

Treasure hunter Malcolm Allred shares adventures and secrets of acquiring treasure - military artifacts, coins, gold, diamonds, rare books and documents, an infinite variety of collectibles - with metal detector and shovel, with scuba gear, and by innovative buying via ads, sales and auctions.

HOW TO HUNT TREASURE - DIG IT, DIVE FOR IT,
OR BUY IT: A GUIDE TO ADVENTURE AND PROFIT

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HOW TO HUNT TREASURE

A Guide to Adventure and Profit

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See <http://vicksburgstreasures.blogspot.com/> for photographs and a further discussion of treasure hunting. Your comments there are welcome.

Notice of errors or suggestions for the next revision of this book will be appreciated. Submit to author at above email or street address.

Site under construction: <http://vicksburgh.com/>

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Malcolm Allred

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or that you are familiar with these detectors, following are some tips for better hunting. It should be noted here that the dual-tone line of detectors is not addressed in this section, but is mentioned in a later section.

An area fairly free of modern-day trash may be hunted using the detector's all-metal mode (assuming it has one). However, such areas are few and far between. After a bit you'll probably switch to a discriminating mode – one that tunes out the “bad” metals but screams over “good” metals. But...

USE A BARE MINIMUM OF DISCRIMINATION when relic hunting. You'll want the detector set so that it will just barely rule out iron - a nail, for instance. For LCD display machines the factory setting for “relic” hunting may be okay, but you should experiment to be sure. If your machine accepts custom settings, you may want to set one up that is a bit less stringent than the factory setting. You will also use the MOST SENSITIVE setting your machine will allow. Assuming you are using a new machine, or one with which you're not thoroughly familiar, it will take a while for you to become accustomed to the machine's performance characteristics. As you do so, you'll want to gradually increase the sensitivity in small increments until you're able to recognize and ignore the warbles and hiccups that come with a more sensitive circuit. You may want to begin your hunting experience with the ground balance set to auto, or to the factory setting, but for best performance you will probably need a manual setting, set up as outlined in the instruction manual or later in this book. For relic hunting, your machine should be at the peak of its performance capability.

You may be asking yourself, “If I'm discriminating against iron, how will I find that cannon ball or bayonet?” Never fear. Fortunately, the discriminating circuits in all of today's detectors with which I'm familiar are not perfect. In fact, they love nothing better than big iron, especially big iron that is symmetrical in shape. Though you may curse the imperfection when you're digging old ploughs and pot lids, you'll be filled with joy when your shovel strikes that artillery shell three feet down in the ground. Cannon balls have a special sound all their own – they exhibit a “halo” effect that comes from corroding in the ground for a long period of time, causing the conductivity of the surrounding soil to increase – a large, smooth, symmetrical area of sound that will get your heart pumping once you've experienced the pleasure. I know it well. I've dug nearly a thousand artillery projectiles in my career, but I still get a thrill every time I hear that broad, satisfying signal.

While on the subject of “big iron” I'll once again mention cache hunting. The cache hunter is looking for large objects that will pay off big –

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real “buried treasure.” He ignores the small signals that his detector chirps by the score and unlimbers his shovel only when the detected object is large and deep. He thereby improves his chances of finding a real pot of gold, or a fruit jar filled with gold and silver coins, buried and forgotten long ago, or even artillery shells left from the War. Generally he will use an all-metal no-motion detector with a large coil, and sometimes even a large two-box detector specifically designed for large, deeply-buried objects. He may not score too often, but when he does, it’s a memorable event.

Some detectors utilize search frequencies that can be near a harmonic of the 60 Hertz field that surrounds power lines, causing the detector operation to become unstable when you search near them. Such interference can be difficult or impossible to eliminate, though machines which have multiple search frequencies may be tuned to somewhat alleviate the problem. Other sources of interference can be buried pipelines, wire fences, and metal junk in general, all of which must be considered undesirable, but undeniable. They just come with the game.

The strength of the signal produced by a detector when it senses metal is directly proportional to the surface area presented the coil by the metal object. For example, a coin lying edge-up in soil will produce a weaker, and perhaps unstable, signal as compared to a coin lying flat in soil. The same goes for a brass button; many of them have been missed for that reason. It’s best to DIG when the detector gives any indication of metal, particularly non-ferrous metal, no matter how miniscule or unstable the signal.

