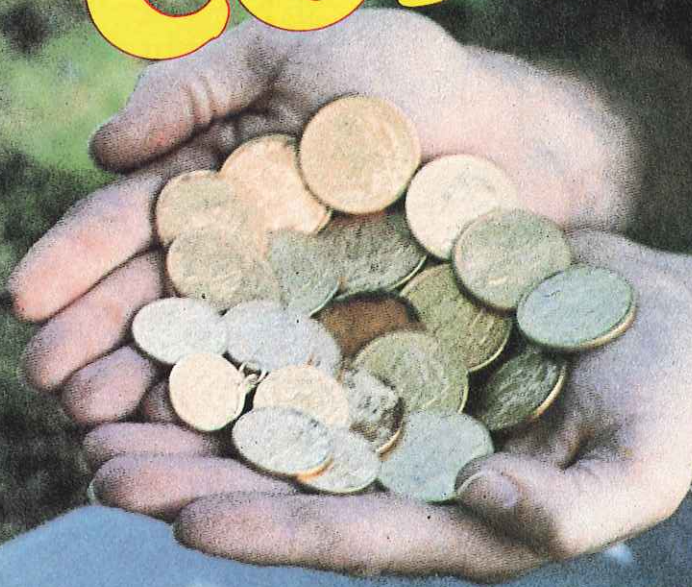


It may have been luck which guided Bob Van Camp to the site, but it was his skill with a detector that allowed him to take full advantage of the opportunity.

By Bob Grant

# TREASURE HUNTER HITS GOLD COIN BONANZA A DREAM COME TRUE



Every treasure hunter dreams of the day he will find a truly valuable cache. And while very few people ever talk about it when they do hit big, we all know that nearly every day of the year somewhere in the world some lucky treasure hunter is digging the gold!

But being a successful treasure hunter takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of money. Endless hours of exacting research in the silent halls of dusty libraries are required. There is just no way of making a big strike **easy**. Or is there?

Well, let's see. Every once in awhile treasure caches **do** just seem to sort of "fall from the sky." Like the case of Chuck Kenworthy, when he found a fortune in ancient gold rings that someone had hidden in the false bottom of a birdhouse (this one was reported in the February 1976 issue of **Treasure Search**). And then sometimes treasure just sort of jumps from the sand. Such was the case some years ago when

*With the top soil and some of the square nails removed, Bob's large coil was able to reach down and "pick up" the deeply buried coins.*

Kip Wagner found the Spanish coin on a Florida beach that kicked off the modern-day search for the sunken treasure galleons. And sometimes treasure just sort of springs from the ground. This is the way it happened for Bob Van Camp, owner of Comstock Metal Detectors in Chico, California.

It all started when Bob got a call to search for a gold coin from a necklace that someone lost while rototilling a garden. "The chain had been found, but nothing had been seen of the \$5 gold piece," explains Van Camp. "The gold piece had probably been caught in the rototiller blades and buried."

The rototilled area covered at least an acre, and Van Camp envisioned a long, drawn-out search. In an effort to speed things up, Van Camp started his search in the most logical location—the spot where the necklace had been found.

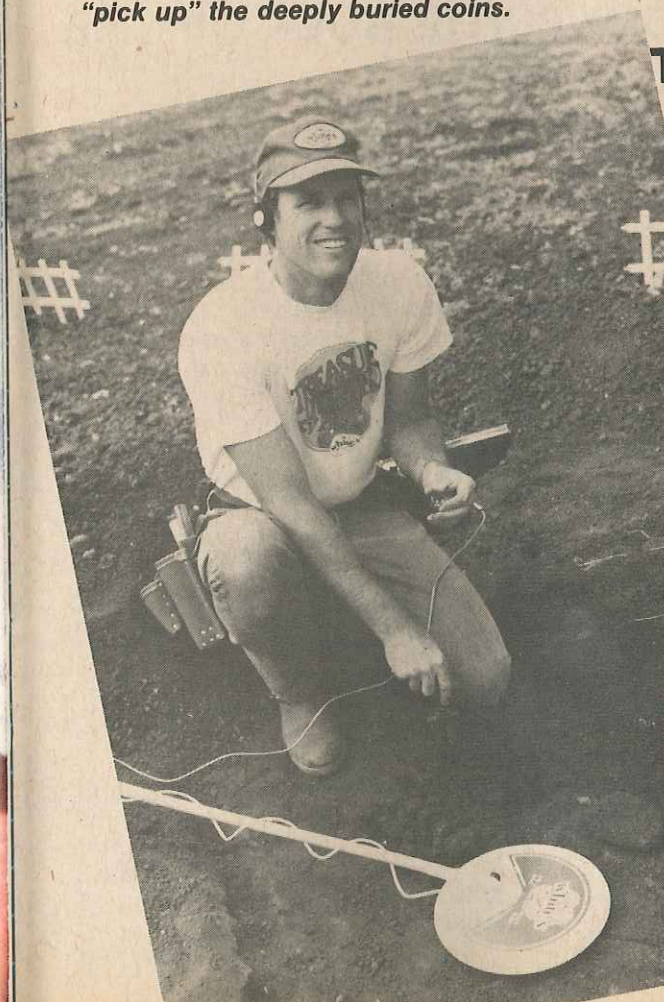
Bob Van Camp is an experienced treasure hunter, very proficient with his metal detector. And knowing well that gold likes to disguise itself as "junk" to a

discriminator, he adjusted the ground-balancing/discrimination mode to a very low point, just slightly above the "nail" setting.

