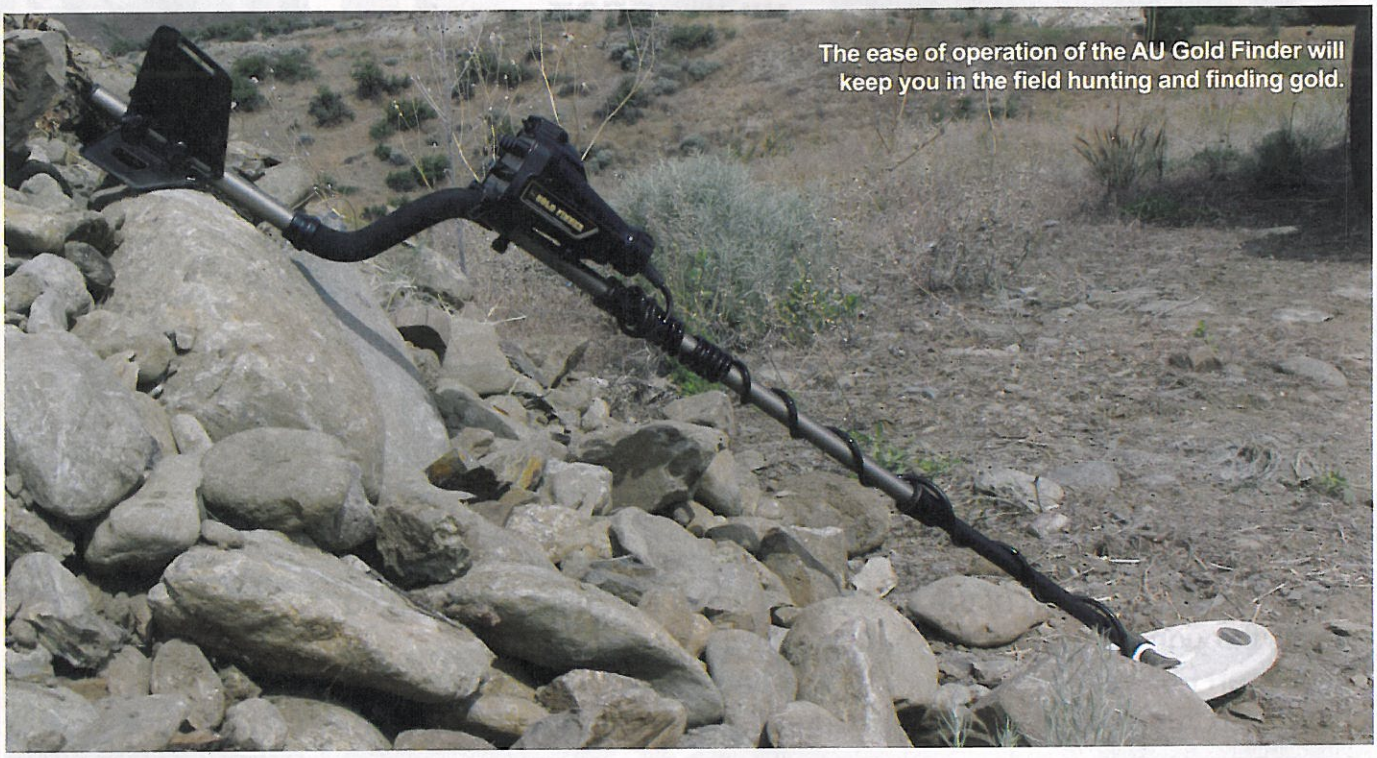
# A FIELD TEST

Story & photos by Kevin Hoagland

## NOKTA AU GOLD FINDER



The ease of operation of the AU Gold Finder will keep you in the field hunting and finding gold.

*Versatility and precision at a higher frequency*

When any company enters a crowded product space with a new product to compete with well-established brands, I always ask questions. I have to know if the new product is at least as good as the top dog or better. Does it really work? Does it meet a need? And, is it competitively priced? I have to say that, in this case, Nokta did the research. Their engineers took the time to ask questions of metal detectorists around the world and set out to create a high frequency analog VLF detector that meets their needs—the Nokta AU Gold Finder.

