

Can you name one natural  
and one human feature  
found in this photograph?

## LESSON 2

### PLACES TO LOCATE

California  
Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest  
Lake Mead  
Pacific Ocean  
Sierra Nevada

### WORDS TO UNDERSTAND

climate  
ecosystem  
elevation  
fragile  
graze  
natural resource  
precipitation  
reservoir  
shadow effect  
species

## What Kind of Place Is Nevada?

Nevada is a place with many beautiful features. Some of them are natural features, like soil, lakes, plants, and animals. Some of them are human features, such as cities, barns, homes, shopping malls, bridges, and roads. Many of these features make Nevada different from other states.

### Our Natural Resources

Nevada is a state rich in *natural resources*. Natural resources are things found in nature that are useful to people. Today, our state mines more silver and gold than any other state. Turquoise and copper are other important metals found in our soil. Minerals such as gypsum, limestone, and salt, are Nevada resources too. Salt mined in our state is used to melt icy winter roads.

People in our state use the land as a resource to raise crops and animals. Many ranches in the northeast part of Nevada feed, or *graze*, their cattle and sheep on our state's rangelands. There are also farmers here who grow wheat, hay, potatoes, barley, and other important crops.

Water is another important natural resource in Nevada. We need water to drink, to cook, and to bathe. Our crops need water to grow, and our animals must have it to live. Water power is used to make electricity too. Nevada's lakes, rivers, and dams are our major sources of water since little rain falls here.

Natural resources are very important to our state. Using them wisely now will make life better for future Nevadans.



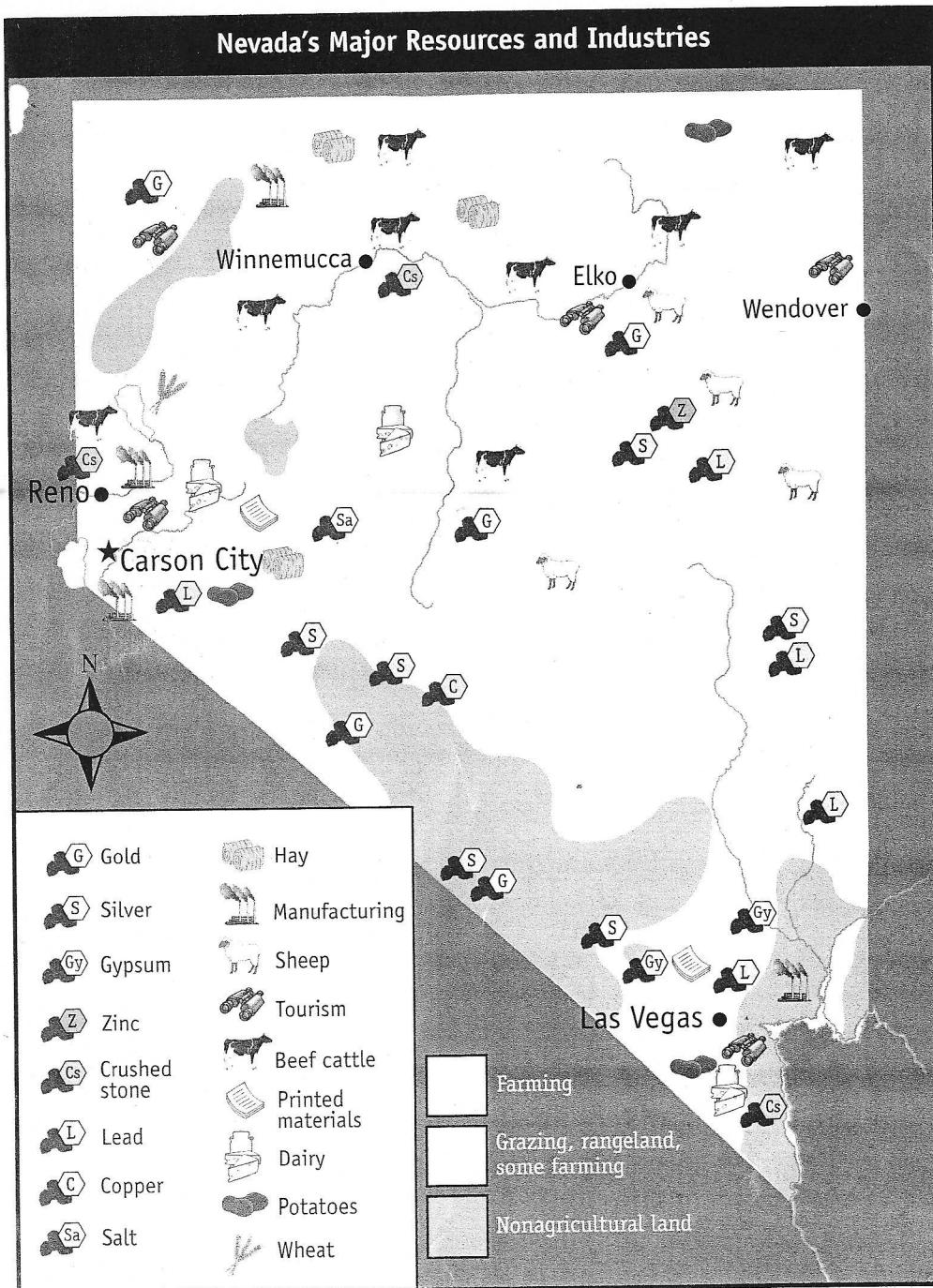
Nevada is a mineral-rich state. Do you know the names of any of these minerals?