By the same token, don’t ever ignore those big signals by just assuming they’re trash or an old barbed wire fence. Twice in my career I’ve almost walked away from great discoveries when I thought that either my detector was lying to me, or that I’d stumbled across a rusty steel drum buried three or four feet deep.

On one such occurrence, while searching along the riverbank near some early-War Confederate fortifications, I encountered a signal some six feet across. Since you often encounter buried cables, beams, and cast-off metal items from towboats and barges along the riverbank, I came very near to moving on. However, you’re never sure, and just to be sure, I dug. In that hole, which eventually measured some eight feet across, I found 19 Confederate round balls – most were 8” and 9” shells – apparently dumped there some 130 years before. It took two days of digging to get them all out. They were located over a mile from my truck (yes, my ’65 VW, and later my old ’74 Bronco, had been replaced by a pickup truck), so there was no way I could carry one 50 or 60 pound ball that far, much less 19. So I left the balls

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that day and drove home, scratching my head, trying to figure a good way to move the balls from hole to truck. And I conceived a brilliant plan for relocating 19 cannon balls one-mile distance.

I would use my motorcycle!

It so happened that a railroad track was near my treasure hole, and this same track ran very near where my truck was parked, a mile away. Next afternoon after work I loaded the motorcycle onto the truck, drove to my parking spot, unloaded the bike, road the mile or so to the treasure hole along the crossties between the rails, and loaded a single 8" ball behind the bike's seat. But 8" cannon balls are HEAVY, and bouncing them along railroad ties on the back seat of a motorcycle can ruin tires, wheels, even frames. The bike and I made it to the truck okay, but the bike was slightly damaged in the process, and would be a total wreck if I continued. I knew I had to come up with a better way.

Of course, I'd thought of using a wheelbarrow, but had already discarded the idea because of the obstacles presented by irregular crossties and loose slag. But another thought occurred to me. The rails were nice and smooth... if only I could place the wheel of the wheelbarrow on a rail without its sliding off...

And that's how I did it. In my shop I fabricated two thin semi-circular steel plates, each about twelve inches in diameter, each with a hole in its center. By fastening the plates on either side of the wheelbarrow wheel, I ensured the wheel would remain on the rail. (Take a look at photos at <http://vicksburgstreasures.blogspot.com/>)

Back at the treasure hole I loaded the balls one at a time into the wheelbarrow and easily walked them back to my truck atop a shiny steel rail.

Now, you're wondering about trains, right? Sure enough, on one trip back I heard a big diesel engine, the sound coming from around a long curve ahead of me. In my haste to remove the loaded wheelbarrow and myself from the rail, the 8" ball fell between the tracks. I watched anxiously from behind a tree as the locomotive approached. Fortunately, the engineer must never have seen it, for the train never slowed, passing right over the old Confederate ordinance. I recovered the ball and continued on my way, eventually unloading all 19 balls in my back yard.

The second large signal I'm happy I decided not to ignore occurred while a friend and I were hunting the fields at the scene of a battle east of Vicksburg. The detector whined over an area some ten feet across – not a solid signal, but a series of long, deep, signals that had no sharp ends – meaning (most likely) either heavy, symmetrical iron, or non-ferrous metal.

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love for big, symmetrical objects by turning the discrimination near the maximum. Even at that peak position, your detector probably cannot resist whining when it comes across those large buried metal objects. Generally it will ignore metal cans and smaller metallic objects, but sound off when near that cannon ball or iron pot full of coins. There are intermediate ranges of discrimination that you can experiment with in order to determine your detector's reaction to such buried treasure.

C. The Coin Shooter

No, I don't know why they're called "coin shooters." It's a name that's stuck with them, though, so I guess it's permanent.