"I slowly worked my way along, carefully covering the area where the chain had been found," Van Camp continues. "I was actually picking up a few borderline positive signals on the audio of my detector, but the meter solidly indicated 'nails.' I dug a few just to be sure. You can never tell with gold. It really likes to hide from a discriminator."

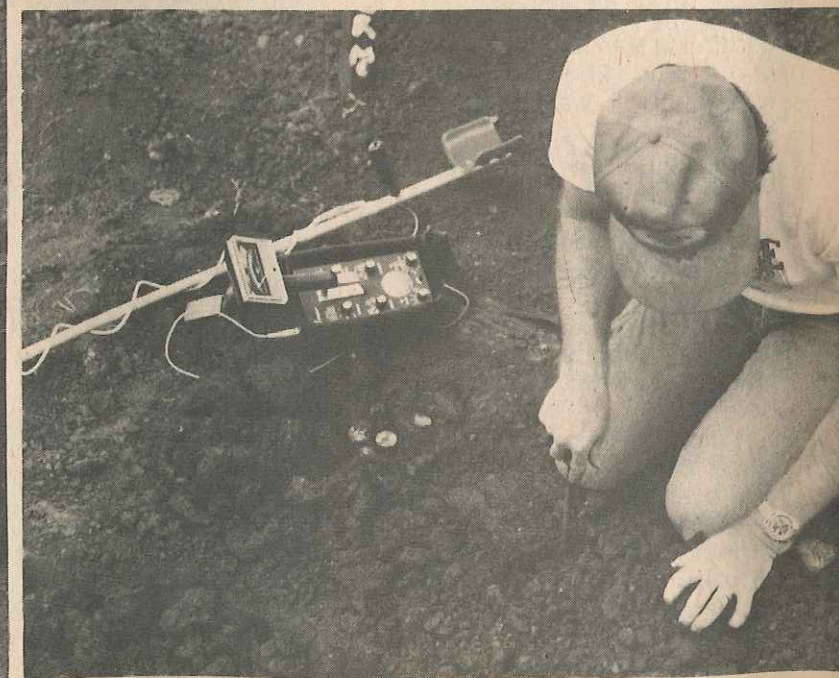
Suddenly a tremendous signal blasted through the headphones, and the target identification meter locked solidly at a point just below "quarter"—the far upper edge of the meter's "gold" reading. Bob was certain that his search had ended. He felt a twang of disappointment that the hunt was over after just 10 minutes of searching.

Bob knelt and began digging the dirt away with his trowel. Sure enough, there it was. As he parted two clods of dirt, his eyes were greeted by the unmistakable golden glint of a large reed-edged coin—a \$20 gold piece!



## THE RUST-STAINED PIECES WERE A GOOD INDICATION THE COINS WERE PART OF A CACHE

*After awhile, Bob became a little jaded about digging the gold coins.*







*On the finger tips of his right hand is the item that started Bob's adventure, a \$5 piece with the bezel; notice the rust-stained piece on the index finger of the left hand, indicating the coins were buried in an iron container.*

"The excitement of the find dulled my senses for a moment," continues Van Camp. "In the back of my mind I knew **something** was wrong, but I wasn't certain just what. Then it struck me. This wasn't a \$5 gold piece with a bezel attached. This was a \$20 coin solidly encrusted with dirt. So solidly encrusted, in fact, that it would have been impossible for it to have gotten in this condition in the short period of time the coin was supposed to have been lost. Just what was going on here?"

It didn't take long for Bob to get some additional facts. It seemed that over the past five years a few gold coins had been turning up in various areas of the plot after rototilling. They just sort of appeared at random without any real discernible pattern or clue to their source. This accidental \$20



*The unmistakable glint of gold left no doubt as to the identity of the targets when the dirt clods were separated.*

## BOB'S THEORY PAID OFF BIG, FOR IT WAS UNDER THE NAILS WHERE HE FOUND THE BULK OF THE TREASURE

gold find Bob made added new spark to an old flame. Could there possibly be a **cache** of gold coins here?

