

## PAYDIRT

“Pay-dirt” refers to striking of gold or some other precious metal in a mining venture; or in the case of the minor to the right, panning for gold in a river. In the movie, *Paint Your Wagon*, the miners of the then California territory are looking for that *mother-load*, big vein, or otherwise discovery of a major find.



When I was a kid, my family went panning for gold up in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee. I vaguely remember the event, much relying on pictures and stories; but, it is still one to think about in for topic of this letter. Of the few memories, the one the stands-out is that one of us actually found some gold – if just a small amount contained in an amber-colored vile.

From Encarta, some reference to pay-dirt below.

In 1848 placer gold was plentiful. The miners could pick it up or scratch it out of ravines, dry streambeds, and gulches. By the end of the year, however, dry digging gave way to wet digging, or panning. Miners put gold-bearing dirt or gravel, which they called pay dirt, into a shallow washing pan. They then held it underwater for a few minutes. The current would wash away the dirt and gravel, leaving the heavier gold on the bottom of the pan.

By the end of 1849 there were so many miners that individual operations were replaced by larger ventures. Miners formed groups to dry up riverbeds by diverting the waters with dams. Even more rewarding was coyoteing. This method called for digging a shaft 6 to 13 m (20 to 40 ft) deep into the bedrock along the shore of a stream. Then tunnels were dug in all directions to get at the richest veins of pay dirt.

Having a pan and some patience were some of the basic requirements to pan for gold. Patience in combination with the method of circulating the pay-dirt until the water had sifted the dirt away from the gold.

Mining towns or communities would emerge and decline over the time in which gold could be found. A *strike* was the needed word to raise *gold fever* and send miners venturing to new grounds. Still today, we venture out to new opportunities to find that *pot-of-gold*...whatever the gold happens to be.

In a

WORD