

The Armchair Treasure Hunt 2016 / 17

Hunters' Tales

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There follows a selection of tales from intrepid Hunters

Tale 1 – The Chiltern Fellowship

THESE GUYS MANFULLY WANDERED AROUND THE DEMESNES OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEAR IIVINGHOE BEACON AND VISITED THE CORRECT CAR PARK FOR THE PITSTONE TREASURE, BUT DID NOT REALISE IT.....!

On New Year's Eve we made our initial exploratory search for the treasure based on our deductions:

Ridgeway trail area has Pubs, Lion, Beacon, Dyke/Quarry and Tring station has a carpark.

Beer: The Chiltern Brewery, Terrick, Aylesbury or Tring Brewery Co. Ltd. Tring (Side Pocket for a Toad)

Lion: The Whipsnade White Lion is a huge 147 metre long carving in the Chiltern hillside which can be seen for miles across the Downs. It was necessary to make frequent visits across to **Ivinghoe Beacon** to check the accuracy of the shape.

http://www.chilternsonb.org/uploads/files/Walks_and_Rides/Ridgeway_Link_Feb_2012.pdf

Beacon: Ivinghoe Beacon

DykeQuarry: Grim's Dyke/Pitstone Quarry

Carpark: Tring Station

Just up from Tring station is a fork in the road similar to the addition on the Priory School map on P1.

We parked at a convenient pulling off place on Northfield Road where there is sufficient space for 4 or 5 cars but not really enough to call itself a car park. We then hunted around that specific area, finding plenty of fence posts resembling the one in the photo at the top of P16 in the Puzzle and checking out a few troughs (see photo).



After exhausting the immediate area, we went off in search of nearby carparks, initially to Ivinghoe Beacon, then to the one southwest of it where the Ivinghoe/Aldbury minor road crosses the Ridgeway path. Lots of evidence of miles of suitable fence posts but little sign of gorse hedges for them to nestle in. After a further hunt around more of the original searching spot, we gave up.

We concluded that there is little hope of finding the treasure until we can decode some specific text that can guide us between the general instruction "WHISKY THEN.....BEACON THEN DYKEQUARRY THEN CARPARK THEN TREASURE" (derived from the numbered questions) up to the detailed final clues from the Marain texts on page 4 (bottom) "search in the trough" and (top) "Look for L on fencepost where it turns. A box is attached to the base nearby loose fence post in the gorse also marked with an L."

After further work and running out of time prior to the hunt closure, we made a further search of the area on Saturday 14th January. Having progressed some work on the Fourth Dynamic codes working on phonetics as in Feersum Endjinn we were interested to find the newly established Puddingstone (Gin) Distillery close to Wilstone Reservoir which we related to "End Gin". With the name encouraging us to think of "PS" on the map on Page 1, and the picture on page 10 looking as though it could be a concrete wall (which the

reservoir has in plenty), this looked worth a look - and how could we reject the idea of a distillery visit on a sunny January afternoon, the brief earlier snow having failed to dent our spirits (pun intended!)?

The reservoir quickly revealed itself as nothing like we had visualised from its picture, the nearby Wilstone cemetery had no suitable walls but the distillery was very welcoming, provided a taster of their Campfire Gin and a friendly chat. They have a big Nineteenth Century OS map on their wall on which we were pleased to see “Engine House” marked by the canal at Little Tring, so in search of a “Feersun Endjinn” we called by there on our way back towards our previous hunting ground near Tring Station. No joy at Little Tring, so our last efforts were to finish walking the section of the Ridgeway towards Station Road near Tring Station which we had started to follow on New Year’s Eve, then a final look around likely car parks near Ivinghoe for gorse/fencepost combinations. A few photos are attached below:



We realise that we were unlikely to achieve a find given the paucity of our final clues, but hope our tale has entertained the setter sufficiently for him to read the rest of our submission with due attention!

Tale 2 – Bruce Hindsight

2016-12-18 to Beer

A friend of the team happened to be on holiday near Beer when we first obtained (at about 01:00 on Sunday 18th December) a (non-red-lioned) location on the coastal path south of the town. This location is obviously much too far away from the traditional ATH hunting ground, but wouldn't it be funny to have a look around and take some photos of us looking mystified! So Leif was drafted into the team, briefed by phone, and dispatched. "If you're feeling really keen, the sign at the entrance to Beer Quarry Caves, and the big car park behind the Dolphin, would be good. For top marks, there's a particular point on the SW coastal path, about 250 metres from the end of Little Lane."

