

Sacramento Valley Detecting Buffs

A Nonprofit Organization
The Public is Invited to Attend our Meetings
SVDB Newsletter

Web Site <http://www.sacramentovalleydetectingbuffs.com/>

Issue Date December 2008



Sacramento Valley Detecting Buffs

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2008 SVDB Christmas Raffle and Pot Luck Dinner December 4, 2008

We anticipate a lot of people at our annual SVDB Christmas raffle and pot luck dinner. So, we are having our best Raffle and Auction we ever had! It will be held at the North County Corporate Yard (Formerly SMUD Building) 5026 Don Julio Blvd. North Highlands - at the intersection of Elkhorn and Don Julio. Our Christmas 2008 meeting will be held on the December 4, 2008 and starts at 7:30 pm



Our **raffle** will have several donations and the grand prize is an outstanding new White's MXT 300 metal detector worth over \$900 that includes the new 12" Spider coil and Royal GT headphones. We anticipate that Fisher, Garrett, Minelab and White's will donate lots of metal detecting items: (hats, shirts, coffee cups etc.) that will be given away. We will also **auction** off a few items a White's new 10" Spider DD coil that lists for \$249 and a White's Bullseye II pinpointer that lists for \$119. We can all thank Larry at Big Valley Metal Detectors for coordinating the purchase of the White's items at a great price to SVDB. We are still coordinating for even more prizes!

Our Sacramento Valley Detecting Buffs president John Duffy said here are the guidelines of what to bring for the pot luck dinner:

If your last name starts with the initial:

P-Z: Bring a main dish

A-H: Bring a side dish

I-O: Bring a desert

Great Raffle, FREE Prizes, Outstanding Food and Funny Metal Detecting Stories - What more could you ask for? Come early and bring lots of raffle ticket money.

Raffle

John Duffy will raffle **1/10 ounce gold coins** as he did in December 2007. If the raffle generates \$475 we will have 2 gold coins and if we hit \$525 we will have 3 gold coins. PLUS no one person can win more than 1 gold coin.



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Raffle

MXT 300
Suggested Retail
\$899.95 (Includes)
Royal GT
Headphones
Suggested Retail
\$49.95



Auction For:

White's 10" DD Coil Fits, DFX, MXT, M6
Suggested Retail \$249.95



White's Bullseye II Pinpointer
Suggested Retail \$119.95



Newsletter Alert: This month's SVDB newsletter will be published in two different page lengths. The US Postal version will be the standard six pages and web version will be 12 pages or greater. There are no restrictions on length for the web version since SVDB does not need to pay for postal fees or paper.

SVDB Office Vacancy:

- The club is looking for someone to step forward and assume the position of **Program Director**. The duties for this position are: develops meeting themes, identify speakers and work with other appointees & volunteers on special club programs.

Minutes from Meeting of November 6, 2008

President: John Duffy

- John called the meeting to order and welcomed four new visitors: Welcome to all newcomers!
- **Visitors:**
Perry Montalbano Richard Harter
Ed & Joyce Radelich Jim Clark

Vice President's Report: Peter Johnson

- Peter read a joke to kick start the meeting. Later he assisted in tonight's monthly raffle.

Secretary's Report: Bob Harrison

- Bob reported that there will not be an election since no one came forward to run for the board positions. The current Officers have volunteered to run again for their 2009 position.

Membership Report: George Magann

- George reported that we now have 141 SVDB members in good standing. Robert Morris was the winner of 1921 Morgan Dollar in tonight's membership drawing.
- **This is the 2009 membership signup period, so let's get your membership up-to-date.**

Treasurer's Report: Allan Woltman

- Allan gave this October's treasurer's report:
Beginning Balance \$ **3652.09**
Income \$ **570**
Expenses \$ **1109.65**
Ending Balance \$ **3112.44.**

Hunt Master Report: Rick Costello

- Rick is out of town but the hunt on the 15th is still on.
- Rick plans on stepping down from the Hunt Master's position in 2009.

Madera Park, November 15th Hunt

Saturday was an ideal fall day for the club hunt. There were 25 Hunters with one metal detectorist Mary coming all the way from the West Bay South of San Francisco. The Hunt field was planted with 642 coin targets and three tokens worth five dollars each.



The Hunt Crew & Hunt Field



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Librarian Report: Tom Schweppe

The SVDB Library is in great condition. Tom will be out of town in December

Hospitality: Al Ezell

- ❑ Thanks Al, for the good selection of munchies and drinks!
- ❑ ***This is the first month for the donation jar at the refreshments table and the amount donated at the November meeting was \$18.41. This is about half the amount spent by the club for refreshments each month. Please keep the donations coming.***
- ❑ Members also asked for name brand diet drinks.

Very Important Meeting Notice from John Duffy:

The SVDB Monthly meeting for January 2009 will be held Wednesday, January 7th NOT Thursday January 1st. Please mark your calendars.

SEE YOU AT THE NEXT MEETING!!

❑ SVDB Meetings are held at the North County Corporate Yard (Formerly the SMUD Building), at 5026 Don Julio Blvd. North Highlands - at the intersection of Elkhorn and Don Julio. The meeting is held on the first Thursday of each month and starts at 7:30 pm.

Do you have metal detecting related equipment

taking up space and not being used? Why not place it on the SVDB web-site classified section for sale? Just send an e-mail to SVDB with your ad – one picture is allowed. You can also bring items to our meetings and sell them on the “for sale” table.

SVDB Club Patches and Decals



Lee had our SVDB club logo put on a patch and George is selling these patches at our meetings for \$5 each. **Patches are still available—profits support SVDB**

Business

Officers Election: John asked those in favor of electing the current board to their position say “Aye” those apposed “Nay”. The “Ayes” carried. The 2009 election process is complete.

Board Meeting Update by John

At a recent Board and key leaders meeting we considered a \$5.00 increase in the family membership dues for 2009 to offset an increase in our club insurance rates which is based on the total number of members. Family members paying before December 31 will get the current rate of \$30.

We started planning for our annual club hunt (exact date and location not yet determined) and based on input from Lee Wiese we are looking at a greatly enhanced prize package including 1/10 oz gold coins, 1 ounce silver rounds and a metal detector (tokens) plus lots of clad and silver coins.

Lee is also in the preliminary planning for a 3-day Santa Cruz beach hunt, based on low tides in August 2009.

We are looking for a Volunteer to become “Program Director” who would help arrange speakers and themes for our monthly meetings.

Finally, we have noted that the first Thursday of 2009 falls on no other than January 1st, New Years Day. I would like to see if we can (or should) find another day to meet for January and a key factor is that I will be gone for the first 3 weeks of January, so Peter will be running the meeting.

