

# *an American Digger*

## *goes to England...*

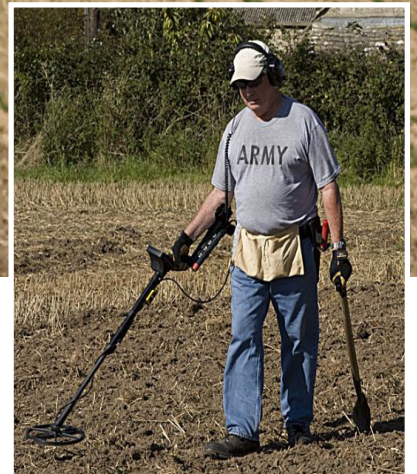
by Jim Leonard

Each year there's a annual hunt in England; they call them "Rallies", where relic hunters gather to join in the fun of digging relics and swapping stories. This year, because of such a large expected turnout, only selected members of MLO were invited to attend. MLO is a web based forum that is worldwide in its' membership and also shares knowledge of detecting while showing finds from all over the world. It's primarily dedicated to people who own Minelab detectors but there aren't any restrictions as to your choice of metal detecting machine you can own. As the American Site Administrator for this forum, which has a large group of members, I couldn't resist attending this years fantastic event.

Last year, after reading and watching the BBC coverage of the 2008 hunt, where a hoard of coins was discovered near Corfe Castle, I could only imagine what a great experience it must be to possibly discover something that old. Imagine digging up an artifact that could possibly be a thousand years old and being the first one to hold it in your hand since it was lost.

As you know, England has been populated for thousands of years. Celtic tribes, Roman occupiers, Anglo Saxon rulers, the amount of possible finds located just under your feet only feeds your imagination of what you might discover. So, with that thought in mind, I made my reservations, watched the local weather forecasts, disassembled my detector, packed my luggage, and headed off to London, England.

This year, the rally was again held near Corfe Castle, an area in the southwest portion of England, known for providing excellent Roman artifacts, gold coins, hidden hoards, and simply just a fantastic area to hunt. The primary organizer, Tony Hunt, had established with local farmers permission for us to hunt the fields, around 500 acres of land, after the fields had been harvested. Some of the fields had been plowed which made detecting easier than hunting on a stubble field, where you have to keep your detector up, around 3 to 4 inches, thus avoiding the stiff stubble.





The fee for the daily hunt was surprisingly inexpensive, only 10 British Pounds, which in US dollar amounts was around \$15.00 per day. Half of the proceeds went to the owner of the land and the other half going to support the MLO forum run by Gary Brun of Norway. <http://www.minelabowners.com>

## ***Can you keep what you find?***

One question that many had asked me, “What can you keep, when you find stuff?” England has established regulations determining on what the detectorist can keep and what is considered “Treasure”. The Treasure Act of 1996 basically describes a treasure as an artifact or artifacts that have significant importance pertaining to English history. These artifacts are usually fantastic finds of gold items, pots of Roman or Celtic coins - known as hoards, prehistoric metal items or items that have significant historical importance. If an artifact is discovered that falls within the treasure classification, it is surrendered to the county historian who will establish a court of inquiry to determine its’ value. Once a value has been established, usually by a museum that wants to purchase the find, the proceeds from the sale are split between the finder and the landowner and the museum receives the artifact. Finding a single silver hammered coin, known as a “Hammy”, a Roman coin or other single coins doesn’t qualify the find as a “Treasure” and the detectorist gets to keep the item. However, hammered silver coins are usually registered with a local county historian along with the finders name, the location and the general condition of the find. This is a convenience and aids the historians who are working on maps of ancient

English population areas. Altogether, the rules are fair and it’s a win-win situation. You still get to keep the your finds.

It’s around an eight hour flight out of Atlanta to London and after landing and getting my rental car, *(make sure you get an automatic transmission, shifting with the*



*Front of the Norden House in Wareham, England*

*left hand can be tricky*), setting up my GPS navigator, I still had to contend with driving for the next 2 to 3 hours on the left side of the road, dealing with the roundabouts, I finally arrived at my destination in Dorset, Wareham, Norden Farms, where I had made reservations in the B&B, the old Norden house built in the 1700’s.

The majority of the hunters were soon to arrive. Since I was a day early, I wanted to take in the local landscapes and frankly just rest from flying all-night and driving from London. Norden Farm, is known for its’ B&B, garden shop, and it also provides a large camping area, complete with hook-ups with a nice rest room/shower facility. This is where the majority of hunters would come with their trailers, RVs and tents. Soon the reserved campsite would be occupied with relic hunters from all over England,

Scotland, Wales, Europe, Ireland, including one person from Australia, and me, the only one hunter from America. I was comfortable knowing we all spoke the same language, even though the accents might be different, we all understood the language of detecting...

