

Field Test

Minelab X-Terra Elite

By Adrian Gayler



Well, just as we are getting over the launch of the very popular X-Terra Pro from Minelab, the X-Terra Elite suddenly appears after a few teaser videos online prior to the launch (Fig.1). Here at Treasure Hunting magazine, we were kindly provided with the new X-Terra Elite Expedition Pack prior to the official launch. This pack comprises of the machine, V12X (12 inch) and V8X (8 inch) coils and the Minelab ML85 low-latency headphones. With our lips sealed, carrying the machine undercover from the car to the field I felt like the world's paparazzi were watching – yes, I can be paranoid. The machine arrived at a time of the year when my permissions were rammed to the hilt with crops. This made me explore my permissions in more depth than ever before to find those odd spots where the crops had either failed or which had been left fallow. Rambling through stinging nettles and across streams, I finally found some quite favourable areas to evaluate the X-Terra Elite, which from a distance I might have presumed were cropped. Many hours have been spent testing this machine prior to writing this review, and I have covered a wide range of soil types and conditions, as well as beach detecting.

Construction and Ergonomics

This, in my eyes, is a mid-range detector based on the features and price point, however, the build quality immediately gives you confidence and is probably why it comes with a generous three-year warranty. Like the X-Terra Pro, the X-Terra Elite adopts the same square aluminium /carbon fibre shaft and lovely Minelab cam-locks (Fig.2). I wish they had used these on the Manticore. The balance and ergonomics of the X-Terra Elite when using both coils (V12X and V8X) were perfect and a pleasure to use in the field, even for long periods (Fig.3).



Fig.2. The superb cam locks – I wish these were on all Minelab machines.



Fig.3. The V12X and V8X coils that come with the X-Terra Elite Expedition Pack.



Fig.1. The X-Terra Elite on its first day out in the field.

Price	£589.00
Available	Now
Brand	Minelab

Specifications

Search Modes	Park, Field, Beach + two custom profiles for each
Frequencies (kHz)	Multi and 15kHz
Noise Cancel	Auto (19 Channels)
Ground Balance	Auto, Manual, Tracking
Sensitivity	Threshold level/Pitch & Target volume 1 to 25
Target ID's	119 Ferrous: -19 to 0 - Non-ferrous: 1 to 99
Target Tones	1, 2, 5, All Tones (At), Depth (dP)
Tone Break	Ferrous (t1) adjustable
Tone Volume	1 (ferrous) adjustable: 0 to 25
Recovery Speeds	1, 2, 3
Iron Bias	-1, 0, 1, 2
Discrimination	30 segments (4 Target ID's per segment)
Wireless Audio	Low latency headphones (Pro package) + 3.5mm jack
Display	Monochrome LCD Keypad Backlight Red Off, High, Low + LED torch + Vibration For ferrous and non-ferrous
Coils	V12X 12" DD Elliptical coil (V8X 8x5.5" DD Elliptical coil with Expedition pack)
Battery	3.7 v / 5100 mAh internal Lithium-Ion rechargeable battery
Dimensions	Collapsed: 63 cm (25 in) Extended: 138 cm (54 in)
Weight	1.3 kg (2.9 lbs)
Warranty	3 Years, control box and coil



Fig.4. Single frequency of 15kHz.



Fig.5. Multi-IQ technology like the new Equinox and Manticore.



Fig.6. The low-latency noise cancelling ML-85 headphones included as part of the Expedition Pack.

The new X-Terra series is compatible with Minelab Equinox coils, including the EQX Series: EQX06 (6-inches round), EQX11 (11-inches round), and EQX15 (15-inch elliptical). Additionally, it works with Coiltek's Equinox series, featuring the 10x5-inch, 14x9-inch, 15-inch round, and 18-inch round coils. This extensive compatibility offers the X-Terra Elite a wide choice of coil options. The weight is the same as the X-Terra-Pro with which it shares many other features, apart from one key change: the X-Terra Elite has both 15kHz and Minelab's Multi-IQ frequency options (Figs.4 & 5). There are also some other prominent features which you will see listed in the specifications.

With the X-Terra Elite Expedition pack comes the two coils mentioned earlier and the Minelab wireless ML-85 low-latency headphones (Fig.6) which connect directly to the X-Terra Elite – Minelab's ML-105 headphones can also be purchased, along with waterproof headphones via 3.5mm jack. I really love the colour scheme of the X-Terra Elite (Fig.7), which reminded me of my old Minelab Safari. For me, the Safari was a bit of a noisy machine at times, with its Full Band Spectrum (FBS) which was state of art at the time of launch – a machine I really loved. Hopefully, it would be much more than just the colours which would impress me over time with this new machine. Minelab have added some great additional benefits to the X-Terra Elite which would possibly make an ideal upgrade from the Xterra-Pro, Vanquish range and even the Equinox 600. The question is, is this additional cost associated with these features worth the upgrade?

