

Metal detecting rallies as fund-raising events – advice to organisers

Those considering such events are advised to think carefully about the implications for the historic environment. Although Suffolk's Archaeological Service has a long tradition of recording survey work by individual field walkers and metal detector users we regard rallies as rather different and cannot offer unlimited support from scarce County Council and Portable Antiquities Scheme resources.

The following comments are designed to help you to observe the law and to minimise damage to the archaeology, which is a unique and irreplaceable resource.

Planning

When getting permissions from landowners and tenants (both should be consulted about constraints etc) check whether there are any environmental designations (eg Site of Special Scientific Interest) and especially any Scheduled Monuments on or near the proposed rally area. If the owner is uncertain about whether there are any Scheduled Monuments they are shown on English Heritage's National Heritage List at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/>. Also check whether the farm is receiving environmental stewardship payments - if so they should check the project with Natural England as it could infringe the cross-compliance rules and adversely affect their grants. Finally establish that ownership of finds is clearly agreed in writing – as a general rule everything found using a metal detector belongs to the landowner unless it is treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996, so it needs to be agreed that participants can remove objects of whatever financial value.

Consult with SCC Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record about the proposed land to be used for a rally – supply a map showing the area to Colin Pendleton, the HER Officer and he will let you know about any archaeological sites already recorded. This will provide a double check on Scheduled Monuments (which cannot legally be metal detected at all without permission from English Heritage and a rally would not be allowed). Ideally most known sites, ie those recorded on the HER, should be avoided.

Recording arrangements

Virtually every arable field (we do not recommend detecting on pasture) will produce archaeological objects, some of which are indicators of a significant unknown site whereas others may be the result of random losses, often reflecting areas of past arable cultivation. Once objects are removed from their context the information that they represent about our past is destroyed.

In an archaeological survey of a known or suspected site finds from the ploughsoil are recorded by systematic coverage (setting out a grid and collecting material within each 20m square separately) or by walking regular transects across a field and plotting individual locations of finds using either an electronic surveying device or, less accurately, a GPS device. By contrast at detecting rallies each individual covers whatever ground they choose within the allocated land and keeps no record of where each item is discovered.

The finds from a professional archaeological survey would be systematically identified after the event. Similarly finds made by individual metal detector users are borrowed by the Portable Antiquities Scheme officers so that they can be fully described, measured and photographed or drawn as appropriate. In a rally situation there are likely to be individuals who do not record their finds with the PAS, and individuals who are not local to Suffolk.

To provide professional archaeological recording for a single Saturday or Sunday can easily cost over £1000, equalling the likely charitable income of a small to medium size rally.

Our suggestions for local mitigation of archaeological damage are:

- Keep a record of who attends your rally.
- Make sure no searching goes below the ploughsoil
- Issue each individual with a map of the detecting areas (and a pencil) for them to record where objects are found – the Archaeological Service can provide large scale OS map printouts for copying and recording use.
- On a compact detecting area you could set out a measured grid with canes and labels beforehand, and provide detectorists with bags and labels to keep separate the objects from each square. This would be ideal for known sites *if* there was a mechanism to prevent participants from focussing their attention on specific areas.
- Insist that all finds are shown to the organiser. Ideally anything judged to be eligible for recording under the PAS (ie older than AD1700) should be photographed with a scale (eg a ruler in mm) and a number correlating with written information about the findspot and finder plus a brief description of what the object is thought to be and what it is made of.
- For any object thought to be Treasure under the Act a Treasure form should be completed and the object retained to be recorded by the PAS officer and reported to the Coroner. Treasure forms and documentation about what is defined as Treasure are available from SCCAS, see our website for links to this information online.
- Detectorists who are local to Suffolk and regularly get their finds recorded by the PAS officer should be asked to take finds in via this route for recording as normal. Encourage them to use the maps to note where the objects were found and to take in the map with the finds.
- Finders from other parts of the country may also be regularly recording items with the PAS – in this case the maps are particularly important as finds officers elsewhere will not have access to detailed maps of Suffolk.

Although we would like to be able to support every project by giving our time for free this is not feasible. Where possible we will provide help both beforehand and by visiting on the day.

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