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PASSAGE ONE

Reward for tourists who handed in buried treasure from Stone Age



Adam MacHale had always dreamed of finding treasure on his travels. But as the British holidaymaker scoured the shallows of a beach in Brittany, he didn't expect to find more than a few pretty seashells.

Even when something greenish-coloured caught his eye in the sea off Petit Rohu beach he believed that, at best, he had found a clam shell.

It turned out to be a Stone Age axe – one of four he found in what French experts are hailing as an exceptional archaeological discovery.

Now Mr MacHale and Sonia Hoba, his French girlfriend, have been put forward for a prize from the Ministry of Culture for donating the neolithic axes to the state.

Officials say they deserve the reward, which could be as much as £23,800, for resisting the temptation to keep the objects or to sell them to a private collector.

“They behaved really well and responsibly, like good citizens should,” said Emmanuelle Vigier, curator at Carnac Museum of Prehistory in Southern Brittany, where the axes went on display this week.

Mr MacHale, 38, a telecommunications engineer from Malvern, Worcestershire, noticed a pair of glistening objects sticking out of the mud at low tide while on holiday with his two children and Ms Hoba, 34, in Saint-Pierre-Quiberon in August 2007.

“I thought they were two edges of a clam shell and I was a bit nervous putting my hand down at first in case it snapped shut on me.”

The axes, made from jadeite, were buried in what was then marshland, about 6,500 years ago, according to French scientists. Researchers believe that the axes, made from a rock found in the Italian Alps, were owned by a Stone Age chieftain and had possibly been received as a form of diplomatic gift from leaders elsewhere.

Source: Adam Sage, from timesonline.co.uk

PASSAGE TWO

UN shuts lid on sunken treasure chests

Historic shipwrecks and sunken cities will be protected against theft by treasure hunters after an agreement was adopted by Unesco yesterday.

The agreement on the protection of underwater cultural heritage, which took four years to draw up, was adopted by Unesco's 138 member states meeting in Paris yesterday.

- 5 Bitterly opposed by private salvage operators, and only partially backed by Europe's traditional seafaring nations, it outlaws stealing from ancient shipwrecks and underwater archaeological sites, a source of rich and growing profits for treasure hunters at the expense of the world's heritage.

10 "As no site or shipwreck is prohibited to treasure hunters, protecting our underwater heritage is extremely important and increasingly urgent," Lyndel Prott of Unesco's cultural heritage division said.

"Also, new technologies have made deep-water wrecks easily accessible."

Unesco estimates that more than 3 million undiscovered shipwrecks remain scattered across the world's ocean floors.

- 15 In Portugal alone at least six international treasure hunting companies have set up base to exploit the immensely rich underwater heritage off its coast, Unesco said, and in the Philippines local fishermen are recruited to scour the seabed for wrecked Spanish galleons.

"An archaeologist can spend years studying and excavating a ship, conserving its objects and publishing his findings," Mounir Bouchenaki of Unesco said.

- 20 "With treasure hunters, records are not kept and artefacts are spread around the world in private collections," he said. "This is tragic for humanity as a whole. Where there is no knowledge, there is no memory."

When a site was excavated properly, he added, everyone benefited. The archaeological survey of the ship, *Pandora*, which sank in 1791 off the coast of Queensland, Australia, helped complete the story of the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the extraordinary search for the mutineers.

- 25 The agreement, which will come into force once 20 countries have ratified it, is designed to fill a legal vacuum. Although many states already protect and manage historic wrecks and sites within their waters, those wrecks in international waters – such as the *Titanic* – are "basically up for grabs".

- 30 The agreement defines underwater cultural heritage as "all traces of human existence of a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water for at least 100 years".

The oceans cover seven-tenths of the planet. They also wash over the debris of 5,000 years of human history. But only with the development of scuba diving and mobile submersibles, capable of withstanding fierce pressures miles below the surface, have we been able to look at the largest unexplored area on earth.