Larry Manger owner BIG VALLEY DETECTORS went over a couple of new metal detector accessories.

White’s coil for the DFX. This is a 10 inch “DD” coil.



- ❑ Fits, DFX, MXT, M6. The new D2 10" DD coil is built for severe grounds - with the best DD pinpointing White's has ever built.
- ❑ Greater ground coverage per pass compared to concentric 10" loops.
- ❑ Minimalist design for the lowest 10" DD weight ever 17.9 oz.

Pistol PROBE Pulse Pin Pointer

Features:

- ❑ Deep Seeking Pulse Circuitry Powered by (2) 9V Batteries (not included)



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- ❑ Momentary On/Off Power Push-button Switch for Battery Conservation
- ❑ Protected Control Settings
- ❑ Two Preset Piezo Audio Volume Levels
- ❑ Dual LED Visual Indicators
- ❑ Selectable Silent LED Only Operation
- ❑ Low Battery Alert
- ❑ 6-1/2 in. Probe Barrel Length
- ❑ Balanced Comfortable Grip Shape

SVDB Finds of the Month Show & Tell

Photos of these finds are on our SVDB website under FOM Tab on the left side of the Home page.

James Neeley won the show & tell prize: **Silver Quarter**.

Some interesting finds for October were:

- ❑ 1822 Large Cent by John Duffy
- ❑ 1925 Japanese .50 cent Silver (Maybe Worth \$3,000 in excellent Condition) There is some damage to this coin.
- ❑ Ron Swenson spoke about his Colusa dirt floor basement hunt. His agreement with the owner was Ron would keep the Silver coins and the owner would take ownership for the Chinese era coins & relics.) Ron found four Barbers and two Mercury dimes plus about 11 Chinese coins and items. He will be going back.
- ❑ Ron also had a personal first this month. He found the following at William Land Park during a two hour hunt: a Seated dime, Barber dime, Mercury dime and Roosevelt dime. In the metal detecting community this is called a Grand Slam.

SVDB November, 2008 Raffle & Auction:

We received \$571 from this month's raffle. Thanks to **James Neeley**, for selling tickets for tonight's raffle.

Raffled Coins:

- ❑ Morgan Silver Dollars 6
- ❑ Peace Silver Dollars 17
- ❑ Kennedy Silver Halves 2
- ❑ Franklin Silver Halves 5
- ❑ Gold Coin 1
- ❑ Gold Nugget 1
- ❑ Donated Wet Suit 1 Set

There was a 2nd drawing for a gold nugget (3/4 Penny Weight) donated by **Paul Giese** and won by **Allan**

Woltman. Thanks again this month Paul for your generous donation! **Chris Poulsen** won the 1/10th ounce Gold Coin raffle.



Allan Woltman



Chris Poulsen

SVDB Day-In-The-Park:

There are two day-in-the park hunts per month. The hunts are on the first Sunday and the third Sunday of each month. Breakfast is at 8:00 am with the hunt starting at 9:00 am. See the following for the meeting place:

- ❑ 1st Sunday Hunt: Meet at Denny's at Watt and Auburn
- ❑ 3rd Sunday Hunts: Meet at Pancake House at 21st and Broadway

October Day-in-the-Park Results.

- ❑ October 5th: 11 Hunters, 251 coins, oldest coin was a 1942 Wheat Penny found by Tony McNamara.
- ❑ October 19th: 8 Hunters, 250 coins, oldest coin 1822 Large Cent found by John Duffy.

President's Comment by John Duffy

What is the second most critical piece of equipment we have as metal detectorists? Why, our detectors, of course. In my mind our detectors have two main components – the electronics to generate and interpret energy waves, and a coil or loop to send and receive those waves into mother earth.

It is at this point that our most critical equipment comes into play – our minds that now must decide what to do with the interpretation of those waves. Last month I went to a park here in Sacramento and started a search pattern. When I didn't receive any signals through my headphones for the first two minutes I used

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my mind to double check that the switch on my Sun Ray probe was set to coil and not probe. Check - it was set correctly. I continued searching for another 15 minutes with zero signals – no treasure, no trash. So, back to my inquiring mind I began exploring my machine and in doing so came to wiggle the connector from the coil to the electronics and got a lot of signal noise.

I went back to my truck and switched to a spare coil and now everything seemed to be working fine. When I got home I did a follow up check on my original coil and was resigned to sending it to the manufacturer for testing and if needed repair. However, before I did that I decided to “test” the coil again, by waving some rings and coins in front of it – and lo and behold! – it was working again. I used it for an hour long search a few days later, no problem. I guess I quit using that most critical equipment for a while.

The next time I went hunting I got a good target signal in the first few minutes and started to dig for it – when I had opened the hole I swung the coil again and got no signal – nothing – this time I just wiggled the connector and sure enough – hiss, buzz, crackle I got lots of signal noise.

When I got home I looked more closely at the coil cable connector – it is metal, with small screws holding it together, not a molded plastic or rubber connector. Being mechanically inclined I opted to take the connector apart and discovered that one of the four wires from the coil had broken at the solder joint inside the connector.

I think this is quite unusual, since the cable wire is protected by both a strain relief covering and a cable clamp where it enters the connector. Since I didn't want to be without the coil for whatever the ship/repair/return time might be and since the coil was out of warranty I spent an hour paring back the broken wire and re-soldering it to the connector. That has fixed the problem and when I went out to test my repair work I found a 1944 S Roosevelt dime in the first five minutes! How many coins had I missed when only a few strands of wire were connecting the coil to the electronics??

While I don't recommend that everyone undertake this kind of repair work I can say that it pays to check that

your equipment is working properly. Set up and conduct a check of how your equipment is working and when you find a problem trust your mind and take care of it sooner rather than later. Good hunting and refill your holes!

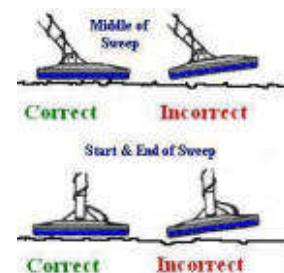
Metal Detecting Tip by Lee Wiese

The first thing a detectorist needs to master is the swinging or sweep of the detector's search coil. This is essential no matter which manufacturer you choose or model you purchase. Mastering the search coil sweep or swing will yield far greater results if done correctly.

