

CONSTRUCTION SITE TREASURE!

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Looking for some, "inside information?" Want a 'hot tip' on how to find some great coins, etc.? Well, listen up! You are about to read the best advice that I can think of!

Of all the great sites to hunt, nothing can beat those areas where the soil has been uncovered, dug or plowed!

For many years my oldest coin find was a 1835 U.S. Large Cent. I was very proud of this coin. Then, one-by-one, many of my friends were passing me by with older and older finds! How were they doing this? By going to the right places! When my 1835 Large Cent was found, I had never considered that it may not have even been detectable. . . apart from construction. When I think back, construction had to play a major part in my good fortune! First, this coin was not more than 4 inches deep. And, as I recall, it also was near a new section of park sidewalk in Schoolcraft. You need to understand that it is rare to find 1980's era coins in that park that shallow!

I firmly believe that 90% of the coins lost before 1880 are still in the ground because they are way beyond the reach of metal detectors.

A good way to prove my theory was demonstrated at the old Hastings' Michigan Fair Grounds.

Several years ago our club had a fall outdoor meeting at this location. There must have been between 12 and 15 good hunters in attendance that evening.

First, we had a short meeting discussing club business. After our business was complete, we spread out to do some detecting. Then, as planned, just before dark, everyone gathered to compare finds. Quite frankly, the items found were 'few and new;' nothing was found that could be called old. This was quite a contrast to the other fair grounds in Kalamazoo, Allegan and Holland that we had hunted.

I believe our lack of success in Hastings was directly related to the number of good treasure hunters in Barry County ---guys like the famed, "Wild Bill Hicks!" Yes, I had heard of several great finds from this location over the years, including old wheat cents, Indian head pennies, silver coins. But after this hunt, I thought it would have been safe too proclaimed this site, "cleaned out!"

Earlier that year, Barry County decided the property was far too valuable as commercial land to continue as a County Fair site. A decision was made to sell the land to a developer who wasted no time clearing it and building a new K-mart store there. The start of construction opened up a once in a lifetime opportunity for local metal detector users. This window of opportunity was very small because these developers move fast!

Once the old buildings and giant oak trees were removed, the big bulldozers started their work. Let me tell you, the treasure hunters swarmed to the property! The whole event was not unlike another California Gold Rush!

Most of the prime area for detecting was soon to become a giant parking lot for the new store. Bulldozers were only removing the top soil, which on the average was 6 to 8 inches deep. That worked out well! By skimming off the top half-foot of ground, they removed nearly 100% of the small metal trash. Because the ground had been detected so much, almost no coins were removed . . . how nice!

This time hunting the old grounds was different! One of my friends recovered 135 Indian Head pennies in two hours! Think about it; that is more than one per minute! Seated Liberty and Barber dimes, quarters and half dollars were abundant! There were also old jewelry items to be found! One of the greatest finds in my book was a Harvard class ring dating to the mid 1880's! What a dream come true!

The bulldozer did not eliminate all the digging however. Items that were recovered were not scattered along the top of the freshly exposed ground as you might think, you still had to dig. It was not uncommon to find coins 6 or more inches deep. That meant most of the items were a foot or more deep before the bulldozing . . . far beyond the range of our detectors at that earlier fall meeting.

What do I mean when I say, "Once in a lifetime opportunity?" How many fair grounds dating from 1857 do you remember them moving?

Asphalt contractors will tell you that they never lay blacktop or concrete over top soil. Top soil is made up of decomposing elements and is subject to constant change. When asphalt is laid over top soil the surface will crack up badly and be ruined in a very short time--- this is because the top soil will not support weight. So, the top soil has to be moved! In fact if the dirt under the top soil is unstable it too must be hauled away! Next the contractor will bring in a gravel and clay mix which is called, "Stabilizer Gravel." This material is spread out and compacted to make a firm foundation for the parking surface.

Now, did you see the hidden tip in that last section? Have you done some extensive research on a site, then found when you arrived with your detector that the area, and all those old coins, were paved over? Well my friend, the area may be paved over, but first, most all of the coins were hauled away! Now the savvy treasure hunter will try to find the contractor and ask questions! You need to discover where the treasure was moved to!

Construction is going on all around us! If you ask permission, are polite, mind your manners, and most importantly stay out of the worker's way, usually they will allow you the privilege of hunting these work sites.

That is exactly what happened last month in Bronson park . . . the oldest park in Kalamazoo. Bronson park is where Abraham Lincoln held an election rally during his only trip to Michigan. But remember, Bronson park is even much older than that!

In October, workers replaced the sidewalks all around and through the park. After speaking to several who tried their luck at the sidewalk project, I learned that finding Indian head pennies was common place!

The treasure hunter who fared best, was our friend and fellow club member Rob Poth! Rob recovered several coins, but his two best finds included a 1825 Capped Bust Half Dollar in beautiful shape! Not only did he find this large, beautiful coin, he also recovered a tiny 1852 silver three-cent piece! How about you? Are you checking out construction site digs?

I did eventually beat my 1835 record! This was done by finding a sweet 1800 Large Cent! This coin was found in the summer of 1987 while vacationing at Sault Saint Marie. One evening, I decided to hunt a stretch of dirt piles where new pipes were being laid along Portage Road. This area was located right across from the campground where I was staying. Portage Road may be the oldest street in Michigan! Sault Saint Marie is the oldest city in Michigan, and the third oldest in the U.S.!

You see, you may not be able to run a bulldozer at your favorite hunt site, but if you see someone who can. . . better follow along!