

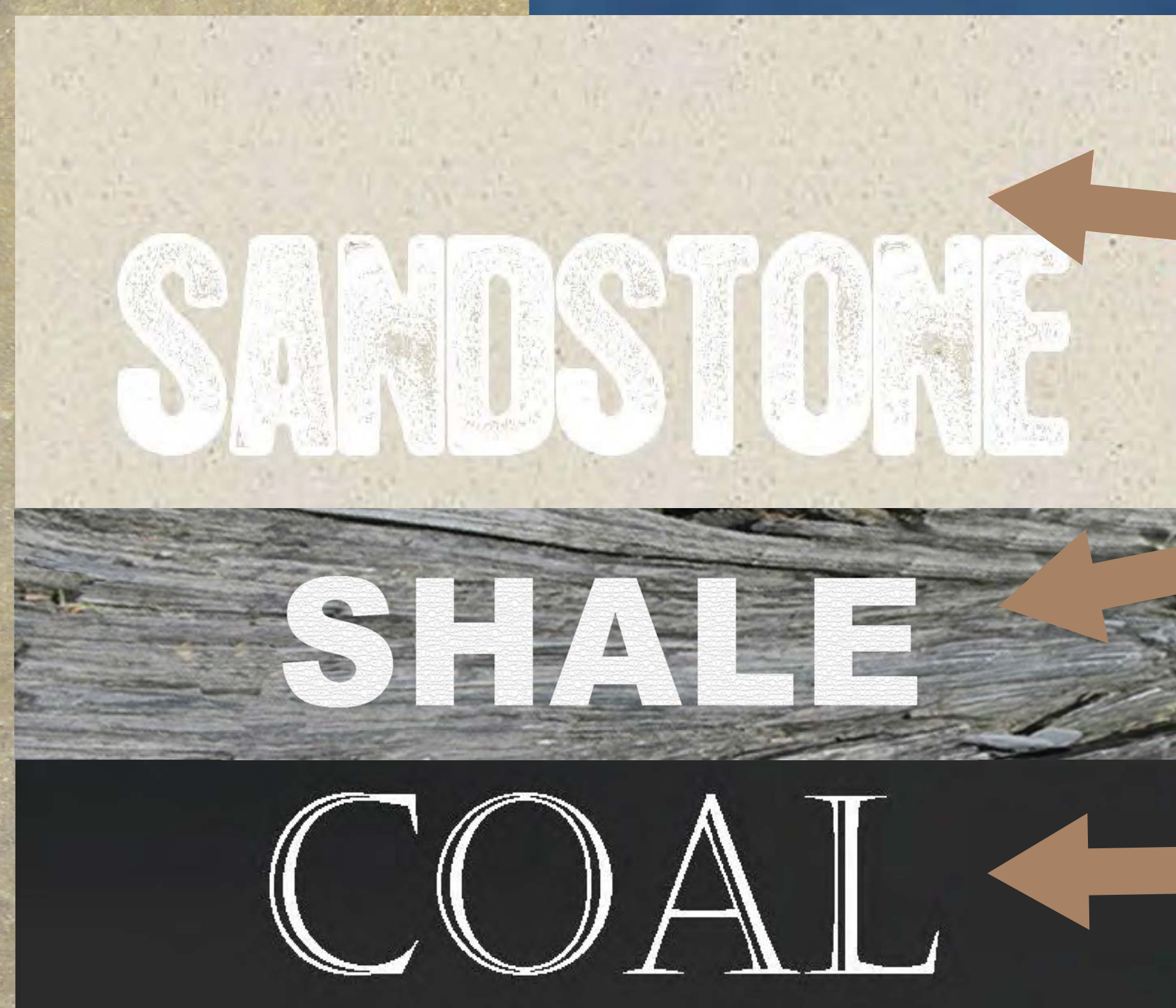
An Ancient Sea Brought “Waves” of Miners

Fifty million years ago, a watery world covered the land above you, and vast swamps and forests lined its shores; Central California was beneath the Pacific Ocean! As sea levels rose and fell over time, layers of sediment and swamp vegetation built up and hardened. Later, shifting in the Earth’s crust created the crumpled hills and mountains of the Bay Area, thrusting these prehistoric sea sediments up into what you see today.



A geologist’s interpretation of California’s boundary placed on the landmass as it appeared 50 million years ago.