There are a number of search coil sweep factors that must be mastered and they are: *search coil height above the ground, keeping the search coil level or parallel to the ground, search coil sweep speed, and overlapping the search coil sweep pattern.*

First the *search coil height above the ground* is one of the most important factors to master since for every one inch you hold the search coil above the ground you will lose an equal amount of magnetic signal penetration into the ground. So if you sweep the search coil three inches above hard packed ground you will lose three inch in ground magnetic signal penetration. This lost of magnetic signal penetration will result in missing the deeper targets. *Hint: To maximize your target recovery you should always feel the search coil scrubbing the ground.*

Second *keep the search coil level or parallel to the ground* at all times. This meaning that the coil needs to be level or parallel to the ground at the beginning, middle and end of the search coil sweep. This may mean a shorter sweep span but it is important to get maximum signal penetration during the entire search coil sweep. See the figure for the correct search coil positions.



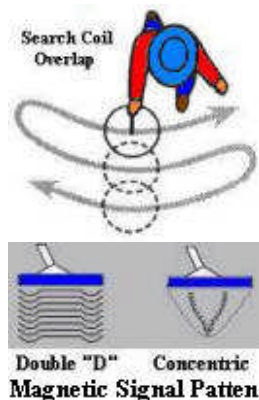
Third the *search coil sweep speed* should be reasonable slow and consistent in speed during each pass of the search coil. A rule of thumb is it should generally take 1 ½ to 3 second for a complete sweep in one direction. To know what sweep speed you should apply, you must read / study the owner's manual. Plus

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you need to practice with your detector so that you can master the sweep speed required for your detector's target response time. Sweep Speeds that are either too slow or too fast will result in missed targets. Also added to the sweep speed issue are ground conditions (trash or mineralized soil), which will affect your search coil sweep speed.

Finally *overlapping the search coil sweep pattern* is extremely important because a Concentric search coil produces a cone shaped ground penetration magnetic signal pattern and

without a search coil overlap you will miss many targets. The Double "D" search coil has a wedged shaped ground penetration magnetic signal pattern and overlapping an inch is usually enough while sweeping the "DD" search coil.



The lesson to learn for sweeping the search coil is to scrub the search coil against the ground, keep the search coil level at all times, maintain the sweep speed down to a level that the detector can handle and remember to apply an overlap for each search coil sweep.

SVDB Classified

For sale Garrett ACE 250, new in the box never been assembled. Price: \$200

Contact: Rick Costello 916-773-9378 or rcostello@rcsis.com

Quote of the Month

And in the end it is not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.

-Abraham Lincoln

Legislation Section

Overland Park Kansas Parks Banning Detecting

*It looks like some progress is being made. **Good Job.***

Issue on:
The Park Directive #4 reads "Metal detecting is prohibited in the city parks." They don't have it posted anywhere, not at the parks, not on their website. I had to call their Parks and Rec. Dept to get the information.

Attached is a petition that can be signed by anyone and mailed to the city of Overland Park, Kansas.

Action Required:

Petition Send with 32 - SVDB member signatures on 9-5-08.

11-19-08 Update:

I received a call from Jim Cox today to invite me to the advisory committee meeting on the 25Th.

Jim also told me that after discussing the issue with the city attorney, that made the original suggestion to prohibit detecting, they have worked up a permit for detecting that is similar to the Johnson County Kansas permit. The permit still has to be approved by the city. The permit will be free and is good for 5 years with rules and areas off limits to detecting like the Johnson county permit.

I'll keep you updated as new info is available. Dan

California Call to Action

I have spoken to Jim Strain, who was involved in California Federation of Mineralogical Societies and its Public Lands Advisory Committee for years before his health became an issue. He is still involved in Imperial Valley politics and he has learned through a County Supervisor that Diane Feinstein is going to propose after Jan. 1, 2009 a Wilderness Bill that will cover all of the Southern California Desert. Senator Feinstein's office in Los Angeles is sending him maps that will cover all the areas involved.

Your job: Convince everyone you contact that this is a bad bill. It will "lock up" the very area that we have used as an educational tool to share our desert with our children and visitors. Who better to be "good will ambassadors of the Southern California Desert" than Californians who have grown up in the desert?

Please forward this information to all your club members. We must flood Senator Feinstein's offices with correspondence and phone calls. Her Los Angeles office was unaware of the agreement making the Houser Bed area west of Blythe, California, a "rockhound area." They have nothing on file. The office of the BLM in Blythe has no files on this, and all those who were involved are either gone or dead!

This leaves us. If you want to continue to enjoy the Southern California desert, then we'll have to fight to keep it.

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Shirley Leeson, AFMS President / CFMS Past President

Offices of Senator Diane Feinstein:

San Francisco, (415) 393-0707, fax (415) 393-0710

Los Angeles, <310> 914-7300, fax (310) 914-7318

San Diego, (619) 231-9712, fax (619) 231-1108

Fresno, (559) 485-7430, fax (559) 485-9689

Suction Dredge Study

To All Miners and Prospectors Everywhere:



It is now time that we start doing these studies and bring about the truth. Recent events in California have brought the situation to the boiling point ... and unless the suction

dredge mining community steps up to the plate and supports the needed studies, we will all be at the mercy of the agencies, tribes, and the environmentalists. If we lose California, it will only be a matter of time before we lose the other states.

For many years, the small miners and in particular the suction dredge miners have complained about the lack of unbiased sound science available to refute the garbage science that is being used by government agencies to regulate us to near extinction. The mining community has been questioning why we or "someone" doesn't do unbiased studies of our own on the rivers and streams open to suction dredge mining. The answer has almost always been "it costs too much" and none of us believed the unity was there in the community to support any such efforts.

With the proper personnel retained to do these studies and with the mining community's support, we can lay many of the negative rumors to rest. And, of equal importance, start addressing the true environmental benefits that the suction dredging has to offer. Luckily, two retired U.S. EPA research scientists have volunteered their time and expertise to do these much needed studies, but even so, funding is needed for such expenses as travel, lodging, equipment, lab analysis, etc.

The first study that we feel should be addressed is the California Water Resources Control Board (CWRCB) study on the detrimental affect of suction dredging and mercury. The CWRCB study claims that a 4" suction dredge only collected 98%

of the mercury it sucked up, and lost 2% over the end of the dredge with the tailings ... and then concluded that the 2% lost is more dangerous than the benefit of removing the 98%! The study claims that it is better to just leave the mercury in place! Those who have had an opportunity to read the study have identified numerous problems with the study, and due to the lack of any real scientific methodology, any results are dubious at best. Unfortunately, no other studies exist. And worse, environmentalists, tribes, and state legislators & agencies have adopted this study as gospel, and are planning to use it to shut down and prohibit suction dredge mining at least in areas containing mercury, and possibly in the whole state.

