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THE RELIC HUNTER

BY ED FEDORY



Gathered on the field by the main tent, competitors were given the final rules and boundary lines of the farm. The TOP DOG hunt was a combination of competition hunting and relic hunting, and all participants got their share of both!

TOP DOG Competition Relic Hunt

By Ed Fedory

Most of us have driven by old farmhouses and silently wondered about the lost objects to be found in the expanses of surrounding fields. What manner of valuable coins or historic relics were cloaked and hidden by that green

curtain of standing corn? With the timeless rhythm of passing seasons, throughout the centuries, from the sowing to the harvest, we wonder about what treasures the plowman has left in his wake while toiling in the rich soil. Following a



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With hundreds of acres on which to hunt, there was plenty of "elbow room" for all.

recent, wonderful weekend in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, my speculation on field contents will be forever altered!

There are certain words and phrases in the realm of detecting that are rarely used in combination. For example, *relic hunting* and *competition hunting* always seem to be considered at opposite ends of the spectrum—and yet, it was just that apparent incongruity that started Kim "Streak" Cox thinking about his

plan. Why not organize a hunt that would incorporate his two favorite aspects of metal detecting, competition hunting and the search for relics? This idea would be the genesis for what would become known as the **TOP DOG HUNT**.

"Finding the proper site," Streak later related, "seemed to be the big problem. We needed a site that was large enough to accommodate over a hundred relic hunters, and old enough to

produce some interesting relics and older coins... and we needed a farmer who would be agreeable to having a horde of strangers digging up his land."

Such factors might have killed the Top Dog Hunt at its conception, but undaunted by obstacles, Streak and his erstwhile companion, Linda, set out to see if such a site existed.

"After a day of fruitless searching Pennsylvania back roads and talking with numerous farmers, we decided to take a break and stretch our legs," stated Streak. "We parked the car by one of the old locks, and while Linda relaxed, I read a historic marker about the history of the canal system. Included on the plaque was a mention of the Durham Furnace that had been in operation during the American Revolution producing cannon balls. The information on the plaque also included the fact that the furnace was only a couple of miles up the road. We decided to take a look at the old and historic furnace, and that's how we found another old and historic site, the Ulmer farm... the site of the first Top Dog Hunt!"

Streak then set about the task of devising a point system for the types of treasures and relics that might be found on the sprawling acres surrounding the massive 1761 limestone farmhouse. Additional points would also be added to the scores for the five best finds made during the two-day hunt. As with most competition hunts, the fields would also be seeded with tokens for a host of prizes and bonus points. Several small treasure chests containing silver coins and jewelry would be hidden on the property as well.

Setting up the hunt would also require the support of an



Interesting features such as this ruined 1700s farmhouse offered the relic hunters some great sites to investigate.

internet website for the sign-ups and getting the information about the hunt to relic hunters across the nation. Donnie Smith



Several small treasure chests filled with silver coins and jewelry were hidden around the hunt fields... a real bonus for any relic hunter!



Numerous petal or crotal bells were found.



The recovery of a Canadian bank token attests to the variety of coins and relics found during the two-day hunt.

came to the rescue and made up a new Top Dog forum on his mytreasurespot.com website.

Each competitor in the hunt was instructed to bring a plastic bowl with lid, to be used for storing their finds at the end of each day's hunt. The bowls were numbered, and the finds were also recorded in a ledger so that individual scores could be tallied by the judges at the end of each day. The relic hunter with the highest number of points at the end of the two-day period would become the "Top Dog."

Several aspects of this hunt were unique and quite appealing. To become the "Top Dog," you needed to recover not only good finds, but the number of acceptable finds would add to your score. This assured that the hunter who made the best find of the hunt would not necessarily walk away with the top prize. This leveled the playing field quite a bit. Another interesting aspect of the hunt would be the huge treasure chest that would be raffled off on the night of the banquet when the awarding of prizes

was to take place. Each competitor was asked to contribute a small treasure, for which they would be given a number of raffle tickets. I watched in amazement as the contents of the treasure chest began to grow to outrageous proportions!

On the first morning, assembled on the open fields and beneath a cloudy, ominous sky, over 100 relic hunters were gathered to hear the final rules of the hunt and be informed of the boundary limits of the hunt. With such formalities out of the way, the eager mass of hunters hit the fields with their detectors... and the clouds opened up, and the rain began to pour!

Relic hunters have to be the most tenacious people on the face of the earth, a fact easily attested to by the mud-covered, drenched, and utterly bedraggled folks who began bringing in their finds during the early hours of the hunt.

Being one of the judges was a lot of fun, as I had one of the first peeks at some of the interesting finds that were being registered under the main tent. King George coppers, state-issued coins, crotal bells, musketballs, pewter spoons, buttons of all types, and Spanish *reales* were all being recorded by Linda, the official record keeper. Truthfully, being sheltered against the elements was not without its merits as well!

One of the most interesting recoveries was made that first morning. Mike Harvey came under the tent to register a Civil War period snake clasp and an odd-looking token. We could make out the date of 1694 on the token, but initially little else. Mike returned to the fields to continue his hunting, while my fellow judge, Charlie Harris, and I pondered the curious disk.



Streak and Kyle Macik pause to pose for the camera outside Kyle's grandfather's 1761 limestone farmhouse.

With a little tender care applied to the face of the coin, I could finally make out the words, *GOD PRESERVE*. Charlie got the final two words with the aid of his jeweler's loupe; *NEW ENGLAND*. We didn't have to

flip through too many pages in the coin book to reveal that Mike had recovered a rare 1694 New England Elephant token!

