

# Prospecting for Gold in the Northeastern United States

**By: Andy Sabisch**

Gold has played an integral role in the development and expansion of the United States since the 1700's. The first U.S. gold rush started when 12-year-old Conrad Reed was fishing in the creek on his family's farm in near present-day Charlotte, NC in 1799 and he found a seventeen-pound gold nugget. Mining activities dominated the surrounding area for several decades and millions of dollars worth of gold was recovered. As a matter of fact, the U.S. Government opened a little-known mint in Charlotte in 1837 to process the gold being mined locally and produced gold coins bearing the "C" mintmark. It remained in operation until the Civil War broke out and over its short lifetime, produced more than \$5,000,000 in gold coins! In 1828, gold was discovered in north Georgia near the town of Dahlonega (even though isolated mining had taken place in the surrounding area for more than a decade previously) and the next big gold rush was on. Miners swarmed into the area displacing the Cherokee Indians, and as was the case with the Charlotte strike, recovered millions of dollars in gold from the streams and rivers throughout the Georgia hills. With the amount of gold being found, another mint was opened in Dahlonega designated with the "D" mintmark (not to be confused with the Denver mint that did not strike gold coins) and operated from 1838 to the start of the Civil War. The next big strikes took place out west with California, Arizona, Idaho, Nevada and Alaska among other areas earning a place in history as a result of the gold that was pulled from the earth. Even today, if you would ask someone where gold has been or can be found, the answer would almost always be the Southeast, out west or Alaska but surprisingly, gold can be found in many areas throughout the Northeastern United States as well – simply not in the quantity it can be in some of the areas that gained notoriety throughout history.

When you picture what might turn up prospecting for gold, you're likely to visualize a long forgotten mining ghost town on the edge of a mountainside finding large nuggets found more than 1 foot deep or a pan full of smaller nuggets located with the aid of a metal detector or a suction dredge. West coast locations can and often do produce results such as these but unless you are retired or actually live near an area known to produce pieces of gold such as these, what options do you have other than to look at the pictures in magazines or online and daydream? Well, with a large percentage of the U.S. population living within a day's drive of the Northeastern portion of the country, there are a number of gold producing locations that most are unaware of and will be the subject of this article.

Before getting into specific locations in which to prospect, a short discussion of what the gold looks like that you will be searching for is warranted. There is a major difference in the size of the individual pieces of gold found throughout the Northeastern U.S as compared to what is found out west and the primary reason is how the gold was formed and then deposited in its final resting place. Formed in a different manner than that found in the western or Australian gold fields; i.e., glacial deposition, the vast majority of Northeastern gold is what is called "flake" or "flour" gold. Nuggets have and are still are

found on occasion; however, they are not the size of what prospectors find in other gold areas. Typically they are “pickers” or pieces of gold just large enough to pick up with tweezers or your fingers; however, with the specific gravity of gold, even small pieces like these tend to add up in weight fairly quickly. In almost every area, gold on the east coast is found in combination with black sand which was left when the rock it was originally contained within was crushed by glacial movement or eroded away over time by the elements. Often prospectors will locate the black sand first and then as they dig down towards bedrock, the gold will start to appear with any nuggets usually close to or in the actual bedrock itself. With the small size of individual pieces, finding them with a metal detector – even one of the high-end units such as a Minelab GPX or White’s TDI – is difficult if not impossible until much of the overburden has been removed. When selecting a metal detector for prospecting in the Northeast, its sensitivity to very small pieces of metal and ability to sense differences in ground mineralization; i.e., black sand concentrations, is often far more important than how deep it can detect a larger piece simply due to the different conditions prospectors in the Northeast face when compared to those in the better known gold producing areas.

A trick that will help you master whatever detector you opt to use and find the smaller pieces of gold typically found on the east coast is to practice with lead buckshot or very small fishing weights. Lead and gold are very similar in how they respond and learning what type of signal a tiny piece of gold produces will pay off when you hit the gold fields. You will find that the response is far different than what you get from say a coin, bullet or piece of gold jewelry with your standard detector even at extreme depths and if you are not listening for those subtle signals, you may very well be walking over pockets of small nuggets. Another feature that will prove to be invaluable is a manual ground balance control or at least the ability to “lock” the ground balance to a specific level.