Before going any further, let's talk about why it's such an important goal to build detectors in the higher frequency range: The higher the frequency, the better the detector will work to find smaller pieces of gold closer to the surface. It's all about the strength and size of the sine wave and energy dissipation. Now, I'm not saying I can't get depth with a high frequency detector, nor am I saying I can't find small gold with a lower frequency detector.

If you think about other methods of gold prospecting and relate that to detecting, together we can paint a pretty clear picture. For example, for every thousand pieces of fine gold we recover, we get a couple of pickers. And, for every thousand pickers we recover, we get a small nugget. For every thousand small nuggets, we find we get a larger one, and so on and so forth. It's a law of averages. In detecting, this means that for every large nugget there are thousands of smaller nuggets and large pickers that in many cases are being passed over every day with some of the lower frequency detectors, and even many of the much more expensive Pulse Induction machines. It just happens. In a lot of cases, the reason gold is missed in the field is because of user error or inexperience. It's not the fault of the machine. So, companies build detectors that will find small gold easily by using higher frequencies. And, in the case of the Nokta AU Gold Finder, it's almost effortless for detectorists to be able to find gold.

### Unboxing the AU-Gold Finder

The AU Gold Finder comes complete with the 56 kHz control box, two waterproof coils, headphones, batteries, manuals and all of the warranty information.

In other words, it comes with everything you need to get up and running in minutes. Plus, it includes a hip-mount strap that allows you to disconnect from the shaft. The strap works perfectly to get the weight off your arm, especially while you're learning every button and knob, and is a must if you're planning to spend long hours in the goldfields.

### The manual

I seldom, if ever, start a field test by reading the manual, and this was no exception.

The Gold Finder design makes setup almost completely intuitive, but I did refer to the user manual a couple of times to more fully understand the machine's functionality as I got it ready to hunt. If this is your first detector, my advice is to sit down and read the manual before doing anything.

One thing you'll read in the manual is that the Gold Finder is IP54 certified. Yes, I did have to look up IP54, which means that the Gold Finder is protected against limited dust ingress and water spray from all directions. That alone makes me happy because I really do not enjoy ending a day over a dust storm or rain shower once I'm in the field.

### The controls

The Gold Finder features three major detecting modes: ALL METAL, DISC 1 FAST and DISC 2 DEEP. These modes are accessed by a toggle switch on the lower left of the control box, and are easy to use and understand. The rest of the control panel may seem a bit complex for a new detectorist. There are a great deal of knobs and switches, but don't let the functions deter you. After a little time on the machine, you'll learn that everything was well thought out and placed in a way that allows you to move from function to function in a certain order, giving you what you need where you need it to be.

Now, for those who've been detecting for some time and are moving up to this detector, there are several features the Gold Finder offers that many of you won't recognize, but it's very important to understand these functions to maximize performance. For example, iSAT is a circuit that adjusts the speed of the threshold recovery and works in conjunction with the unit's sensitivity and ground balance. Mastering the iSAT is crucial when hunting in areas of high to extreme or variable mineralization where decreasing the sensitivity or increasing the iSAT could cause you to lose faint target responses of small or deep targets.

How this works is simple. Threshold (the constant or slightly broken background sound) is where your targets will be heard. In many cases, these targets are nothing more than just a small bump in the threshold and are all too often walked over by not having the sensitivity properly ground balanced on most detectors. Utilizing the iSAT, you can set the sensitivity to the maximum that the ground can handle and dial in the threshold recovery speed to assure repeatable signals on good metal targets. This will allow you to overhear excessive background instability or slow response while hunting at the Gold Finder's maximum performance level for small, shallow and larger, deeper targets.

For my detecting style, this a great feature and one that I found myself using a lot. In extreme ground with a great deal of variation of the ground mineralization, I would set my sensitivity to the ground in one spot. When there were variations in the threshold that were clearly caused by mineralization, I could easily overcome them by increasing or decreasing slightly the iSAT. I was able to keep my Gold Finder at maximum depth and sensitivity with little to no effort. It was also a great deal faster to adjust rather than constantly resetting the sensitivity.


