

Guidance on searching for archaeological finds in Scotland during COVID-19

Guidance for members of the public (including metal-detectorists) searching for archaeological finds in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In-line with public health guidelines, the Treasure Trove Unit will be providing a reduced service until further notice. We will continue to monitor e-mails but at this time we will be unable to meet finders and take in artefacts. All outreach events until the end of August have been postponed. We will continue to review the situation and will resume normal service as soon as we are able.

Many aspects of the TT system have been delayed and this means that cases are taking significantly longer to process. The Treasure Trove Unit are unable to return or take in finds currently. We appreciate your patience and understanding at this time.

Should you decide to engage in metal detecting or field-walking activities, the below guidance has been produced to advise how finders can continue to stay safe and follow the law.

Introduction

Treasure Trove is based on the principles of the Scots common law *bona vacantia* (ownerless goods). The Treasure Act (1996) does not apply in Scotland.

In Scotland, any ownerless objects found by chance or through activities such as metal-detecting, field-walking, or archaeological excavation become the property of the Crown and therefore may be claimed as **Treasure Trove**.

As of 28th May 2020 (Phase 1), unrestricted outdoor exercise adhering to social distancing guidelines is permitted. Social distancing measures will be following [the route map as outlined by Scottish Government](#) and you must keep up to date with these guidelines before engaging in activities outside the home. If you choose to leave your home to search for archaeological finds through activities such as metal detecting or field-walking, you must follow this advice.

This guidance is to help individuals search safely and maintain the safety of others during such activities. It provides steps to ensure you are able to:

- Safely social distance while searching for archaeological finds
- Fulfil your legal obligation to report all finds under Scots Common Law.
- Ensure the protection and preservation of archaeology in Scotland

This guidance has been written with advice from the Treasure Trove Unit.

Searching safely

Finders should refer to the full current guidance from Scottish Government on Coronavirus (COVID-19) [route map](#) before leaving home.

Before you leave

1. As usual, you must obtain landowner permission before venturing on to any land.
2. If you gained permission from the landowner prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, you should check again that the landowner is happy for you to continue accessing their

land now that restrictions have eased. Take into consideration that the landowner may be isolating or shielding, and may wish to limit the number of people coming onto their land. You should accept any decision they make.

3. Consider how you will interact with others, such as the landowner and/or occupiers, other metal detectorists or field-walkers, and other members of the public. Make a plan for how you will ensure you practise and maintain safe social distancing.

Travelling

You must follow government guidance on [Getting Around](#).

1. There are restrictions on how far you can travel during Phases 1 to 3.
2. You should travel in a private vehicle, alone or with members of your own household.

Being outside

When you are outside you must follow government guidance on social distancing.

1. You can be outside with members of your household. In Phase 1, individuals can meet with one other household outdoors, with a maximum of 8 individuals. Social distancing measures must be followed.
2. You should be alert to other people nearby, such as walkers. It is recommended that individuals try to keep [two metres](#) away from people as a precaution.

Protecting archaeology

During this time, we are requesting that metal detectorists do not begin detecting until Phase 3 in order to support the work of the Treasure Trove Unit and protect Scotland's archaeology.

If you decide to go metal detecting, finders should avoid detecting on ground that has not been disturbed in order to avoid damaging *in situ* archaeology (such as an undisturbed hoard or human burial). This is because it may be difficult at this time to get archaeological assistance in excavating them.

If you discover an *in situ* find:

1. Cover it up, note the location (using GPS or 10-figure grid reference), and report to the Treasure Trove Unit as soon as possible. The landowner can also be informed.
2. The Treasure Trove Unit will advise you when and if an archaeological excavation can be organised. Due to the current situation, this may take weeks to be arranged. Information about the site **must** be treated in confidence.
3. If you are not sure whether you have found an *in situ* hoard, please contact the Treasure Trove Unit before excavating further.

Finders should note that in the event of an object or hoard being damaged, the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel can recommend that an *ex gratia* award be reduced or not paid.

For more information about the Treasure Trove process, please see the Code of Practice: <https://treasuretrovescotland.co.uk/code-of-practice/>

Reporting your finds

Due to the current social distancing guidelines, you will be unable to report and/or hand in finds in person to staff at the Treasure Trove Unit. However, all historical/archaeological objects must continue to be reported within 1 month of initial discovery.

1. You must report all finds to The Treasure Trove Unit (treasuretrove@nms.ac.uk).
2. You will need to complete a finds reporting form ([link](#)) and submit photographs of the objects. At least one of the photographs must contain a scale (such as a ruler or measuring tape) and the finder should send several views of the object. This will be for your own records to show you have fulfilled your legal obligations and the TTU can begin the TT process where possible.
3. You should hold onto the finds, secure them in a safe place, and await further instructions from the TTU. This may take several weeks or months.
4. Advice on how to safely store and look after the finds at home can be sought from the TTU.
5. As the finder, you do not own the artefacts and it is illegal to attempt to sell them.

Contact us

treasuretrove@nms.ac.uk

@TTUScotland

For further guidance on the Treasure Trove system: <https://treasuretrovescotland.co.uk/>