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METAL DETECTING RECOVERY METHODS

INTRODUCTION

Metal detecting has been a growing hobby ever since World War II when some of the soldiers came home and bought large bulky land mine detectors from surplus stores. As then as well as now, when an object is detected in some type of strata you must decide whether or not to retrieve it. If the decision is to retrieve the object, how should you go about it? How this problem has been approached, the consequences and suggestions for better object retrieval methods is what this introduction is all about.

Years ago when only a few folks were involved in metal detecting, retrieving an object was done in just about any way that worked or didn't work. Only a few individuals and small groups recognized the growing problem of indiscriminate retrieval techniques. As more people became involved in the hobby and profession, those sometimes irresponsible retrieval methods and also the more common Plug Method, caught the attention of Parks and Grounds keepers, Memorial and Historical Sites keepers, Archeologists and Private Property owners. Seeing their grounds with large dirt holes and brown circle patches from shovel and plug digging outraged them. The complaints were justifiable, many people from these groups started complaining to authorities in Government agencies, which started to write laws that restricted, and sometimes outlawed and banned metal detecting.

If one reads old treasure magazines from the 70's to even the present, there are commentaries, articles and editorials full of this very subject. Thanks to a few individuals and organized legal groups, many restrictions and laws were relaxed. Unfortunately, in today's metal detecting world, I see these old problems coming back to haunt us once more. The actions of irresponsible conduct haven't gone away. To the contrary, it is becoming more prevalent as the popularity of metal detecting grows. I have personally seen entire areas of city and county parks marked with plug turf damage. To complicate this problem even further, high-end metal detecting companies with their manuals and television advertisements are promoting bad retrieval methods to an unknowing public who look to them for proper use of their equipment. In today's metal detecting world, we as a group must address this problem and keep what progress has been made and should continue to be made with other concerned groups and authorities. We all live here, so let's try to do it with good conscious efforts.

In the next section of this article I will illustrate two different retrieval methods, which by the way, have been around for years, but somehow got lost to the general group of detectorists. I hope these techniques will help promote better practice for retrieving objects from the ground and gain back the trust from others that comes with proper retrieval methods. Any thoughts, ideas, questions or constructive criticisms on this subject is welcomed by Fossickers.com and will be posted for others to simulate.

METAL DETECTING RECOVERY METHODS

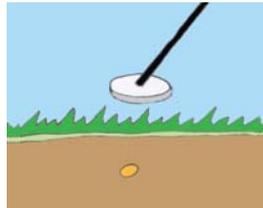
THE PROBING TECHNIQUE

This first technique calls for the use of 2 tools – a fair sized round shank flathead Screwdriver and a Probe that is made of a strong, but non scratching material, i.e. brass, nylon, etc with a knob or handle at one end. Also, may I suggest, that you purchase a good pair of kneepads. The kneepads will spare you pain from rocks and other objects on the ground and keep grass and turf stains off your pants and or skin. Gloves are optional, however in some areas I would definitely recommend them. Let common sense be your guide.

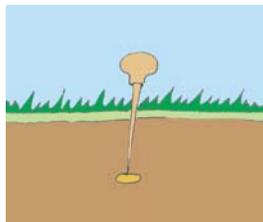
In general, Probing, (as we shall call it), is used for shallow objects not more than 4"- (10cm) or perhaps a little deeper for the Pros. Probing is good for turf and soil that has little or no rocks or pebbles. These types of conditions are usually encountered in well kept places like Parks, Public Centers, Schools, Athletic Fields, Golf Courses, Private Homes, etc. One of the best uses for Probing is when your object has fallen into a grassy turf or has worked itself to just below it. It is not unusual to see pieces of grassy or other types of turf torn up from the ground in some ones attempt to find a shallow object embedded in it (Usually done by Plug Diggers), but more about this later. This problem is minimized or eliminated altogether using the Probe Technique.

1. The first illustration shows a detector coil over an object embedded in turf or soil. If your detector has pinpointing and depth reading abilities, X in the object then read the depth. Many folks don't know how to properly pinpoint or read depth with their detector and/or use the type of coil they're using. Keep in mind that pinpointing with a concentric coil is different than a double "D" type. Knowledge and practice is the key to proper use. If the object is in grassy turf or shallow clean soil, 4"- 10cm, proceed to the next step.