Millions of coins have been lost over the years, and thousands of "coin shooters" are out there with their detectors trying to find them. Coins can be shot anywhere people are likely to lose them, e.g., abandoned towns, old house sites, school yards, parks, playgrounds, churches, beaches, fairgrounds, etc. Obviously, the older the site the better the coins you'll find. My favorite spot for coin shooting is an old house site. You may not find too many, but they're generally vintage coins in reasonably good condition. And there's always the possibility of finding that cache of gold and silver coins or silverware hidden and forgotten. Surprisingly, old house sites have yielded many War relics as well.

Beachcombing is another favorite of coin shooters, though there's also the inevitability of finding not only coins, but jewelry lost by those who have come to enjoy the sun and water. Along some stretches of the coast of Florida there is also the chance of locating very old French and Spanish coins washed in from shipwrecks.

When I was transferred to Greenville, Mississippi, back in 1974, I left the relic fields of Vicksburg behind. I had the disease, though, and Greenville had many old house sites. I sought them out, and I hunted them one at a time. Take note of this fact: I never once asked permission to hunt a vacant lot, and I never once had anyone object. Should you decide to become a coin shooter, seek out the old, deserted, vacant lots and work them well. You'll find not only coins, but countless other fascinating items – and perhaps that fruit jar filled with gold and silver. Over the four years I lived in Greenville I dug thousands of coins, the best being a 1916 Standing Liberty quarter dug from beside a sidewalk near downtown. There were only 52,000 of these coins minted. Who would have thought there was one lying beside a sidewalk in

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Greenville? I still have the coin, which was graded “Fine-15” by the grading service: its value continues to increase every year.

When I returned to Vicksburg in 1978 I began exploring some of the old towns that lived and died in the area, some as old as or older than Vicksburg (including Warrenton). I bought a motorcycle that was a big help in reaching these out-of-the-way sites; it also gave me a bit of anonymity in that it could be parked invisibly, far off the roads. On a sunny day in 1978 I pulled the bike up on a rise near the Mississippi River and spotted a gleaming little coin, an early Spanish Half-Reale, lying atop a mound of freshly plowed earth. That discovery led to my unearthing hundreds of like coins in the area over the next few years, the oldest being a 1738 Peruvian half-real (I know there is a Peruvian coin dated in the 1690s somewhere in my collection, but I’ve been unable to locate it). I pulled many fine early American and Spanish (Peruvian) coins from the site, probably the most interesting a large silver Spanish “piece of eight.”

Now to the business of your preparations for digging similar coins...

For coin shooting your detector will be in “coin” or “jewelry” discriminating mode, and your sensitivity setting can be relaxed a bit, particularly if there are lots of nails, pop-tabs, bottle caps, etc. When the sensitivity is set too high, it’s difficult to sort the good signals from the bad. You’ll find soon enough that the detector will give you all kinds of conflicting beeps as you scan for the good stuff amongst the more plentiful trash that exists alongside the coins in most sites. You will learn to generally ignore the pops and blips – the signals that have sharp beginnings and endings – and concentrate on the smooth, continuous signals that can be repeated as you run the head over them left-to-right, top-to-bottom, and vice-versa. LCD display models help with the sorting process, but they’re certainly not infallible. Listen for the good signals – they’ll usually begin with a faint tone that increases in volume when the head is directly over them, then decreases as the head motion is continued – unless there’s a nail or other interfering metal nearby. In the latter case, DIG if your detector is telling you there’s something there besides a nail.

When you have a good signal, you’ll need to pinpoint the target. Some machines have a pinpointing trigger or button, while others don’t. Generally, though, you can satisfactorily pinpoint a target by carefully raising the detector head until the signal weakens, then, by crisscrossing the target while continuing to raise the head until the signal barely registers, you’ll have the center of the head directly over the target. Now, this USUALLY works, but there are exceptions. Should your target be, say, a button or a coin that is

Many detectors come with a 7", 8" or 9" round or oval head standard, but larger and smaller heads are available. I've used them all, and I can tell you from experience that the larger heads (10" – 15" or more) have better depth ability. However, they're much heavier (and more tiring), and they may not detect the very small objects as well as the smaller heads. For starters, I'd stick with a standard head.

Earphones allow you to hunt in noisier areas, and they absolutely give you more sensitivity. Makers of certain specialized earphones claim to enhance the performance of detectors. I haven't tried them, but I do use standard earphones nearly 100% of the time. And I have friends who swear the special earphones enhance depth and discrimination capabilities.

