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What Can I Collect With a Hobby License?

By Carl Naylor

According to state law, licensed hobby divers are allowed to conduct recreational, small-scale recovery of artifacts and fossils. The law goes on to say that recovery is limited to objects that can be recovered by hand. It is the intent of this law, the South Carolina Underwater Antiquities Act of 1991, to allow licensed hobby divers to recover small artifacts such as bottles, fossils, and shark's teeth found along the bottom of state waters. However, several incidents over the past few years indicate that even licensed hobby divers may not understand what those terms mean.

In 1997, a licensed hobby diver recovered a prehistoric canoe from the Cooper River. When contacted by SCIAA staff, he claimed that he didn't know that recovery of such a large artifact was not permitted under the stipulations of a hobby license. After the diver threatened to destroy the canoe, SCIAA staff, along with a SC Department of Natural Resources law enforcement officer, confiscated the canoe, and the diver was written a citation.

More recently a group of hobby divers recovered an old anchor from the Cooper River. The anchor's

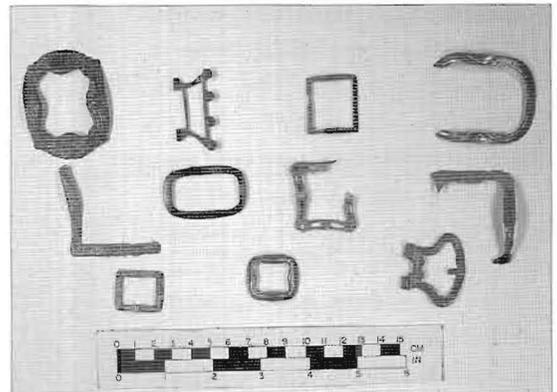
shank measured more than six feet and the anchor itself weighed several hundred pounds.

The divers admitted using 55-gallon drums to raise the anchor and get it to the boat landing. After learning of the recovery, SCIAA staff members contacted the divers and advised them to return the anchor to the river bottom. The anchor is now part of the Cooper River Underwater Heritage Trail.

Hobby divers are reminded that the law states: All powered mechanical dredging and lifting devices and buoyancy equipment, except a personal flotation device of any sort, are prohibited including, but not limited to, prop wash, air lift, water dredge, and pneumatically operated lift bags, under the (hobby) license.

Should you find an anchor or canoe on the bottom, instead of trying to recover it, record it. Basic measurements will do—length of shank, distance between points, length of arm, width of shank, etc. If you find a canoe (or any other kind

of shipwreck), basic measurements you should take include length, width, thickness of sides, and depth from sides to the inside bottom. Also, the diver should note any tool marks or evidence of burning.



Artifacts collected by Steve Nash from a site in the Cooper River with a hobby license. (SCIAA photo)

Also, divers should note that the law also states: No more than ten artifacts a day may be recovered from a shipwreck site. Divers may not destroy the integrity of the ship's structure by removing or moving timbers, fittings, fastenings, or machinery. Hobby divers who have recovered any artifacts from a shipwreck site must include in the quarterly artifact report both a locational reference to the shipwreck site by locating the site on a topographical or hydrographic chart and a sketch map of the wreck site showing the location where the artifacts were recovered from in relation to the wreck.

If you want to learn more about the proper way to record underwater sites, you should consider signing up for the Underwater Archaeology Field Course set for August 2-6, 2000. Anyone wishing a complete copy of the South Carolina Underwater Antiquities Act of 1991, should contact Carl Naylor at (843) 762-6105.



Artifacts collected by Steve Nash from a site in the Cooper River with a hobby license. (SCIAA photo)