step 5.** Now to the exciting part of gold panning. Sifting through the black sands and getting to the gold. It is a good idea to do this over a second pan or tub just incase you wash off to much. It would be a shame to loose the gold you have worked so hard for. This part of the process is done out of the water.

With about 1 inch of water left in your pan, tilt the pan slightly towards you and slowly swirl the water in a circular motion. You are looking for nuggets and pieces of gold that can easily be picked out by hand. Use the tweezers to extract the gold because the oils from your hands can cause the gold dust to float in the water and be washed away.

**Step 6.** Once the nuggets are out of the pan and safely in your vile, repeat steps 3 and 4 to extract the final particles of gold. This is the most critical part of panning. Take your time so you don't loose your gold in the river.

**Step 7.** This is where the plastic pan becomes important. Once your feel that you are down only to black sand and gold. Tilt the pan slightly away from you and swirl your magnet on the underside of your pan. (you still should have about 1 inch of water in your pan) This will isolate the gold from the black sand. Pick the gold flakes out with your tweezers and put them in your small glass vial.

If you have a metal pan, you can also use your snuffer bottle (if you have one) to suck out the fine gold or to quirt the black sand out of your way.

If you notice gold floating on top of the water, squeeze a couple drops of dish soap in the pan to break the surface tension of the water allowing the gold to sink and be extracted.