So, how can you assure yourself that you're buying a detector that will suit your purposes? Start by calling around for recommendations. Talk to dealers, talk to other treasure hunters, talk to the manufacturers. Some dealers will loan or rent you a machine like the one you're considering buying, so take advantage of that possibility.

A heavy machine will tire you quicker, so weight should be a consideration. Many detectors available now weigh only two or three pounds.

Pushbutton switching between discriminating and all-metal modes is a handy feature, and some machines have a dedicated "pinpoint" button that automatically switches to the "all-metal" mode.

A range of coil sizes should be available, preferably at least three, ranging from "small" (sometimes used for coins in trashy areas) to "standard" (all-purpose) to "large" (the deeper targets). The new elliptical coils may be useful in trashy areas since they scan a smaller area down the center of the coil.

When using large coils a hip-mounted central processor can reduce the weight you have to swing. Personally, though, I don't like the things – you tend to get tangled up in the wires. An arm rest, though, is a must to ease the strain on the arm and thereby tire you less quickly.

I prefer a manually adjustable ground balance – don't buy a cheap machine that has a preset ground balance and completely "silent" operation. Silent operation loses depth. Some manufacturers brag about their "one-touch" or "turn-it-on-and-go" machines. I avoid them. Bear in mind that one good treasure will pay for that high-dollar detector.

Battery life can be an important consideration. You'll want to check the batteries often when you're hunting, so a battery-check feature is a must for any detector. In many cases, low batteries are responsible for poor performance.

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Search coil covers are inexpensive and can prevent wear to the coil should you hunt areas that are graveled or sandy.

Consider a pulse-induction machine for salt water beach hunting, though most VLF machines have come a long way and can match or exceed the performance of the PIs. Keep in mind that a new line of discriminating PI machines is in the offing. For gold, buy a specialized machine that has precise ground balance and an all-metal no-motion mode.

Regardless of the detector you purchase, thoroughly read the operating manual and familiarize yourself with the controls. Test it indoors using a penny or a dime, and perhaps a larger object of iron or steel, just to get a feel for its performance. Its capabilities in the field on buried items won't be exactly the same, but you'll be able to observe the detector's audio and visual characteristics.

* * *

Let's assume now that you've spent your hard-earned money on a new detector, a VLF discriminator with manual ground balance capabilities. Before you set out for the woods or the playground, you need to learn how to operate the detector, and nothing will acquaint you better with the detector's characteristics than PRACTICE.

Some new detectors have such complex controls that you simply have to thoroughly study the instruction manual in order to gain the ability to operate them. The following discussion applies to some of the simpler machines, the type machines that I prefer.

The various brands of VLF detectors use basically the same electronic circuitries, but you wouldn't know it by looking at all the fancy names given what amounts to the same functions. That's why you need to study the instruction manual that comes with your detector and memorize the basic tuning requirements. Generally, the first considerations will be 1) Mode – all metal or discriminate, with discriminate requiring further adjustment, 2) Threshold – the audio level when the detector is not on a target, 3) Ground balance – auto or manual, with manual requiring further adjustment, 4) Sensitivity, and 5) On some machines there are frequency adjustments.

Some pros recommend that to get started you should bury pennies, quarters, etc., and practice finding/digging them. Frankly, I think it's a waste of time. There are zillions of coins and pop tabs and nails everywhere, so why not just go to it?

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“Growl?” He removed the earphones. “Why would I growl? I’m the happiest man in Mississippi.”

“Listen.”

Moley heard it then, a low-pitched rumble that must be coming from the throat of the biggest hound in Mississippi. He straightened, clutching detector and spade and Parrott shell. “Dog,” he said casually, pointing. “Big dog. In them bushes over there.”

“More than one,” Hot Shot said fearfully. “A pack.”

“Mr. Goodson!” Moley recalled Sugarplump’s malicious cackles. “He let his dogs out. Reckon someone called him...”