## Activity

### Using the Land

This map shows some of our state's resources and industries. Each picture symbol shows the areas where a product is grown or produced. Study the map and answer these questions:

1. List four resources shown on this map.
2. Name two areas in Nevada where potatoes are grown.
3. If you lived in Las Vegas, would you grow wheat? Why or why not?
4. Pick one of our state's resources to learn more about. Try to find out why that resource is so important to Nevada.





# LESSON 2

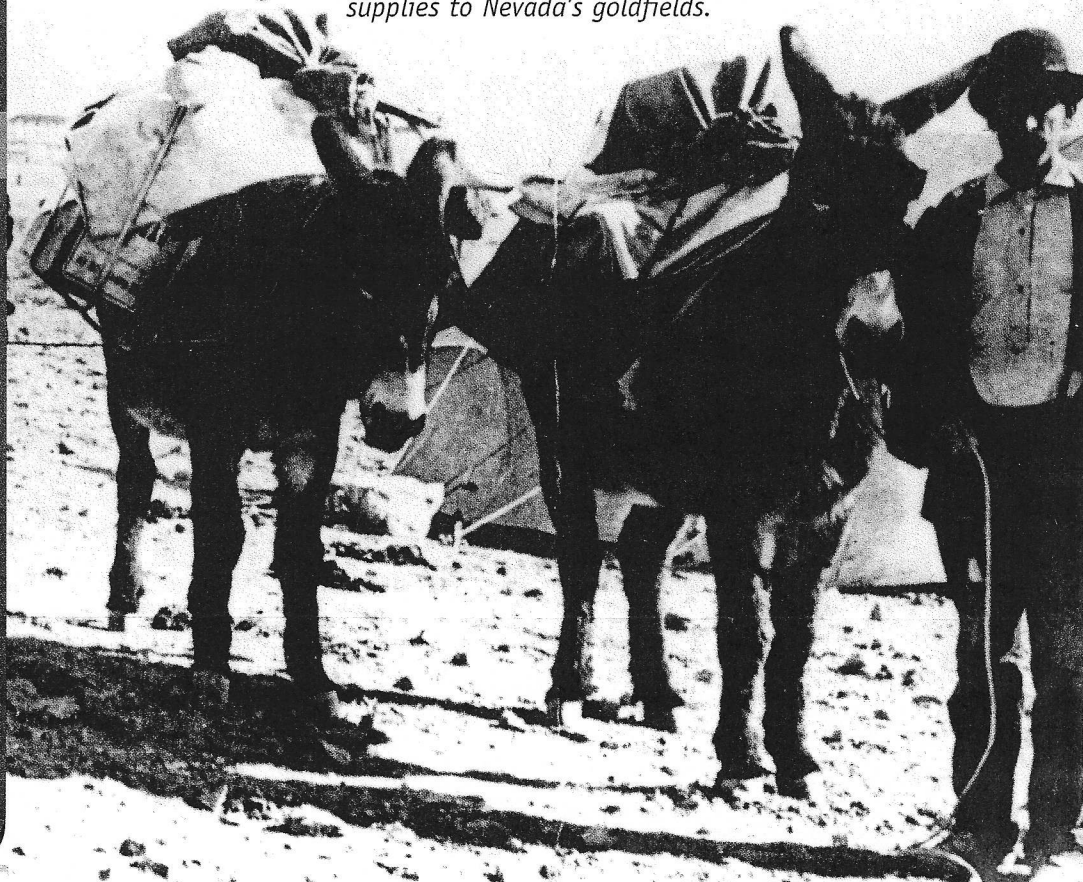
## Mining in the West

News of gold in California brought thousands of gold seekers to the West. Most *prospectors*, or miners, only stopped in Nevada on their way to California. Prospectors look for valuable metals, or *minerals*, in the ground. Minerals are things that are mined, like gold, silver, and salt. They are usually mixed with rock, dirt, sand, or gravel. Miners call this mix *ore*.

*Panning* for gold was slow, back-breaking work. Prospectors used flat bottom pans to scoop up water, earth, and gravel from the bottom of a stream. As they moved the pan in a circle, the water spilled over the sides of the pan. Then they could see gold dust or gold nuggets mixed in with the dirt and gravel. Many prospectors got sick from standing knee-deep in freezing water day after day.

When they found something valuable, prospectors *staked a claim*. This means they measured the area and then recorded it at the nearest government office. They did this to keep others from stealing it, but it didn't always work. People who stole someone else's claim were called *claim jumpers*.

*Prospectors hauled many tools and supplies to Nevada's goldfields.*



Nevada, Our Hon

### PEOPLE TO KNOW

Henry Comstock  
Philipp Deidesheimer  
James Fennimore  
John Mackay  
Chief Numaga  
Adolf Sutro  
Mark Twain

### PLACES TO LOCATE

Denver  
Pyramid Lake  
San Francisco

### WORDS TO UNDERSTAND

blasting caps  
claim jumper  
collapse  
Comstock Lode  
crib  
deposit  
dynamite  
mineral  
ore  
panning  
patent  
placer mining  
prospector  
sluicing  
staked a claim  
vein

# Trying Their Luck in Nevada

As the rush for California gold began to slow down, miners came to try their luck in Nevada. Most were using *placer mining* methods to gather gold and other minerals from our rivers and streams. Panning for gold was one of the earliest placer mining methods prospectors used. Another method, called *sluicing*, allowed miners to sift through more dirt in less time.