Unfortunately we had identified the wrong car park, so our target point was about a quarter of a mile too far north. Despite diligent work and repeated telephonic consultation, no treasure was found apart from a pumpkin in a hedge.



Of course, we weren't really expecting to find any, because it's obviously much too far away.

2016-12-19 to Whisky Treasure

Colin, having a free afternoon, was dispatched to check out Pitstone Hill, the other location not yet red-lioned, armed with our knowledge so far, including a couple of Marain hints that looked suitable for the site: "search in the trough" and "Look for l on fencepost where it turns' a box is attached to the base of the nearby loose fence post in the gorse also marked with an l."

He left Cambridge at 12.15 and arrived on site about 13.50 following a quick lunch stop. A good omen was sighted en route in the form of the White Lion pub in Houghton Regis, although the weather steadily worsened, with persistent light rain and low mist.

Convenient use was made of the indicated car park at Ashridge, and the 100 yard trek to the likely treasure site commenced.



A short search later, the trough pictured on the poster was sighted, adorned with Logica L and in it a bottle of whisky, Glenfiddich as expected!



We had found the treasure, and probably first as the whisky looked intact, but where was the box? We had already identified that there was likely to be a bend in the fence here, and indeed there was, but with no L on it. Worse was that the neighbouring fenceposts were either inaccessible or guarded by fierce brambles.

Several attempts to find a loose fencepost failed, and at point something was sighted, only to turn out to be a discarded beer can (and not from one of our favoured breweries either). Nor was there any gorse - here, at least. Widening the search a bit revealed plenty a little way up the hill, but the fenceposts remained resolutely well-made, and straight. Encouragement and hints rained in from HQ on Skype, but nothing helped. And still no L.

Finally, the penny dropped. Perhaps the treasure box was also in the trough. Returning to check, there was nothing else hidden there, but it finally occurred to Colin to open the whisky, which was considerably lighter than he expected.

The contents revealed all: a smaller bottle of whisky in a fine Pablo-esque touch, a sheet of instructions, and – most importantly - a set of hunt tickets including number 1!



Half an hour had been wasted in the fruitless search but finally victory was ours. Or was it? The instructions mentioned a second treasure that we had not even suspected.

Retreating to the warmth of the car, the call was made to Steve Hames, mutual congratulations exchanged, and confirmation made that what we had found was in fact the main treasure. The original plan had been to climb Ivinghoe Beacon and take a photo of the Whipsnade Lion from there, but with dusk approaching and increasingly poor visibility this was abandoned, and an attempt to see the Lion from the A4146 also failed. Another stop for tea at the Little Chef in Marston Moritaine (an old haunt) and then home to celebrate!

2016-12-24 to Beer Treasure

The whisky treasure text made it plain that there was another treasure, and on 20th December we refined the page 16 path: the quarry is huge, so maybe the car park isn't the one in the town centre but the cliff top one by the caravan site?



This pushed the end of the page 16 path about 300 metres south, and on 21st we found this picture which looks very similar (in fence and vegetation) to the picture on page 16.



We communicated this guess to Steve Hames on December 21st, and he confirmed the presence of the treasure and sent a PDF of the treasure document. Despite the family holiday having moved on to St Ives, Leif agreed to return to Beer, which he did on the morning of 24th.

Our location was still about 50 metres off, and turned up nothing but a circle of flints in the turf.

Following the fence, Leif finally found the marked fence post, and following the page 4 Marain instructions fished out the loose fence post, opened the treasure box, and obtained beer treasure ticket 3!



Tale 3 – The Slow Learners

THIS SET OF ANSWERS WAS CERTAINLY THE MOST INVENTIVE THIS YEAR. I LOVE THE DEDUCTIONS THAT THEY MAKE – ALL COMPLETELY WRONG....

Devon and UK Maps and Lines – the Red Herring!

There is always a **Red Herring** puzzle in the quiz and this year it is **the maps of Devon and the UK**.

