

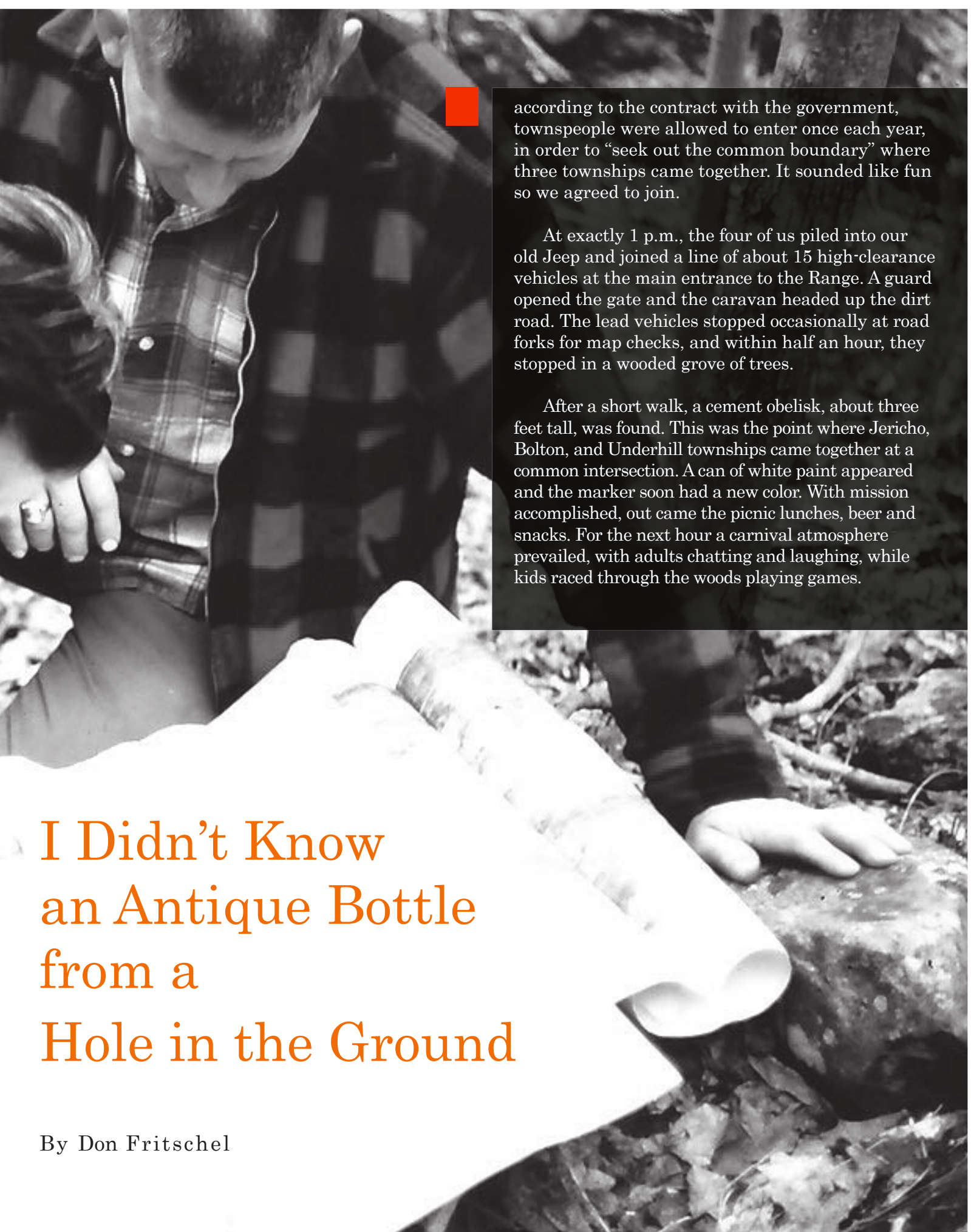
**In 1971**, there were more cows than people living in Vermont. And many of the people populating the Green Mountain State had lived there for several generations, particularly those in the smaller towns and rural areas. There were probably many family heirlooms stashed in some of those older houses, but, at the time, I had no interest in “old things”, and especially no interest in old bottles. (Why would anyone collect empty bottles?) But that was soon about to change.

My wife and I, and two small children, were living in Jericho, Vermont, a small rural community about 15 miles east of Burlington. On the morning of Mother's Day 1971, one of our neighbors, a town “selectman,” called to invite us to join a group of townspeople who were venturing into “the Range” that afternoon. “The Range” was an 11,000-acre wilderness that the U.S. Government leased from the township, and re-leased to the General Electric Company for armament testing. At the time, GE was testing its Vulcan guns.... Six-barrel, 20-mm, Gatling-type cannons, capable of firing 6,000 rounds per minute. These would be mounted in the wings of F-16 and later, F-18 fighter jets. Due to almost daily firings, “the Range” was completely encircled by fencing, and had very restricted access. However,



Young lady with a treasure of a find.





according to the contract with the government, townspeople were allowed to enter once each year, in order to “seek out the common boundary” where three townships came together. It sounded like fun so we agreed to join.