One of the beasts stepped boldly into the moonlight and growled fiercely. “Chow, ain’t it?” Moley ventured. “We ain’t never tried leg o’ Chow...” Another Chow stepped into view, growling more earnestly than the first, then another, and another; in moments the entire pack of monstrous animals was in view, each yowling and smacking and savoring the next few minutes... “I don’t know about you, Hot Shot,” Moley whispered, “but I’m fixing to haul cabooty...”

They never figured that man was faster than Chow, but with the howling pack right behind, they were in the process of proving just that...

“Wake up! Moley. You’re having another wet dream!” It was Sugarplump, whacking his mouth with a wad of fist and kicking his ribs with a number twelve.

“Wha... Wha...,” Moley managed as he tried to control feet still churning under the bed sheets. “What happened?”

“You and those dreams,” she complained.

“Nightmare,” he answered groggily as consciousness returned. “Musta been that mule jerky. Musta had a fungus or something.”

Sugarplump ignored his words and sighed. “You were wonderful last night, Moley. MR. Moley,” she said dreamily. “I never knew you could be like THAT.”

Moley sat up. “Wha... Whaddaya mean?”

“You’re the greatest, Mr. Moley.” She stroked his cheek and navel. Moley sagged with the bed as she moved closer. “What a man! Come here!”

A while later Moley lay puzzled and exhausted and wondered if Sugarplump would notice if he spiked her praline ice cream with little chunks of Confederate mule jerky. Alas, however, he found upon his eventual arising that it was not to be. Outside, most of the dogs in town were ending their war over the remnants of ancient mule. The police and fire departments had been

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on alert all night, attempting to quell a citywide canine uprising that rivaled the Siege of '63 in scope and spectacle. It was another day for which Vicksburg would be famous.

IV.

STALKING FOR PAYDIRT

A. Yard & Estate Sales, Flea Markets, Thrift Shops, & Live Auctions

One of the most-read parts of newspapers is the classified ads section, and of that, the “Garage and Yard Sale” category probably ranks in the top three categories. These ads bring out hundreds of shoppers looking for bargains, or better yet, that overlooked treasure that can be worth thousands. Yard sales are a national phenomenon, used not only by homeowners to turn unwanted household items into cash, but by charities, churches, and other organizations to raise extra money. They’ve become so organized in the larger urban areas that the participants use public ball fields, convention centers, and other large arenas for what have become every-Saturday events better described as flea markets than yard sales.

A few weeks ago on an early Saturday morning I was participating in the great American tradition of madly dashing from one yard sale to another, trying to outrun the others who, like me, wanted to “get there first.” I’d had little luck this particular morning, and had about decided to give it up when I spied an ad for a sale that had a 9AM starting time. 9AM is a strange time to begin a yard sale, since most begin at 6AM or 7AM, but, it being only 8:30AM now, and my just happening to be only a few blocks from that address, I decided to drive by and check it out.

I arrived at the house just as another vehicle pulled into its carport. When the driver, a lady, opened her trunk and began removing boxes, I, of course, offered to help. It took about ten minutes to relocate her yard-sale items from trunk to living room, which circumstance allowed me to take a look at everything she had to sell. In conversation with her I learned that the house belonged to a friend, for whom she was holding the sale, and that she’d brought along some things that had belonged to her son when he was a young man. Naturally, though 9 AM had not arrived, I asked if I might browse. Happily for me, she consented. I found a few small items that I set aside, but most interesting was a box of old 45RPM records – I could see that they were early labels - on which she had attached a slip of paper that read “twenty-five cents each.” Other treasure hunters were arriving by now, some of whom seemed quite interested in the records as well, so I hastily cornered the lady

treasure-seekers who attend the same auctions or shows that I do. You'll nearly always generate a positive response, because most people have a few items they've collected over the years, or an attic where their parents or grandparents stored their used furniture or the kids' old toys – or, they'll know someone who has such. And what could be easier? **ASK!**

As in relic hunting, you should never give up. I recall one Saturday morning when I was faced with the miserable fact that today's hunt would yield no great treasure. However, I made a final stop at a small house whose owner had sold nearly everything she'd put out – her driveway was practically bare. She'd even retired inside, content with what had apparently been quite an enriching Saturday morning. I browsed through what little junk was left, then spotted a lone book resting atop a retaining wall alongside her driveway. One lousy book, I thought. However, when I inspected it, I found it was a Hemingway, and its copyright date looked singularly interesting. I roused the lady from her contented lair, asked the price, and paid her ten-cents. It turned out to be a first edition, second state of one of Hemingway's first novels. I'm not a collector of fiction, so I sold the book for a very tidy profit of approximately 150,000.00 %.