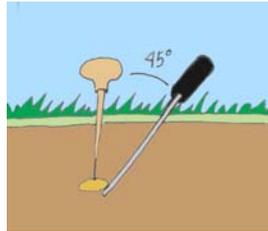
Note: If your object is deeper than a good probing depth or is in rocky soil, precede to the Slit Technique in Part II of this article.



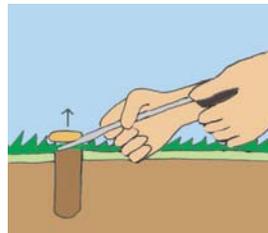
2. While keeping your eyes on the X spot, stoop down and probe the center of it down to the object like shown in illustration 2. Note: Do keep the shank of your Probe vertical to the ground when probing for the object. If you have pinpointed the object properly with your Probe, move on to the next step.



3. As shown in illustration 3, take your screwdriver and drive it into the ground at a 45-degree angle so that the flat side of the tip comes just under the object.



4. Now put your other hand that is not holding the screwdriver onto the shank and with both hands bring pressure to bear under the object driving it up towards the surface as shown in illustration 4. Do not back off on the pressure put onto the object; otherwise you can lose the grip on it, which makes recovery more difficult. Now put back any excess soil that came up from the hole that the object left, squeeze the turf together, then stand up and stamp on it with your shoe.



If you have performed the above instructions properly you should have recovered the object with no damage as well as the turf and ground it came from.

TIPS & HINTS

When pinpointing, sometimes the object isn't where the signal indicates. This can be caused by incorrect use of the detector as mentioned above and/or the object is not lying flat in the ground, but rather being on end or at an angle to the horizontal. Dual objects may also cause a similar problem. These situations can cause the return signal to report the object in the wrong position. Many times in these cited situations, folks will dig many holes chasing the signal everywhere. This becomes very messy indeed and can cause the object to shift from its original position creating even more problems. One technique to get around this is to probe the suspected spot then work out from there in a spiral pattern to around a few inches or about 5cm.

If the object has not been located stand up and pinpoint again, but only from a different angle of approach this time to see if your object is detected in the same place again. If it is still in the same place you may be encountering an object that is thin or ringed shaped so its form can sometimes be more difficult to pinpoint and/or probe. In some areas where I go detecting, I have a rule that if I can't locate an object in a minute or so, I will pass on it rather than create any possible mess. Those of you that have detected those kinds of spots will understand my rule and perhaps adopt it as well. In parting I must say that the probing techniques introduced here, in my region, is the law of the county parks system. In some districts you aren't even allowed to detect at all because of the damage caused by bad recovery methods. The damage has already been done there – don't let it happen to your area as well.

METAL DETECTING RECOVERY METHODS

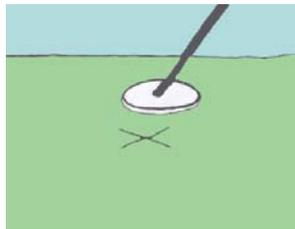
THE SLIT TECHNIQUE

This second recovery procedure is the most controversial in as much as it challenges the most used and abused recovery system of all – outside of using posthole and shovel diggers to recover objects in delicate areas. (See Introduction.) The recovery system, which is being challenged, is commonly known as the “Plug Method.” Almost everyone who has swung a detector has, and/or still does, use the plug technique to recover most, if not all, objects one is seeking. The technique is fairly straight forward - pinpoint the object then cut a circular or hatched plug into the turf and soil, retrieve the object, then replace soil and turf to its original position. (Some folks even carry water to use when replacing plugs in delicate areas.) The plug is so common that even detector manuals show it as the way to retrieve objects. How then can this technique be so abusive as to upset so many people and officials? Because it doesn't work in most conditions, it's just that simple.

