

Use of Metal Detectors

Tahoe National Forest



Metal detectors are used by both hobbyists and professionals to look for hidden coins, pipes, and other metallic objects. Due to the need to protect archaeological sites, we've prepared this guide for the use of metal detectors on Tahoe National Forest lands. If you have questions, contact information is listed on the back of this document.

Help Protect History

Archaeological sites throughout California provide important insights and knowledge about the past that can be gained nowhere else. They are the repositories for people and cultures not represented in history books. Removing artifacts from sites destroys the context of the site, much like tearing pages from a book. Professional archaeologists depend on finding artifacts in their original location and association to other objects, so they can accurately understand and interpret the story of that site. Ultimately, this helps us learn about little-known aspects of our past.

Sites on National Forest System lands are protected by the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 and the Secretary of Agriculture's Regulations. You could be charged with a felony if you disturb, alter, remove, or damage archaeological sites and objects that are over 100 years old on Federal lands.

How You Can Help

You can help preserve our history by leaving archaeological sites undisturbed. Report looting or vandalism to the closest Forest Service office. When making a report, ask for the District's Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) or archaeologist.

Should you discover an archaeological or historic object or site, enjoy what is there, but please do not disturb anything. Feel free to call the Tahoe National Forest Headquarters with a report of your discovery, so our Cultural Resources staff can evaluate it.

Metal Detector Use Definitions

Treasure Trove

Treasure trove includes money, gems, precious metal coins, plate, or bullion that has been deliberately hidden with the intention of recovering it later. The search for buried treasure can involve methods that are damaging to natural and cultural resources, thus a special-use permit from the Forest Service is required. Each permit request is evaluated before such permits are granted.

Archaeological Sites

The use of metal detectors to locate objects of historical or archaeological value is permitted subject to the provisions of the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 and the Secretary of Agriculture's Regulations. This activity requires a special-use permit. Permits are only issued for legitimate research conducted by qualified professional archaeologists. Unauthorized use of metal detectors in the search for and collection of historic artifacts is a Federal violation.

Mineral Deposits

The use of a metal detector to locate mineral deposits such as gold and silver on National Forest System lands is considered prospecting and is subject to the General Mining Law of 1872. Permits are not required for prospecting. However, a Plan of Operations is required if the prospecting methods will involve ground disturbing activities, such as digging holes or moving rocks. Before metal detecting, it's important to make sure the activity is not on an active mining claim. Prospectors can check mining claim records at Bureau of Land Management offices (where claims are filed), or contact the Minerals Officers at the Yuba River or American River Ranger Stations.

Recent Coins/Metal Objects

Searching for coins of recent vintage and metal objects having no historical value, as a recreational pursuit does not require a special-use permit as long as the equipment is confined to areas that do not possess historic or prehistoric resources.



United States Department
of Agriculture



Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
www.fs.usda.gov/r5

Tahoe National Forest
www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe

For More Information

Tahoe National Forest Headquarters

631 Coyote Street
Nevada City, CA 95959
530-265-4531 (voice)
TTY users dial 711 for telecommunication relay
www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe

American River Ranger District

22830 Foresthill Road
Foresthill, CA 95631
530-367-2224 (voice)
TTY users dial 711 for telecommunication relay

Sierraville Ranger District

317 South Lincoln
P.O. Box 95
Sierraville, CA 96126
530-994-3401 (voice)
530-994-3521 (TTY)

Truckee Ranger District

10811 Stockrest Springs Road
Truckee, CA 96161
530-587-3558 (voice)
530-587-6907 (TTY)

Yuba River Ranger District

15924 Hwy. 49
Camptonville, CA 95922
530-288-3231 (voice)
530-288-3656 (TTY)

All Are Welcome

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