Another morning a lady in one of the older sections of town insisted that I buy two old trunks she had had for some years. I did. One was a leather-wrapped Jenny Lind trunk labeled with the name "Rebecca" – a packet boat that ran between Vicksburg and Memphis during and after the Civil War. Talk about happy! I collect artifacts from Vicksburg and the War, so that one went into my collection. There is a photo of the trunk and other "treasures" at <http://vicksburgstreasures.blogspot.com/>.

Auctions are another great source for treasure, and, again, knowledge is key to grabbing those bargains. Do your homework before the auction if possible. Take along a pad and pencil, a loupe, perhaps a tape measure and a camera, and list the items in which you find interest along with all the details available. Take a photograph if that will help. Back at home, use your library and eBay for research. Determine an approximate value for each item of interest, and return to the auction armed with the knowledge necessary to bid intelligently.

Estate sales sometimes price items prior to admitting the buyers, so, unless there's a preview period, you have no time to perform specific research. That's when time spent in study and research pays off.

Whether auction or estate sale, avoid making purchases on impulse or without a thorough examination of the article in question. The very worst purchases I've made were a result of buying at auction from a third-row seat

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while judging an article solely on appearance and the auctioneer's hype. You'll be sorry most of the time.

It's also essential that you understand the terms of the auction or sale. "Buyer's premium," for example, is a particularly galling term, one that indicates that a percentage – usually 10% in this part of the country – will be added to the price bid. There's no logic behind the practice, only greed on the part of the auctioneer. Obviously, the "buyer's premium" must be considered each time you raise your hand. Also essential is an understanding of the returns policy. An auctioneer who has an "as is" or "no returns" policy must be viewed with skepticism.

Should you purchase an item that has a crack or other defect not mentioned by the auctioneer during his sales pitch, go ahead and refuse to accept it. It'll make the auctioneer mad as hell; however, though it's your job to inspect the merchandise prior to bidding, it's his obligation to accurately describe the article, pointing out any obvious defects that will affect its value.

Sales that feature the estates of ethnic groups, especially Native American or African-American, can yield exciting finds. Some years ago at the auction of the estate of a locally-prominent African-American I purchased for \$20.00 a small bookcase filled with books. Among the treasures it yielded was a signed copy of Alice Walker's scarce title, "Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems." Walker, you might remember, also wrote "The Color Purple," a book on which a film of the same name was produced. That one book produced a profit of 3,500 % on the total purchase. And that wasn't the only rare book in the lot.

You'll develop a "feel" eventually for the articles that have value, though like a wise man once said, "Jack of All Trades, Master of None" – you can never gain true proficiency in all areas of collecting, but rather only in your chosen field(s). Still, that "feeling" will sometimes guide you to make noteworthy buys. Treacherously, however, that "feeling" can lead you in the wrong direction, as fakes and reproductions of many collectibles abound. Again, knowledge is essential. Some of my most treasured possessions were purchased at auctions at prices well below their "true" value. No doubt, then, it is to your benefit that other participants at an auction are less aware of values than you.

Thrift shops and pawnshops are good sources for treasure. Just remember – knowledge is (again) essential. Visit them often, as the merchandise is in a constant state of flux. Unfortunately, in recent years the managers of such shops have become more aware of the value of certain collectibles and as such try to skim off the better items before placing them

out for public sale. I know this has happened in Vicksburg. An example comes to mind. I visited a local shop a while back and found that someone had dropped off a large stack of vintage LP albums. The shop manager, I learned, had been bragging of how he had taken all the Elvis Presley records and planned to sell them on eBay. I was heartbroken. But I searched the pile of records anyway, and found that the manager wasn't quite as smart as he thought. Among the LPs I bought for 25 cents each were several early rock and roll discs, including Gene Vincent's "Bluejean Bop." It sold for a quite handy amount.