A lot of theories quickly formed. Could these just be a few random coins lost by some previous owner of the property? Perhaps there had been a saloon or hotel on the site once, and the coins had fallen through the floorboards, spilled from a pocket during a fight. There were a hundred different possibilities. One known fact is that the property is beside one of the original stage and supply roads into town. And much later a bootlegger of sorts operated there during the 1920s and '30s. But before those dates no information could be found.

After working out an agreement with the landowner, Bob once again set about working on the treasure hunt of his life!

"Armed now with a better knowledge of just what it was I was looking for, I was much more methodical and thorough in my

search patterns," says Van Camp. "I set up a mental grid and worked the entire area carefully, checking every signal, but nothing turned up except some heavily oxidized square nails."

Suddenly realizing that he had failed to recheck the original hole where he had located the \$20, Bob doubled back, but the hole itself and the area immediately surrounding it yielded nothing but more nails and some bits of rusted metal. Then suddenly, several feet to one side of the hole, there it was again—that same loud, solid signal.

"I didn't even have to look at the meter," says Bob. "I knew immediately what it was. I dropped and dug, and, just like last time, the clods parted to reveal a large gold coin!"

Bob concentrated his efforts in the immediate area, and was quickly rewarded with another \$20—then another, and another. Within 10 minutes he had found a total of four more \$20 gold pieces!

About 10 feet further Van Camp

got a smaller, weaker signal which he felt just **had** to be a pulltab.

"Oh well," he thought, "there **always** have to be a few." So he dug quickly to get rid of it.

"You can imagine my surprise when instead of an aluminum ring the same golden glow of a coin appeared. This time it was a \$5 gold piece. It was a good lesson for me. Sometimes we all tend to forget just how much small gold items really do sound like pulltabs to a discriminator!"

When the coins once again began to play out, Bob spent the next couple of hours searching different areas, but to no avail. So, just before dark, he decided to go back and check the original hole one final time.

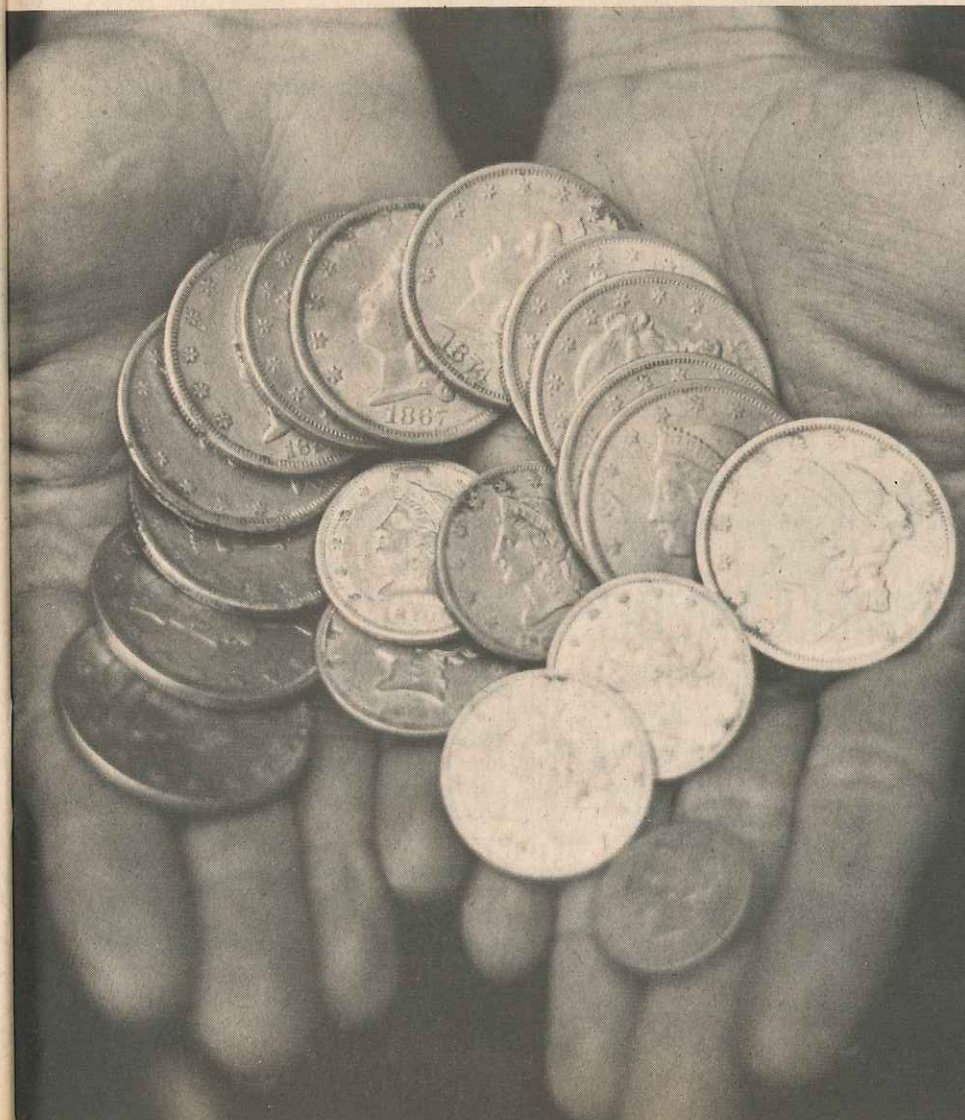
"This time I switched the detector from the discriminate to the normal mode so I could get a better idea of just how much junk was in the hole," explains Bob. "There was a lot. The detector

