



News staff photo by Neil Brake

Warrior Basin Treasure Hunters, from left, John Proctor, Andy Bobyarchick and Richard Gardner prepare for weekend hunt at Brookside Park

Treasure can turn up at Brookside Park hunt

By **Byron St. Dizier**
News staff writer

Brookside Park will be rich in buried treasure this weekend as metal-detector enthusiasts from throughout the country search for thousands of dollars worth of buried loot.

Silver coins, one gold coin and tokens which can be redeemed for prizes are being buried by members of the Warrior Basin Treasure Hunters Association, which is sponsoring the two-day hunt Friday night and Saturday.

Richard Gardner, who joined the club when it was founded 12 years ago, said the group is trying to promote the responsible use of metal detectors.

"You would be surprised at the number of people who have detectors," he said. "But a lot of folks don't know how to use them. We'll be showing them this weekend."

The popularity of the sport has risen as better metal detectors, which normally cost between \$200 and \$600, have come on the market.

"A few years ago, you could find a penny if it was about 12 inches deep, but with a new detector you can sometimes find them at 18 inches," said Gardner.

As a result, many hunters are now finding that it often pays to go back over land that earlier had been scoured. Although the oldest part of the United States — the Northeast — contains the most lucrative hunting ground, residents have found their share of treasures in this part of the country, too.

Bayonets from the Civil War battle at Shiloh, \$6,000 worth of silver coins and the remains of an Indian burial, complete with silver rings and bracelets, are among relics that have been found by Alabama treasure hunters.

But Gardner warns beginning hunters against expecting to find sudden wealth.

"Some people think they're going to go out with a detector and suddenly find money and rings," he said. "They need to be patient and learn how to use it first."

Many novices randomly dig holes in the ground without knowing what they're looking for, said Gardner, who said those interested in the sport should begin by studying old deeds and records to determine what structures existed in specific locations.

"It's always good to look for old foundations that may tell you what once was there . . . look and see if there may have been a playground there," he said.

Most metal detectors now have settings that enable the user to look for specific types of metal while ignoring less attractive objects, like aluminum tabs.

Other factors can also affect the degree of difficulty a hunter encounters in his search for buried loot. When the ground is wet, detecting metal is tougher, and minerals in the soil don't make the job any easier.

The Warrior Basin Treasure Hunters meet every two weeks at the Hickory House Restaurant in Forestdale. Members talk about their expeditions and show off what they have found.

"Most people will tell you what they've found, but they usually won't say where they found it," said Gardner, who found a Civil War bayonet while digging on the Shiloh battlefield in Tennessee.

Some members are in their 70s while others are teenagers, said Gardner, a 38-year-old accountant for Alabama Power.

As "huntmaster," Gardner will direct this weekend's event, which runs from 6 to 10 p.m. Friday and all day Saturday. In addition to the coins, tokens good for prizes — including about a dozen metal detectors — will be buried at Brookside Park for the hunt.

□ Participating in the event costs \$45, but discounts will be given to senior citizens and children. Further information is available by calling 798-1336.