

Just ask!

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You may be surprised where permission to search can be found. I am new to the East Riding of Yorkshire, and to England as well having recently relocated from Florida to Bridlington with my spouse, a native of the area. I've found myself amazed at the rich history that can be found. With every step I took I couldn't stop thinking about what lay beneath my feet.

Searching for a good machine

Having been a detectorist in Florida for several decades it was a natural progression for me to want to get involved in the hobby here. I immediately realised that detecting here was a totally different animal. In Florida my efforts were split between beach and underwater detecting. I used my Fisher Aquanaut, a pulse induction machine, but it was totally unsuitable for the environment here.

So my first task was to obtain a good detector, a job much easier said than done. I hadn't given the market a thought in over 25 years. Where to begin? I searched the Internet for bits of information, but found it full of biased opinion and unsubstantiated conjecture with a sprinkling of truth hidden between the lines. Continuing down that path, could lead to confusion so I decided to subscribe to a couple of hobby magazines, *The Searcher* being my first choice. Between the articles and the adverts I began to garner a good idea of the state of the art with regard to detector technology.

LEFT Jennifer Edwards & Roman silver **TOP** Buttons

RIGHT Regimental badges, sword hanger, Victoria shilling, sixpence, florin & half-crown, Anne shilling, Victoria double florin, Mary groat, pre-decimal copper





After much deliberation, I settled on the Nokta Impact. It has all the features I was looking for – sensitive, well designed, and well accepted by the detecting community. Most importantly it was being sold at a reasonable price for a higher end machine and was probably one of my better decisions. That machine has come through for me time and time again, getting good signals when other higher priced machines searching beside me were not doing nearly as well.

Gaining permission

My next task was to find a place to use this shiny new piece of technology that I had in my hot little hands. Of course, the first thing one discovers when new to the UK detecting community is that, unlike America, there is no land available to detect on without first gaining permission. How do I gain these sought after permissions? Where do I begin? I decided it was time to enlist the aid of others and joined a local detecting club that met at the rugby club near our new home.

I attended my first meeting. People were eager to help and answer any questions. The club had its own permissions and held a dig every fortnight. By the second one I was becoming quite comfortable using my new machine and found my first hammered coin, which was an indescribable moment of joy. Two weeks later I unearthed my first Roman coins. Most importantly I had made new friends. Being a stranger in a strange land, not knowing anyone, this was much more valuable to me than anything else the group had to offer.



Dismay ... then triumph

Then it happened, at the very next meeting I found myself in the middle of that episode of Mackenzie Crook's 'Detectorists' where the club was officially disbanding. As the last meeting closed I found myself gazing out of the window dismayed at the loss of this wonderful group that got me started detecting here.

Whilst staring out the window looking at the five lovingly tended rugby pitches, my thoughts wandered to what must be under the ground. I made my way to the bar for a conciliatory gin and tonic when I noticed the club president having a conversation with the groundkeeper of this privately owned rugby club. I had nothing to lose so found the courage to approach them. In a faltering voice I muttered, "I would love to do a bit of detecting on the edges of your practice pitch; do you think I could give it a go?"

The president asked the groundkeeper, "What do you think?" and he looked at me with a glare that shook me to my soul. I was about to become the biggest laugh that they'd had in a long while.



I was sure he was thinking who in their right mind would ask permission to dig holes all over the rugby clubs biggest asset. Then it happened. He cracked a big smile and said, "Sure, you're welcome to dig anywhere on the club grounds, including the main pitch!" I was flabbergasted. I'd just landed my first permission and it was literally in my own backyard. Better yet it was a piece of never touched ground that literally dozens of detectorists had looked at time and time again. I had no doubt that the same thoughts of wondering what was in the ground had gone through their minds; they simply did not think to ... **JUST ASK!**

After a thousand nervous thanks and promising to be super careful when digging, I ran home to share the good news with my mate.

Results of careful research

I soon began my research, which included trips to the library digging through the archives, talking to everyone I met who might know about the history of the area, searching numerous databases and, of course, the Internet.

What I found out was amazing; that piece of ground had once been a walled off area for the inhabitants of the towns to shelter when raiders from the sea landed in the harbour. It was also medieval fair ground, a church owned farm, a Victorian fairground, (which explains why the deed on our home forbids us building a carousel or a shooting gallery), and the site of a camp during both world wars – and now the rugby club.



I had hit the jackpot on my first try!

I was almost ready to dig my permission, but there was one more thing left: I had to learn a way to recover an artefact from under the grass without destroying the turf. I practised cutting nice neat plugs with a narrow spade. I found that if I made four or five cuts in the sod about twice as deep as around I could extract a nice neat 'plug' without much damage. Once I removed the coin or artefact I would carefully reinsert it in exactly the same orientation and gently tamp it back. My Impact's built-in pinpointer is very accurate, allowing me to dig the smallest plug possible.

I arranged my digging with the grounds man, who let me know when cutting was scheduled. The plan was to dig on the couple of days before mowing, the idea being that the heavy rollers would tamp down my plugs. And it worked like a charm! Between the neat ways I worked and the lugs being tamped down by the heavy tractor, you couldn't tell where I had dug.

Being as prepared as I knew how, it was time to dig. I chose a practice pitch as my first effort not knowing how well my reinserted plugs of turf would fare. I turned on my machine, found a spot without a signal and performed an auto-ground balance. I didn't get more than two or three steps when I received a positive signal. Nervously I dug out my first plug and located my first coin, a nice 1948 shilling. Silver on my first signal. I was quite excited. All my preparation was beginning to pay off. Little did I know how well it was about to get!



Working methodically

After replacing that first bit of sod and carefully arranging the blades of grass, I swung my machine and hit another strong signal. This went on again and again and again. There was a coin, piece of jewellery, a regimental badge and hammered and Roman coins about every two feet! I could not believe my luck. That first day and the following day, I worked that first pitch, methodically scanning, making sure I overlapped. At the end of about 18 hours of digging I was able to search over half of the first rugby pitch.

I had amassed literally hundreds of post decimal coins, and another couple of hundred ranging from Roman to WWII. There were also many interesting bits of history that told the story of this piece of land. I unearthed three gold rings, a platinum and three stone 1/2 carat each diamond man's ring which

I decided to turn into the rugby club as a gesture of good will. If they do not find the owner by seasons end I instructed them to sell it and add the proceeds to the general fund.

An unexpected benefit from digging so many targets in such a short time was that different sounds quickly burned into my mind which type of target gave what type of feedback. After that first day I could more often than not tell exactly what the composition of the target was, how deep it was in the ground, and whether or not I should dig.

A bonus of having dug at the rugby club was that I amassed what I am positive is the worlds largest collection of rugby studs throughout the ages! Perhaps I will one day open a rugby stud museum!

By the summer's end I had successfully searched about half of the rugby clubs pitches. Whilst the groundskeeper encouraged me to keep digging, I felt it prudent to set it aside until the season was over. The thought of injuring a key player by him stumbling on one of my holes weighed on my mind. The last game of the season is in one week. I cannot wait to start up where I left off.

Remember, there are opportunities to gain permission everywhere, and in the most unexpected places. All you need to do is ...

JUST ASK. ●

CLOCKWISE Musket balls, Medieval buckles, miscellaneous, sixpences, Roman bronzes