**The Nokta AU Gold Finder is easy to use, precise and fast. It is quickly becoming my go-to VLF detector.**

**Discrimination: DISC 1 FAST and DISC 2 DEEP**

As many of you know, I'm not a big fan of discrimination. I am an "all metal" guy who believes in digging every target. After spending time on any machine, you can audibly discriminate to a slight degree hot rocks and some other targets, but using discrimination all of the time could cause you to miss good targets that may be masked by junk or carry enough varied minerals that the target may sound bad when in fact it's a valuable one.

To give the AU Gold Finder a rigorous test, I used the machine in both DISC 1 (Fast) and DISC 2 (Deep) modes, and I will say that each of these settings does have a place on the detector. So, as long as you don't become too dependent on discrimination, these settings will serve you well.

DISC 1 Fast works very well in areas with a high level of ground mineralization and a lot of hot rocks. I was actually surprised I could eliminate all but the worst of the hot rocks. And, in some of my testing with planted targets in the test bed, I was able to work through high mineralization and hot rocks to identify good targets.

Nokta states that the DISC 2 Deep setting is best suited for areas of lesser mineralization and hot rocks and can be used for deeper discrimination. It does work, and if I were to hunt in an area with a great deal of trash, I might use it more than I did in the testing. Actually, I *know* I would use it, but at the same time, I would be concerned about good targets at a greater depth that could be missed.

The Gold Finder features a TONE/LED system which I used, but not extensively. New detectorists might be inclined to use the single-tone, two LED lights which visually signal green for non-ferrous and red for ferrous targets. I will say that two ferrous targets in my test bed that were placed over non-ferrous targets showed as only ferrous targets. Though mixed signals represent "worst case" targets, by flipping to two-tone LED OFF mode I was able to pick out the audio signal of both ferrous (low tone) and non-ferrous (high tone) targets. All in all, I believe it's a feature that's great for new detectorists with their first machine, but I would hope it's not something anyone would rely upon too heavily as part of their longterm hunting technique.

Finding gold is not complicated, especially when you have a detector that offers so many features at your fingertips. This is a feature—not a function—in my book, and like anything there is a time and a place for its use. For that, I like the feature and it definitely makes the Gold Finder a detector that you can grow into and not out of.


**Six nuggets in six days found at five different locations, including recovering a nugget I had lost as a test target a couple of months ago.**

In the test garden, the Gold Finder rates a 90 out of 100 for functional discrimination, and in the field I will rate it at 80 out of 100 for overall discriminating capabilities. Now, if you don't believe those are good numbers, the closest VLF detector on the high side of my scale ranks about 65.

I have to say this from the heart: "I will not hunt in a full-time discrimination mode. I do not trust discrimination." Yet, I will occasionally use discrimination to test a target that I think is iffy, meaning I'll always hunt in the all-metal mode, and only use discrimination to test a target.

**Ground Balance (GB):** To me, the Gold Finder ground balance offers the best of all three worlds in a way that few other machines compare.

**Manual GB:** The manual GB is fast and easy to use. Utilizing a dial for positive and negative is reminiscent of older machines I loved for their

ability to fractionally fine tune the GB to any ground. This is a feature that I use exclusively anytime I'm working ground that is somewhat consistent in its mineralization. If you're going to use the Manual GB, make certain that you're testing the GB at the end of each swing and making the necessary adjustments. The detector only remembers the spot where you balanced the machine, making it truly necessary to assure that the detector is always balanced.

**Automatic GB:** The Auto GB on the AU Gold Finder is almost spot on, and for those of you who are just getting into detecting or those wanting to use a manual GB detector, this is a great feature. Press and pump the detector up and down a few times and it will quickly ground balance. I found that even with the auto being an averaging of the ground, in a new spot I could use the auto and only have to make minute adjustments to the detector with the manual GB to balance perfectly to the ground,

**Auto Tracking:** This feature is perfect for those new to detecting or those working highly mineralized ground where it would be virtually impossible to keep a manual GB tuned in. To use the feature, you simply do a manual or auto ground balance, flip the tracking switch to the ON position and the detector will do the rest for you.