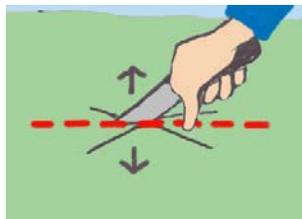
I know that a lot of you are going to disagree with that statement, but the bottom line is the minus out weights the plus. Some folks have realized this and have tried various ways to minimize the problem including cutting very large plugs in an attempt to not localize the root damage. Most of these attempts have all failed to be consistent enough for good results. Another problem with the plug method and probably the largest offender of complaints is cutting a plug to retrieve an object, which is in the turf and not in the soil. So then, what is a person to do? Fortunately there is another technique, which has been around for many years, but was never, outside of a few articles, put before people who needed a better and cleaner method of recovery. In this case it's “better late than never.” So enters the “Slit Technique.”

With the Slit Technique many of the problems that are encountered with Plugs are overcome and are easy and fast to learn. The Slit Technique is good for recovering objects that are below the turf line and into the soil. It is also handy for recovering objects that are in rocky soils and in sensitive places where making a mess of any kind is forbidden. The Slit Technique of recovery calls for a knife, (preferably a Japanese Garden Knife), as the only tool needed and a cloth, (Like a mechanic cloth etc), will do, to get the job done.

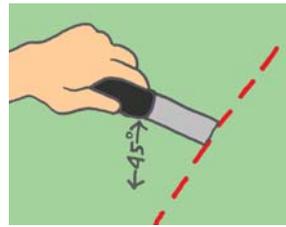
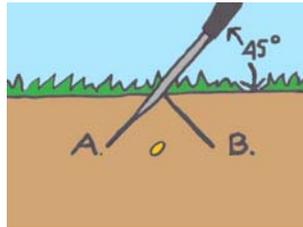
1. The first illustration shows a detector coil over an object embedded in turf or soil. If your detector has pinpointing and depth reading abilities, X in the object then read the depth. If your object is in the grassy turf or shallow clean soil 4" – (10cm) proceed back above to the Probe Technique of this discussion. If your object is in the soil, rocky or otherwise, proceed to the next step below.



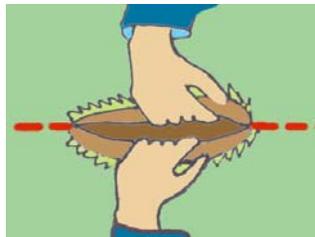
2. While keeping your eye on the X spot stoop down and draw a line with your knife over the top of the object center as shown in Illustration 2. This line will be 3"- (7.5cm) to each side of the object center for normal coin size articles or more for larger size objects.



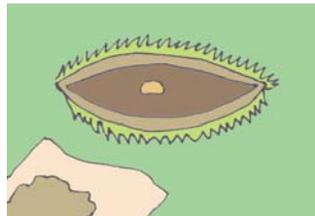
3. As shown in the cut away view of illustration 3, push the knife blade into the turf and soil making a cut along the line at a 45-degree angle from vertical as shown in the dashed line illustration of 3. The knife blade should go down past the turf roots into the soil when making your cut.



4. Now make the same 45-degree cut along the opposite side of your line the same way you did the first, as shown in illustration 4, push your hands into the cut of the open slit and spread the two sides of the turf outward exposing the soil under the turf.



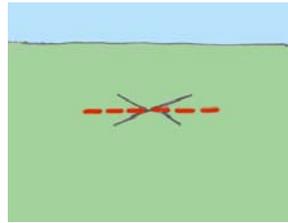
5. Spread your cloth on the ground next to your opened slit then take your knife and dig a plug around the outside of your object. Now remove the plug and put it on your cloth if you haven't found your object already. Break up the plug, find the object, and then remove it.



6. After you have retrieved the object fold the cloth in half with the soil in it and pour the soil back into the hole as shown in illustration 6.



7. Pat down the soil into the hole, close the opened turf sides together now stand up and press down on the slit with your foot. Illustration 7 shows the finished slit all closed up and ready to keep growing as if nothing happened.



CONCLUSION

I hope that the techniques and illustrations presented will give you the information and knowledge for proper object recovery in normal and sensitive conditions. It is up to us to develop good habits that will avoid upsetting the public and turning them against our hobby and for many of us our passion.

Comments, opinions and added knowledge are welcomed.