

Local treasure hunters help people recover lost items

By **BOBBY FOSTER**
Reporter

After losing his senior ring in ankle-deep mud at the Aggie bonfire last fall, Trey Gross was delighted to have it returned 11 days later by a group of part-time treasure hunters. Members of the Historical Research and Recovery Club of Brazos Valley use their metal detectors to search for lost jewelry, but more often they are sending signals into the ground and finding old coins, artifacts and the unknown.

Mike Orts, president of the club, said, "Metal detecting is a rewarding hobby like hunting or fishing. The difference is that most other hobbies don't allow you the chance to be rewarded financially."

The thrill of not knowing exactly what lies under the grass draws the 35-member group to state-wide competitions and keeps it active on regular outings.

For instance, some members of the club recently searched for relics on the site of a large Civil War battleground in Elkins Ford, Arkansas. Over the course of four days they found minnie balls, musket balls, pieces of cannon shrapnel and even a shotgun barrel.

It can be tedious waiting for the metal detector to beep, signaling

that some metal object is lying just a few inches underfoot.

"I think 10 out of 10 treasure seekers would like to pass over pull tabs," he said. "But if you adjusted the metal detector accordingly, you wouldn't get a signal for a ring."

But those expecting to only find pull tabs can be surprised.

Once while teaching a friend how to comb the ground, Orts got a signal.



Expecting it to be a pull tab, he ended in digging up an 1842 silver dime.

Right then the thrill of metal detecting was obvious to him, Orts said.

"It was the first pre-1900 coin I ever dug," he said. "I almost had a heart attack."

As far as stumbling upon unexpected items however, Orts said an honest effort is made to track down their original owners if possible. But

some artifacts have little value other than being from another time period.

Members of these organizations are also committed to protecting natural resources and wildlife, Orts said.

"You should barely be able to tell if someone is looking for treasure," Orts said. "The club helps make sure people keep the environment the way they found it."

Although the club has no fee for seeking lost objects, such as jewelry, Orts said people usually give some type of donation.

"Traditionally, private detectors charge 10 percent of the value of the object they're looking for," he said. "Now it's often a figure based on what (the object) is worth to the owner to have it returned."

Although the club does most of its work for individuals, Orts said the club is often called upon to help organizations.

The Society of Historic Preservation for Brazos County, for example, recently asked the club to comb a tract of land for a proposed Sesqui-centennial park. Orts said all artifacts and relics found were turned over to the society for use as they saw fit.

Ex-officer testifies at Fontenot trial

Associated Press

LIVINGSTON — A former undercover narcotics officer testified Thursday as prosecutors tried to discredit a defense attorney's conjecture that football coach Billy Mac Fleming could have been killed by underworld drug assassins, not his school principal.

Hurley Fontenot, 48, former principal at Hull-Daisetta Woodson Junior High School, is on trial for the murder of Fleming, 36, who coached and taught math and science at the school. Both wanted to marry 36-year-old school secretary Laura Nugent.

Montgomery County Attorney Jim Dozier told the 10-woman, 2-man jury he had never heard that leaving a victim without shoes and socks is a style or trademark of a drug-related killing.

Fleming's body — discovered on an old logging road in Polk County 10 days after he disappeared April

Sheriff's investigator Jimmy Belt said he had heard Fleming might have been involved with a man identified by the defense as a drug dealer.

12 — did not have shoes or socks.

Wednesday, defense attorney Dick DeGuerin asked another witness, "Have you noticed a curious similarity in drug-related deaths, that there's a trademark or signature in such dope-related executions where the victim is left with no socks or shoes?"

That witness, Liberty County sheriff's investigator Jimmy Belt, said he had heard of such a practice but had no first-hand knowledge. He told, however, of finding a white substance believed to be cocaine in

Fleming's apartment and acknowledged he had heard that Fleming might have been involved with a man identified by the defense as a drug dealer.

Dozier was introduced Thursday as an expert witness because he is a former U.S. Customs Service officer who worked undercover as a federal narcotics agent.

DeGuerin tried unsuccessfully to keep Dozier from testifying, noting he was not on the prosecution's list of potential witnesses and was a former co-worker of District Attorney Peter Speers. Dozier said he just happened to be in the Polk County courthouse and Speers asked him about the shoes-and-socks controversy.

Polk County Sheriff Ted Everitt also testified Thursday about the day Fleming's body was found. He said he saw no tire tracks or footprints on the logging road leading to the body.

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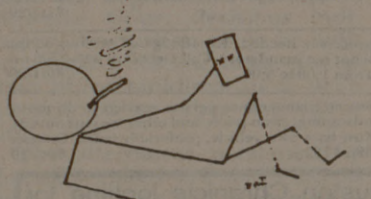
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