The quiz drew a lot of attention to North Devon with many references to it amongst the answers as well as the several maps of the area. Working through the maps, there appears to be five unidentified places: FRITHELSTOCK and WEST PUTFORD to the west of Great Torrington; BEAFORD and CHITTLEHAMHOLT to the east of Great Torrington; and ROCKFORD to the north-east of Great Torrington, near the coast. But that's all a smoke screen - the point of all the maps is that they are of North Devon, which contains, on the coast, **Clovelly**. Every November the historic fishing village of **Clovelly, North Devon, celebrates its annual Herring Festival**.

Moving on to the UK map, this provides the word '**Red**'. There are four unidentified destinations on the map, each of which can be tied to 'red':

Manchester – Manchester United strip is **red – the Red Devils**

Preston – home of British Leyland. Derek Robinson was a convener and shop steward at British Leyland for much of the 1970's and he was commonly known as "**Red Robbo**" in the British press.

Carlisle - To mark the 40th anniversary of **Red Rum**'s last win at Carlisle's racecourse, the opening meeting of its 2016 national hunt season on Thursday October 13th 2016 was named Red Rum Day. Red Rum famously prepared for each of his National wins (1973, 1974 and 1977) by riding a winner at Carlisle's first autumn meeting.

Chelmsford – Simply **Red** performed at Chelmsford City Racecourse on 1st July 2016.

Location of the Treasure

Although we were unable to solve the crucial puzzles to locate the treasure, we were drawn to the Devil's Punch Bowl at Hindhead, Surrey, as being the most likely spot by a number of references, both in overall terms and from specific hints throughout the quiz pages, as follows:

1. The Golf Connection - the James Bond clues took us in the first place to the Huntercombe Golf Course on the Ridgeway, where Ian Fleming was a member: but having detected that golf was in play in the quiz, we found that the Hindhead Golf Club around The Devil's Punch Bowl was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (his Sherlock Holmes story, The Adventure of the Priory School, having appeared on Page 1.

Reinforcing the connection, another Ian Fleming was an Australian actor who played Dr Watson in a 1937 film version of Silver Blaze. Other films he was in were "The Missing Rembrandt" and "The Sleeping Cardinal". There is a DVD available on Amazon which has Silver Blaze/The Devils Foot on it. The Devil's Footprint is about mysterious footsteps in the snow in Devon but the Devil and Thor are mentioned in a legend at the Devil's Punchbowl.

That gave us a link between several of the themes and brought the Devil's Punch Bowl well into play.

2. Page 2 – In the black circle, behind the main cross there is a faint one in the background, which we took to be a hint at the cross on Gibbets Hill at the Devil's Puch Bowl (although not the actual one).
3. Page 3 – the headstone was possibly a nod to the headstone at the Devil's Punch Bowl known as the Sailors Stone, in memory of the sailor who was murdered by three fellow-travellers whom he had met up with at the Red Lion at Thursley.

4. There are frequent references to the Red Lion throughout the quiz: although of itself not that helpful as a clue (as the answer to one questions says, it's the most frequent pub name in England), it took on a particular significance when we made the Unknown Sailor connection. The pub has now been converted into two cottages (well, only one wouldn't have done for this quiz, would it?)
5. Associating lions in general with the rock group theme from the Poster, then we get the band Lion's Mouth (female duo from Los Angeles) and this is the name of an area at the Devil's Punch Bowl.
6. Page 3 - there are remaining the foundations from The Temple of the Four Winds. These are in three decreasing layers in the same way as the monopoly board is raised up.
7. Page 4 - Haslemere Visitor and Local Information Centre has an informative leaflet and map called "The Devil's Punchbowl Walk". It mentions that part of the walk was cobbled during WW11 for tank manoeuvres which looks like a link with the image of tanks on with Page 4.
8. Page 7 – image of the Sailing Stone a nod to the Sailor's Stone.
9. Page 8 – at the bottom right of the image within the red ring, there is a drawing of what looks to be a gibbet the murderers of the Unknown Sailor were hanged on a three-man gibbet at the Devil's Punch Bowl.
10. Page 10 – The answer to Question 5, Oak, seemed to leave an s and u hanging in the air, perhaps a hint at Surrey, and more specifically the famous oak trees were a hint at an oak tree with a circular seat at Thursley.
11. Page 14 – the image of Dante's inferno a hint at the devil.
12. There were also a number of other references in the quiz that connected with the Punch Bowl area – a Ridgeway Farm, an Abbots Farm, amphitheatre.
13. From an overall point of view, for a treasure hunt that had whisky and beer as a major theme a Punch Bowl seemed a very apt location.

