



Early 1900s (appx 1903) Savannah, GA Coca Cola bottle. Photo by JT Blatty. [↗](#)

## Relic Hunting for Buried Treasures

### How to Find Artifacts in Your Own Backyard



By [JT Blatty](#)  
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Who hasn't dreamed of going on a dig in Africa with the Leakeys, or standing next to Howard Carter when he discovered King Tutankhamun's tomb? Treasure hunting has always been a source of intrigue for many, but only a few enter the challenging field of archaeology.

So maybe the closest you'll ever get to the Terra Cotta Warriors is in the National Geographic Museum, but here's the good news: It's possible to be an "off the books" archaeologist in your own neighborhood, even with only 30 extra seconds to

spare.

#### Beginners Relic Hunting: Where and How

Whether you're on your way to the bus station in the morning, at the park for an afternoon jog, or in the garden on a Sunday afternoon, start looking for ground surfaces where dirt is still exposed. Is there a variety of strange debris scattered in the dirt, such as shells, rocks, and broken glass? If so, you are probably looking at "turned over" earth, or a deep layer that has been surfaced from a major construction project.

These areas are most noticeable after a hard rain, as the water rinses the debris and adds a shine that may catch your eye. Also, try poking around large trees: chances are they were around 200 years ago, and just as they do today, people then liked to break and picnic under the shady foliage.

#### Common Artifacts to Find

Remnants of glassware from Colonial America are abundant in the "turned over" dirt: Look for shards of blue and white China, fragments of old glass bottles, and glass bottle stoppers. If you find something and have extra time, try digging a little as there may be more fragments in the same proximity.

Clay tobacco pipes from the settlers are also common to find: The fragments of pipe stems are easily mistaken for cigarette butts from afar. Colonists purchased the pipes in bulk and discarded them after one or two uses. If you're lucky, you may find a pipe bowl or the upper portion of the pipe stem bearing the maker's name.

Artifacts such as Civil War and Revolutionary War uniform buttons, belt buckles, and old coins are possible to find with a little extra effort. Due to years of corrosion and rust, they are harder to identify in the debris, but when found and cleaned they are priceless.

#### Developing the Hobby and Resources

Chances are you'll want to expand the search after finding a specific treasure that sparked your interest. It's just not enough to have that fragment of a beautiful blue cobalt bottle; you'd do anything to find one in its complete form. Or maybe you'll buy a metal detector to become a hardcore Civil War uniform button collector.

There's a plethora of resources available to develop your hobby, but a great starting point is finding others in your field of interest. Try stopping by a current construction site towards the end of the workday. Seasoned relic hunters of all types can be found scanning the area during off work hours, and they are a wealth of information.

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