

HOT TIPS FOR NUGGET SHOOTERS

By James E. Mulkey - Published in Gold Prospector May/June 1999

It was that time of the year again, and a couple of friends of mine, "Red Bottle Ray and his buddy, "Desert Dog Dave," got the surprise of their lives when their wives gave them each a new Fisher Gold Bug metal detector for Christmas. Of course, they rushed right over and asked me where we should go to search for nuggets. Earlier, they had been shown the basics by Dale Schutte, a prospector and rockshop owner.

Their questions brought to mind all of the advice I had received over the years from successful nugget hunters, including: Chet Long, "Rattlesnake" John, Pieter Heydelaar, Stan Grist and Alaska's Ed Lapp. While each of these fellows has found thousands of nuggets, Rattlesnake John may hold the record for finding the largest nuggets. One of the whoppers he found using a Garrett gold detector weighed in at 32 ounces while another weighed an incredible 64 ounces! Yet, none has found a greater number of nuggets than Arizona's Chet Long, especially in gold districts like those around Quartzsite, which many believe, are worn out.

Chet says he loves nothing more than to get up in the morning and hit the gold trail with his detector! He says he must have what the old-timers used to call a "nose for gold." When Chet started out, he used a dry washer, but once he got his hands on a gold detector, he was convinced that it was the only way to find gold nuggets quickly and easily. Chet says the characteristics that make a successful nugget-hunter are patience, library research and persistence, but it's mostly persistence. For instance, a few years ago Chet spent a total of 28 days searching for nuggets near the old mining camp of Encampment, Wyoming using his White's Goldmaster H. During the first week, he says he didn't find a single nugget. Not willing to call it quits, Chet and his wife, Nancy, spent a few days in camp.

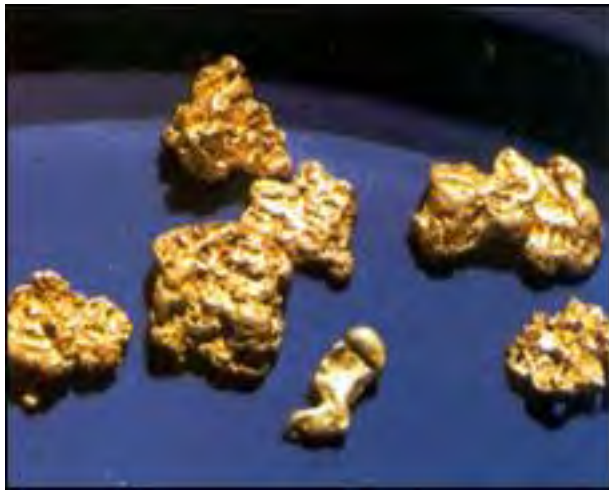


"Mostly," Chet said, "because it rained so darned hard that neither one of us could walk outside our cook tent!"

Chet spent those rainy days reading various geological reports and studying topographic maps of the area. He was convinced that there ought to be nuggets somewhere in the district that had been overlooked by the old-timers, and he was right. As soon as the rain cleared out, he grabbed his gold detector and went over the tailings piles one more time. Perhaps, the rain had loosened up some stray nuggets. Sure enough, on the first day out, Chet found a couple of half-ounce nuggets on those tailings piles! Early the next morning, he ran into a nugget patch out along the perimeter of the district, some distance from the tailing piles, followed by more nugget patches in the days that followed. All together, Chet found 397 nuggets near the ghost town of Encampment! So impressive was Chet's find that the White's detector company ran a full-page color advertisement on the back covers of both *Gold Prospector* and *Lost Treasure* magazines with photos of the nuggets found by Chet at Encampment, Wyoming.

"What advice would you give to newcomers who want to find nuggets in desert regions?" Clarence Thomas, who had just bought a White's gold detector, asked.

"Find out where old placer camps are located, travel to those locations and try your luck," Chet Said. " In other words, go where gold has been found in the past. Dig every target until you gain experience, and be sure to wear your headphones!"