So, what are the benefits above the X-Terra Pro offered by the X-Terra Elite?

Multi-IQ Technology

I am still a strong believer that single frequency which the Pro provides is not a done-and-dusted technology. Many times, when using a Multi-IQ machine, I will drop it down a gear into one of the many single frequencies on offer. Being restricted to a single frequency is not the end of the world, especially 15 kHz which is a nice ballpark option to use in the UK – you will still find silver hammered and gold staters. However, Multi-IQ technology on the X-Terra Elite will provide additional benefits, including improved target ID, versatility in various soil conditions, enhanced target discrimination, increased sensitivity and better stability. These advantages make it a much more powerful detector for both novice and experienced detectorists.

Wireless Audio

With the Expedition Pack on test the ML-85 wireless headphones are included – no more wires tangling around your pinpoint or yanking on your ears, enabling better freedom of movement when out in the field or on the beach. A no-brainer in my opinion.

Recovery Speeds

On the X-Terra Elite you have the option to change the recovery speeds from 1 to 3 (low for deeper penetration and high for better target ID separation). Unlike the Pro where this is changed automatically when switching your programme – for example, Field 1 on the Pro has a slower recovery speed than Field 2, but it's not adjustable. This is not an option a beginner should delve into straight away, and I feel users should only experiment and adjust once they have really got to know their machine.



Fig.7. The X-Terra Elite and it's wonderful colours, reminiscent of the earlier Safari model.

Iron Bias Control

The four levels of iron bias control are a nice addition to the X-Terra Elite for those who understand how it works. However, changing the settings in the wrong environment can cause you to miss small or deep targets. Basically, a high iron bias will reject iron and a lot of trashy targets like bottle tops and nails. Not every field is abundant with these kinds of items in the UK, it's more useful for areas like a park or festival field. A low iron bias will make the machine pick up more signals from all metals and identify smaller targets around iron, ideal in an area of low junk or iron. Finding the right balance between depth and discrimination is absolutely crucial. Too high an iron bias might lead you to miss valuable targets, while too low might result in digging too much iron. If in doubt, leave it on the standard factory setting. I did have a tinker with this in the field on a range of targets and it worked well 'if' you know what you are doing.

First Day Out in the Field

Based on the abysmal summer we have had so far, I was very pleased that the X-Terra Elite arrived late morning on a beautiful sunny mid-week day. As mentioned earlier, all my permissions, including the one I commonly use when first getting a new machine, were crammed with crops. Maybe I could head off to the beach? Finally, I remembered just the place which provided me with pasture, arable fields and an irrigation pond used by the farmer. With my lunch already packed that morning in anticipation of the machine's arrival, I unboxed it at home and was happy to discover it had some charge, so headed straight out.

On arrival, I bagged up the compact X-Terra Elite in case those paparazzi were lurking and headed off to find a spot to test out the machine. This, however, led to many stings from nettles, accompanied by a very wet foot after attempting to jump a wider-than-I-thought stream. To get to my desired destination certainly was a battle (Fig.8). Finally at a spot adjacent to the irrigation pond, I laid down my detecting gear and extended the machine with the wonderful cam-locks. Being only 25 inches when folded down, the X-Terra Elite is nicely compact. With the machine fully extended I powered it on and selected the Field Mode 1 and Multi-IQ, along with the standard discrimination as it came out of the factory. The only

other change I made was to the Continuous noise cancel which is similar to that on the 'Nox' and Manticore (Fig.9). Rather than just pressing once, to find the cleanest channel for the machine hold down the Accept/Reject button or (-) and (+) it will scan continuously and pick the quietest channel. Not that I really needed to do this as I had no EMI, but it's so quick and I really like this feature on Minelab machines. I started detecting around the fringes of the irrigation pond where the soil was wet and compact – the Multi-IQ handled it well. Along with water and the compacted soil, there was a quite prominent smell of cattle urine where cows and sheep had visited for a drink. This is naturally full of salts and other minerals so potentially could have caused the machine to run false signals, but caused no issues at the time. After pulling up a few tent pegs and bits of shrapnel, I moved away from the pond and headed out into long grass pasture.

Swapping Coils

At this point, the V12X was not the right choice, with the force of the high grass against the coil. I swapped over to the V8X coil within a matter of minutes (Fig.10). The coil bolt and yoke are very similar to that on the Equinox 700-900 with a plastic bolt and thread. This slots in and tightens up perfectly, not too tight and not too loose – some people (me included) had issues where these broke over time with the old Equinox machines, but hopefully these will survive the test of time. With the V8X coil, the X-Terra Elite was an absolute pleasure to detect with: compact, lightweight and able to fly through the long grass. The V8X coil has improved sensitivity on smaller targets than the larger V12X and I was looking forward to testing this out.