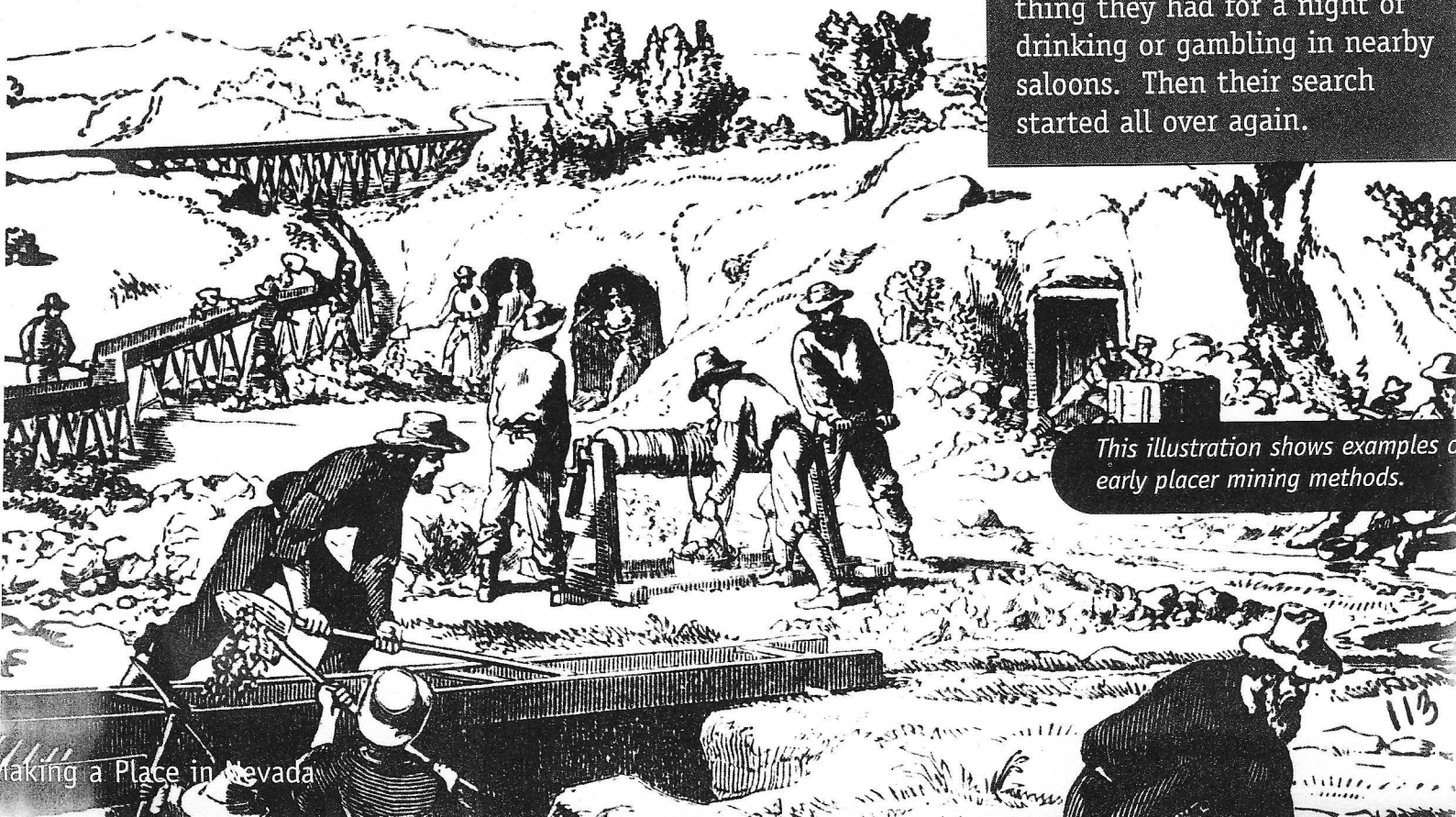
Sluicing was done with a series of wooden boxes. Each box had a downhill slope and was slightly lower than the one before. Gallons of water were needed to sift the dirt and gravel away from the gold. As the water flowed through the box, the dirt, sand, or gravel washed away. The heavier pieces of gold fell into the ridges at the bottom of the box.

One group of Nevada miners had trouble with thick black sand that clogged their sluice boxes. Some prospectors threw the black sand out. Later, they learned the sand was filled with silver ore. The miners soon discovered it was the richest silver ore ever found in the United States. They called it the *Comstock Lode*.

## A Prospector's Life

Prospectors were very unusual people. Sometimes they spent their entire lives looking for precious metals, like gold and silver. They often wandered through the mountains or deserts for months at a time with only a few basic supplies. They packed things like food, clothes, blankets, and a pick and shovel.

