

Digging for Gold and History: Romers RV Club at Empire Mine

BY Jeff George & Chery Schult

Our recent outing to the Empire Mine State Historic Park in Grass Valley, CA, was a resounding success, offering a fascinating blend of California Gold Rush history and Gilded Age opulence. For the members of the Romers RV Club, this tour proved to be an educational and visually engaging day trip perfectly situated in the beautiful Sierra foothills.

The Empire Mine, one of the oldest, richest, and deepest gold mines in California, immediately impresses with its sheer scale. We were guided through the historic mine yard, where we learned about the arduous process of hard-rock mining. Standing before the entrance to the main shaft — a glimpse into what was once 367 miles of underground tunnels — truly underscored the monumental effort that extracted over \$5.8 million ounces of gold. Our knowledgeable docent brought the entire operation to life, detailing the machinery, the work ethic, and the harsh realities faced by the miners who kept the operation running from 1850 to 1956.

A highlight for many of us was a stop in the famous "Secret Room" within the Visitor Center, where a massive scale model depicts the mine's subterranean network. It's a visually stunning exhibit that helps you grasp just how vast the gold-bearing quartz veins were.

In stark contrast to the gritty mine works, the tour led us to the stunning Bourn Cottage, the former estate of mine owner William Bowers Bourn II. This "cottage" is, in fact, an elegant English-style mansion surrounded by beautifully restored formal gardens. Walking the grounds and seeing the impressive architecture offered a peek into the wealthy life funded by the gold deep underground. It's a wonderful example of the two very different worlds that existed side-by-side during the mine's operation.

The Romers RV Club unanimously recommends this tour. The park is easily accessible, with plenty of space for larger vehicles in the parking area (always a plus for our group!). It's a perfect destination for a day out, offering a deep dive into the industry and lifestyle that built this part of California. The combination of industrial history, beautiful architecture, and engaging storytelling made this a memorable stop on our club's calendar.

See you at the next rally!