Archaeology and Metal-Detecting - The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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The Ugly: American Diggers and National Geographic Diggers

American Diggers, Spike TV

National Geographic Channel
The Ugly:
Great Relic Hunting Shoot-Out

Organized by Metal-Detecting Group
200 – 250 Camouflaged Participants
Each pays ca. $200
Land-owner paid $20,000 - $40,000
Artifacts removed from historic context
Sites destroyed
Award given for best artifact
Artifacts dispersed across country, assume many sold
History destroyed
Flowerdew Hundred: 2010:
DHR Threatened Sites Project

DHR photographs
Flowerdew and Bermuda Hundreds: Historic Continuity

Courtesy of C. Hodges

W&M Dept of Anthropology
Flowerdew Hundred Destruction

Excavations by W&M, University of California – Berkley, UVA
Sites: 1620 English Fort,
1630 Stonehouse, Indian Ossuaries,
1st Windmill, 18th / 19th C Plantations
Grant’s Pontoon Crossing

Great Relic Shoot Out
200-250 Metal Detectorists
8,921 Artifacts removed
Unknown number of resources destroyed
The Ugly: Ebay Sales:
April 25, 2014

Ebay – Springfield Musket Bayonet
Petersburg

Ebay – Dug Civil War Artifacts
Time Crime:
Illegal Metal Detecting on State and Federal Land

- Archaeological data destroyed forever
Time Crime:
Relic Hunters “Records”
The Bad: The Hobbyists

Good people doing not so good things

Remove artifacts from Historic Context
  Artifact only part of story
  Relations to other artifacts and features
  Ignores remaining material culture (ceramics, bone, etc.)

Reasoning
  Archaeologists too slow
  Artifacts just rotting in ground
  Personal Property rights
  Perfectly legal on private land
  Saving History
Unfortunate Truth: Uncontrolled Metal-Detecting Destroys the Past

Unequivocally, no debate

Destroys historic context
Exposes metal to air – immediately begins to break down
Artifacts dispersed to 4 winds
   Isolated on mantles
   Sold on e-bay or auction
   National “Hunts”
The Good

Due diligence on recordation
Willingness to work with professional archaeologists
  With research design and appropriate research questions
  With public interpretation
  With refined methodology for recordation
Coordinate work on public lands with proper controls
Enlightenment – Stop uncontrolled destruction
  Ethical minefield
    Some archaeologists willing to work with “hobbyists”
    Others – not so inclined
The Good: Advanced Metal-Detecting for the Archaeologist

Assumption: Archaeologists are not inherently stupid

Do have ability to use tools

Do have ability to learn

AMDA – Approved by Register of Professional Archaeologists

1 day lecture, 2 days in field (Clermont Farm, VA)

Gain familiarity with machines
DHR Guidelines

Battlefields recognized as unique resources

Difficulty of Survey
  STPs inadequate
  Landscape examination
  Metal-Detecting Survey recommended

KOCOA System (NPS ABPP)
  Key Terrain
  Observation – Fields of Fire
  Cover
  Obstacles
  Avenues of Approach
All DHR Collections Available for Research
Getting the Data to the Public: Selected DHR Partnerships and Loans

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+ over 80 other institutions
Archaeological Sites are Non-Renewable Resources

Once destroyed, they cannot be reconstructed.
Sites are fragile and easily disturbed.
There are numerous natural and man-made threats to sites.
We do not need to add additional destructive processes.
Professional Work: Conservation

Preventative Conservation

Treatment Procedures

Exhibit Preparation

Preserved for the Future
17th Century English Armor: Appropriate Conservation

Expertise in Conservation
Appropriate Conservation and Curation:

Proper Packaging & Storage
Proper Curation

Storage – stable environment
Accessibility
Conservation
Tracking/Loans
Camp Misery (44ST0286), Stafford County, Virginia: Meals, Trash, and Ash
Camp Misery (44ST0286), Stafford County, Virginia
Soldiers’ Huts
(Geier et. al 2013)
Representative Material Culture Recovery – Not Metal Only
What Archaeologists Can Do

Provide More Opportunities for Professional Work by Metal Detectorists
Change the Law
Obtain Property Easements
Explain Archaeology to Land-Owners
Educate the Public
Learn to use a Metal Detector
We are All Stewards of the Past:
The Past Belongs to All of Us
Acknowledgements

Advanced Metal Detecting for the Archaeologist (RPA, Clermont Farm Project, 2013, Chris Espenshade, Director)

American Diggers (Spike TV; www.spike.com/shows/american.diggers)

Diggers (National Geographic Channel; www.channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/diggers/articles/meet-the-digers/)

DHR (Image Archive; MBBarber)

Ebay (2014 Dug Civil War Artifacts; www.ebay.com/bhp/civil-war-artifacts)

Geier, Clarence R., M.L. Coleman, E.A. Samulski, and K.R. van Zandt (Site Architecture, Plan and Associated material Culture from One Sector of Camp Switzer (Misery (44ST0286): A Union Winter Encampment (1862/1863), Stafford County, Virginia. JMU, submitted to DHR, Richmond.

Hodges, Charles (Personal Communication 2013)
“Ugly” Diggers’ Shows
Unintended Consequences

Add by Detectorist
- Devalues history
- Emphasizes Treasure/Money
- Too much Heavy Machinery
- Lack of Science

Land owners denying access to property
Less destruction of sites