Courtesy of Ron Blakey, Colorado Plateau Geosystems

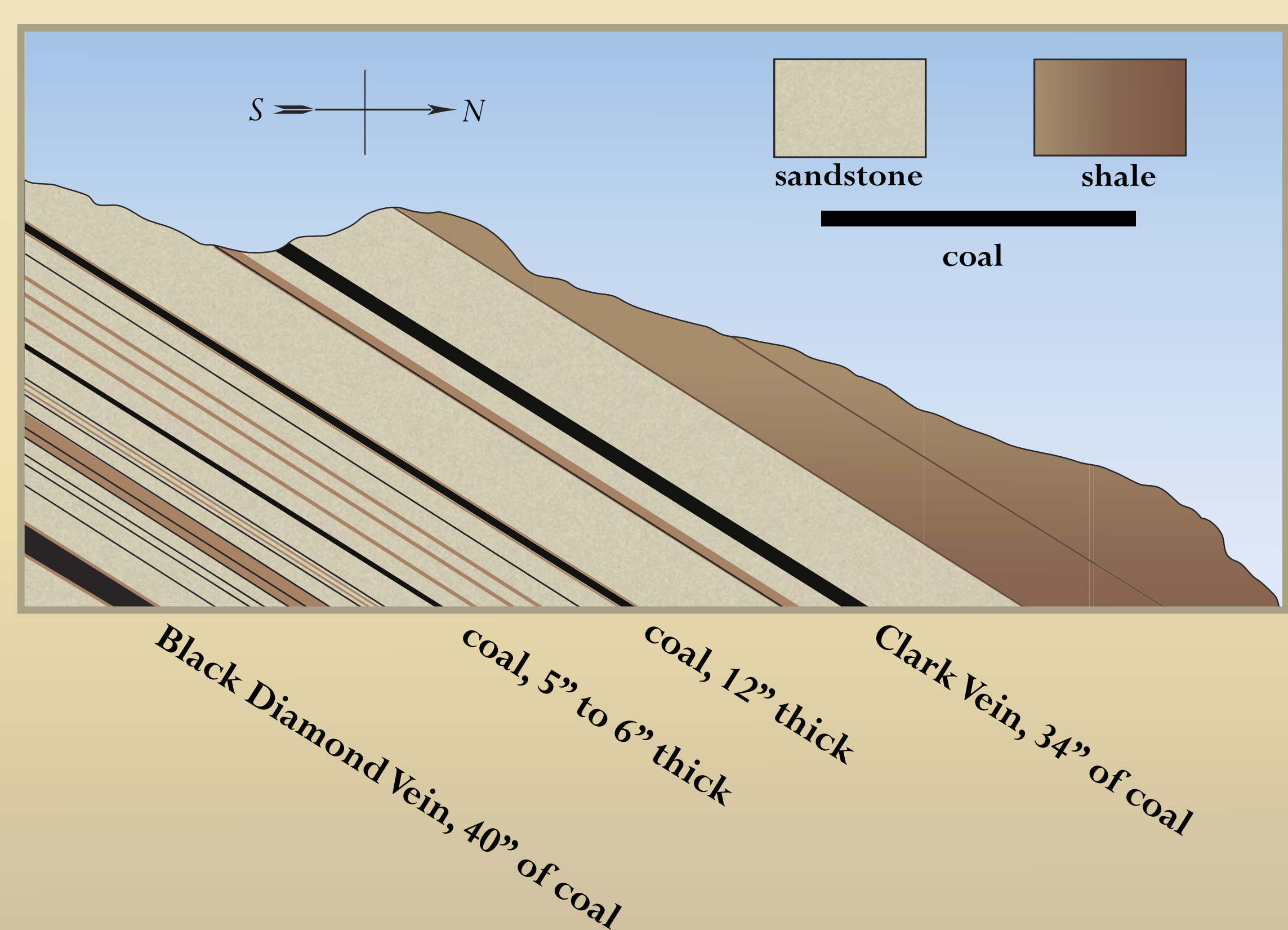


Once loose sand at the bottom of the sea, these hardened sediments make up most of our hills.

Made of compressed mud, shale is often found in conjunction with fossil fuels, such as coal. It crumbles easily and earned the nickname “bone” by miners.

Nicknamed “black diamond,” coal is really the remains of buried trees, reeds, and other swamp vegetation kept under incredible heat and pressure over millions of years.

Cross-section of the hills above Nortonville historic townsite



From the mid nineteenth to early twentieth century, waves of miners came to these hills to remove coal and sandstone. Look closely around this rocky chamber, and you will find ancient bits of grit, sand, and silt that once covered an ocean floor.