An Opportunity Arises

By Ronald R Washburn

In the middle of March, I received information that my son had a soccer game in Wilmington, NC scheduled for April 3rd. My wife thought we might drive down Saturday afternoon, spend the night, look around town, go to the soccer game, then return home. (My wife is not into metal detecting.) I, on the other hand, had a different plan. So, Friday afternoon I headed down I-40 with my metal detector packed and the Holiday Inn in Wilmington locked into my GPS.

After checking-in at my hotel I gathered my equipment and headed for the beach. I'd not been down to Wrightsville Beach in over 10 years. In the past I had found this area to be a great place to attend training conferences, make scuba diving trips, and fly my kites on the beach. After crossing the bridge over the causeway to Wrightsville Beach I immediately noticed something different. Parking meters had been placed all along the sides of the roadway. I pulled into a space in front of the Blockade Runner Hotel and got out of my car to inspect the meter more closely. "Two dollars per hour" and "quarters only," was printed plainly on the meters. Or I could call a phone number (also printed on the meter) and give them a credit card number. (Not "no" but "NO, NO.") It looks like the town of Wrightsville Beach has figured out a way to make up for the deficit shortfall. A quick inspection of my pocket change revealed two quarters on me at the time which would only give me 15 minutes. OK. I can do this, I thought. Fifteen minutes should give me more than enough time to pop into the hotel, get some change, and return without loosing too much daylight.

When I entered the lobby the bellboy asked if I needed assistance. As I explained my dilemma he informed me that the hotel would not give out change for the meters. In fact none of the businesses would. My best bet was to call the number on the meter and use my credit card, or drive back across the bridge to the town hall and get change there. With the sun sinking quickly in the west I headed back to my car. Approaching my vehicle, I happened to glance up at the meter several spaces away. Could I be seeing that right? The digital display on the meter displayed seven hours of time remaining on the meter for that "empty" space. Never let it be said that I passed up a good opportunity. After safely parking, I grabbed my detector and scoop and headed down the public access path to the beach.

My first clue that conditions might be a little challenging came when I had to put my headphones on in order to hold my cap on my head. As I walked out to the beach, I realized that the wind was gusting between 30 and 40 mph. The sun was still bright so I had worn my sunglasses when exiting the car. That was a good thing because now the wrap-around lenses were protecting my eyes from the blowing sand.

I had brought my wetsuit and large scoop with me on this trip thinking that I might try to brave the cold water. With the surf being as heavy as it was, (and the water being quite cold still) I decided to search the sand on the beach and to not venture out into the waist deep water. (There is something about being beaten to death by the cold ocean waves and having my metal

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detector broken in half as I fight to keep from drowning, that is just not appealing to me.) I pondered for a moment wondering if this is a sign that I'm getting old?.....Nahhhhh! I hated scuba diving in cold water when I was in my 20's. Do you know how a scuba diver makes his wet suit warm in the cold water? Yep! He puts warm water in it. Which is something else I don't feel like doing today. (You may need to think about that for a minute.) So, the dry sand it is.

After adjusting my Surf Pro PI to my satisfaction, I started down the beach dragging my heavy scoop behind me. (It was kind of nice to have an anchor in the heavy wind.) Seeing a volleyball setup on the beach nearby, I headed straight for it. At last I got my first signal. Digging down about eight inches I discovered that I had located an old, rusty, sharp, tent stake. This thing was about twelve inches long. Knowing that I could not just leave it lying on the beach, I placed it in my apron pocket as best as I could. Undaunted by this disappointment, I continued on a few feet when my detector put out another strong signal. A shallow dig with my scoop revealed what appeared to be a very sharp, rusty, needle. Oh man! I need some better luck. I placed the needle in the left pocket of my apron as safely as I could. (I usually store trash in the left pocket for later disposal and anything that I want to keep goes into the right pocket.) After searching for an hour or so I had found nothing but a few coins, and a lot of very sharp rusty pieces of metal. Old hairpins were everywhere. That's the thing about a pulse induction metal detector. Neither the black sand nor the damp sand seems to have any negative affect on this metal detector. But the item it locates might be on the surface or two feet down.

My trash pocket was getting full of dangerous sharp pieces of metal and I had very little in the right pocket to show for my evenings endeavor. At about this time, I noticed the small shorebirds that usually flew around me were missing. The plovers were usually darting back and forth from the waves searching for food in the wet sand. Instead, the little birds were all hunkered down avoiding the strong wind in some deep tire tracks that had been left by a vehicle traveling down the beach earlier.

It was getting late, so I decided to call it a day with only a few coins, a dog tag and lots of sharp dangerous looking metal items in my pouch. Walking back toward the public access path, I heard another strong, loud signal. Zeroing in was a little difficult but I could tell that it wasn't a small piece of valuable jewelry. After digging up all the sharp pieces of metal found earlier, I was afraid to just walk away and leave it there for someone to injure their foot on. So I started digging. After going down about eighteen inches I struck metal. A few more scoops of sand were removed and out came what appeared to be an old, rusted-out ring from the top of a fifty-five gallon metal barrel. Here again the edges were very sharp and dangerous.

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This piece of metal was not going to fit into my apron. In fact, it wasn't going to fit in the garbage can at the head of the path to the public access. Feeling a little frustrated by my lack of success, I propped the metal ring up against the garbage can and headed for my car.

After packing up all my gear, I realized that I was feeling a little down by my lack of success. You know what they say, "After a couple of hours of beach hunting it's time for the next best thing, some really good seafood." If that's not an old saying, we should really think about making it a new one. I checked with some of the locals for their best recommendation and then made my way to the Bluewater Waterfront Grill on Marina Street which is right on the causeway. (They even had free parking.) The hostess seated me at a table with a beautiful view of the water and the marina. There I had one of the best seafood meals that I've ever had. Blackened Mahi Mahi, Tuna and Shrimp with beans, rice and vegetables. Once again I found myself facing yet another danger there at the beach. I ate too much!

As I was leaving the restaurant and walking back to my car I started thinking about the Wrightsville Beach from years past. After remembering today's finds, I could not help but say to myself, "You know……..I may never go walking barefoot on the beach again." I wondered if that was a sign that I'm getting old?

Nahhhhh……..I hated cutting my feet up when I was a kid too.

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April 3rd, 2011