

More Than Messages in Bottles

Interesting Beachcombing Finds



Some interesting beach finds including a decorative brick, a teddy bear, a mannequin leg and a daily beach badge.

Beachcombers often lose track of time as they scour the sand in search of sea glass or shells, and before they realize it, they have walked over a mile or more in their pursuit of treasures. Sometimes the sea delivers more than just a random message in a bottle and gives a whole new meaning to the term “finders keepers,” especially after storms and abnormally high tides.

The “Roster of the Ridiculous”

As a part of their bi-annual Beach Sweeps event, the environmental organization Clean Ocean Action tallies every piece of debris collected by over 170,000 volunteer participants since the event began in 1985. While final numbers are still being tallied for 2023, over eight million pieces of debris have been removed from over seventy sites in fifty-nine municipalities and parks along the New Jersey coast as of 2022.

“The data collected by the thousands of dedicated volunteers up and

down the coast is one part of the amazing story of the Beach Sweeps. When the data is put to work in the form of advocacy for better policies and laws to reduce pollution sources, it makes the Beach Sweep a legacy of action that benefits communities, wildlife, the economy, and the environment,” says Kari Martin, Clean Ocean Action’s Advocacy Campaign Manager.

Clean Ocean Action relies upon site captains and participants to accurately log everything picked up before properly discarding the debris. Their annual “Dirty Dozen” list includes the most collected pieces of debris and the worst offenders of litter on the seas.

One interesting 2022 trend was a noticeable reduction in the number of straws, bags, and foam collected because of the Single Use Waste Reduction Act going into effect that May. Plastic shopping bags dropped from the #7 most collected item to #14, and foam takeout containers

decreased by 29% from spring to fall 2022 and decreased by 38% from 2021 to 2022.

The Dirty Dozen typically includes plastic pieces, plastic bottle caps and lids, food/candy wrappers/bags, cigarette filters, foam pieces, straws/stirrers, plastic cap rings, plastic beverage bottles, and more. In fall 2020, personal protective equipment, including face masks (both disposable and reusable) and disposable gloves, were added to the Dirty Dozen for the first time because of the pandemic.

However, COA’s annual “Roster of the Ridiculous” raises the most eyebrows. The list of anything and everything considered unusual reported by volunteers varies from year to year, but some of the most bizarre items from the past five years include the following:

2022: a car (batteries, bumper, parts, pieces, spark plug, tire), half of a dock, garden shovel, refrigerator, Jell-O mold, propane tank

2021: mini-fridge, floating dock, sink from a boat, fake flowers, G.I. Joe doll, Christmas tree ornaments, Turkish Airlines hygiene kit

2020: bed frame, twelve-foot hose, foam tombstone, Trump 2020 flag, barbecue grill, tool box, LG computer monitor

2019: car bumper, wheelchair, turkey baster, chainsaw cover, camera lens, windshield wiper, glass trophy, Christmas tree, carpet

2018: air conditioner unit, barbed wire, porta potty door, roof shingles, plastic pig, upper dentures, shotgun shells

Other peculiar finds reported over the years include a cheese grater, a bird cage, a Bradley Beach beach badge from 1977 found in 2008, a parking meter, and mannequin legs with socks.

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Jill Ocone

Munitions Among Us

Every now and then, remnants from history appear upon the Jersey Shore’s beaches to remind us that war was never that far away.

Just weeks before the summer 2007 began, more than one thousand unexploded World War I-era munitions were discovered in the sands of Surf City’s beaches. The Army Corps of Engineers were finishing up a seventy million dollar beach replenishment project when an unnamed resident discovered an antique grenade while using a metal detector. During the following nine weeks, almost 1,100 devices were discovered within the area where sand had been dumped. Officials determined the munitions, mostly anti-aircraft shells, were dumped offshore before Congress passed laws prohibiting ocean dumping, sometime before 1973. The beaches on LBI remained off-limits for a time out of an abundance of caution and for officials to determine that all the munitions were removed.

As reported in this magazine’s Spring 2015 issue, a World War II-era mine was discovered in the ocean about ten feet from the shoreline by Larry Bathgate in Bay Head just south of the Johnson Street beach entrance in June 2013. Divers from the Point Pleasant Beach Dive Team and Naval Weapons Station Earle first believed the three-foot metal ball to be a buoy but soon realized it was a mine that might contain explosives. Officials decided the best course of action was to detonate the mine because of its weight and unknown stability. On Wednesday, June 26, 2013, nearby residents were evacuated from their homes and beachgoers were kept off the beaches as a precaution. At 11:00 AM (high tide), officials from the U.S. Navy detonated the mine, which sent a boom throughout Bay Head and a column of water one hundred twenty-five feet into the air. Afterwards, officials determined the device did not contain any explosives and never posed a threat to residents or vacationers. Officials believed the surge and currents from Superstorm

Sandy led to the mine’s appearance so close to shore.

Points from the Past

Almost since the dawn of time, the ocean has served as a food source by providing a home for fish, crustaceans, cephalopods, mollusks, algae, and aquatic plants. From dinosaurs to animals and early humans, the ocean’s bounty provides sustenance to all kinds of beings. Three ancient artifacts found at local beaches during a fourteen-month span serve as a reminder of the Jersey Shore’s place in the world’s historical timeline since the end of the last Ice Age.



A Clovis Point, discovered in Beach Haven by nine-year-old Noah Cordle.

In August 2014, Noah Cordle, a nine-year-old Virginia boy vacationing with his family on Long Beach Island, found a projectile point at the edge of the surf in Beach Haven while boogie boarding. Assistant curator of the archaeology and ethnography bureau of the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton, Greg Lattanzi, determined the piece to be made from jasper by the Pale Indians between 10,000 and 13,500 years ago. Cordle donated the 2.5-inch-long artifact, known as a Clovis point (and similar in shape to an arrowhead), to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. It became the first Clovis point from New Jersey in their collection.

Less than a month later, Victoria Doroshenko, an eleven-year-old from Fair Lawn, found a similar pre-

historic projectile point on the beach at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park in Long Branch while she searched for seashells. Once again, Lattanzi’s expertise was called upon, and he determined the artifact to be an Adena point and perhaps crafted by Early Woodland people between 1,000 BC and 100 BC.

In October 2015, Audrey Stanick of Lanoka Harbor found a third ancient artifact while she was searching for sea glass in Seaside Heights. Lattanzi identified the object as a Pale Indian point from the Middle Period, about 10,000 to 11,000 years old. Officials from the New Jersey State Museum said in a statement that the projectile point was made from flint and that its sharp edges were smoothed from having been tumbled in the ocean, like what happens to sea glass.

Because bow-and-arrow technology was still centuries ahead in the future, the artifacts are referred to as projectile points instead of arrowheads. Projectile points were typically carved from stone and most likely used as spear points for protection and hunting.

“Periodically, points get washed up on the shore and in the bay area,” Lattanzi explained. “This is due to an increased number of storms as well as their intensity. There are thousands of precontact sites offshore that are disturbed through storm action, and over time, those artifacts wash up on shore.” Researchers believe beach replenishment efforts after Superstorm Sandy possibly unearthed the artifacts from the depths of the ocean floor and they became redeposited closer to the surface.

Lattanzi added that if anyone finds something resembling a projectile point or arrow head along the shore that may be archaic to contact the New Jersey State Museum.

You never know when the next treasure will turn up on the Jersey Shore’s beaches. To the person at the right spot at the right time goes the spoils.

—Jill Ocone

courtesy Gregory Lattanzi, New Jersey State Museum