At exactly 1 p.m., the four of us piled into our old Jeep and joined a line of about 15 high-clearance vehicles at the main entrance to the Range. A guard opened the gate and the caravan headed up the dirt road. The lead vehicles stopped occasionally at road forks for map checks, and within half an hour, they stopped in a wooded grove of trees.

After a short walk, a cement obelisk, about three feet tall, was found. This was the point where Jericho, Bolton, and Underhill townships came together at a common intersection. A can of white paint appeared and the marker soon had a new color. With mission accomplished, out came the picnic lunches, beer and snacks. For the next hour a carnival atmosphere prevailed, with adults chatting and laughing, while kids raced through the woods playing games.

# I Didn't Know an Antique Bottle from a Hole in the Ground

By Don Fritschel



Soon it was time to leave, and the motorcade wound its way down from the wooded hills onto the flats. About a mile inside the gate, the lead vehicles stopped next to several old cellar holes at the side of the dirt road. In Vermont, "old cellar holes" were usually rectangular holes, about five to eight feet deep, with rock lined walls. Sometimes trees, as large as two feet in diameter, grew from the bottoms.

In most cases, the holes were filled with debris from the house that had once stood above. Often there were bedsprings and other metal that had not disintegrated during the 70 to 100 years since the property had been abandoned. As we watched, several of our neighbors jumped into the cellar holes and began clearing junk out of the way, so they could attack the dirt floor with rakes and shovels. I thought this looked hilarious and I started taking pictures of the melee.

Suddenly, someone held something up and shouted, "I found one!" It was a clear glass rectangular bottle, about 6 inches tall, with the lettering that read: E.B. WILLIAMS / DRUGGIST / JERICHO, VT. I was stunned. There was no drug store in the tiny village, just a post office, a garage, and an old mill. I was told that the drug store had burned down in 1906 and had never been rebuilt.

Soon, another bottle was found. This one was similar to the first, except its embossing read: DR. W.S. NAY / UNDERHILL, VT. Underhill was another small village, about three miles east of where we now stood.

Then, some of the older members began to speak: "I've heard of Dr. Nay! My mom and dad used to go to him!" Another said, "I read a book that he wrote called 'The Old Country Doctor.' It tells what it was like to go to school here in the 1800s. The teacher used to lock him in the wood box if he misbehaved!" Finally, a realtor friend, who was in his late 50s, quietly spoke, "I was the last baby that Dr. Nay delivered."


Suddenly, the commotion in the bottom of the cellar holes was no longer funny. This was cool stuff! It was living history coming out of the ground! We were hooked! We spent that summer combing the remote jeep roads in the state, looking for abandoned home sites. We mostly dug bottle shards, but those pieces represented historical flasks, inks, bitters, mineral waters and scarce Vermont medicines! That next winter, we made numerous trips to the University of Vermont's historical library and compared its old town maps to our modern topographic maps. When we found a building on the 1800s maps that



Two early druggist from small local VT. towns







Shards from years of digging

did not appear on our topo maps, we drew a circle. That location would yield an old cellar hole, or a forgotten town site.

During our travels around the state, we met a bottle digger by the name of Jack Brooks. He had taken an entire year off from work in order to dig, and had amassed a collection of many types of antique bottles. When we told him that we had a slight preference for the Saratoga-type bottles (my wife had gone to school in Saratoga Springs), he showed us his collection of “Saratogas” from the state of Vermont and suggested we concentrate on those, since there was a limited number of embossings from the state. Little did we know how difficult some of them would be to find.

The next 40 years followed a classical pattern. Bottle digging gave way to bottle shows, and then to bottle dealing. Bottle collecting expanded to include “go-withs,” such as bottle-related souvenir china, almanacs, trade cards, documents and other ephemera. Those interests broadened to include similar materials, but from a wider scope of antiques. Eventually, I found myself with a resale tax number and an antique shop name.

What about that earlier advice to pursue the “Vermont” Saratogas? Today, I have examples of all the known embossings from the Green Mountain State, except two. My collection includes color variations, plus two known error bottles, as well as the elusive ALBURGH A SPRINGS, VT., in a pint size. These are joined in the bottle cabinet by inks, flasks and pontiled medicines. And the quest continues. I am still hooked!

But every so often, I reflect back, nearly 42 years, to that day in “the Range” when I didn’t know an antique bottle from a hole in the ground. On that day, everything changed.