We thought the above connections made the Devil's Punch Bowl the general area for the location of the treasure, but when it came to pinning down the location more specifically we had two schools of thought:

1. The area to the north of the Punch Bowl known as the Lion's Mouth on Kettlebury Hill near Thursley. The thinking for this is shown on the Answers to Questions page.
2. National Trust areas at Waggoners Wells. The Hidden Trail from the Devil's Punchbowl was our first promising location to look at. Judging by photographs it does have fences, cows and had a cobbled area for tanks which are all clues mentioned in the Quiz. However we have been unable to pinpoint an actual place on that trail or in the Punchbowl.

We then considered Sir Robert Hunter. There are many trails in the area which may well not have existed today without his efforts. He founded the Commons Preservation Society – later known as The Open Spaces Society and was the person who was instrumental in founding the National Trust. It was through him that the Devil's Punchbowl and Hindhead Commons were acquired for the National Trust. He also enabled the NT to acquire the adjoining area of Ludshott Common when he was chairman of the Ludshott Preservation Society. This did not save that area and a large tract of common there from being used for military purposes during the war. Tank manoeuvres were also extensively practised there albeit not as futuristic as the ones on Page 4.

After his death Waggoners Wells was bought to honour his memory. This area joins the Ludshott Common. His commemoration stone was erected at Waggoners Wells because apparently there is no record of his official burial place. A group walk around all these areas taking in the main relics such as the Sailors Stone, Gibbet Hill, the Celtic Cross and the Wells to celebrate all he had done prompted this press release in 1995- “ Real Life Drama and the inauguration of the Sir Robert Hunter Trail. Actors and local residents including “Sir Richard” led a cavalcade of people on Hindhead Common yesterday to tell people about the area and the people who frequented it.”

The area of his influence seemed to be spreading outwards from the Waggoners Wells.

There is a stone “Wishing Well” At Waggoners Wells. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (who had also lived in the area) wrote a poem there introducing the flower motif, possibly gorse as mentioned in one of the codes. There is a NT plaque which commemorates this.

*The National Trust.
At this wishing well in 1863
Alfred Lord Tennyson
Composed this poem;
Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies
I would hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower- but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.*

This led to Tennyson. The Tennyson memorial statue (1903) by George Frederick Watts at Lincoln shows him holding a flower in his hand and a plaque with this poem. The phrase “flower in the crannied wall” is sometimes used in a metaphorical sense for the idea of seeking holistic principles from the constituent parts of their connections.

The crannied wall mentioned in the poem led to the adjoining Ludshott common.

There are remains of a military camp based there during the war. It was a Canadian military camp, which was called Camp Superior (after the Canadian lake). One such remnant is the rifle range. This feature consists of a large mound of earth supported by a large redbrick wall. There is a large pit situated before the wall that shores up the mound – the earth probably taken from there to make the mound. The firing targets were then placed upon the mound. Our information about this was taken from Ludshott Common in the C20th by Matthew Tilley Part 2. A picture of the wall is included in his dissertation.

This is a very “crannied” wall capable of concealing any amount of “Treasure” especially if there is a gorse bush handy to examine!

If mounds in front of a wall count as “banks” – he is there too!

The author **Flora** Thomson also lived in and wrote about this area. There is The Flora Thomson Trail. Walk and Cycle. This trail covers Waggoners wishing well and Camp Superior and the rifle range. It can also be approached from the Devil’s Punchbowl and Ludshott Common Trail which links to her trail at Waggoners Wells and covers the relics mentioned in the quiz.

An Iain Banks link might be made with Sir Robert Hunter who features largely in this quiz and “Names Aren’t Important a Panegyric for Iain M Banks” written by Rob Hunter.

Astronomically speaking also to be seen along this trail is the house which used to be called Hunter’s Moon, very apposite in view of the super Hunter’s Moon in 2016.

Other speculations

There are Monopoly games which cover the themes in the quiz. James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Pub Crawl and even Devon all exist, whether Banking covers Iain Banks is open to interpretation but there is a Star

Trek! The monopoly board and Olympic rings might indicate the Docklands Light Railway which has a new station link to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park or Hindhead tunnel and the trails in that area.