- 35 The most dramatic prizes lie in ancient sunken shipping. Robert Ballard, who found the *Titanic*, has discovered five ships of the Roman period settled in soft Mediterranean mud.

Source: adapted from *The Guardian*, Saturday 3 November 2001

PASSAGE THREE

In 1943, Gordon Butcher found a big metal dish while he was ploughing a field near Mildenhall in England. He and his boss, Sydney Ford, dug up from there 34 items of buried Roman silver. Ford kept the treasure for three years and told no-one about it. When the “find” was revealed to the authorities, Ford and Butcher only got a small reward and not the full market value they would have received if they had reported it right away.

This account tells of Butcher’s first discovery.

Around three o’clock the thing happened.

There was a slight jolt, the wooden peg broke, and the tractor left the plough behind. Butcher stopped, dismounted and walked back to the plough to see what it had struck. It was surprising for this to have happened here, in a field. There should be no oak trees underneath the soil in this place.

5 He knelt down beside the plough and began to scoop the soil away around the point of the ploughshare. The lower tip of the share was twelve inches down. There was a lot of soil to be scooped up. He dug his gloved fingers into the earth and scooped it out with both hands. Six inches down... eight inches... ten inches... twelve. He slid his fingers along the blade of the ploughshare until they reached the forward point of it. The soil was loose and crumbly, and it kept falling back
10 into the hole he was digging. He could not therefore see the twelve-inch-deep point of the share. He could only feel it. And now he could feel that the point was indeed lodged against something solid. He scooped away more earth. He enlarged the hole. It was necessary to see clearly what sort of an obstacle he had struck. If it was fairly small, then perhaps he could dig it out with his hands and get on with the job. If it was a tree-trunk he would have to go back to Ford’s and fetch a spade.

15 ‘Come on,’ he said aloud. ‘I’ll have you out of there, you hidden demon, you rotten old thing.’ And suddenly, as the gloved fingers scraped away a final handful of black earth, he caught sight of the curved rim of something flat, like the rim of a huge thick plate sticking up out of the soil. He rubbed the rim with his fingers and he rubbed again. Then all at once, the rim gave off a greenish glint, and Gordon Butcher bent his head closer and closer still, peering down into the little hole he had dug
20 with his hands. For one last time, he rubbed the rim clean with his fingers, and in a flash of light, he saw clearly the unmistakable blue-green crust of ancient buried metal, and his heart stood still.

It should be explained here that farmers in this part of Suffolk, and particularly in the Mildenhall area, have for years been turning up ancient objects from the soil. Flint arrowheads from very long ago have been found in considerable numbers, but more interesting than that, Roman pottery
25 and Roman implements have also been found. It is known that the Romans favoured this part of the country during their occupation of Britain, and all local farmers are therefore well aware of the possibility of finding something interesting during a day’s work. And so there was a kind of permanent awareness among Mildenhall people of the presence of treasure underneath the earth of their land.

30 Gordon Butcher’s reaction, as soon as he saw the rim of that enormous plate, was a curious one. He immediately drew away. Then he got to his feet and turned his back on what he had just seen. He paused only long enough to switch off the engine of his tractor before he walked off fast in the direction of the road.

35 He did not know precisely what impulse caused him to stop digging and walk away. He will tell you that the only thing he can remember about those first few seconds was the whiff of danger that came to him from that little patch of greenish blue. The moment he touched it with his fingers, something electric went through his body, and there came to him a powerful premonition that this was a thing that could destroy the peace and happiness of many people. In the beginning, all he had

wished was to be away from it, and to leave it behind him and be done with it for ever. But after
40 he had gone a few hundred yards or so, he began to slow his pace. At the gate leading out from
Thistley Green, he stopped.

‘What in the world is the matter with you, Mr Gordon Butcher?’ he said aloud to the howling wind.
‘Are you frightened or something? No, I’m not frightened. But I’ll tell you straight, I’m not keen
to handle this alone.’

45 That was when he thought of Ford.

Source: adapted from *The Mildenhall Treasure*, by Roald Dahl.

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