

THE BROKEN CABLE PATCH

by Bill O'Connor

What is a gold patch? My old mate reckoned three pieces of gold in the same small area qualified as a patch but whatever the minimum nugget requirement is, the main rules for any patch are to work it until there's nothing left and then keep real quiet about its location because new detectors will be built in the future that will be able to return and find more gold there. And that's exactly what we did. We found a nice little patch 100km out in the spinifex from Nullagine and lucked on to five gold nuggets that totalled 115 grams. We had a great time but often such wonderful times are beset by difficulties and this trip was no exception.

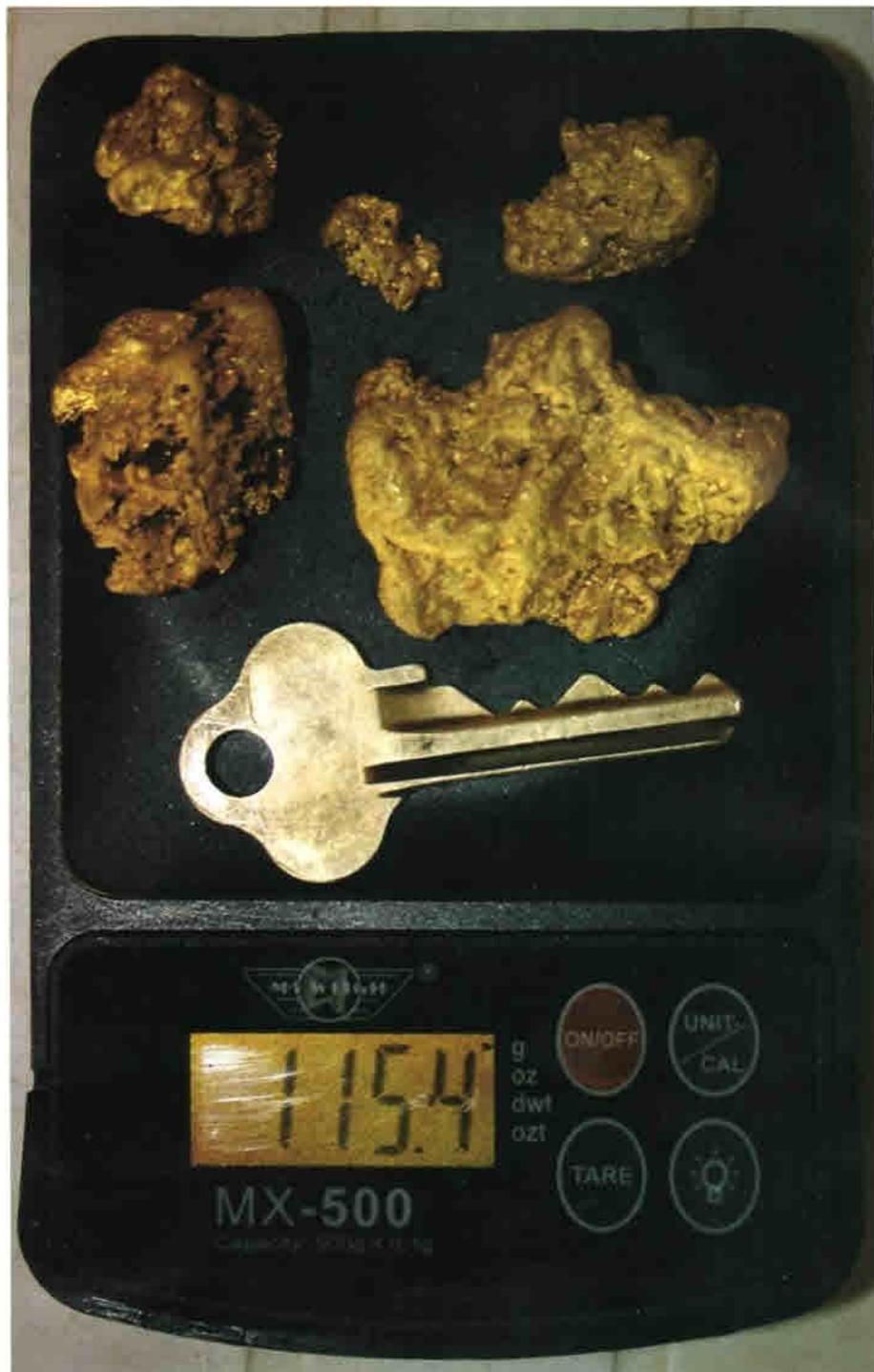
In our case the problem was that after I'd found the first 2-gram nugget I broke the spare battery cable to my brand new Minelab 4500. This meant I had no more battery cables for the 4500 and no hope of getting another one or repairing either of the two broken ones.