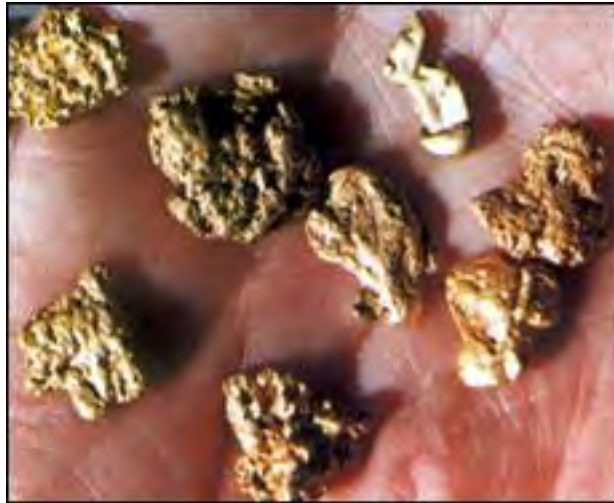
Another highly successful nugget-shooter the author is acquainted with is Stan Grist, a professional placer geologist, who began using a metal detector in the early 1980's in northern Brazil's Mato Grosso State. As a result, he found placer deposits, which were located in an ancient streambed. Stan was one of the first to use a metal detector in Brazil to find gold, a technique that returned in excess of \$10 million to his investors!

"At the time," Stan said. "We didn't know whether we had found any gold. What we had done was to fly in a backhoe, piece by piece, and assemble it; then, we dug into what I thought was an ancient river channel. By the time we had finished digging, the investors had arrived to see how we were spending their money. On that day, we had little to show for it other than the labors of twenty men and a runway carved out of the jungle. That's when I decided to try out a White's metal detector I had picked up in Rio. In an hour's time, I found three nuggets weighing in excess of three ounces and dozens of smaller nuggets using that detector in an open-cut in the river channel we had made earlier."

"When the investors finally arrived," Stan said. "I handed the head man my detector and pointed to where we had found quite a few nuggets earlier that day. Six hours later, that fellow, an experienced miner who had made his fortune during the first rush to the Amazon region, quit and handed my detector back to me. All told, we found well in excess of three pounds of gold nuggets that day, proving that placer deposits are located in ancient streambeds in the Amazon and can be found using a metal detector."

Since that time, Stan has found in excess of \$40 million in placer gold deposits in ancient streambeds throughout the Amazon region, including the headwaters of the river in both Peru and Ecuador. Stan says the one big thing to remember about finding placer gold

with a metal detector is to wear headphones! Other than that, plenty of patience and research are required. Stan told me he spends three months on library research for every month he spends in the field! Today, Stan uses a Minelab XT- 18000 gold detector as well as his old reliable, as he calls it, a White's 6000 general-purpose detector.



Patience is something each of the nugget-shooters mentioned above have in common. For these fellows, it has paid off!

Arizona's Rattlesnake John is a veteran of the gold fields of both the United States and Australia. When he's not swinging a detector, John spends his time selling the nuggets he finds at rock and gem shows such as the ones in Tucson, Arizona. At the time I met him, he was asking \$32,000 for his 32-ounce nugget and had already sold a 64-ounce nugget a few days earlier for an undisclosed sum to a museum. John told me that a nugget-shooter who wants to be successful needs to remember the three "P's," patience, persistence and plausibility. Plausibility, John says, means that you should nugget-shoot only in areas where the geology is such that you stand a good chance of finding gold. That is to say, if you find copper minerals, limonite and/or tungsten ore in a given district, you have a good chance of finding gold ore, too. John uses Garrett's Gold Stinger detector.

If you're like most folks, you're wondering where you should go to find nuggets. Chet Long has found thousands of nuggets in places like Quartzsite, Rich Hill, Octave and Prescott, Arizona; in the old placer gold fields south of Winnemucca, Nevada; near the ghost town of Encampment, Wyoming; and throughout California's Mother Lode country. Chet and his wife, Nancy, made a trip to Australia a few years ago, where he found dozens of nuggets. More recently, Chet and a Mexican partner spent two summers in the Sierra Madre

Mountains of central Mexico searching for and finding a lost Spanish gold mine. The nuggets that Chet found along a trail that led to the mine were worth \$10,000! Chet's advice on where to go nugget shooting is to go where gold has been found in the past. Among his favorite locations are dry washes in known gold districts. I asked Chet how to best find nuggets along dry washes.

"Well," Chet said, scratching his chin, "one thing you can do is to search the benches, which are located above the washes in desert areas and along stream banks in the mountains. They are so very important. In desert areas, when the wash is dry in the summer, you'll find nugget patches containing large nuggets because no one has picked over them like they have down in the washes."

"The small gullies are good, too," Chet added. "When you prospect a dry wash, if you don't find anything, extend your search out around the edges into the rough. These areas weren't searched much in the old days because digging was slow, hard work; however, with a gold detector, you can easily cover the same ground in 10 minutes that the old-timers covered in three or four days!"

"There's one other thing," Chet continued, "that you wanna do when you're nugget-shooting along a dry wash: take your detector and explore up the hillsides above the washes. I've found more than a few nugget patches on hillsides!"