Some of my nicest finds were bought from pawnshops. Operators of such shops are sometimes not as knowledgeable of the value of their goods as they could be. You may thereby find some real treasures.

Lastly, I want to mention "cold calls" – door to door solicitation for goodies. I am not prone to try this method – I guess I fear rejection – but I know of individuals who greatly enjoy the challenge of driving the countryside knocking on doors and asking the questions that will lead to discovery of "treasure." Frankly, I think this may be one of the best methods for buying collectibles; I've just never tried it. But it makes good sense. Phrase the questions so that the other party gets a pretty good idea of what you're looking for, and hope something comes to his or her mind that can be purchased for a reasonable fraction of its value to you. And if he has nothing of interest, perhaps he knows of a neighbor or relative who does.

B. The Internet

eBay

Most American households have computers these days, and many of the users of those computers know that when they type a word or two into eBay's search engine, more than likely they'll get a hit. So now everybody who has the least bit of intelligence and computer savvy can find out in a few seconds, and to a pretty accurate degree, the value of anything that has a name on it or which can be described accurately enough to be found by the search engine. From marbles to bottles to insulators to... anything! I've been amazed at the quantity and variety of collectibles that are on sale on eBay everyday.

For example, sometime ago at a yard sale I came across a "Violet Ray Machine." The lady who owned it gave me a demonstration – the thing produced crackling violet rays from within tubes of various shapes and sizes. I'd never seen or heard of such a thing, and had no idea how much to offer the

V.

ADVERTISING FOR TREASURE

One of the best ways to find treasure is simply to advertise for it!

The process is more likely to turn up “hidden” treasures than running from yard sale to yard sale. Why? Because you’ll probably be the first person to get a look at the goods. I keep an ad in the local newspaper under the “Wanted to Buy” classification that reads something like, “CASH for collectibles and antiques – coins, books, postcards, guns, Civil War relics, bottles, documents, records, etc.” Now, I won’t say I don’t get a lot of calls about a “1942 nickel” or a “coke bottle with Vicksburg on the bottom,” because I do. That’s just part of it. But every few weeks I’ll receive a call that will pay for all my ads the whole year long, and then some. Though I don’t use one, an ad in the yellow pages of the telephone book would no doubt bring even more customers.

Some time back a gentleman called me about an “old trunk” that he’d found in an “old house” that had some “old newspapers” and some “old clothes” in it, and would I like to look at it? Of course, I would. I made an appointment with him, and drove the fifteen miles to his home, which was not one of the classier abodes in our county. But he was an agreeable fellow who allowed me to rummage the contents of his trunk, most of which was worthless. Along with some newspapers dated 1900 – 1910, and a few moth-eaten garments of similar vintage, there was a lot of trash. I decided the trunk was the only piece with any value, and that I would save all of the newspapers, clothes, etc., for a thorough inspection later. I told the gentleman that the trunk would probably bring around \$175.00 retail, and that my offer was one-half that amount. I explained my reasoning – in order for me to make anything off the trunk, I’d need to mark it up 100% to allow me to make a little profit and pay for my trip and time. He was delighted with the offer and accepted it.

Let me pause here to make a point – I always try to treat the people who sell to me the same way I’d like to be treated – with honesty. Many times these people are very poor. I admit to having a soft heart anyhow, so I generally err on the side of paying too much for my goods rather than trying to barter my way to the lowest possible price. There is a beneficial return from this practice, however: I feel good about it. I’ve purchased goods that I did not want or need from people who obviously were in need of help, perhaps to buy

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groceries, or to pay a car note. Not only do I feel better inside knowing I've helped, but – and I'm a firm believer in this – do a good deed for someone, and you'll receive two in return. I have many repeat customers because of this policy, and generally gain by my “generosity.”