Heading away from the pasture I ventured into the field where there was an area used to keep pigs. This began to make the X-Terra Elite a little noisy based on the contamination of the soil the pigs had left behind. I conducted a ground balance and then reduced the sensitivity from 24 to 22. I continued to detect with the X-Terra Elite now happily silent and eventually I had a target ID reading 44 / 46 on the VDI and showing a depth of four arrows on the screen – 8 inches, 20cm according to Minelab. Using All Tones (AT) it gave a very crisp and clear signal through the headphones. Using the pinpointer function (which Minelab

say is more precise than the version on the Pro) I located the target and dug down just over six inches. I then ran the X-Terra Elite back over the hole and it was still giving a signal, so I continued to dig with my trowel and pull out the final couple of inches of soil from the hole. Eventually I located the target – a nice little child's thimble (Fig.11). Firstly, I was very impressed, the depth



Fig.8. The thick undergrowth I had to do battle with in order to get to the fields.



Fig.9. The rolling Noise Cancel on the X-Terra Elite picking one of 19 available channels.



Fig.10. Removing the V12X coil to change to the smaller V8X in long grass.

ID had been pretty accurate (on many machines you get a mixed bag of results with this feature) and secondly, this was quite an impressive depth for a mid-range machine. I continued for the next few hours digging every target, uncovering a range of not-that-impressive finds.

Heading back to the pond to collect my gear, I ran the X-Terra Elite in All Metal mode – not something I would usually do in the early days of testing a new machine as it would open a complete can of worms digging every target. After passing over some very large iron targets which I presumed was old farm machinery, I found a fair-sized target. Knowing that this was iron, I sunk my spade in, fully aware that this was not a gold torque but still potentially something of interest. And there it was, that orangey leached looking soil around a lump of iron. Pulling it out produced a lovely old horseshoe, exactly as the Minelab All Metal icon depicts (Fig.12).



Fig.11. A pleasing and complete child's thimble.



Fig.12. Literally unearthing the Minelab All Metal horseshoe setting icon.

Out on a Group Dig

A week after receiving the X-Terra Elite I was kindly invited out to a dig by Dedham Vale Detectorists. This was a good chance to see how the machine, with its addition of Minelab's Multi-IQ, would manage around a group of other machines. The permission was a turf farm where the turf had recently been removed leaving a perfectly flat but very heavily compacted field surface (Fig.13). Around 60 people were on the dig and the sun was trying to shine. I turned on the X-Terra Elite in multi-frequency close to a dozen or so other detectorists. The Elite sounded like a 1980s arcade machine at first which concerned me. A quick hold down of the Noise Cancel button and it scrolled through all the 19 channels available – within seconds the machine had settled down to a comfortable and usable place.

I was still using the standard settings in Field 1, All Metal off, with the sensitivity almost at its maximum of 24 and running on all tones. A few milled silver coins and hammerededs were coming up around me and I was hoping I would be next. I switched the X-Terra Elite to Profile 2 on the Field setting which is designed for smaller targets and hammered coins with increased sensitivity. This is similar for Park mode. I also switched from All Tones to 5 Tones which is my preferred option on Minelab machines. After digging a ring pull, 'moo tube' and some bits of lead I had a delightful two-way signal show-

ing at around four inches with a faint VDI switching between 44-49.

The hard, top layer of the turf field needed me to have a proper jump on my spade with both feet to break through the compacted soil. After what seemed like half an hour of digging, I managed to remove the hard plug. Wriggling my pin pointer around, it rang out and vibrated right in the base of the hole and with a slight scraping of the soil there was a little glimpse of silver – a lovely James I halfgroat (Figs.14a & b). Was it found because I switched to the Field 2 profile? I replaced the coin back in the hole (on its side as it lay originally) and switched the X-Terra Elite back to Field 1, carried out a noise cancel and ran the coil back over the hole. The VDI was naturally clearer due to there being no soil over the coin, but the tone was not quite as strong. I have since found a cut half hammered using this Field 2 profile, so in the right soil conditions this may be a bit of a hammered hunter.



Figs.14a & b. Obverse and reverse of a lovely James I silver halfgroat found using the Field 2 profile.



Fig.13. The club dig on a heavily compacted turf field.

