

Ten Tips for Safe Bottle Hunting

By Jamie Murdock

If someone were to ask me the best time to go bottle hunting, my quick reply would be “All the time.” But before you head out, one thing you need to think about above all else is safety. Nothing is more important than your well being.

As I sat back and thought about all experiences in the woods, I felt compelled to offer up some safety tips to think about before you walk out the door:

1. **“Tune in”**...Flip on The Weather Channel to get a quick update before you head out. There’s nothing worse than driving an hour, walking into the woods only to get caught up in a sudden storm. Weather in Maryland can change in an instant.

2. **“In case of”**...Never leave home without a fully charged cell phone or at the very least, a whistle. A small mirror can also come



in handy. In the event of an emergency, there’s nothing more valuable than a whistle to alert someone as to your whereabouts. It’s always a good idea to tell a family member or friend as to the general area that you plan to go bottle hunting.

3. **“Refuel”**...Pack a quart of Gatorade or other sports drink and a couple of energy bars. You would be surprised how much fluid (sweat) you can lose when you’re furiously digging bottles even in the winter.

4. **“Know Your Critters”**...a) **Bee-ware!** Yellow jackets nest in the ground. Before you start clawing and scratching the ground, take



a few seconds to scan the area you are about to disturb. There’s nothing worse than cunning through the woods with a squadron of “Bee-52’s” in

close pursuit.

b) **Check for ticks.** Check your clothes constantly for deer ticks. Contrary to popular belief, you can pick up those little hitchhikers all year round. Check your clothes before getting back in your car and again when you get home. Lyme with and is becoming more prevalent.

c) **Not so reclusive.** One critter seldom mentioned is the Brown Reclusive Spider. These little half-inch buggers can pack a wallop when they bite, even nastier than a Black Widow. They especially like hanging out under rotting wood and leaf litter. Wear your gloves!.

5. **“Furry Fury”**...All our furry friends are not as friendly as you think. Constantly be on the lookout for wild dogs, feral cats, or any other animal exhibiting unusual behavior. “Wild” cats like hanging out in woodland dumps. They will usually high-tail it, but I just don’t trust them. Wold dogs scare me the most. They always seem to have an attitude, which is why I always carry my trusty machete hanging from my belt. You never know, besides no one wants to go through a series of rabies shots. If a fox or raccoon makes an advance, it’s time for you to retreat, pronto!



6. **“No tennis shoes”**...Although it may be tempting in the summertime, do wear tennis shoes on a bottle excursion. Rusty nails, broken glass and rubber soles are a bad combination. Always wear a sturdy pair of work or hunting boots.

7. **“Watch your step”**...Watch the morning thaw, even though the ground can be locked up in winter’s grip. Around 9:00 a.m. the sun rises up just high enough to begin melting the top quarter inch of ground overtop the frozen soil below. Believe me, nothing can put you on your wallet quicker than



nature’s “slip ‘n slide.” Watch out on those south-facing hillsides!

8. **“Hunters”**...Fall and winter can be a great time to scour the woods for bottles, but unfortunately it’s also hunting season. Be careful out there. Wear some orange or go on Sundays when hunting is not allowed in most counties.

Ticking off a hunter may be hazardous to your health. The last place you want to be is hanging in someone’s trophy room next to last year’s ten pointer.

9. **“Woods in the ‘hoods”**...Watch your surroundings, especially when bottle hunting in and around urban wood lots. Many shady characters can be encountered in the woods, which makes you extremely vulnerable, or as I like to say, “easy pickings.” It’s not your bottles they want, believe me!

10. **“Know your limitations”**...Don’t be a hero. Rome wasn’t built in a day and neither should your bottle collection. Don’t overdo it, especially if it’s your first outing of the year. You may not feel sore when you get home, but when you wake up next morning and can’t move, you’ll know what I’m talking about.

I realize that some of these safety tips just boil down to good old common sense, but when you're in hot pursuit of bottles, who uses common sense? Hopefully, you can file away some of these tips to make your next bottle excursion as safe as possible.

Happy Hunting!