

## Yuba Blue: Tails & Trails

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From the fall issue of [Sierra FoodWineArt magazine](#):



*“Rivers run through our history and folklore, and link us a people.” – Charles Kuralt from “On The Road”*

Our region is linked by magnificent rivers such as the American, Truckee and South Yuba. Each has its own identity and history. The South Yuba is inextricably linked to Nevada County, just as Lake Tahoe is tied to the High Sierra.

“Locals treasure this river and consider it a healing place,” as one Nevada City resident, John Anthony Law, puts it. “Crystal clear waters, granite boulders the size of houses, endless miles of trails and swimming holes—some of the most pristine in all the world.”

The south, middle and north forks of the Yuba make up the Yuba River watershed. The Yuba River was originally situated in one of California’s largest Native American population centers. It also has been home to wild Chinook salmon and steelhead trout.

“The river was discovered by Jedediah Smith on March 14, 1828,” Erwin Gudde writes in *California Place Names*. “When Sutter came to the valley, he named the stream Yubu after the Maidu village near the confluence of Yuba and Feather rivers.”

The Gold Rush brought some of the first European-American settlers to the region. In 1850, Nevada County was the state’s leading gold mining county. Malakoff Diggins State Park is a stark reminder of the reckless impact of hydraulic mining, which led to the nation’s first environmental laws.

Like other California rivers, the Yuba was dammed during the 20th century. Englebright Dam was built in 1941 to trap mining debris on the north fork of the Yuba in 1969.

The discovery of gold and dams “saw the destruction on the Yuba on a grand scale,” as *The Ecological Angler* observes.

The [South Yuba River Citizens League](#) was founded in 1983 as the leading voice for the protection and restoration of the Yuba River watershed.

Other environmental groups such as the [Sierra Nevada Conservancy](#) helped protect the Yuba’s headwaters on Donner Summit from a major development in 2012, which would have destroyed the legacy of historic mining in our region.

Conservationists such as John Olmsted were instrumental in preserving open space in the Yuba watershed, including land that became South Yuba River State Park. Olmsted went on to transform the old Excelsior mining

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flume near Nevada City into the Independence Trail.

Where to Explore the Yuba watershed:

### **SOUTH YUBA RIVER STATE PARK**

This 20-mile portion of the South Yuba River canyon stretches from Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park to the Bridgeport Covered Bridge. It is accessible from various locations, including Edwards Crossing, Purdon Crossing and the Hwy. 49 bridge.

### **BRIDGEPORT**

The headquarters of the South Yuba River State Park and site of the Bridgeport Covered Bridge, the world's longest single-span covered bridge (now closed for restoration). The Buttermilk Bend Trail is known for its spectacular explosion of spring wildflowers.

### **INDEPENDENCE TRAIL**

The Independence Trail is the nation's first identified wheelchair-accessible wilderness trail.

### **LITTLE TOWN OF WASHINGTON**

Located on the banks of the South Yuba River, Washington is 16 miles from Nevada City, via eastbound Highway 20 and Washington Road. Historic hotel and campgrounds.

### **BIG BEND ON OLD HWY 40**

A scenic route along the river, ablaze in fall colors this time of year. Big Bend was the "bend" in the river where the wagon trains climbing Donner Summit rested.

For more information, visit [GoNevadaCounty.com](http://GoNevadaCounty.com), [YubaRiver.org](http://YubaRiver.org), [BYLT.org](http://BYLT.org), [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov), [SouthYubaRiverStatePark.org](http://SouthYubaRiverStatePark.org) or [YubaWatershedInstitute.org](http://YubaWatershedInstitute.org)

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#### **About jeffpeline**

Jeff Peline is a veteran editor and award-winning journalist - in print and online. He is publisher of Sierra FoodWineArt magazine and its website SierraCulture.com. Jeff covered business and technology for The San Francisco Chronicle for years, was a founding editor and Editor of CNET News, and was Editor of The Union, a 145-year-old newspaper in Grass Valley. Jeff has a