

In search of buried treasure: More people discovering metal detecting as a hobby

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Published 5:42 a.m. ET Jul. 16, 2021

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DOYLESTOWN – With a tool belt strapped around his waist and headphones over his ears, Scott Brown stalked his immobile prey.

Three steps forward and a shuffle step to the side, he glided like a ballroom dancer across the backyard lawn of Amanda Seenes' century house on a recent morning. Brown's [Minelab Equinox 800](#) metal detector led the way, a protruding extension of his right arm, as he swept a circular coil at the end across the grass.

"Beep, beep, beep."

Droning tones sneaked out the edges of his headphones.

Finding treasure: [Hoover High class ring unearthed 53 years later](#)

Brown honed in on his target. He studied numbers that flashed on his digital display screen. He dragged the coil back and forth, then planted it firmly on the ground. He took off his headphones. A long piercing squeal, like an old AOL phone line connection gone berserk filled the air.

Experience told him a dime was below.



Scott Brown looks for treasures on July 8 with a metal detector in the yard of a century home in Doylestown. *Julie Vennitti Botos*

"I'm digging this," he said.

He was wrong.

"It's one of *those*," he mused, holding the object close to his eyes, then rubbing dirt off a piece of scrap metal he couldn't immediately identify, before dropping it into a pouch on his tool belt.



Scott Brown looks for treasures on July 8 with a metal detector in the yard of a century home in Doylestown. *Julie Vennitti Botos*

Not every find is treasure

Even longtime treasure hunters, such as Brown, unearth their share of junk: Pop can tabs; dreaded "can slaw" (aluminum cans once shredded by a mower into slivers); even newer pennies are disappointing, considering the effort it takes to find and dig one — hunters call them stinkin' Lincolns.

The thrill of the chase, though, is intoxicating.

Quality machines, like Brown's Equinox 800, are adept at discerning which type of metal is below, and approximately how many inches below the surface it's buried. But they're not perfect. So, a solid and tight beeping tone means a new rush of adrenaline each and every time.

"I don't gamble," said Brown, a retired math teacher who lives in the Doylestown area in Wayne County. "But I imagine this is a lot like gambling."

Hobby growing in popularity

He's hooked on the hobby.

There are indications more people are at least dabbling in detecting, too. Market reports forecast an increase in sales of metal detectors in the next five years. And Minelab, the Australian maker of high-end devices, mentioned a 30% increase in sales last year to \$236 million in its annual report.

"Especially since the pandemic ... it's gone kind of crazy," said Shelby Richardson, a sales representative at Kellyco, a 65-year-old metal detector superstore, which sells units over the phone, online and from its showrooms in Casselberry, Florida, and Knoxville, Tennessee.

In three decades worth of hunting, Brown has found his share of the valuable and unique: A .25-caliber pistol; an ax from the 1800s; toy cars; a valve stem cover to a Ford Model T; an 1829 half-cent piece; gold rings; diamond rings; bracelets; necklaces; keys and piles of silver coins.



A three-cent piece Scott Brown found with a metal detector. Julie Vennitt Botos



Brown recently unearthed this fire hose nozzle in North Canton. Submitted

"I just like recovering history," said Brown, who likes to get out a couple times a week.

He prefers to hunt old properties, including farm houses or vacant land that used to be home to a shop, business, or dwelling. Brown keeps binders, filled with old maps, of places he's been and places he wants to visit. Usually, he simply knocks on a door and asks for permission.

"I tell them they can keep anything I find ... only the stuff they don't want is what I take home," he said.

One of Brown's passions is helping people find lost items. He's connected three people to long-lost family possessions, [including a 1967 North Canton Hoover High class ring](#) last year.

John Schick had contacted Brown, who happens to be a Hoover High graduate, as well. Schick explained that he'd lost the ring shortly after he got it, as a then-17-year-old senior. He was certain it had slipped off while washing a car at his childhood home on Pineview Avenue SE.

"I knew I'd pulled the vehicle in the yard ... between two big trees to get shade," Schick said of his car-washing that day in June 1967, for a story that appeared in [The Canton Repository](#) in 2020.

The current owner of the Pineview house gave the men permission to search. After about 90 minutes — with hopes fading — Brown began to sweep an area closer to the house.

Jackpot!

Great finds come in all shapes and sizes.



John Schick's 1967 class ring *Repository File Photo*

Treasures near and far

Russ Snyder, president of the Silver Creek Treasure Hunters club in the Barberton area, stumbled on to the hobby by accident. He and his wife, Connie, had purchased a metal detector as a gift for her parents — but they never used it, so Snyder finally tried it out himself.

That was about 30 years ago.

"We're probably into about our sixth detector now," he said.

Snyder said those who don't understand the allure of detecting should check out the [YouTuber Beach Pirate](#). His 97 videos of hunts take the viewer along for the ride on hunts that have unearthed a combined treasure chest full of gold, silver, gems and all sorts of rarities.