A great use for a metal detector in the Northeast is to search for concentrated pockets of black sand and then work that area with a pan, sluice or dredge if regulations allow until you get close enough to bedrock to be able to detect the small pieces of gold that may be trapped there in crevices. If you are interested in purchasing a metal detector for prospecting, contact a dealer that services the area(s) you are looking at visiting rather than a dealer 1,000’s of miles away that may be recommending what works in their area but will fail to meet your needs based on the vastly different conditions you will face. Other equipment such as pans, sluice boxes, high bankers, dredges and the like will have universal applicability and obtaining information from fellow prospectors across the country can be used when making purchase decisions.

So now you have an outline for a shopping list of equipment but are still wondering exactly where you can use the equipment to find gold within a reasonable distance from your home right? As I have said in previous how-to articles covering a number of different forms of treasure hunting, doing a little homework up front will pay off in spades when it comes to actually getting out in the field in terms of what you recover. Clearly doing some research to find out where gold has been found in the past is the best place to start. It stands to reason that the old timers did not find it all and there should be some yet left to find. The Internet is a great place to start and a few well-defined searches containing the terms “GOLD PROSPECTING” and your state should help you zero in on where the gold producing areas

are near where you live . . . and in fact you might be surprised just how close they are. Check with your local historical society if gold was mined in the past as they often have old maps and other material that is not available on a wider scale and you can often get an edge over prospectors that live further away and can't access the records you can.



The secret to filling your vial with gold is processing enough of the right material – much of the gold in New England is of the placer variety and this is what the raw material looks like (Note: Some states do not allow digging in the active stream bed)

Once you have zeroed-in on the areas that have the greatest potential to still hold gold, the next step will be to gain access to the areas and do so LEGALLY. Ignoring No Trespassing signs or trying to slip in unnoticed is a sure fire way to develop a close personal relationship with the local sheriff as well as an irate property owner and will ensure more areas are closed to future prospecting and add additional restrictions to the hobby.

When it comes to finding areas to prospect on, the premier organization to become associated with is The Gold Prospectors Association of America (GPAA). Dedicated to obtaining access rights to gold-producing property across the country and making it available to members and their families, the GPAA has earned a great reputation among prospectors for doing what they set out to do more than 40 years ago. They have chapters in most states that meet regularly as well as property you can prospect on within a few-hour drive from virtually anywhere. The cost of GPAA membership is a real bargain when you consider the benefits received such as access to proven areas, discounts on equipment, an informative magazine subscription and a group of fellow prospectors willing to “show you the ropes.” More information is available on-line at <http://www.GoldProspectors.org>. The GPAA has local chapters in many Northeastern states and if you have an interest in trying your hand at prospecting for gold,

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attending one of their meetings will provide you with some first-hand local information that will prove to be invaluable

Another option to gain access to potentially productive locations is to simply ask for permission from the current landowner once you have narrowed down an area to search. If you approach them the right way and assure them that you will not destroy their property, many will give you access to select areas on their land. If you live in the area and either know the landowner or know someone that does, it can be quite easy to obtain access to what might become your own "Mother Lode." Most counties now have tax records available online which makes it very easy to find out who owns a specific piece of property and then add a personal touch when asking for permission. In addition to obtaining permission from the landowner, some states have additional regulations and may require permits to do anything more than panning in a stream. Make sure you check with the appropriate agency in the state you are interested in before you find yourself paying a hefty fine for failing to follow what is usually a simple process.



Unfortunately most of the gold you will find in the Northeast will be what is called "flake" or "flour" and will look like that shown here but it adds up quickly.  
(Photo courtesy of Ted Scott / Goldplacer.com . . . a great online prospecting resource)

So what are some of the areas that have been shown to produce gold and in quantities sufficient enough to allow the diligent prospector fill a vial with that shiny yellow metal? The following list – which is by no means complete - provides a few areas in the Northeastern States that may be worth investigating further – again, with permission and after obtaining any state-issued forms / permits:

- **New Hampshire:** Gold was discovered near Lyman in 1864, sparking a minor gold rush that while short lived, revealed that the state had gold deposits in both hard-rock and placer forms. The largest gold deposits are in what is called the Ammonoosuc Gold District which includes Lyman, Monroe and Bath, including southwestern Littleton, northwestern Landaff and western Lisbon. Other areas have placer gold and there are several state publications that define where gold has been found in the past. A campground – Twin River (<http://www.twinrivernh.com/>) located in Bath affords guests access to gold producing property nearby.
- **Pennsylvania:** Creeks throughout the counties in the Southeastern part of the state including York, Adams and Lancaster have produced an abundance of flake and flour gold along with an occasional small nugget. Gold has also been found in the Northeastern area throughout the Pocono's as well as areas in the Southwestern part of the state where glacial deposits have left traces of gold, platinum and other metals. (PA has 3 GPAA chapters)
- **New York:** New York has an odd law on the books that states any gold or silver found in the state belongs to the state and while there are efforts underway to change that law, it makes finding out where gold has been found a bit more difficult. There are geologic reports stating that gold has been found in the Adirondacks and the Hudson Highlands regions as well as the Schwangunks and Catskills due to the way they were formed. Prospecting in New York takes some research and getting tied in with other prospectors is a wise course of action. (NY has 1 GPAA chapter)
- **Connecticut:** Gold has an early history in Connecticut when it was discovered and mined by the first governor of the state, John Winthrop Jr. and one of his servants in the late 1700's. Geologists have sampled most of the streams in western Connecticut and found virtually all of them contain gold. The quantity of gold discovered in the streams is small but it is present. (CT has 1 GPAA chapter)
- **Vermont:** Gold can still be panned from the Broad Brook which is where a minor gold rush took place in the 1800's. Many other streams in the state offer prospectors a chance to find some placer gold including the Rock River in Newfane and Dover; the Williams River in Ludlow; the Ottauquechee River in Bridgewater; the White River in Stockbridge and Rochester; the Third Branch of the White River in Braintree; the Mad River in Warren, Waitsfield and Moretown; Shady Rill Brook in Wrightsville; Minister Brook in Worcester; the Little River in Stowe and Waterbury; Gold Brook in Stowe; the Lamoille River in Johnson; the Gihon River in Eden; and the Missisquoi River in Lowell and Troy
- **Massachusetts:** Most of the gold that is found in the state lies to the west of the Connecticut River on the east slopes of the Berkshires. According to state geologists, just about any stream draining the East Flank of the Berkshire Mountains contains placer gold. Some of the more

notable gold panning streams that are found in the Berkshires are the Deerfield River, the Mill River and the Westfield River. (MA has 1 GPAA chapter)

- **Maine:** According to the Maine Geological Survey placer gold has been found in the following streams: the Swift River and its tributaries, the Sandy River, the South Branch of the Penobscot River, Gold Brook, Nile Brook, Kibby Stream and the St. Croix River. Another productive location is Ogunquit Beach, Maine which produces flour gold at the point where the streams enter the ocean. (ME has 2 GPAA chapters)

Other equipment that will be needed includes gold pans of various sizes (larger ones for general processing and smaller ones for final separation), a sucker bottle, vials to hold your gold (think positive), shovels, and 5-gallon buckets to collect concentrates. Stepping up from panning, you may want to invest in a sluice box, high banker, rocker box or dredge depending on your level of enthusiasm, what you are finding on your first few trips and what the State allows to be used. Many east coast electronic prospectors carry along a handful of wooden stakes that can be used to mark areas found to contain concentrations of black sand that warrant closer scrutiny. For example, when I am prospecting a creek, I search for pockets of black sand over a 100' to 200' stretch before digging them out and seeing what the sands may hold in terms of gold content. If I am working with a partner, one can pinpoint possible areas with the metal detector while the other snipes the areas to see which are worth bringing in additional equipment to work.

While you likely will not be finding enough gold to be able to quit your day job, there is enough out there throughout the Northeast for you and your family to have an enjoyable time in some of the most beautiful scenery in the country collecting memories that will last a lifetime. With a little research and some planning, you might just be surprised at what you can find 1,000's of miles from where anyone might think gold should be located. A few years ago I was surprised when I was able to pan out several pennyweight of beautiful raw gold in a Vermont stream less than 20 yards from a road that had a continual stream of traffic passing by. Once you see those first few flakes swirling around the bottom of your gold pan, you will be hooked and having sites close to home will afford the opportunity to get your "fix" without travelling all the way across the country. I'd love to see some of what you find if you decide to venture out in search of Northeastern gold . . . . best of luck in your prospecting!

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES

- **Gold in Vermont:** <https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/rivers/river-management>
- **Gold in New Hampshire:**  
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/geo/documents/geo-1.pdf>
- **New England Gold Locations:** <http://www.wheretofindgold.us/2011/01/02/winter-prospecting-in-new-england-hell-yea/>
- **Where to Find Gold in the United States;**  
<http://www.goldfeverprospecting.com/whtofiqoinun.html>