Most prospectors lived in small, rough cabins built from branches, stones, and sagebrush. They ate simple foods, like potatoes, dried beans, meat, and coffee. They looked for gold from sunup to sundown. Some tried searching where no one else had looked. Some sold or traded everything they had for a night of drinking or gambling in nearby saloons. Then their search started all over again.

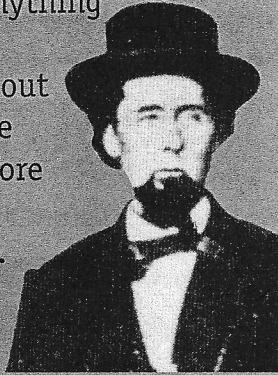


This illustration shows examples of early placer mining methods.



### "Old Pancake"

Henry Comstock was not liked by other miners. He was known as a bully and a liar. Some even called him "Old Pancake" because he was too lazy to cook anything but pancakes. Comstock sold out his share of the Ophir Mine before its real value became known. He made only \$10,000.



### What do you think?

What do you think about naming the largest silver strike in U.S. history for a man who didn't really discover it?

## The Comstock Lode

Many people took part in the discovery of the Comstock Lode. One of them was James Fennimore or "Old Virginny." Fennimore and a few other prospectors found one end of the lode in an area called Gold Hill. What they found was a strip of gold mixed with silver. The biggest part of the strike, though, was found in a place called Six-Mile Canyon.

Two Irish miners digging in the canyon found gold sand in a spring. When they dug under the stream, they hit a large *vein* of gold and silver. A vein is a pocket of minerals found in rock. The names of the men were Patrick McLaughlin and Peter O'Reily. They called their find the Ophir Mine.

After going to town to celebrate their find, McLaughlin and O'Reily came back to find a man named Henry Comstock at the spring. Comstock claimed the land and spring were owned by him. The two Irish miners didn't want problems, so they split their find with Comstock. Later the find was named after Comstock.

*Mining towns, like Gold Hill, sprang up all over central and western Nevada.*



Nevada, Our Ho

# The Rush to Nevada

With the discovery of the Comstock Lode, miners from California began pouring into Nevada. The rush of people helped create new towns like Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Silver City. As the towns grew, life for the area's earliest miners began to change.

## Life in the Mining Towns

Mining towns were rough places in the beginning. There were saloons and gambling houses, where miners spent much of their time and money. Some towns had horse races, concert halls for singers, plays, and dancing animal acts.

Mining towns were also places where people from many different countries came. One man, named J. Ross Browne, wrote about what he saw in the mining towns of Nevada.

*In the course of a day's tramp we passed parties of every description and color: Irishmen ...American, French, and German foot-passengers, ... carrying their packs on their backs; ...Mexicans, driving long trains of pack mules, ... women in men's clothes, ... whiskey peddlers, organ grinders, ...all stark mad for silver.*

At first, most of the miners were single men. Those from faraway countries worked hard to send money to their families. Later, families with children moved into mining towns too. More homes were built, and schools for the children sprang up. In a few short years, the small tent camp of Virginia City had become a town of more than 5,000 people.

*Virginia City was a very busy place during the peak of the mining boom. Records say over 22,000 people once lived in the city. This photograph shows a stagecoach parked in front of Wells Fargo & Co. on C Street.*

## Blasting Caps

Life in the mining towns was often very dangerous.

**Blasting caps** were one of the worst dangers. Miners used them to set off sticks of **dynamite**. Dynamite sticks are made from explosive materials. The caps were filled with small amounts of blasting powder. Sometimes children played with blasting caps they found lying around. According to one man, "about one boy per week would scratch off the end of a blasting cap." The cap would explode, and the boy holding it would lose the tip of his thumb or sometimes his whole finger. Gold Hill and Virginia City had many boys with missing fingers.