**Sensitivity:** Sensitivity is the heart and soul of a metal detector, and if it is not set properly or cannot be set properly to the ground, then sadly you've invested in a machine that will never fully meet your needs or your potential. That is a powerful statement, but it's very true. If you talk to any successful detectorist, they will all share with you that being able to completely tune to the ground is one of the major factors to their success. The Gold Finder offers you that ability in a simple, easy-to-use process that will become intuitive for you in no time. This unit does have a factory preset and the engineers at Nokta spent a lot of time getting feedback from detectorists around the world prior to establishing that perfect point from which to start.

**Threshold:** I really like the threshold on the AU Gold Finder. I can set it to just audible to find the wavelength I am so dependent upon. Even the faintest changes in the threshold were signals that came out of the ground as good targets. It is one of the most precise thresholds I've ever found. Quite frankly, to get it better than this I would have to invest in a much higher priced detector. With the addition of the iSAT on the Gold Finder, misses in the threshold are a thing of the past. I experienced very little falsing and what I did experience was easily adjusted out with the iSAT. In the test garden, I heard a number of signals that would not activate the LEDs. They were faint but clear signals that I would dig instantly if I were in the field hunting.

**Boost**: One of my favorite features on any detector is an audio boost, and the AU-Gold Finder has it. I'm always listening for those "barely there" signals. Many of these signals are ground noise that may require you to make a slight adjustment in the iSAT, or they are targets. By flipping the switch to "Boost," I can instantly tell the difference in a stable target signal over a slightly static ground noise. So you ask, 'Why not run in Boost all of the time?' Well, it's not necessary, you will get a headache and I can almost assure you that your battery time will be cut dramatically. Running in Boost is only needed for testing targets.

### Hunting with the AU Gold Finder

Follow the quick start guide if you are new to detecting for your first few outings with the machine. Get a few hours on it, and after that go to town making adjustments even if you don't know what you're actually doing at first. Anything that you can do to mess up the AU Gold Finder is quickly fixed by going back to the factory presets. For those of you who have been swinging detectors for years, set it up to the ground and then your ears as you would your old favorite and go hunt. Be prepared to hear a few things you may have missed in the past with other VLF detectors and always remember to dig everything. I suspect that seasoned detectorist will have a bit more of a learning curve than someone new to detecting for the reason that everything we're used to in a VLF machine is on the Gold Finder and then some.

Nokta took a great deal of time in working with detectorists around the world to create a detector that does a number of things great. One is that they built a detector that fits the needs and wants of the detectorist. I will say it again—the AU Gold Finder is a machine that you can grow into rather than grow out of.

Although I will probably seldom use the discrimination features of the Gold Finder, I know many detectorists will. With that said, it is one of the best discrimination systems built. The options while using the discrimination controls on the Gold Finder make it extremely versatile for anyone.

All of the core functions (Sensitivity, Threshold and Ground Balance) are fast and easy to use. The Gold Finder has expanded capabilities within these functions that allow you to precisely tailor the unit to suit your own detecting style or technique.

The Gold Finder comes with two different Double D coils. I made a few coil swaps from the 10" x 5.5" to the 5" round while testing the machine, and I found that the 5" coil is ultra-sensitive and worked exceptionally well except in areas of extreme mineralization on bedrock. It was only after making a number of settings changes that I was able to completely stabilize the machine in these conditions. The small coil is too sensitive in these circumstances to use without making adjustments, but I found gold that was in the two-grain to three-grain size

with little trouble. Each target was clear and pinpointing was easy in the cracks and crevices. If you listen to the machine and take your time to properly set it, you'll most likely find gold.

### High frequency

The high frequency 56 kHz decision from Nokta is a winner, which became quite apparent after a few hours of detecting—and seeing the gold in my vial.

The Nokta AU-Gold Finder is exclusively available from KellyCo Metal Detectors and their partners with an introductory price of $749. If the AU Gold Finder stays anywhere in this price range, I suspect it will be in high demand. I will use this detector a lot. It meets a great deal of my needs. And, with the ability to precisely adjust the core features, it allows me to use one detector in areas where I've been known to use a few different VLF detectors just to feel that I had effectively covered the ground.

Now that I own an Nokta AU Gold Finder, I'm sure I'll be somewhere out there detecting for gold with it again soon.

*Kevin Hoagland is the host of the GPAA-produced TV series Gold Trails and Executive Director of Development for the Lost Dutchman's Mining Association. He can be reached at khoagland@goldprospectors.org.*