*17th century musket ball was found about 7 inches down.*



On the first day I walked to a close-by field and hunted for about 3 hours. Didn't find much in the way of treasure so I returned back to the camping field to see if others had located any relics. Later that afternoon I climbed up to the steep ridge that overlooks the Corfe Castle ruins and made my first find, a pulled musket ball. Then hunting along the ridge I found another musket ball, dropped and in perfect shape. This area was used by troops during the English Civil War, that were attacking Corfe Castle.



*1697 William III, half farthing*

The following days provided much better results. I went to another field that had just been plowed and raked. Up on a hill from where I was hunting, a gold coin had been found. Apparently, the tractor had uncovered it and the coin was lying on top of the soil. With a large group already up on top of the hill hunting for more, I hunted around the side and found a William III, 1697 half farthing. It was a bronze coin from the same period as the gold one. I was hooked. Later on that day I found several pewter buttons, more musket balls, a brass buckle and the usual trash.

### ***Old Relics - very old relics...***

Relic hunting in England is very similar to relic hunting here in the states, with one exception, the relics you find in England are old, very, very old. Where can you go in the states and dig up a coin that is over a thousand years old? This was one of the reasons I came to England and why I'd go back again and again when the opportunity is available.

Meeting face-to-face the group of enthusiasts of whom I've only chatted with on the web was also lots of fun. I made many lasting friendships while hunting during the day and sitting around the bonfire we had in the campsite during the evening. As with

most group gatherings, lots of stories were told, relic collections were shown in cases and laughter was always heard.

### ***Just a little bit of history...***

Roman troops had occupied the area where we were, long before the Corfe Castle was built. Corfe Castle was begun by William the Conqueror soon after his arrival in Britain in 1066. It was served by the surrounding community in return for the use of homes and land, as well as shelter in the Castle in times of trouble. From the 14th to the 16th centuries, Corfe Castle was less important as a royal stronghold and often fell into disrepair. In 1572 Queen Elizabeth I sold it. In the Civil War of 1643, it was successfully defended. During a second siege in 1646 an act of betrayal by a member of its' garrison led to its' capture. The attackers deliberately demolished the castle resulting in the dramatic ruins you see today.



*1697 William III, top  
Roman coin of Claudius II, 270 AD, bottom*





*Hunting on top of the ridge line. This is where the Roman coin was found, along with several others. A Roman garrison was once quartered up here overlooking the land. Yes, those are sheep in the background*

## **Last day, still finding stuff and loving every minute...**

On my fourth and final day of hunting, we were all happy and surprised to find out that the farmer had plowed down all the stubble in one of the more productive fields (see article main photo). This was a great field. Already, there had been several hammered silver coins, many Roman coins and other artifacts located just a few inches below the soil.

Hunting in England, less discrimination is used and many of the hunters didn't use any at all, unlike here in the States where you'd use some just to cancel out the nails that seem to be everywhere, unless you're hunting iron, all metal would be the mode.

I had the privilege of meeting many of the fine hunters mentioned in Andy Sabish's book and got to pick their brains on setting my machine. By choice, I use a Minelab but there were others hunting with different brands and doing just as well.

Neil Jones pulled me aside and did an adjustment to my settings on my detector. Then he said "Now walk down the road a bit and you're going to dig up a hammy". Yeah, I thought..., so I proceeded down the road with my machine with it making every

possible tone it had as I swung the loop very low and slow, left and right, thinking to myself, he's really screwed up my settings. "There, there, there", Neil said, "You hear that low tone?" I couldn't hear crap. My machine sounded like a sick HAM radio with someone trying to tune into a distant station. "There", Neil pointed to the ground, "dig right here." I took out a large clod from the road bed and checked the hole. The machine still was singing all sorts of tones. Then I crossed over the clod. Amazingly, I heard a low tone. I crossed over the opposite direction and pinpointed it. There was definitely something there. Using my probe on the clod, I found an Elizabeth I silver hammered coin. I was amazed. Thoroughly amazed, that through all those tones that were coming from my speaker, not using headphones, Neil was able to distinguish that faint tone of a silver coin. "Let's do it again", he said. So down the road I went once more and again the same thing happened. Not until I had dug up the clod could I recognize an object and this time it was a small bronze medieval buckle.



*Members of the Corfe Castle Rally, 2009*

Now, I've been a hunter for years having found hundreds of American Civil War relics and coins and I've never, ever seen anyone that could pinpoint a tone and know indistinctly that it's a tone worth digging. Neil's got a great talent when it comes to listening to sounds. I saved his settings to my machine and it still sounds like a sick HAM radio...

When I returned back home, my wife asked me if I'd go there again? I answered her, "I'd do it in a heart beat."