

Panning for gold

By John Grant Emeigh of [The Montana Standard](#) - 08/27/2006

Rocker Neil Young may have been searchin' for a heart of gold, but finding a few flakes of gold would be just fine for Bob Temple.

The Helena man was among 20 people squatting over Silver Bow Creek Tuesday panning for gold.

"It's kind of exciting, like finding buried treasure or something — only it's harder work," Temple said.

Several people participated in the Mineral Museum's field trip about the history of early Silver Bow County gold miners called, "The Quest for Gold." Participants walked through German Gulch where gold was mined as far back as 1865. They also went "panning" for gold in Durant Canyon.



Bob Temple, of Helena, pans for gold in Silver Bow Creek Tuesday in Durant Canyon. Temple has been panning for gold on and off for about 10 years. "It's kind of exciting, like finding buried treasure or something — only it's harder work," Temple said.

These amateur prospectors don't expect to strike it rich, so they are keeping their day jobs. Temple said his most productive weekend yielded about a half an ounce of gold — worth approximately \$200.

Carol Kelly, of Libby, agreed that it's more a labor of love than a labor of profit.

"You really are just looking for gold dust," she said.

Panning works by taking a pan of dirt, shoveled from the nearby banks, and washing it out in the creek. Since gold is heavier than the dirt, it sinks to the bottom of the pan. The process is easier said than done, since this precious metal is often tiny and sparse.

John Foley, of the museum, said some participants found "color" in their pans that afternoon, but in very small amounts. "Color" is a term for miniscule flakes of gold.

"It's about size of the head of a pin," Foley said.

For Kelly, panning is more about getting back to nature and relaxation.

"I love geology," she said. "This is just another way to explore Montana." Robin McCulloch of the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology led the tour of the old hand-dredged gold mines along German Gulch, west of Butte. He said those old prospectors were innovative people with a history as rich as the gold they were scavenging from the soil.

"You're fascinated with the gold, but once you get out here, you get fascinated with the miners," McCulloch said.

Ginette Abdo, program director of Tech's Mineral Museum, said this is the fifth year for the panning field trip, and it seems to be gaining in popularity.

"These field trips are constantly booked. People like to get out and see Montana," she said.

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