Recognizing this immediate danger, various mining organizations and individuals from Oregon and California-and we hope other states-are joining forces to fund these necessary studies. Public Lands for the People (PLP) has agreed to be the lead organization in these efforts ... and for this purpose, PLP has set up an exclusive account so that 100% of all donations earmarked for "Scientific Studies" will be spent solely for this purpose.

Our first project (the Mercury Study) has already started with a \$1,000 donation from Mike Higbee of the Armadillo Mining Shop in Oregon. With this donation, the fund has made the down payment of \$1,000 to the two retired Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) scientists to duplicate the CWRCB study on Mercury for the purpose of showing the flaws in the agency paper and to provide bona fide scientific data for a change!



PLP has agreed to have all donations earmarked for "Scientific Studies" sent to the scientists where they can draw from it as needed for the Mercury Study,

and hopefully future studies.

PLP is a non-profit organization and all donations are tax deductible.

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Donations can be sent to:

PLP c/o BH Wetherby Science Study
3700 Santa Carlotta Dr. La Crescenta, CA 91214

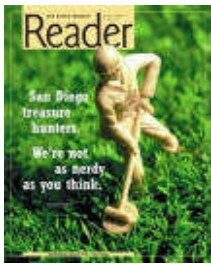
Donations are also accepted online at
<http://www.plp2.org/>

Sincerely,
Jerry Hobbs - President, PLP
Tom Kitchar - President, Waldo Mining District

San Diego Treasure Hunters. We're Not As Nerdy As You Think.

By Moss Gropen | Published Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2008

It's Monday, 5:00 a.m. at Mission Beach. Russ Gish and his son Lance have already been here an hour, sweeping the sand with a contraption that looks like a skinny, upright vacuum cleaner with a coil at the end. They're treasure hunters, looking for things — metal things to be exact — that were left the day before, or even a few years ago. If they're lucky, they'll find some coins, maybe some cheap jewelry. If they're really lucky, if some beachgoer was flagrantly careless or stone drunk, perhaps the haul might be a platinum ring or a Rolex watch. Can you say "finders keepers"?



When I pull into the parking lot just south of the roller coaster, Russ greets me with a serious look on his face. A self-described "ex-Navy man," he claims 6'4" but appears shorter. I notice that he's wearing low-cut, black neoprene boots. I ask, "Are you trying to make a fashion statement?" "No," he replies. "We wear these diver's boots to protect us from fishing hooks and other sharp objects; they also keep our feet warm when the water's cold." Without much fanfare, he opens the back of his SUV and hands me a Fisher "Quick Silver" metal detector, a dual-frequency model with an eight-inch coil.

He also gives me a long-handled metal scoop and a pair of headphones. We walk onto the beach and proceed straight to the wet sand, where Russ hopes to demonstrate why anyone (much less a 70-plus fellow with arthritis) would want to leave the house at three in the morning to walk back and forth on a dark, deserted beach.

Strangely, I'm happy to be here at this hour, standing about a half mile north of the jetty. Perhaps it's the balmy air or the warmer-than-expected water, maybe it's the gentle wavelets or the faint light to the east, but damn if

this isn't relaxing. Even the sand looks pristine, at least to my untrained eyes. Russ isn't here for the ambience, though; he's all business, a stern but well-meaning instructor in this art and science.

"Start over there, where the sand is shiny." For wet-sand hunting, Russ recommends the area of the beach kept perpetually wet by the tide, so that's where I go. I imitate Russ, who ambles along, passing his coil in an arc an inch above the sand. Back and forth, back and forth — there's a precision, a consistency, so ingrained that it seems mechanical; by contrast, my sweeps seem forced and halting. "Keep the coil parallel to the ground," he admonishes, and "Remember, if your detector can only go about a foot down, and you're sweeping the coil five inches above the sand, you've reduced your range to seven inches." Still, within seconds, my headphones squawk with a tone that sounds like an amalgam of a siren and a wailing infant, and I jump. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," says Russ. "I'm a little hard of hearing, so you'll want to turn the volume down."

My detector continues to sense something every few feet, but as it happens, I've jostled the control knobs; I'm not sitting on a gold mine — these are just false alarms. I call Russ over, and somewhat annoyed, he fixes the settings. I resume my sweeping, but the headphones are now silent for what seems like eternity. Finally, I get a signal and Russ shows me how to position the scoop to dig a well-placed hole. I sift the sand that holds my bounty — an aluminum pull-top from a soft-drink can.

A while later, Russ shows me a silver ring with a black inlay that he's just pulled from the sand. (Before I arrived, he'd dug up an eight-carat-gold band and another ring that looked like white gold with three crappy amethysts.) We meet up with Lance, who's been blanked. Along with a couple of pennies and nickels, that's the morning's catch — possibly worth enough to pay for the gas burned in the round trip between the beach and Russ's house in El Cajon. It's now 6:30 or so, and for me, the predawn magic of the beach has evaporated in the sunlight, which reveals the trash strewn about the seawall and the losers scurrying around the foul cinder-block restrooms. Russ says, "I'd hoped you'd find something good so it would spark your interest in the hobby. It's not as easy as it looks, is it?"

Whether the hunt is a well-financed quest for long-sunken doubloons off the Florida coast or a solitary man looking for old quarters in a local field, one can only describe treasure hunters as obsessive. Members of a small (and at times, secretive) fraternity, they can be found swapping bounty stories online, posting photos of old coins, artifacts, and gold nuggets uncovered by their "guns." In

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San Diego, as in other parts of the country, most are hobbyists, but rather serious ones; the equipment is expensive and the time commitment can be formidable. It all boils down to separating the treasure from the trash.

Among the metal-detecting cognoscenti, there are three generally recognized types of hobbyist searchers: “coinshooters,” “prospectors,” and “relic/artifact hunters.” Although there is some overlap (driven locally by seasonal considerations), most treasure hunters eventually sort themselves into a niche within this already arcane avocation. (The high-profile shipwreck divers and cache-seekers — those looking for large quantities of old gold or silver — are in a different league.)

In coastal San Diego, many treasure hunters, such as Russ Gish, can be classified as coinshooters, folks who comb the beaches not only for coins, but jewelry and watches as well. In the far-inland reaches, gold prospectors scour the desert and mountain backcountry for nuggets and the occasional coin. And although San Diego has neither Civil War battlefields nor Colonial stomping grounds (the sites most popular among devotees in the Midwest and East), the county has its share of relic and artifact hunters, those who look to unearth bits and pieces of history. They haunt both rural and urban sites, whether long-abandoned mining camps in the Cuyamacas or old homes being demolished in Golden Hill. Whatever their specialty, treasure hunters have a distinct argot, a passel of terms that describe not only the lucre but the tools it takes to find it.

