

## Low Water Sniping

Sometimes a prolonged dry spell can have benefits:

In South Western Canada a couple of summers ago, the weather was powerful dry. So dry in fact that some of the streams were at extreme lows--not seen in many decades. The wonderful advantage for sniping in the following, even drier, fall was that in narrow gorges, where the water usually thunders and roars, the existing stream flow was reduced that of only a gentle riffle.

That meant that bedrock that had been permanently submerged for many, many years was now accessible. A sniper's dream!!

Don't get me wrong about the ease of reaching said bedrock, it was still dicey getting across the stream even with the flow down, as the water was covering about eight million boulders, and every one of them slippery enough to grease a crooked politician's way into heaven!

Anyway, after only barking my shins a dozen or so times, and strategically filling just one of my boots with ice cold water (so cold in fact that my brain thought nothing was left alive below my knee) I finally managed to artfully stagger onto the opposite bank where ice was covering any standing water.

The sight that greeted me was exciting. Here was virgin bedrock--black slate with quartz stringers with little crevices all over the place. Cobbles were doggedly lodged anywhere they had managed to get trapped. I pulled out the Sand Shark and went to detecting and found a nice pants pocket-full of old squares--but no nuggets.

So I moved downstream a bit to an area of the mother rock that was covered with boulders and gravel.

I then realized I'd have to resort to regular prospecting methods. It was bar and shovel time. Moreover, I pack a huge bar that weighs slightly less than the Statue of Liberty, but it serves many purposes. It's saved me from plunging down mountainsides (though I should have had it with me on one hair-raising occasion up in Northern BC when I was artistically rocketing down a steep slope!), and it's stopped me from plummeting over precipices, and has stopped me as I've been rolling, completely out of control, downhill through boreal forests.

That bar will easily open crevices, and the blunt end is so solid it doubles as a big sledge! It's wonderful for prying and shifting large boulders, and the size of the bar makes it just enough of a comforting bear deterrent. I don't really relish bar and shovel work, as I'd rather some nice person just mail me the cleaned and sorted gold, but it gets the job done.

After jarring my bones so much that I thought I was one solid mass of bone, with no cartilage cushion left between any joints, I finally uncovered some nice bedrock. The overburden was only about eight inches and the bedrock underneath was full of little pockets that had lots of tightly packed small stones compacted with some clay.

For those of you familiar with good dirt, this is the stuff that gets your blood pumping: That and

the fact that no one else had been over there poking around. I got my sniping tools out of my backpack and went to work.

The first pan I washed had pickers in it! It was rare after that not to get large flakes or pickers in the pan. It was a ton of fun--the most fun I've had panning in a good while.

There were oodles of ironstones as well. Ironstone loves to travel with the gold. I even found one almost the size of a golf ball--it is one heavy sucker, but not gold--too bad, but it and my super magnet are fast and eternal friends.

I went to another patch of exposed bedrock and hunted it very, very slowly with the detector and got a nice, crisp signal. All I could see was bare bedrock, but the detector saw something else.

I got my giant bar and started pounding. Some material, same color as the bedrock, went flying, and I saw the beginning of a tiny crevice. I passed the detector over it and the signal was still strong.

I got out my little sledge that I carry in my backpack, and a chisel, and started banging away. I opened up the crevice some more and I could see little packed stones. The detector still sounded solid and mellow. A few more swings with the sledge and I saw something silver that the chisel had scraped.

I passed over it with the detector and got a loud tone. I broke the rock around it and out popped six cemented square nails--all flattened and tightly held together by minerals and rust. Nobody had been in this crevice.

So I went to work with the sledge and chisel and broke away the bedrock on the sides to widen the crack. I took the material out of the bottom--there were maybe four tablespoons full--and carefully panned the compacted material out. It held a nice piece of rod gold, some chunky little pickers, and lots of nice flakes: A beautiful crescent in the bottom of my green pan.

Now the story here is not really about my sniping skills, or lack thereof, but that the old square nails from the 1800's led me to the gold. (Those old nails could probably tell a few tales!) The gold was well hidden beneath them, but the nails definitely gave up the secret of the gold!

By Lanny in AB