Brown found this antique wax stamp several years ago.
Submitted

"Actually, YouTube is one of the biggest sources for information out there," said Snyder.

Although the hobby itself is largely a solo affair, metal detectorists often share their finds and seek advice in clubs and on social media. One of the largest local social media groups is [Metal Detecting Northeast Ohio](#), which has grown to more than 1,350 members. Almost daily, someone posts photos of their haul from a recent hunt, often in the Akron-Canton area.



Scott Brown rummages through metal he has found over time while treasure hunting with his metal detector. *Julie Vennitti Botos*

The internet is littered with lists of the most valuable and odd metal detector finds worldwide. Among those on a top-15 ranking by Hobbyhelp.com:

- A 385-year-old gold chalice, valued at \$1 million, from the Spanish ship Santa Margarita.
- Gold nugget, dubbed the "Boot of Cortez," which sold for \$1.5 million at an auction.
- A finger bone and ring from Little Bighorn, where the Sioux had wiped out Lt. Col. George Custer's troops in a famous 1876 battle.
- A 10,000-year-old, two-pound meteor.
- Hoard of buried gold and silver coins valued at \$2.6 million.

Snyder mentioned several local legends that occupy the minds of area hunters — \$2 million in gold bars in Cleveland, a cache from a 1983 Northeast Ohio robbery, and one of the Stark County area's greatest mysteries, the lost French gold buried somewhere in the Minerva area.

As the story goes, as much as \$13 million in gold coins was buried in 1755 in what's now the village, straddling Stark, Columbiana and Carroll counties.



One of the many old coins Brown has recovered through the years *Submitted*

During the French and Indian War, French soldiers had moved the cache from Fort Duquesne, west along the Great Trail, to prevent attacking British soldiers from stealing the loot.

With the British in pursuit of the French convoy, the treasure was buried by a pair of French soldiers. They supposedly left clues, so they could return one day to claim the gold.

"I think someone already found it," Snyder said.

Ins and outs

Metal detectors work because they transmit an electromagnetic field from a search coil into the ground. Metal objects become energized, which in turn makes them re-transmit their own electromagnetic field.

The basic technology dates to 1881 when Alexander Graham Bell created a rudimentary device in an attempt to locate an assassin's bullet lodged in a dying President James Garfield.



Scott Brown shows a rusted gun that he uncovered while looking for treasures with a metal detector. *Julie Vennitti Botos*

Snyder said there are plenty of places to hunt, though permission is almost always required from the property owner. Many locales also have rules which strictly prohibit detecting in parks, for example.

Snyder said it's best to check with the government entity which controls the site, such as a school or park, before digging. And federal lands are protected by laws, which prohibit digging and removing any object.

"Anything or anywhere with the word 'National' in it should not be dug," he said. "They will confiscate your detector, fine you and take away the car you came in ... and I'm not kidding."



Scott Brown talks July 8 about the treasures, as well as junk, he has uncovered with a metal detector in the yard of a century home in Doylestown. *Julie Vennitti Botos*

Experts say some of the best places to hunt are those where people likely dropped items, including walkways, churches, ballfields, beaches, campgrounds, fairgrounds, old drive-in movie theaters, or even your own yard.

Know the lingo

Wheatie – A pre-1959 penny with a wheat straw symbol on the back.

Silver – Coins that were 90% silver, typically dated prior to 1965.

Clad – Coins produced from 1965 until present, which contain no silver.

Discrimination – Detector settings to reject certain metals or junk.

Black dirt – Often a sign of old, undisturbed soil.

Bucketlister – A rare, once in a lifetime find.

Spill – Locating multiple coins in one spot, likely lost from a pocket or purse.

Honey hole – A favorite hunting ground, which consistently produces finds.

Rosie – A silver Roosevelt dime, made from 1946 to 1964.

Plug – A carefully dug hole, which causes minimal damage to the grass when it's returned – the mark of an ethical metal detectorist.

Sources: Interviews and assorted metal detecting websites and literature

Metal Detecting 101

Some basic equipment for successful hunting:

Detector – Some of the most popular manufacturers are Garrett, Minelab, Fisher, Bounty Hunter and Teknetics. Prices run the gamut. But some experts say you get what you pay for. If you don't want to get frustrated digging too much junk, count on spending at least \$800 for a machine.

Pinpointer – An absolute must. A handheld detector, which resembles a skinny flashlight. Once a hole is dug, a pinpointer is used to find the exact location of the metal object, saving time and effort..

Headphones – Especially helpful when detecting in a noisy area, to filter out ambient noise.

Digger/trowel – Handheld tool to dig a hole.

Shovel – For digging larger holes; serrated edges are best.

Frisbee – Comes in handy to hold dirt that will be returned beneath the plug.

Sources: Interviews and assorted metal detecting websites and literature