Unless you're handy with a modified divining rod or have extraordinary extrasensory powers, the first step in the quest for buried treasure is to buy a metal detector. Although they can be purchased online, those who live within driving distance of an actual store generally prefer to acquire them in person; the expertise and guidance of an experienced dealer is key. Unlike many of their rural counterparts, San Diegans have it good in that regard, with three full-fledged shops in the county. “Full-fledged” is relative, of course; metal detecting, a rather esoteric and relatively expensive hobby — at least in terms of start-up costs — isn't popular enough to support many stand-alone stores.

If you head to Columbia Metal Detectors in Escondido, don't look for a sign with a big neon gold coin or vintage prospector photo out front; instead, pull up in front of the Inkwell Printing Company. It's not that they don't sell metal detectors — they have about 60 in stock, along with de rigueur accessories like long-handled, stainless-steel scoops and headphones. But, according to owner Frank Trutta, metal detecting just isn't big enough to warrant exclusive floor space here. Nonetheless, business is good,

spurred in recent years by an upswing in gold and silver prices.

Like most detector dealers, Trutta is a longtime enthusiast himself, initially selling the machines out of his house decades ago. When I asked him what draws people to the pastime, he said, unequivocally, “The thrill of the hunt.” I also wondered, “Do you have to be technically inclined to use a detector?” He replied, “No, they're become pretty user-friendly. Even a five-year-old could do it; actually, a five-year-old — with the way kids use computers and cell phones nowadays — could probably do it better than you.

”He added, “If you buy a detector from me, I'll take you out and show you how to use it.”

It's a lot easier to uncover a treasure hunter than, say, a Morgan quarter, a widely sought-after silver coin dating from the late 19th Century. Although most participants are unaffiliated with clubs, you can find some of San Diego's most fervent practitioners at the Coinshooters' Clique, a group started in 1974. Russ Gish, the Clique's president, told me what first drew him to this quirky, esoteric pastime. “As a kid, I loved reading about pirates' treasure.” Gish, who has been sweeping his coils for over 40 years, is regarded by many as one of San Diego's foremost experts on metal detecting — the equipment, the treasure, and the people. As for the last, he says that there are three principal motivators that drive detecting: “Greed, thrill, and an excuse to get out into the sun or under the moon.”

Although San Diego is not bereft of a past, it's not the place to dig for Confederate Army belt buckles or Jeffersonian-era coat buttons; Old Town and Presidio aside, and with a nod to Horton and Serra, local treasure hunters aren't on the speed dials of museum curators. Gish notes, “Unlike other parts of the country, we don't have the history here in San Diego; what we do have — the Indian and old Spanish stuff — it's all been covered up by shopping centers and houses.” So goes a coinshooter's lament about the dearth of hoary diggables in Diego. That's why Gish and his cohorts are largely beach hunters, wet-sand specialists at that. Pick a holiday — any semi-major calendar standout will do — preferably one where Middle Americans inexorably scurry to the seashore because, well, that's what they've always done. Now that the crowd's in place, add the distractions of bikinis and booze (unless banned by the cops), screaming toddlers, and, of course, the earnest ones who think volleyball is a sport. With forgetfulness and frivolity at a fever pitch, it's now time for the most important ingredient of all: seawater, preferably cold and rough.

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Wet-sand hunters love chilly ocean surf, though they seldom venture too far into it.

Gish says that it's the cold water of our not-so-beloved California current — more than anything else — that relieves us of our bangles, baubles, and beads. Thanks to typically sub-70-degree temperatures (often closer to 60, to tourists' chagrin), as fingers shrink in the brine, well-fitted rings become loose, and those that start out loose end up lost.

Gish says that a fingerless ring will be moved three or four feet by each wave. As for relinquished bracelets, necklaces, and watches, he surmises that "roughhousing and grab-assing" in the surf are the usual causes. Whatever the cause, San Diego's beaches yield more than a few items whose value exceeds the "sentimental." But to find them, you've got to "read the beach."

"When I go to the beach, I don't see sand and water; I see dips and hollows, places where the waves deposit things. We could go to the same beach, and you might not find a thing. But after doing this for all these years, I know where to look." Gish doesn't say this with arrogance, just the kind of quiet confidence that builds over decades, much in the same incremental way the ocean crafts a stretch of sand; still, he doesn't discount the chance that a tyro, with good equipment, patience, luck, and most importantly, a mentor, might come across some nice treasures after a few trips to the shore.

Gish says that the Coinshooters' Clique (often shortened simply to "Coinshooters") has roughly 60 to 70 active families, which, in most cases, means a retired man who is sometimes accompanied by his wife. (Gish's own late wife, who lovingly derided him as a "penny hunter," never joined him but did express a willingness to try on any stylish jewelry he came across.)

I asked Gish about the club's name. "Back in the early 1970s, there was a local club called the Gem and Treasure Hunter Association. The president did some, uh, unethical things, like putting all the club dues right into his own pocket. So we broke off and formed our own group; when the prez heard about it, he became hostile and said to me, 'So you effin' cliquish people are gonna start your own Mickey Mouse club?' We thought about calling it the 'Mickey Mouse Coinshooters' Clique,' but we didn't want to get in trouble with the Disney people, so we just called it the 'Clique.' "

Unlike many of the other Clique members, Gish is willing, even enthusiastic, to be that mentor; he'd like to see metal detecting grow. He acknowledges that most veteran

treasure hunters want to keep "their" hunting grounds secret and are typically loathe to share knowledge. He says, "I want to promote the hobby. But I won't let you hunt with me unless you meet my criterion, which is that you must return an item if it's returnable."

What's "returnable"? To many treasure hunters (and, I confess, would-be beachcombers like me), "returnable" items are limited to those things whose repatriation is forced by the point of a gun or the prospect of imminent incarceration. But that's not how Gish sees it at all; in fact, he goes to extraordinary lengths to reunite owners with their lost lucre. If an item is especially valuable, he may "sit on it" for up to six months, perusing lost-and-found ads on craigslist, in local newspapers, and through other sources.

Gish told me that, on occasion, he's actually commissioned by an owner to look for a missing piece of jewelry or a watch. More often than not, the quest is a "crapshoot," but not long ago, he found and returned a \$4800 engagement ring for a woman who'd heard of his expertise. He doesn't charge them but now and then receives a tip for success; at times, "They'll just put it in their pocket without so much as a thank you." But he doesn't care. "The best thing about treasure hunting is the feeling I get when I'm able to return something to the owner. That feeling is indescribable." That's not to say, however, that every master of the detector is willing to undo your carelessness for free; Frank Trutta's rate is \$60 for two or three hours of work — inherently reasonable (some would say downright cheap), given recent repatriations of expensive rings, one worth \$44,000.