On the Beach

The beach is not my first-choice destination to detect on, but I had pretty much exhausted the spare fields on my permissions in the early days of having the X-Terra Elite. So, I headed to the dreaded beach (Fig.15). Why dreaded? Well, without going into too much detail the nearest detectable beach to me is usually swamped with rubbish and a lot of interruptions of the nature of "Have you found much?" Now it's not that I mind talking to people, but five in one hour I counted (with headphones on) detracts from my love of detecting. I should possibly just go early in the morning. Upon arriving, the sun was out and I had a deep feeling

that the X-Terra Elite would perform well on the beach like many Minelab machines have proven to, especially with Multi-IQ. Starting on the dry sand with Beach Profile 1 selected I worked my way along the sea wall where many sit in the summer months. The X-Terra Elite was on form and picked up the usual ring pulls, discarded aluminium barbeque trays and a few modern coins. I headed down to the semi-wet sand where the tide had gone out and one signal that stood out was a modern silver finger ring, which had given a nice toned signal, but with a fluctuating VDI reading. Digging down and running the coil over the surface this was much deeper than I expected. From a depth of a good 10 inches, up came a nice silver finger ring, which I have to admit was impressive (Fig.16). Even more so that it fits my wife's finger, and she is now wearing it. I continued into the surf with the machine staying on Beach Profile 1 and was surprised how stable it was, only having to knock the sensi-

tivity down slightly. In my head I was hoping I did not get a good target as I had forgotten to take waterproof shoes / boots as it was sunny, but of course that's exactly what occurred. Taking my shoes and socks off I plodded into the 3-4 inches of water and started digging into the sand with my scoop. Another pleasant surprise appeared in the form of an Edward VII penny dated 1906, in immaculate condition after a quick clean (Figs.17a & b).

I continued detecting for the next few hours in the wash as it was bringing out some nice amounts of modern coinage which would certainly cover my car parking costs. The final worthwhile find of the day confused me, being an American silver Liberty half-dollar dated 1952, in great condition, again found in the surf (Figs.18a & b). How on earth this had got onto a beach in Essex, I will never know?



Fig.15. The X-Terra Elite performed exceptionally well on the beach.



Fig.16. Some modern jewellery found on the beach, with the ring that's now being worn by my wife!

Figs.17a. & b. Obverse and reverse of a lovely condition Edward VII penny dated 1906.

Figs.18a. & b. Obverse and reverse of silver American half-dollar dated 1952, how on earth did this get to be on a beach in Essex?

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Fig.19. The X-Terra Elite has encountered many weather conditions in the field test.

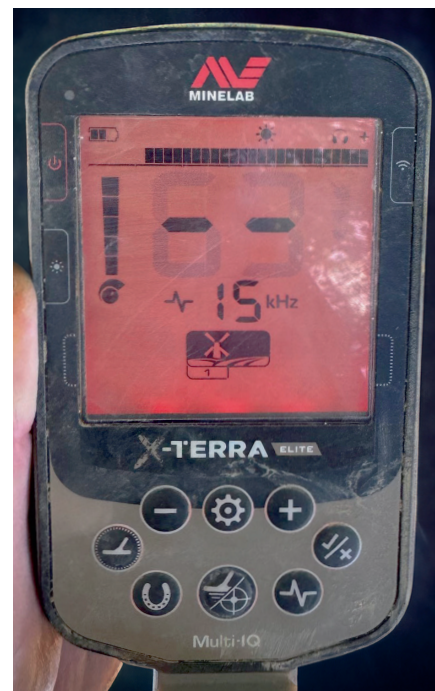


Fig.22. The lovely red screen is perfect for those late winter evenings and was not much of a drain on the battery life.



Fig.20. Detecting streams with the X-Terra Elite.



Fig.21. The screen protector doing its job whilst playing with the tones and tone breaks.

Summary

As more fields became available on my permissions I have been out for many weeks with the X-Terra Elite (Fig.19) and have found it to be a perfectly balanced detector based on the features available for the price, especially with the Expedition Pack. It's not complicated to use for a beginner and with just the right number of features available for those who are looking at upgrading from a single frequency or older machine. The navigation is simple to use and it feels a rugged machine. I've tested it on fields, beach, streams, torrential downpours to 30° heat. I didn't have the chance to test the claim that it is waterproof to 5m (16ft), but it has been completely submersed many times in the sea and streams for significant periods without any problems (Fig.20). Fortunately, it comes with a screen protector applied (Fig.21), which is the only aspect of the detector that is showing any signs of wear.

There are additional little features that I like – for example, within the tone volume advanced settings, there's the option for ferrous and non-ferrous vibration through the machine's handle. A nice feature which I don't think many use on other Minelab machines. If you have the ferrous vibration enabled while



Figs.23a & b. Obverse and reverse of a George V florin dated 1921.

Overall, the performance of the X-Terra Elite has surprised me, especially on depth, target separation and performance. It has unearthed a cracking George V florin dated 1921 (Figs.23a & b) and some other good finds generally (Fig.24) and is most definitely a machine that packs a punch. I have taken out a wide range of detectors with me and compared them to the X-Terra Elite, with both the standard settings and fully opened up (Fig.25). It performed well for its class and certainly kept up with the 'big boys' on some occasions. In time, the X-Terra Elite will no doubt receive updates like the Equinox and X-Terra-Pro models have just received, future-proofing the machine for many years to come. You most certainly won't go far wrong with this detector for the price.

