Maryland Historical Trust Metal Detecting and Archeology FAQs (revised January, 2015)

Q. Do archeologists and metal detectorists work together?

A. Yes, they do. But to understand how they work together today, it's important to understand that archeologists and metal detectorists have had less than outstanding relations in the past. This state of affairs was largely the result of the sort of misunderstandings that result when people assume they understand others' motives, but have not taken the time to actually discover them through dialogue. Archeologists have often taken the position that metal detectorists are only interested in the 'things' lost or left by people who lived in the past, and that by recovering them without regard for their location and associations, metal detectorists have actually destroyed the research value of countless irreplaceable archeological sites. For their part, metal detectorists have often thought of archeologists as elitists who wanted to reserve for themselves only the right to dig and recover artifacts from the sites of our shared history. In fact there is more that unites archeologists and metal detectorists than divides them. They have a great deal in common in terms of their love and passion for history, and they have much to offer each other in terms of their unique skills and their different knowledge of history. Collaborations between archeologists and metal detectorists are increasingly common, and have resulted in some very significant research findings. An excellent example local of such a joint project occurred at the Monocacy National Battlefield Park near Frederick, Maryland (http://www.heritage.umd.edu/CHRSWeb/NPS/Monocacy/NewPerspectives.pdf). For information about other collaborations between archeologists and metal detectorists (including the Battle of Little Big Horn project), visit the Society for American Archeology website at http://www.saa.org/ForthePublic/Resources/MetalDetectingInArchaeology/MetalDetectoristsParticipatinginArchaeologyRe/tabid/1030/Default.aspx.

Q. Is metal detecting on archeological sites OK?

Uncontrolled and unreported excavation of archeological sites, whether by a metal detectorist or anyone, does result in significant diminishment of their research value. Metal detecting can be particularly destructive as it can result in the virtual extraction of all metal artifacts from valuable archeological sites, resulting in a remaining archeological record that is a very skewed record of the past human use of those places.

Q. Under what circumstances would an archeologist think is it OK to metal detect?

If the primary object of your metal detecting is recent coins and jewelry – the types of things commonly lost at places of public congregation (parks, beaches, etc.), then your activities will likely have little important impact on significant archeological resources. If, however, you seek historical objects left or discarded at places of past domestic, commercial, industrial, or military activity (for example old home sites, stores, ferry sites, mills, foundries, factories, encampments, forts, or battlefields), then you should work only with archeologists.

Q. If I find something should I tell you about it?

Should you discover, through your hobby, sites of potential historical importance (such as old home sites, stores, ferry sites, mills, foundries, factories, encampments, forts, or battlefields that are more than 50 years old), please report them to the Office of Archeology. A dot on a map with a verbal description of the site location, accompanied by a description of the find (photographs would be great), will allow us to add your find site to the inventory of historic places we maintain. Please understand that our Office, thorough this inventory, exercises no control over the use of private property, nor do we have any claim to objects found on private property. The inventory is used primarily for research purposes, and secondarily by land use planners. This second use can provide a limited measure of protection for the site should government (Federal, State, or – in some cases – local) seek to impact it.

Q. Who owns what I find?

It is generally true that objects/artifacts embedded in or laying upon the ground belong to the owner of the land where they are found. Further, land owners can control access to their property through application of trespass law. For these reasons, and for common courtesy, you should always truthfully seek permission of landowners before you hunt their property, letting them know what you intend to do and why.

Q. Does the Office of Archeology issue permits for metal detecting on State-owned property?

Our Office of Archeology issues permits for activities that may affect archeological resources located on State-owned lands (State Finance and Procurement Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, §5A-342, to access the code on the internet, visit http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015rs/statute_google/gsf/5a-342.pdf). Anyone, including professional archeologists, seeking to excavate on State-owned lands for the purpose of locating and recovering historic artifacts must obtain a permit from our Office. This permit process is properly invoked by The Maryland Department of Natural Resources when individuals approach their land managers with requests to metal detect on DNR lands (see Code of Maryland Regulations Title 08, Department of Natural Resources, Subtitle 07, Forests and Parks, Chapter 06, Use of State Parks, Paragraph .18, on the internet visit http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/08/08.07.06.18.htm). The regulations provide, however, that metal detectors may be used to search for modern

objects on all State-owned swimming beaches excepting Point Lookout and Calvert Cliffs. Should you wish to apply for a permit from our office, please contact the Office of Archeology. Please be aware, however, that the Office issues permits only to professional archeologists, or to those working with or under the direction of professional archeologists, and only for research or rescue purposes.

Q. Does the Office of Archeology issue permits for metal detecting on non-State lands?

The Office of Archeology is not involved with the issuing of permits for archeological or metal detecting activities on private lands, on Federal lands, or on municipal lands. One good source of information regarding laws and regulations pertaining to metal detecting on these types of lands is found on a website maintained by the Society for American Archaeology (http://www.saa.org/publicftp/PUBLIC/resources/MetDet_Laws.html). As with any hobby, it is important that metal detecting be conducted in a lawful, respectful, and courteous manner. For metal detectorists, there can be serious consequences for unlawful practice. If you are unsure how the law might pertain in any given instance, please feel free to contact our Office, and we will try to assist you.

Q. Does the Office of Archeology work with metal detectorists?

Our Office has worked with metal detectorists before, and have generally found them to be knowledgeable and responsible. As we are coming to know and respect each other, however, we find that we still have some important differences of opinion. To learn more about opportunities to participate in archeological-metal detectorist collaborative work, please contact:

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