Ed Lapp of Central, Alaska is another highly successful nugget-shooter. One of the questions I asked Ed Lapp, who spends his winters in Yuma, Arizona, is how on earth does he find so many nuggets in a mining district that's been worked to death by others?

"Now that I think about it," Ed said as the rain began to come down in earnest, leaking through the roof of one of the big tents at Cloud's Jamboree in Quartzsite where Ed was selling his gold, "there are a few things that I do when I arrive at a site where I suspect nuggets can be found. They're tips that might help your readers find nuggets at old mining camps. The first thing I do is to look for the tailings piles. Now, as a rule, old tailings piles have been worked to death, but I check them out anyway, especially after a rainstorm. For example, up near Eagle Creek, Alaska, a well-known mining district where they once dredged for gold, I tried my luck on the tailings piles first, but I didn't find any gold. Then, like it usually does up north, it rained really hard for several days! When things dried out, I re-checked those tailings piles again. That's when I started finding nuggets!"

"A few days later, when I got tired of climbing over the tailing piles,"

Ed continued, "I started swinging my detector out along the perimeter of the old camp, looking for the source of the tailings and the gold. The old-timers were often in a hurry to get out before winter arrived and only concerned themselves with searching for really big nuggets. Keep in mind, gold sold for \$10 an ounce in those days! It didn't take long to find a hillside where miners had used high-pressure water to remove the soils, leaving behind nuggets. I set up a high-banker, shoveled in some of the debris I found at the bottom of the hill and, as a result of a week's work with a shovel, eventually found about 65 good-sized nuggets!"

"Jeeze, that's a lot of nuggets!" I said. "What are some other techniques or tactics that you use to find gold?"

"Whenever I'm prospecting in the desert, I walk along dry washes in old mining districts searching for places where the bedrock is exposed," Ed said. "During flash flooding, the gold is transported downstream and eventually becomes trapped in cracks and groves in bedrock and can be easily found with a gold detector."

Like other professional nugget hunters, Ed Lapp believes in the value of "book work." He says you must make it a point to buy and study reference books such as those listed in the sidebar.

Another nugget-shooter, Pieter Heydelaar, who uses a Fisher Gold Bug detector, is so successful at finding nuggets with a metal detector that he is able to make his living at it. As the author of *Successful Nugget Hunting*, Pieter says that the most productive places to search for nuggets is in dry regions where the gold was recovered in the old-days by miners using dry washers.

"There are two reasons for this," Pieter wrote in the above-mentioned source. "First, the early miners could only work these placers profitable by mining the richest concentrations. They knew that there was more gold scattered around these areas, but they could not mine the whole desert with a pick and shovel for the odd nugget like you can today with your detector."

"Second, dry washers work only when the gold-bearing dirt is classified to a certain size. Usually a one-half inch screen is used, which means that any nugget larger in diameter than one-half inch would end up in the tailings. Also, in areas where gold was found caliche, it often was not broken up properly and large chunks would end up in the tailings sometimes containing many small nuggets. So, when you find a drywashed area, always detect the tailings first."

Finally, if you're using a metal detector to search for nuggets in an

old placer mining district, more than likely you'll be rewarded with unexpected finds, such as hand-forged tools, old bottles, old rifles and pistols, barbed wire, rifle shells and gold and silver coins from the days of the Old West. Chet Long, like Pieter Heydelaar, has a large collection of mining relics found while searching for nuggets, only Chet and his wife's collection takes up an entire acre of space in their backyard!

Books you need!

Arizona Bureau of Mines, Gold Placers and Placering in Arizona, Bulletin 168, University of Arizona, Tucson 1961.

William Clark, Gold Districts of California, Bulletin 193, California Division of Mines and Geology, Ferry Building, San Francisco, 1970.

Lambert Florin, Ghost Towns of the West, Promontory Press, Superior Publishing, Seattle, WA, 1971.

Pieter Heydelaar, Successful Nugget Hunting, self-published by the author in 1991 and widely available in rockshops and detector shops.

Gold Prospector's Association of America, The 1999 Mining Guide, published annually by the Gold Prospector's Association is a "must have" if you intend to find gold nuggets!

Robert Johnson, Gold Diggers Atlas, Cy Johnson & son, Publishers, Susanville, CA 1992.

Ronald S. Wielgus, Arizona's Golden Secret or How to Get Your Share of Desert Gold, self-published by the author in 1992. There are several similar titles by the same author, all with maps and tips on how to find placer gold. Widely available in rockshops and at detector dealers.

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