If you pay careful attention to this story there may be enough clues for you to find this spot (which breaks one of the rules relating to gold patches) and, given the circumstances we were in, there may be plenty of gold still left at the spot.

This trip was a winter sojourn for me and Sue and we decided to travel in a trusty old camper and bush bash remote places to find some big gold and enjoy the peaceful solitude of the Aussie bush.

We took everything on the trip for every emergency because we were going into the 'tell a copper where you are' remoteness of Western Australia to search for gold. Every spare and tool imaginable was taken, even a welding plant, but alas, I left the soldering iron at home.

We started the trip in June last year and travelled to Cue, a wonderfully preserved old goldrush town about 650km north-east of Perth between Mount Magnet



and Meekatharra. Here we stayed with our mate Udo and his fabulously mad dog, Mandy.

Above: Gold from the Broken Cable Patch

Right: People who sneak on to mining company leases and use machinery not only ruin it for everyone in the game, they are straight out criminals

Below right: The author with his 15-gram and 62-gram nuggets

TUNING UP THE NEW MINELAB

Udo has been in the metal detecting and rockhound game for longer than Minelab has been making metal detectors and our time in Cue was spent really tuning up the Minelab 4500 and being regaled with unbelievable but true stories of the old days. You have probably heard some of them. Like the one where two prospectors sat down in the main street of Geraldton outside the Freemason Hotel and cut a 33-ounce nugget in half with a tomahawk. The reason they did this was because they couldn't find anyone with enough money to buy the whole nugget and one prospector wanted his half share.

Udo also took us around to a few of the local spots like Curtis Find, Mainland, Mindoolah, his own mining lease and all the places modern Australian goldrush nomads go to in Cue at this time of year.

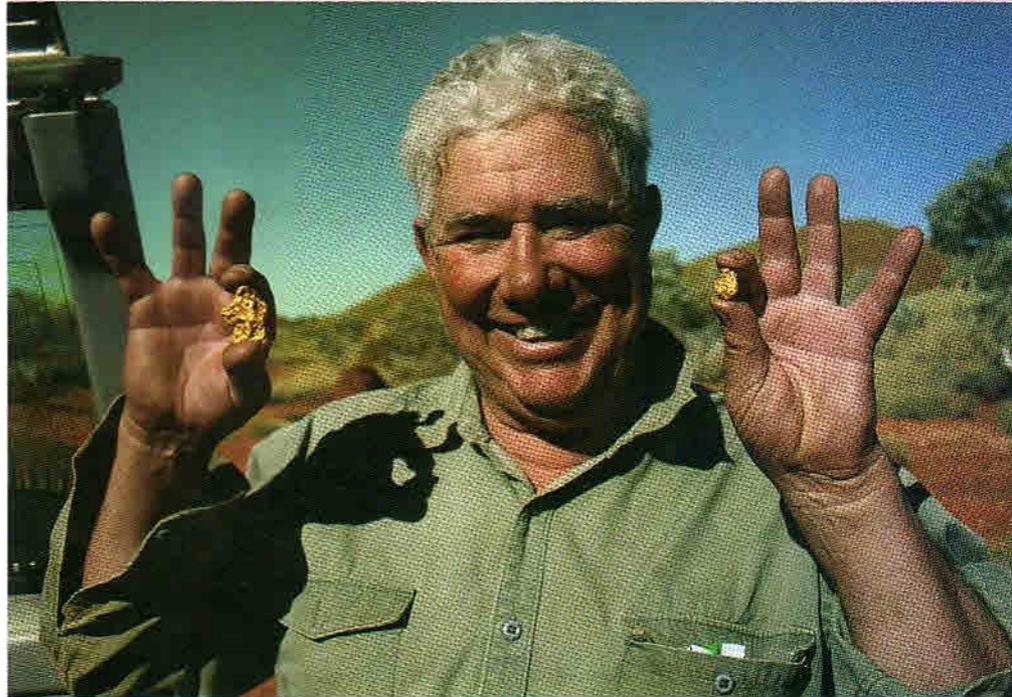
Sue found her first piece of gold ever, a lovely 6.5-gram nugget beneath a tree we'd parked under for shade the day before and she was a very happy lady.

Alas we had to leave Cue and head to the great outback far away. Just like the old timers, why would you stay in a place where you are finding gold when there is unknown, unproven ground across the desert a thousand kilometres away?

On the way we wanted to detect at a spot near Meekatharra we'd had to leave abruptly earlier in the year because of family business in Perth. On the morning we'd had to head back to Perth we found four small pieces in under two hours and I was sure we would now find a lot more.

