Gold in Indiana

Gold is not a naturally occurring metal in Indiana, but rather, is disseminated through glacial drift deposited by the glaciers that once covered much of the state. It had its origin in the bedrock deposits of Canada. Because the ice came from the northeast and did not extend much beyond an east-west line through Helmsburg and Beanblossom in Brown County, streams entering Beanblossom Creek from the north are more favorable panning localities than those flowing into it from the south.

You might wish to buy two U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle maps, the Morgantown and Beanblossom 7.5-minute quadrangles, to aid you in locating likely panning spots. These maps are available from our Publication Sales office (see the last paragraph below). In the two quadrangles mentioned, the various tributaries to the reach of Beanblossom Creek that extends northward nearly to Spearsville, as well as those that flow into the North Fork of Beanblossom Creek, are worth prospecting. A bit farther west, Lick Creek and Brier Creek and their tributaries should also be of interest. On the topographic maps, perennial streams (those with year-round flow) are shown by solid blue lines, whereas intermittent streams (those with seasonal flow) are shown by alternate blue bars about one-eighth of an inch long and a series of closely spaced blue dots.

In some placer gold regions, the point at which a stream changes from intermittent to perennial is considered to be an especially favorable site for prospecting, probably based on the concept that the winnowing takes place most effectively in the steeper part of the stream gradient, and that the heavy particles are most likely to drop out where the water is first pooled. These principles apply to all stream systems, though to varying degrees.

You should be aware that many of the small streams have been dammed to impound artificial lakes, and wherever this has taken place the regimen of the streams has been altered. Those portions above the lakes are still in the pre-impoundment situation, but the lakes act as catchment basins, and the downstream reaches of the valley floors are now starved of more recent sedimentation. This is an important concept because stream channel deposits are ephemeral, being partly carried away and partly renewed from season to season and year to year. Some of the gold-bearing alluvium is the result of accumulations built up over periods of many years; some is formed in a single season or even by a single storm. Higher concentrations of heavy minerals, including gold, result from recycling of materials through multiple stages of transport-deposition-erosion-transport-redemption.

We do not have a map on which the sites of reported gold discoveries are plotted in sufficient detail and at such a scale that one could be sure of locations. It would not be possible to construct such a map that would be useful, as many of the accounts are not specific enough to allow one to put a shovel into the ground with any degree of confidence that the location is accurate. Even an accurately located site that showed traces of gold some years ago, or even last year, may not yield gold today because the fine-grained materials may have been washed entirely away by subsequent stream action. In fact, some accurately known former sites are now bare bedrock. Our Bulletin 18, Minerals of Indiana (1960), which is available for download from the Indiana Geological Survey Web site, contains a table showing locations reported in the literature to that date.

With the exception of the stretches, for the most part very short, that may be within county or state road right-of-ways, and a few drainage lines in parcels of Yellowwood State Forest, the streams that have been mentioned are not within public domain. You must seek permission from landowners for access to privately owned property. For information about panning in Yellowwood State Forest, contact the forest office at 812-988-7945.

For more information about the occurrence of gold in Indiana, you may want to order a copy of Gold and Diamonds in Indiana: an Update by John R. Hill. The report may be obtained by contacting the IGS Publication Sales office at the address or phone number shown below.