produced a nearly continuous signal—indicating plenty of trash to easily mask a good signal from a gold coin when working in the discriminate mode."

Bob scraped off about three inches of loose dirt, picked up a handful of square nails, and switched the detector back into discriminate once again. Another "borderline" signal was produced, and digging brought out a square nail at about three inches. Then, to Bob's surprise, at four inches out popped another \$20. Bob was now really beginning to have **very** positive thoughts about that hole!

"It was too dark at this point to do anything but clean up the coins and examine them," says Van Camp. "All in all there were six \$20s and one \$5. With the exception of one 1875 CC \$20, which had a bad scar from the rototiller blades, all were in excellent condition. A few showed rust stains either from contact

*After cleaning, most of the coins proved to be in Very Good to Almost Uncirculated condition.*



with the nails or, more likely, from some type of a container they had been buried in. There was no doubt at this point that I was onto a cache rather than just a few scattered coins!"

When Bob returned to the site the next day, the landowner had cleared off the topsoil around the area, and in the process had unearthed two more \$20s.

"This time I was better prepared," explains Van Camp. "I brought my 10-inch loop, and some new ideas. I felt that there were some deep coins there, but that their signals were being masked by the nails."

It turned out that both the 10-inch coil **and** the new ideas were correct. There were, indeed, more positive signals, but they were mixed with the signals from the nails and therefore very difficult to pinpoint.

"I picked the strongest signal and started digging," says Van Camp. "I was now down to hard ground where the rototiller hadn't touched. Even so, all I was turning up were nails."

But suddenly, things took a turn for the better. As Bob pulled a nail from a clod, he found himself staring at another \$20. Then out popped a \$10 piece!

"I changed back to my standard loop, switched to the all-metal mode, and started digging every signal," says Van Camp. The hole gradually got deeper and wider. Most of the first signals were nails, but then small, flat pieces of iron started showing up, probably the remains of an iron pot in which the coins were once buried.

"Then suddenly, all of my theories were confirmed," exclaimed Bob. "I turned up two \$10 gold pieces stuck together. This **had** to be the original cache hole!"

The next two hours were an excited blur of gold coins and rusty iron for Bob Van Camp. The \$10s and \$20s kept falling out of the edges and appearing from the bottom of the hole. As he dug deeper and wider, the gold just kept coming.

"I was so excited," stated Bob, "that I was all the way back to calm! Digging \$20 gold pieces got to be just like digging pennies on the beach!"

Clean-up time showed that Bob had found six \$20s, six \$10s, and

*(Continued on page 74)*



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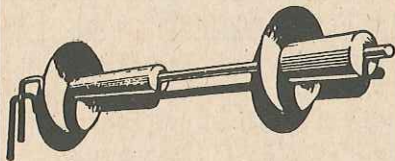
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# GOLD

(Continued from page 61)

one \$5—a total count of 13 coins for the day.

The following day yielded additional coins. Then, just as suddenly as they had appeared, the hole was dry. Continued digging produced nothing. But the total for three exciting days of detecting stood at 24 gold coins. Added to those coins found previously in the field, the grand total now stands at 44 coins, with a face value right around \$1,000. Thirty-five of the 44 coins were \$20s!

"The oldest was an 1839 \$10 gold piece, the newest was an 1876 \$20," Bob explained. "The condition of the coins ranged all the way from Very Good to Almost Uncirculated. All in all, spread out on the table, it looked like a king's ransom!"

It would be easy to come up with a thousand theories of how the coins got there originally, but to date no one knows for sure.

"There is, by the way, a sad ending to all of this," concludes Van Camp. "How can I ever go back to ordinary coinshooting? Even a silver dollar pales in comparison to a \$20 gold piece!"

Be that as it may, the fact is there are hundreds upon hundreds of other valuable caches out there just waiting to be found. And, by way of a final note, I just thought you'd like to know that Bob **did** find the \$5 gold piece with the bezel for which he originally started out searching. He just forgot to mention it in all the excitement of remembering this fabulous treasure cache! □

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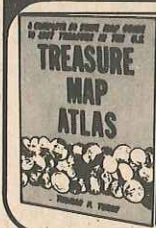
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