Some things, of course — notably, items bereft of distinguishing marks or unique characteristics, especially if lost years ago — are indeed unreturnable and may gleefully be assigned to the pile marked "finders keepers." Jim Hill, owner of Treasure Trove in North Park, reasons, "Say you find a nice 14-karat-gold chain on the beach. It's like every other bracelet or necklace you can find at stores all around town. What are you going to do, trace it?" And so it goes: Despite the best efforts of well-intentioned finders, expensive hunks of metal — the stainless-steel diving watch you bought at the duty-free shop in the Caribbean, the gold ring your wife snagged at Nordstrom — may find their way to auction after a careless jaunt to the beach. Gish (who says that over the years, he's found three or four rings worth over five grand apiece) recently sold a "nice four-figure, 1000-foot diving watch" on eBay for a "fair price."

Not every valuable find goes to auction; many veteran San Diego treasure hunters prefer to amass modest collections

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in display cases, while others, like Bruce Campbell, a psychologist for the Santee School District, choose to wear their bounty. In Campbell's case, it's a piece he calls his "Mafia" or "pimp" ring, consisting of more than a carat of high-grade diamonds set in 31 grams of gold and appraised at \$3200; he uncovered it on a North County beach in 1999.

As a child growing up in Kansas City, Campbell developed a fascination for Civil War memorabilia and fossils. Decades later, after moving to San Diego in 1980 just shy of earning a doctorate, he turned to the beaches. For him, the lure of treasure hunting is the relaxation that comes with, as he puts it, "using a different part of my brain." A contemplative man with a gentle demeanor and an advanced degree, he's been immersed in the hobby since the mid-'70s; he's a member of the Coinshooters' Clique, as well as an occasional attendee at meetings held by the Prospectors' Club of Lemon Grove.

Campbell describes his occupation as both analytical and "highly stressful." His head-shrinking tenure *was* punctuated a few years back by proximity to the notorious 1998 Santana school shootings. He says that the hobby is a good way to unwind, though not necessarily socialize. Noting that Campbell differs from most treasure hunters (club-affiliated or not) in his temperament and level of education, I quizzed him about his fellow detectorists, as they're sometimes called, asking if he fit the "profile," as it were. He replied that although he enjoys hanging with buddy Paul Dragos at the "Clique," he's rather atypical, except, perhaps, in his attitude about returning items to owners. "Maybe it's my background; my father was a [Harvard Law School-educated] judge, and my mother was a Mennonite. I was always taught to be honest."

Campbell recalls one return story in particular. "I was hunting at Presidio Park a few years ago when I found a 1966 class ring from Mt. Miguel High School. It was huge — big enough to put a quarter through it, and it was engraved with initials. I contacted a secretary at the school who looked through an old yearbook. There were pictures of two guys with the same initials, one of whom looked like he might be pretty big. We contacted him, and sure enough, he was a short, fat guy who'd lost the ring 'ice blocking' — sliding down a hill on a block of ice. He was elated to get it back after all these years because, apparently, his wife had accused him of giving it to a whore in exchange for her services."

Campbell realizes that he's an atypical Clique member but says that the group — while undeniably plebian — isn't close to the bottom of the barrel. To find the bottom-dwellers, he recommends hanging out with the old coots at

the Prospectors' Club, whom he good-naturedly characterizes as "beneath blue-collar." Most treasure hunters are neither contemplative nor well educated; as a rule, they're taciturn blue-collar retirees — ex-military or military-industrial-complex guys without even undergraduate degrees — rough around the edges and not given to self-analysis. According to Jim Hill, "Folks who use metal detectors are mostly outdoor types who like hunting and fishing; there aren't a lot of doctors or lawyers." In order to understand the psyche of "the type," I spoke with one man, another Coinshooters' Clique member, described by Russ Gish as someone who "eats, breathes, and sleeps metal detecting." Treasure Hunter X, as I'll call him, didn't want his name used but told me, "Everybody will know it's me anyway."

"X" is a gruff redneck and a self-described "10" on a 1–10 treasure-hunting-intensity scale. He's also one of the few locals who has found gold coins — three to be exact — which makes him an object of both respect and envy in San Diego detecting circles. Known for a curious mixture of braggadocio and secrecy bordering on paranoia, he was happy to tell me about the coins — to a point. When I pressed him for details, he said that the mid- to late-19th-century gold pieces (valued more for scarcity than gold content) had been found, respectively, at "the beach," a "stage stop," and a "World War II training site." Apparently fearing that I might scamper out to the boondocks to plunder his mini-El Dorado, he wouldn't reveal more precise locations. What he *did* reveal, however, was the profile and mindset of a typical (some would say stereotypical) treasure hunter: When I inquired as to what sort of people are attracted to the hobby — specifically asking him whether college graduates were common — he seemed nonplussed, replying testily, "It's mostly a bunch of 'Joe Blows' who get up and go to work every morning." He also said, "You don't have to be personable; very few are social people. There are a lot of loners."

"Sonny" might typify the loner contingent, the crusty old guys who eschew even the marginal interaction of a club. Living in a Lakeside trailer park, alone save for an old cat, he told me that detecting gives him a reason to get out and, more importantly, cash to supplement his disability payments. A retired forklift driver and ex-Marine, he's 66 but relatively new to the hobby. "About five or six years ago I was havin' some heart problems. The doctor told me to quit drinkin' and smokin' and start exercisin'. I still drink and smoke, but I git my exercise by lookin' fer stuff on the beach."

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Sonny told me that, unlike treasure hunters who focus on “fancy” beaches like La Jolla Shores and Del Mar, he prefers Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, and Oceanside. “I like the lower-down places; the quality’s not as good, but there’s a lot more of it. Just a while back, I found a couple of — you know, the things colored people put on their teeth — ‘grills.’”

Loners or not, they’ll almost certainly be men. Although metal detectors are surprisingly light — under five pounds, including the control box — the absence of a brute-strength requirement doesn’t translate to a gender-neutral hobby. While there’s no evidence that repetitive sweeping motions — even, albeit, in bosky corners of East County or in chilly surf — would require the manipulations of a manly man, “wimmen” are hard to come by “out there” in the proverbial field. Jim Hill of Treasure Trove says that the distaff contingent is made up of “gals who wear gun boots.”

Gender, attire, and personality aside, treasure hunters, to a man (and the very rare woman), positively revel in showing off their finds, if not the coordinates. Whether tight-lipped or garrulous, transparent or guarded, there’s a measure of pride in uncovering something shiny and/or old. Some of this showing off is done online, some in person at club meetings, like the Coinshooters’ Clique monthly get-together; but wherever the treasure is displayed, value and historical significance are always held in high regard. Nonetheless, some detecting devotees, like Paul Dragos (who hunts with pal Bruce Campbell), are enthralled as much by the “time capsule” notion as by market or museum value.

