



# A Capstan Dig!

By Barry L. Bernas

There I was, sitting and pondering my first dig. Would it be a pit, a privy, a dump or something else? What would I find? An unreported, "CAPSTAN MASON" labeled jar; an embossed, amber "hutch"; a cobalt, blob top; a SIMPLEX in a diamond half-gallon or another treasure came to mind in quick fashion.

Then reality set in. I was going into the "woods." Since I only made it through the early levels of a cub scout in my youth, valuable training wasn't in my past. I decided to consult an expert, my wife Sally. A former senior scout,



Style of fruit jar produced by Capstan Glass Company

she told me all about "flee from three," what shape of a head a poisonous, slithering reptile possessed, how to avoid being a Center for Disease Control's statistic and the creatures that I best leave in their natural habitat.

Crammed with nature information, armed with a spray, which promised to repel bears or whatever "deet" chases away and my grubbiest, outdoor clothing stuffed in a box, I was off to my buddy's home. On the way, my mind returned to what awaited us in the field. I was sure a pint-size jar, with ANCHOR MASON'S PATENT on the front and a molded anchor on the reverse, was buried just under the surface of the spot I was going to dig.

Arriving at my partner's house, we chatted about

his plans for the excursion and he showed me his finds from past digs. Quite an impressive array of glassware awaited us. So off we went in his vehicle.

We arrived outside of site one a short time later. I was ready to don my gear but this was only a scouting trip. The rookie was nervous. Here I was moving into the woods in shorts and running shoes. Doomed was a word that passed rapidly through my conscious mind.

I quickly lost this thought when I saw my first bottle. My partner wanted to dig around a bit to see if the spot had any traces of being older than it appeared to be. While he probed, I was lost in wonderment. Every bottle, jar, product container or glass fragment seemed to be wondering into my hands for examination and dating. I was sure an amber, checker-patterned jar with a Capstan logo was going to turn up. None ever did. The cursory digging by my partner and the surface reconnaissance I performed confirmed for us that this spot contained only 1940s and newer stuff.

Back into the car, we moved on to site two. It held more promise, at least according to my buddy, who had dug some items from it in the recent past. This area was a little more remote so we put on our "digging



Capstan trademark on base

clothes," sprayed ourselves with repellent and moved into the brush and down a ravine. Surface articles, which had been uncovered in the past by my buddy were visible. Of course being the novice, I was drawn to them. For some reason I unfailingly forgot that we came to "dig" not to look at what was already dug.

My partner got me quickly reoriented and soon I was digging. At last, I was doing what others

had been doing for decades in the countless articles I had read about their experiences. Hopefully, I would be as lucky as they had been on their digs.

Depression pink and green glass shards were found almost immediately right under the surface. Glass marbles, spoons, buttons, perfume and unembossed medicine bottles, slews of ketchup containers, the occasional zinc screw cap, and buried ant nests soon showed up under our tools. However, the amber “hutch” eluded us. This spot had ware that was from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. We moved on.

Shifting our base of attention to a point that was higher up on the side of the sloping terrain, we dug again and deeper. This time I was rewarded by unearthing countless ketchup



bottles. I couldn't believe the number I found. No family consumed that much ketchup. It wasn't humanly possible, I thought to myself. The more I dug; the more ketchup bottles I surfaced. I moved to the right and guess what I came up with. Yeah, more ketchup bottles emerged.

While I was busy “discovering” someone's discarded ketchup bottles, my partner was finding containers with the Capstan Glass trademark on them. Jar after jar came out of the ground under his hand. New mold series numbers were being accounted for while I amassed a torrid number of, yes, you guessed it – ketchup bottles.

While my buddy and I dug, I suddenly “discovered” another truth about digging. It is work! The random up and down, side-to-side, pushing and pulling motions, not to mention going up and down the side of the hill, stooping over, bending down, and kneeling soon took its toll on my aging body. The thought that I was in shape for an afternoon of digging before I went into the “woods” underwent a reevaluation about

four hours later. Besides ketchup bottles, I also found more muscles in my body that ached for the first time. Sensing my fatigue, my buddy suggested we call it a day. I agreed without another thought. But before we did quit, we looked at a nearby site three. This one was more difficult to get to but we surmounted this hurdle without too much trouble. Soon, I was probing and digging once again. Not one ketchup bottle was uncovered. My finds from this spot were a sole from a shoe; a clear-colored, square, Ball PERFECT MASON, pint-size jar; a rusted, red-and-white, enamel-ware bowl and an old, metal bucket. These were hardly something to write home about. We decided that this spot wasn't

worth any more time and left for the day.

When I got back to Gettysburg, my wife asked me if I enjoyed my adventure. She knew I always wanted to go on a dig. As I sat on my

couch with aching muscles, recounting my day to her, I could only offer an “I don't know” as a preliminary reply. But after a good night's sleep, I was renewed with the urge and ready to go once again in search of the elusive find that is out there waiting for me.

Some of the items from my first and hopefully not last dig will be shown in a display at the club's March 2004 show. Our exhibit will feature items from the Capstan Glass Company [see picture of the factory above]. This corporation made containers for packers of commercially prepared food during the 1920s and 30s. To my knowledge, this will be the first time Capstan products will be highlighted since the Canner's Conventions of the 1930s.

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The author, along with his wife Sally, are BABC members. Barry wrote an article on Capstan in the Fall issue of Bottles and Extras and will have a Capstan display at our March 7 show.

