

Protecting archaeological sites from metal detecting

Why is this an issue?

Farmland is a prime area for metal detector users to practise their hobby. But as over 90% of recorded archaeological sites lie in the countryside, archaeologists have concerns that some sites and finds may be at risk of damage or loss during detecting work. Archaeologists are happy to work with responsible users but continue to have concerns over how finds are sometimes uncovered and treated.

Why are archaeologists concerned about metal detecting?

It is important that the nature and position of archaeological objects are recorded for public knowledge rather than private benefit. It is also important that objects are not dug out of intact archaeological deposits. Finds in context are important for understanding and dating sites. Separated from these sites they lose much of their related value. Even where finds are lying in ploughsoil and have been separated from their archaeological context they can still be valuable as stray finds, indicators of specific past human activity. Individual finds can also be easily damaged by inappropriate handling and treatment after their discovery.



It is a criminal offence to metal detect over Scheduled Monuments such as this Roman Fort in Perthshire.

Prosecution has even led to prison sentences!

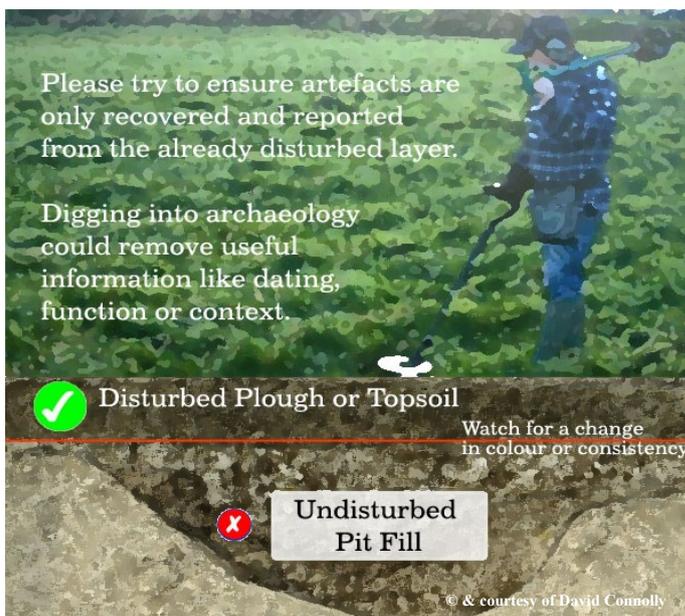
What is the legal situation?

'It is a criminal offence (under section 42 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979) to use a metal detector on a scheduled monument or a monument in the ownership or guardianship of Scottish Ministers, or of a Local Authority, without prior written permission from Scottish Ministers.'

While the following Good Environmental Conditions (GEC) below, no longer legally apply they remain good environmental practice.

Do not allow the use of metal detectors on ancient monuments or remove any archaeological finds. Report any archaeological finds to [Treasure Trove Secretariat](#), your local authority archaeologist or local museum. Any new archaeological feature or site should be reported to your local authority archaeologist.

Farmers and other land managers should not permit detectorists to carry out work over known archaeological sites unless this forms part of an organised programme of research. They should also encourage detectorists to report all significant finds in line with the Scottish law of [Treasure Trove](#) 'All treasure trove - which comprises any portable antiquity and not just those incorporating precious metals - are the property of the Crown at Scots common law. The Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer is the Crown's representative in Scotland for such property and is supported by the Treasure Trove Unit in the exercise of her functions in relation to treasure trove.'



GOOD PRACTICE

Metal detector users are free to practise their hobby provided they do not disturb known archaeological sites or affect your responsibilities as a manager of this land.

Archaeological sites and finds must be protected from disturbance and all stray finds should be registered for public benefit.

- Any metal detector user working on your land should be encouraged to sign an undertaking to report all finds to the appropriate authorities. A sample undertaking can be supplied if required.
- No metal detecting should take place over known archaeological sites unless forming part of a survey authorised by Historic Scotland or your local council archaeologist. This includes sites newly discovered that have not yet been included on local authority Sites and Monuments or Historic Environment Records.
- Report all finds to the Treasure Trove Secretariat, your local authority archaeologist or local museum.

By law all archaeological finds should be reported to the Treasure Trove Secretariat. They may refer you to your local museum or local authority archaeology service for help in recording any finds recovered. Most regional museums are registered to accept finds and you can find a list of these through the [Museums & Galleries of Scotland](#) website

- No excavation of detected finds should take place below the depth of ploughsoil and absolutely no deeper than 300mm.
- Mark the positions of significant finds and measure this on a plan of the field so the place of discovery can be re-found.

Further information - [Treasure Trove Secretariat](#)

to identify your [local museums service](#)

to identify your [Local Authority Archaeology Service](#)

for more information on [distinguishing & conserving significant finds](#) (but note Scottish legislation is more rigorous than English on what finds should be kept)



De-stoning fields for root crops like potatoes and carrots may mean metal & pottery finds are sieved out by machine. They are then re-deposited (as here) in distinct lines or dumped off the field.



A typical group of finds found in plough soil. Though all are potentially of interest there is nothing here that would need reporting as Treasure Trove. Use your local museum to help distinguish between ordinary and significant finds.

Archaeology Scotland | Suite 1a | Stuart House | Station Road | Musselburgh | Edinburgh | EH21 7PB 0300 0129878 |
info@archaeologyscotland.org.uk | www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk

Company Registered in Scotland No. 262056 | Registered Scottish Charity No. SC 001723