Of all the treasure hunters interviewed, Dragos, a good-humored electrical engineer at Sony, seems the most transfixed by everyday items. He speaks of prosaic things of decades or centuries past that were lost — and perhaps never mourned — but whose discovery now, in the age of the Internet and the cell phone, shines a light, even if faint, on the lives of those who once held them. As with many local detecting hobbyists, he hunts at the beach in the summer (and after big winter storms) but ventures inland when the mercury descends; he says that’s where most of his favorite treasures have been uncovered — places like the ruins of trading posts and missions near Anza-Borrego and amid the remains of abandoned homesteads and mining camps near Julian. When I asked him what finds he values most, his answers were evocative: four silver coins minted in 1732 Spain, worth a modest \$30 to \$50 each; a 1920s brass lipstick holder engraved with a woman’s name; and above all, an 1890s cast-iron toy train engine — worth perhaps \$4000 if in good condition, considerably less as is, but fascinating nonetheless.

Whatever one’s motivation for hunting treasure, it’s vital to achieve a balance among the attributes of penetration, discrimination, and sensitivity — terms that speak to how deep a unit can find metal and how readily that unit can distinguish among different types of metal. This takes one to the first and foremost consideration in treasure hunting — choosing a machine, a daunting task for the novice. To get an overview, I chatted with local dealers and other experts. To begin with, there are two commonly employed technologies among detectors — very low frequency (VLF) and pulse induction (PI), each of which operates — roughly speaking — by gauging the strength of the magnetic field produced by buried metals. (VLF units, in turn, can be subdivided into single-frequency and multiple-frequency units.) There are other specs to consider as well, things like coil size, and among multiple-frequency units, the number of frequencies. There are four big-name brands out there — Fisher, Garrett, Minelab, and White; less known are Bounty Hunter, Tesoro, and a handful of others. Not surprisingly, each brand has its loyalists and detractors.

What are you trying to find, and how much money can you spend? — it all boils down to this, goes the consensus. According to Frank Trutta of Columbia Metal Detectors, multiple-frequency VLF machines are generally the way to go for wet-sand beach hunting and general relic/artifact hunting, while those seeking gold nuggets are better off using the PI detectors. In any event, there’s always a trade-off; the deeper a detector can go, the less it’s able to discriminate; sure, it’ll find metal, including nails, pieces of near-worthless aluminum, and lead — “trash” to the cognoscenti. On the other hand, if you’re looking for gold nuggets, you’ll need a unit sensitive enough to pick up small pieces of metal. And, of course, size matters — coil size, that is; smaller coils (8, 10 inches) are good for detecting individual coins, while larger coils (up to 15 inches plus) will go deeper but be less apt to pick up the small stuff.

Ultimately, what counts is what you find and who knows about it. Although the Coinshooters’ Clique is the most visible aggregation of San Diego treasure hunters, many detectorists aren’t affiliated with a club. Still, there has been an effort to organize, if for no other reason than to push back against the constant, inexorable forces of government — both state and federal — that seek to restrict where one can pursue the hobby.

Treasure hunting doesn’t have a lobby to match the NRA; hell, they’d be hard-pressed to match the influence of La Leche League, or even Spelunkers Anonymous, if it existed. Nonetheless, via the FMDAC — the Federation of

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Metal Detector and Archaeological Clubs — there are attempts, with modest success, to stave off incessant efforts by politicians and cops to fence off any and every good hunting site that might exist.

It isn't just that one is prohibited from, let's say, sweeping a coil at the base of Mt. Rushmore or around the grounds of Monticello; veteran treasure hunters say that, if the antihunters had their way, the only legal place to detect would be in your own backyard — if you had a permit, that is. The Federation, as all good, compliant organizations are wont to do, publishes a "code of ethics," which apparently is designed — by dint of polite (obsequious) rhetoric — to placate those who stay awake at night fear-stricken at the thought that a misplaced spade might (God forbid) rearrange chunks of dirt.

For San Diego hunters, whose natural range has typically encompassed not only So-Cal beaches but the high deserts, bans have sucked some of the thrill from the chase; places like Calico Ghost Town and other sites deemed too holy for private-sector exploration have been marked off-limits by the powers that be. However, these arid reaches are sparsely patrolled and still — to some hard-core aficionados — fair game. After all, if you've spent a couple grand on equipment and logged dozens of hours researching historical documents, why let an officious dork in a Smokey the Bear hat interfere?

Every treasure hunter with whom I spoke expressed frustration at being shut out. Even Russ Gish, a diplomatic and circumspect man, can't help noticing that these days it's harder than ever to find a lucrative place to reconnoiter lost lucre without being cited or chased out. Take Balboa Park; as a sprawling, wooded tract — replete not only with modern-day tourists but a good measure of old-enough buildings, walkways, and other likely metal depositories — it's a must-sweep property. There's nothing on San Diego's extensive books banning treasure hunting there, but apparently park rangers defending the sanctity of their fiefdom feel justified in demanding that metal-detector-wielding folks cease and desist. Some once-fertile private-sector sites have dwindled as well, notably construction sites where owners and their minions, citing lawsuit concerns (real or feigned), have increasingly erected chain-link fences and No Trespassing signs.

According to Gish and the others, San Diegans (and Californians in general) looking for subsurface bounty still have it good, at least compared to states like Oregon, where — under the pretext of archaeological concerns — little public land remains open.

Locals also have an intrinsic advantage here — lack of snow cover in the winter and generally tolerable weather. Among treasure hunters, another question surfaces, though: Can a location become "hunted out"? Gish, always the optimist, says that the problem is overstated. To begin with, he notes, "The beach renews itself every time crowds come and lose things and every time there's a big storm which churns things up." Even popular sites that have been visited many times before can yield rewards. "You just have to know where to look."

As it turns out, creativity and research (along with patience and persistence) separate the top-notch, veteran detectorists from their distant, weak cousins — the rank tyros who end up stashing their "guns" in the garage and selling them at a yard sale. Some of it's pretty basic. For wet-sand hunters, it means perusing the tide charts for the lowest low tides — the "minus" tides — which mostly occur between midnight and dawn in the summer but during the day in the winter. It also entails heading for the beach immediately after big storm waves subside; the stronger the surf, the greater the chances that long-hidden objects will reemerge. Find the location of an old pier or landing, and you're ahead of the game. For dry-sand hunters, it's a matter of scoping out concession stands, bus stops, or a seawall — places where coins and jewelry are likely to disappear. Still other treasure hunters gain a leg up by cruising the streets of older residential districts to look for demolition or reconstruction sites. And, of course, dedicated detectorists are known to scan the hills for places heretofore overlooked.