Unfortunately, 'shamateurs' had been in with a small grader and cleaned the area out. I doubt they had permission from the company that very generously allowed metal detector operators on their lease in this area. And even if they did, they are not allowed to use this sort of equipment and disturb the ground.

People like that ruin metal detecting and prospecting for the 99.9% of operators who do the right thing. Shame on them.



TWO SMALL PIECES

We still managed to find two small pieces weighing 0.2 and 0.4 of a gram. Oh well, at least we could use them as test pieces for the 4500.

After the disappointment at Meekatharra we set off for Nullagine and Marble Bar via Newman where we stocked up on supplies.

When you get into the country from Meekatharra right out to Nullagine through Woodie Woodie and Marble Bar, you start to get an inkling of the ruggedness and enormity of Australia. It is stunning country out there.

We eventually arrived at the charming and secretive little Nullagine Caravan Park and immediately met a bloke who informed us he had just found six pieces of

gold weighing less than a gram all up but he wouldn't tell us where his secret spot was, except to say that it was somewhere in WA. He was very excited and perhaps just a little mad.

We detected for a few days around the town and while we didn't find any gold we did discover spinifex. This stuff definitely has an inbuilt defence mechanism. If you get anywhere near it without protective canvas or leather leg protectors, it will penetrate your jeans and in some cases go right through the elastic of your boots and socks. Then, if you don't look after the scratches and remove the spines, the small wounds can often get infected. Make sure you are adequately protected if you want to prospect up Nullagine or Marble Bar way.



Left: The camp at Carawine Gorge

Below left: Sue with her first ever gold, all 6.5 grams of it



We decided to camp in the bush out from Nullagine and try our luck detecting. The scenery east of Nullagine is mind blowing – majestic hills and broad plains with ribbons of whitegum where the creeks flow out of the hills and valleys.

Finally, after negotiating the Skull Springs Road out towards Mosquito Creek, plus a few rugged tracks, we arrived at a valley and set up camp. There was some old pushings in the valley and recently someone had burnt the spinifex and tried metal detecting the area. It looked a likely spot so we decided to give it a go.

NUMEROUS SPINIFEX BARBS

The first day we walked many kilometres with full kit and water and only had numerous spinifex barbs in our jeans,

socks and legs to show for our trouble. The second morning it was the same; a lot of walking and no gold. It appeared we had arrived at the area a little too late and it was already cleaned out but, on the way back to the camp for lunch, I found my first piece – a nice 2-gram bit on the top of a ridge that sloped down to a creek. Things were definitely looking up but that's when disaster struck. The Minelab 4500 battery cable malfunctioned. This was a disaster because it was my spare battery cable, the original cable having malfunctioned a week before.

When I returned to camp with the sad news, Sue informed me that out of the dozen eggs we'd bought at the Newman supermarket, 11 were green and, more importantly as far as I was concerned,

we were down to the last few cans of beer. However, we had plenty of wine, flour for damper and water to wash the wineglasses with.

Over a small glass of wine and half an egg on damper, I realised that I would have to use Sue's Minelab 3500 if I wanted to continue detecting. I love the 3500 but why fly a Cessna when you can soar in a fighter jet.

The next day I decided to chain the slope leading down to the creek and found another piece that was much bigger, 15.2 grams in fact. I was ecstatic. The spinifex made it very hard to detect though and I didn't have a small elliptical mono coil with me that could be worked in between and under the tough plant.

Then, in the afternoon, I got another signal that just about blew my head off; a veritable 'empty beer can' signal. I scraped a couple of centimetres of surface soil away and there was a magnificent 62-gram nugget of pure gold.

ALL THE AVAILABLE GOLD

But I wasn't satisfied. I needed to use the 4500 and not the 3500 if I was going to convince myself I had gleaned all the available gold from the patch. So, we packed up camp and headed off to Marble Bar to get phone coverage to order a spare lead.

We travelled via Woodie Woodie and Carawine Gorge, then to Port Hedland to pick up the two spare battery cables kindly Express Posted to me by Petra from Reeds Prospecting.

To get the cables involved a round trip of some 700 kilometres and I suppose there is a fine line between keenness and stupidity but it was worth it in the end because we picked up a few more pieces deep in the creekbed that weighed in at 36 grams. In total the little valley gave up 115 grams of gold and yeah, maybe we would have detected the gold up at depth with the 3500 but why take the risk?

I guess the moral of this story is, if you plan on travelling to the back of beyond in search of gold, take three battery cables for your detector and don't forget the soldering iron.