When Mike returned to register a couple of additional finds later in the afternoon, we had him sit down and handed him the coin book opened to the page displaying the Elephant token, its rarity, and its value. You could live a lifetime and never witness a smile as brilliant as the one that dawned on Mike's face at that moment of realization!

Every relic hunt has its lighter moments and this hunt

would be no exception. I was photographing some of the hunters digging a burn pit, and lingering around the edges of the hole was the landowner's grandson, Kyle Macik. Kyle, as would any youngster witnessing

such an event, had a bucket of questions he was firing at the diggers with a speed rarely achieved by a Vicker's machine gun. It seemed we all had the same idea at precisely the same moment. We distracted Kyle (no easy task, to be sure), and when he was looking the other way we emptied our pockets of loose change and buried the coins in the pile of soil beside the hole. We suggested that Kyle might want to check the pile to see if the men digging had missed anything of value. The end of all Kyle's questions came with his recovery of the first coin. I wonder if all 9-year-old boys have a little badger in them? Boy, that Kyle could dig!

The second day of the hunt brought clear skies, but the quagmire of mud still lingered. It was the last day to score points, and oblivious to the pounds of mud clinging to the soles of their boots, the relic hunters attacked the field with renewed energy. More large cents and coppers were being recovered, registered, and sealed away for scoring; and it



With our loose change buried in the soil, Kyle quickly showed he had the makings of a future relic hunter. Later, at the banquet, Kyle was awarded his own metal detector with which to explore those historic fields.



Troy Galloway was the lucky winner of the treasure chest raffled off on the final evening.



Still unable to get the smile off his face, Top Dog Mike Harvey displays his trophy as the winner of the event, and the plaques for his two Top Five finds.



Sitting at the front of the banquet hall were trophies for the three "Top Dogs," and plaques and gold coins for the Top Five Best Finds.

seemed that Mike Harvey hadn't used up *all* his luck the first day, as he presented a beautiful 1854 Seated Liberty quarter love token for scoring.

When the hunt ended we headed back to the hotel, where the judges gathered and the final tallying of the scores was completed. We all knew that the top three point earners were in a close match for the trophies and cash prizes. The suspense in the judging room was thick, and several votes had to be taken when we were considering the top five finds of the hunt. The

suspense and anticipation was even greater that evening when Streak announced the top five finds and the top three "Dogs." Each of the top three would receive trophies and cash prizes, while the top five finds winners would receive a plaque and a gold coin. You could have heard a pin drop when Streak announced the following winners:

Best Finds

1st Place... Mike Harvey, 1694 Elephant token (1880 \$10 gold coin)

2nd Place... Jim

Good, 1835 Shako plate (1886-\$ \$5 gold coin)

3rd Place... Mike Harvey, 1854 Seated Liberty love token (1886 \$5 gold coin)

4th Place... Mark Gerrick, 1717 King George copper (1907-D \$5 gold coin)

5th Place... Tony Banas, early 1700s Spanish 1/2 real (1787 Spanish gold coin)

Top Dogs

1st Place... Mike Harvey

2nd Place... Mark Gerrick

3rd Place... Marc Sciance

As the evening drew to a close following the awards and door prizes, it was time for the treasure chest raffle. The expectant crowd waited, hoping they held the winning ticket. I was still looking through my stubs when I heard the fellow beside me yell, "Bingo!" Troy Galloway had a hard time lifting the chest that was filled with \$700 in cash and a couple of thousand dollars' worth of silver coins and jewelry. It looked as if Troy had stolen Mike Harvey's smile for a while!

During the course of that entire weekend, I never turned on my detector, and yet it was a fun-filled time just watching all the excitement. I don't think any of the participants will ever again take for granted acres of open fields sitting idly on the side of the road. There's treasure out there, and your coil just has to go over it!

Simple, isn't it?

"All relics and artifacts featured in The Relic Hunter were found and recovered on private property with the permission and total consent of the owners." — Ed Fedory

ED'S NOTEBOOK

Elephant Tokens

Regarding these rare tokens there is one thing we can be certain of... there's a lot of *uncertainty* about them! There is a great deal of speculation as to their purpose and use. There are three basic Elephant tokens—the London, the Carolina, and the New England. The London variety is the most common, while the New England variety is the rarest, with only a handful of specimens known to exist. Even the use of the word “handful” seems to be an exaggeration, as I have read in several sources that



Mike Harvey's New England Elephant token after a judicious cleaning.



The reverse of the London Elephant token.

only two or three exist in private collections.

The London variety is the only type which does not have a date, and some speculations center around its being minted about the time of the great London fire, or after the plague devastated London. Both the Carolina variety and that of New England bear the date of 1694 and are thought to have been a way of drumming up interest in the Colonies. It has also been suggested that they may have been used by the Carolina Coffee House, or the New England Coffee House located near the Royal Exchange in London. Coincidentally, or not, the Bank of England opened its doors for the first time near the Exchange in 1694. (Am I making any sense here?)

Most authorities agree that these tokens were never in wide distribution, and that the few

found in North America were brought across the Atlantic in the trunks and baggage of English immigrants to the Colonies. They *may* have seen circulation during times of coin shortages, but that thought is not supported by any hard evidence.

Some evidence leads to the fact that the tokens were produced in the Royal Mint in the Tower of London. In the mint's 1769 inventory there is a listing for an “old elephant die” which was still accounted for until 1910. Additionally, the only time the lords proprietors met in 1694 was at Tower Hill, only a short distance from the mint, providing us with a circumstantial link to the reverse of the Carolina Elephant.

It seems that the more we investigate these rare tokens, the foggier the picture gets. It leaves us with a few mysteries and no shortage of questions. The biggest question is: *How did the rarest of the rare wind up in a Pennsylvania cornfield?* □



The Carolina Elephant token with its reference to the “lords proprietors.”

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