The most dedicated treasure hunters go farther — not just farther afield, but deep into the thickets of historical research, where casual detectorists seldom tread. Although there's no treasure-hunting "bible," there are dozens of books, many quite specialized, offering "where- and how-to" tips. There are also micro-market periodicals, including *Western and Eastern Treasures* (to which Russ Gish has contributed) and — notwithstanding the hobby's age demographics — Internet forums. If those sources are too "mainstream," there are also the dusty volumes at the San Diego Historical Society in Balboa Park.

For the layman, this level of dedication might denote a "dweeb" or "wonk," to which Paul Dragos disclaims, "I want everyone out there to know that we're not as nerdy as they think; we don't wear black socks with shorts."

After all is said and done, San Diego treasure hunters — neither deterred by rules (written or unwritten) nor slowed by high winter surf — manage to bag, through dogged persistence and quiet patience, a sparkling array of metallic currency and finery.

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And they're damned proud of it. Every veteran treasure hunter, whether a self-described coinshooter, relic/artifact hunter, and prospector (or amalgam), has a crown jewel, a find whose discovery defines who he is — at least for now — in the hobby. But is treasure hunting worthwhile from a bottom-line perspective?

With the recent spike in precious metal prices, one might be excused for fantasizing that, given a certain level of expertise, a dedicated and skilled treasure hunter might not only pay for his equipment but secure a passable living. Jimi Ellis, owner of Escondido Coin (another shop where detectors are sold as a sideline), told me that some of his customers, fresh from pink slips and the like, buy into the notion. But the initial outlay can be steep; if you buy a decent-quality detector with headphones, along with a scoop and other accoutrements, it's hard to spend less than \$500 to \$1000.

For the serious treasure hunter, equipment outlays can run into the thousands because, as it turns out, hard-core devotees usually have at least two machines, one of which is deemed a backup unit in case the first-stringer goes down. And none of this figures in sweat equity — the ostensibly relaxing, occasionally thrilling, but often tedious hours spent sweeping a detector from side to side over a swath of sand or dirt. According to Frank Trutta, a typical treasure hunter can pay for his equipment in “a couple of years,” and clearly, old hands like Russ Gish and “Treasure Hunter X” can do much better.

Jimi Ellis, even as someone who'd like to sell you your first metal detector, is quick to caution, “Don't give up your day job.” Nevertheless, even the most rational among us find something exciting about uncovering buried treasure.

The Coinshooters of San Diego (who eschew “Clique”) publish a monthly newsletter, “Digs & Scoops.” It looks the way I imagine a small-town church bulletin might appear: there are committee reports, notices about bake sales and “ice cream socials,” trivia columns, and lists of members with serious illnesses and/or upcoming birthdays.

If you thumb through “Digs & Scoops,” you'll find out that the club meeting always opens with the Pledge of Allegiance and that on December 6, 2008, club members will convene for a Christmas dinner at the Sizzler in El Cajon. It's “red state” all the way.

Specific to treasure hunting, there's also a calendar of upcoming events, a recap of recent hunts and contests, and a handy San Diego Bay tide chart. But for my money, it's the “show and tell” portion of the newsletter — which

chronicles the prior month's finds — that tells the treasure hunters' story, the tale of San Diego's outdoor repository of lost objects.

The June 2008 edition of “Digs & Scoops” is illustrative of the breadth of what's unearthed — the mundane, the bizarre, and the valuable. Russ Gish's 28-inch, 27-gram, 14-karat-gold chain (appraised at \$1200) was deemed “best find,” while son Lance garnered the “most unusual” for his 50-pound dumbbell. All told, club members scoped out items ranging from vintage coins to late-model switchblades, as well as a San Diego Padres ring, a musket ball, and an antique condom tin. Still another Coinshooter, Alan Calvert, reported finding “a silver rose ring, a silver pendant necklace, a silver earring, two working cell phones, a working digital camera, a flashlight, a survival knife, a spring-loaded locking knife, a heart pendant with pink stones, an unusual pendant necklace, a Costa Rican coin, a pot pipe, and a nose ring.”

On any given sortie to beach or field, few of the things you'll find, even if you're highly skilled, will turn out to be saleable, much less valuable. There's “trash,” of course, detritus and debris such as pull-tops from cans, mundane nails and screws, and other bits and pieces of nondescript, worthless metal. One step up (arguably) are the morbidly fascinating remnants of San Diego's recent military past; Treasure Hunter X says that he occasionally picks up bazooka shells and other live ordnance near Coronado or Imperial Beach. Above the merely bizarre, but beneath the truly lucrative, are items like watch fobs and lapel pins, considered quasi-collectable by some but just mundane curiosities to most. And let's not forget the nonmetal byproducts of detecting — the patent medicine bottles and such that turn up now and then in the lots of old urban homes and around rural ruins.

Although the majority of treasure hunters keep records (often quite meticulous) of finds they consider worthwhile, Frank Trutta takes it to an extreme. “Maybe it's my accounting background, but I've broken it down precisely, and it's the same, year after year. Pennies are 44 percent of what I find; nickels, 10 percent; quarters, 25 percent; dimes, 20 percent; and jewelry, 1 percent.” Russ Gish tracks his treasure by time — an average of 30 coins and 1.5 rings per 2.5-hour session.

But no one buys a \$1000 metal detector in order to traipse through the stingray- and jellyfish-laden shallows to find common pennies. It's the big hit, the big score they're after. Treasure Hunter X is still tramping through the high desert looking for a meteorite, and he may eventually find it, but who the hell knows when?

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Other treasure hunters are looking for their first gold coin or jar full of old silver dollars but may die before they find it. Frank Trutta says it can take years of practice and patience, as in the case of an ultra-rare silver dime — found at an unspecified local beach and appraised at \$19,000. On the other hand, there's no discounting luck. Jim Hill of Treasure Trove claims that one of his customers, on his first hunt — detector fresh out of the box — plucked a platinum-set diamond ring from the sands of La Jolla Shores.

No matter what *has been* found — it's the *waiting-to-be-found* that keeps treasure hunters coming back for more, trudging the shoreline on foggy nights and dodging rattlesnakes in the Cuyamacas' scrub. Whatever they seek most ardently — gold nuggets, an old railroad watch, even a cheap toy from the 1950s — the anticipation of the next find creates an inexorable, one might say magnetic pull. Arms swinging like pendulums, they're hard on the heels of the next rush. Finders keepers.