I paid the gentleman for his trunk, drove home, and unloaded it in my basement, where it sat for several days. When I got around to going through the contents, I was a bit discouraged, for most of the newspapers had no value, and the vintage clothing was so badly moth-eaten that it had to be discarded. The trunk itself was in worse condition than I originally thought, so I was wondering if I'd even break even on the deal. However, toward the bottom of the pile of old newspapers I discovered two with which I was unfamiliar. After a bit of investigation I determined that they were Mardi Gras “Parade Papers” dated February, 1907. Inside each was a full two-page lithograph of all twenty floats in the New Orleans Mardi Gras Parade of that year – one for the Krewe of Comus, one for Proteus. I had no way of knowing their value, so I placed them both on eBay – where they sold for a surprisingly handsome amount!

You may wonder if I thought about giving a portion of my “winnings” to the gentleman from whom I purchased the trunk. The answer – heck, no! I gave him what I considered a very good price at the time, an honest price, and a deal's a deal. I have a soft heart, all right, but I've gotta eat, too.

Several years ago another gentleman called as a result of reading my ad to tell me he had a flat-bed trailer loaded with old furniture, weigh scales, books, and a wide variety of other “junk” taken from an old warehouse in Port Gibson. I made an appointment with him, drove the twenty miles to his house, and, after examining the goods, made him what I felt was a fair offer (most of the furniture, books and other goods appeared to be in very poor condition, with much of it truly “trash”). He refused, so I left him. Several days later, after getting offers from others, he called to tell me I could have the lot. I emptied the trailer at my home, then, over a period of several weeks, gradually sorted through the goods. Soon I was amazed by the discovery that many of the books were very early American law books that had belonged to famous Mississippi lawyers – one was even signed by Joseph Davis, Jefferson Davis' brother - and, though they were in poor condition, some of them were worth hundreds of dollars each (several were 18th century). Much of the furniture I stripped, refinished and sold, some I kept for my own use. In the end a \$1,000 investment yielded several thousands in return.

HOW TO HUNT TREASURE

Another caller had a collection of older books and other goods. I made an appointment to see him at his house. I found that there were hundreds of the books; I bought many, along with many of the other items and antiques he had for sale. One book of especial interest to me was an old store record book into which some collector had pasted 19th century newspaper articles, advertising cards, and currency – Confederate and state bank notes.

The Confederate notes were fairly common, and the removal process damaged them as well. Among the state bank notes was a trio produced in the 1840s by a bank in Florida. They were not in good condition, especially after I had pried them from the pages of the book. I could find nothing of their history in any of my reference books, nor on the internet, so I did as I have previously mentioned – I placed them for sale on eBay, with a starting bid of \$3.95 each. A week later I was astounded at the price they fetched. My wife and I celebrated like we had won the lottery.

I always pay cash for what I buy. Cash impresses and relaxes your seller, and makes it more likely that he will give you a call next time he comes across an item of interest. Checks make sellers nervous; cash is always king. I also make it easy for sellers to find me again (and give them the means of passing along my name and telephone number to others with whom they are acquainted) by giving each one of my business cards. These cards state not only name, address, phone number, etc., but list the items I like to buy, and the fact that I pay cash for them.

Ads can also be a good way of finding new digging spots. An ad in the classified section of your local newspaper that reads something like “Will search your land or lot with metal detector; all relics and coins found will be split equally” may not bring an immediate response, but only one such lead could result in finding enough treasure to pay for the ad many times over. Have some business cards printed as well that state, like the ad, “Have detector – will search for your treasure” or some similar wording. Just one productive call or contact could produce not only treasure, but many an hour of great fun.

A. Gold, Silver, and Diamonds

Gold and silver coins, jewelry, tableware, and other forms of the metals are an inevitable product of a newspaper ad for treasure. Each piece you are offered must be analyzed for its collector appeal versus its intrinsic value. Many times this is difficult to determine, for there are millions of different shapes into which silver and gold have been transformed. EBay may

Treasure hunter Malcolm Allred shares adventures and secrets of acquiring treasure - military artifacts, coins, gold, diamonds, rare books and documents, an infinite variety of collectibles - with metal detector and shovel, with scuba gear, and by innovative buying via ads, sales and auctions.

HOW TO HUNT TREASURE - DIG IT, DIVE FOR IT,
OR BUY IT: A GUIDE TO ADVENTURE AND PROFIT

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