

# Relic Hunting Farm Fields

by Chuck Marcum

Farm fields are some of my favorite places to hunt because most of them provide lots of space with very old spots in them to find relics. River bottoms have really good soil for crops and the rivers use to be the old highways. People travelled in the rivers, next to them, settled along the banks, and then began to farm the adjacent fields. Even farm fields that are not along rivers may have had old roads running through them where people camped and just about all fields have had different generations of houses. I have heard that at one time or another every forty acres, if it was decent land had a house on it.

Before you metal detect a field be sure to get permission from the land owner and/or lessee. Every piece of property is owned by someone. If public property is being farmed then someone is leasing it. Like any where else always fill in your holes and do not leave iron or trash on the ground next to your holes. All of the farmers I have ever talked to do not want people driving in their fields. They also get pretty irate if you block their drives where they cannot get their equipment by. If they come out to work in their field it is best to get out of their way, leave, hunt a different part of the field if you can keep far enough away, or just go to a different field. Do not hunt a planted field.

One way to start out hunting a strange new field would be locating where the houses were according to the old maps. By detecting the old house sites and by looking at the scattered glass and pottery, if some are visible, you can pretty much get an idea of how old the sites are. I like to hunt the very old spots and I do not waste much time in turn of the century house sites or newer. Some of my hunting buddies have done well in some of the newer spots finding out that they were built on top of older sites.

Another way of finding sites in fields is to start walking and swinging your detector. Head for the higher ground such as humps and ridges and check them first. If the field is completely flat it will take a lot of swinging to find the sites in it. A large 10" coil or bigger works best for finding spots because you can cover more ground with it. I also do not use any discrimination because I want to hear the iron and nails. I want to know when I get into a site and when I am out of it. When I reach a good looking ridge or hump I swing from the bottom of the slope all the way over the top listening for iron. I will zigzag up and down the slope along the ridge or hump until I start hearing some iron or find a good target. Then I will work a slower and tighter pattern. I search up the slope, across the top for a ways until the iron sounds stop, and then back down the slope. I listen to all of the iron and pick out the good targets to dig. I do a pattern because I am not very lucky and working a grid I am hearing more of what is there instead of depending on luck to get over something good. I call myself a "Spot Hunter". I do know people that can roam around and find stuff. I call them "Roamers". Some of the Roamers are really good at it too. It is a matter of preference, how you like to hunt. After all we are all out there to have fun. I will get a stray now and then but if I do find something good I work a quick pattern to see if I am in a spot or not. If you walk crooked like I always do there are different ways to mark where you have been while working your grid. If the ground is moist enough you can drag your shovel, if there are clippings on the ground you can see where you have been or just make a kick mark every once in a while, and if you are in a really good spot you can tell by all of the holes you have dug and filled in. Soy bean stubble is hard to hunt in. In some places it is cut close to the ground where it is easier. In other places especially where the ground was wet when they harvested their beans it is cut higher which makes it difficult to swing a coil in plus you will lose some depth. Sometimes my coil gets caught on a stalk and sometimes I stumble around almost falling. I just about always set the sensitivity on my detector all the way up and sometimes when the coil hits the stubble it will produce a false signal that I always have to go back and check. If I get an iffy signal I will kick a clearing in the clippings with my foot and recheck the signal. If the stubble is not too green you can stomp straight down on top of a stalk and it will break.

Be sure your boots or shoes have good soles before doing that. Corn fields could be even harder to hunt than soy bean fields. I have been in them where the corn stalks have been cut almost flush with the ground and in some where the stalks were cut four feet tall. You also have the furrows to contend with. The furrows could be pretty deep. It takes little strokes to swing in between the corn stalks and in the furrows which can really wear your swinging arm out. When my arm gets tired I will swing at 45 degrees across the furrow to cover more ground and get longer swings in. You can be more accurate by walking and swinging across the furrows instead along them. Walking across the furrows is more difficult and will wear you out quicker. A lot of times they will cut the corn before they harvest the soy beans. I have hunted lots of corn fields early in the season and have burned up because it gets real hot in the fields during the Summer and early Fall. They do still disk corn fields unlike most soy bean fields where they have gone to the no till farming. I have so much fun in plowed fields where the dirt shows the scattered glass and pottery. I can date lots of the sites by the type of glass and busted plate pieces laying around. I really get excited when I see the thick pieces of busted black glass or pieces of busted blue and white plates because I know I am in a very old spot and that I am getting ready to dig something really good up! When I am hunting in spots like that it makes me feel that I am in an old site more than just hearing the stuff. I keep my eyes to the ground and sometimes find trade beads, stone arrowheads, buttons, and other things that the rain has washed up.

Old, big bullets from the Civil War Era and before are always lots of fun to dig. I found lots of them in low spots, swags, and on slopes. When the fields are little wet is a very good time to find bullets. I have learned that some of the very deep ones will sound like iron with a little hint of a good signal, your numbers on the detector may or may not be good, and if you dig the very deep signals you will be surprised. Sometimes you may dig a square nail but it could also be a deep 69 caliber Musket Ball or a Minnie Ball. After a while you will recognize those deep bullet signals. I know some people that dig up all of the iron they hear and some that just dig some of the iron. They learn which iron signals are the good iron relics to dig. They find the musket barrels, cannon balls, meteorites, and other nice iron artifacts.

Back to the pattern I was working earlier on the slope and on top of the ridge. Which are some of my favorite spots to search. I work the grid back and forth until the iron signals stop. Sometimes it takes all day, more than one day, and other times a matter of hours or minutes depending on the size of the spot. If you do not hear any good signals after a long while working your pattern it could mean that it was hunted by someone else recently or hunted to death for a long time. Usually every season a field changes even if it was not plowed or disked. When the soil is real moist the deep targets will come in and if it is too dry you may not hear them at all. Rain can erode the dirt making slopes steeper, wipe them out completely, or even cut new drainage ditches. The ground needs to be at the right level to hear the targets and sometimes the sites will be buried deep with dirt when you try and go back to them even after finding all kinds of good stuff there the season before. Sometimes something gets in the air that makes the signals come in. We hunted a field once and got into a spot where all we could dig was little musket balls and scrap brass. When the sun started going down buttons started popping up everywhere and we got about six buttons a piece. Another time I was in a hay field that was freshly cut. I got a quarter signal, looked down, and there was an 1802 Two Reale Coin on top of the grass. I hunted for two hours around it and didn't dig anything else. I went back there every season when they turned it back into a plowed field and all I could hear was square nails. Then one year I dug eleven big bullets in the same field. Some fields are hot some seasons and other seasons they are not. A lot of times it depends on which field I choose to hunt whether I find something or not. Farm fields are lots of fun to hunt and are a great change of pace from pastures and woods.