Tale 4 – The Pathfinders

Our hunt started slowly but steadily, with various team members away over the holidays, but we chipped away at the questions, and the sentence was found around New Year (in a house in Northern Peru, using the next door neighbours' wi-fi.) We also established the Banks books & characters fairly quickly, and solved some of the more minor codes, but it wasn't until a few days to go that we finally cracked the important 'distances' code. Even then we remained unsure of how to use these – surely we couldn't need all 16 sets – but attempts at adding them together within or across pages failed. It looked like we would finish empty handed for the second year in a row.

Appropriately enough it was Dave Harding's old pal & colleague Mitch who made the key breakthrough, on the morning of the final Saturday. Armed with a table of distances between the few distilleries and breweries we'd found in the hunt, he noted that one of them matched one of the distance codes exactly, and that by drawing imaginary circles he could go on from the (Tring) brewery to the Greyhound pub and then what he described in his excitement as “that #*&@! great lion” near Whipsnade. This was too much to be a coincidence and he extended this to Pitstone Hill, where it looked very much like there could be gorse and a loose fencepost. He and his wife decided to head up there straight away (by now mid-afternoon on Saturday.)

With Mitch en route, Matt decided to try the technique on another page - by chance (and because we had only 3 distilleries) it was p16. But the circle from the Roundham distillery cut through huge swathes of countryside – it was clear something was needed to give not just range but direction. Of course! The flipping constellations. Using a combination of a copied-and-pasted protractor overlaid on the constellations in Word, and some fairly horrible internet tools for taking bearings, the treasure site at Beer was found within half-an-hour, in a place looking even more likely to have gorse and loose fence posts. This meant three things: 1) the jaw-dropping realisation that Steve really had devised 16 different routes to 16 different sites 2) that Totnes-based Matt would finally get to go to a real treasure site tomorrow ¹and 3) that Mitch was heading to Pitstone Hill with directions for the wrong site.

The call came in from Mitch around 5pm – it was dark, snowy and no obvious sign of treasure. However we were sure from some tiny constellation on a PDF file measured with a rubbishy protractor that it must be about 107 m south-south-east of an ambiguous point in the car park. Perhaps he needed to 'search in the trough?' Radio silence followed until at about 5:30pm the news came in that we had found the box, in the red trough on the poster – ticket number 7. A great result and one of the most exciting days of armchair treasure hunting in recent memory.

Work continued late that night to find the other sites, and convince ourselves that many were red herrings or old sites. (We also finally found Mike Oldfield's house!) Next morning the Devon contingent set off for Beer. Despite a few hiccups – the car park entrance was closed, and we also searched fruitlessly on the right before realising that Steve really had hidden the treasure in plain sight of the busy coast path – we retrieved the box around 2.10pm. Ticket no. 6 (and Kitchener_Hyndersley as password for the missing VHS). As we knew, it was the secondary box, but we celebrated nonetheless in the pub for that route, the Hare & Hounds in Putts Corner – a decent carvery washed down with a nice pint of Otter by the fire. We also checked out some of the other landmarks – Beer Quarry, Fire Beacon & the Golden Lion in Tipton St John (I was very glad we didn't choose to eat here as it was an expensive looking, and closed, gastropub², with an owner who came out and wanted to know what I was doing photographing the lions outside his pub. I said I was on a treasure hunt and he said: oh, yes, we get a lot of those round here.)

After that there's been barely enough time to write up our results – in fact it's doubtful we'll finish all the 16 routes. Not even enough time to include our photos or for proof-reading, so apologies for poor formatting & typos. It's one of the few hunts where we really could do with another few days. But we've done much better than we could have imagined two days ago!

¹ Setter's note from Steve – one of the reasons that I had quite deliberately put a treasure down in Devon was that I knew that Matt lived in Totnes and I was hoping that he would get to visit the site!

² Steve: actually, it's not that expensive and is very nice food. I've eaten there several times now, as I have a house just up the road...

In closing we'd like to thank Steve & Roger for what has turned out to be a beautifully crafted hunt of breathtaking scope & ambition! We look forward to finding out some of the many things we didn't get, such as those blessed radar charts, those sodding NEWSs codes and those ruddy maps!

Tale 5 - Quinta Essentia

Dear ATH-Setters,

As a loyal German and non-native speakers awarded team, we again participated in Pablos ATH this year.

Honestly we must say, it has been a great pleasure for us to learn about the renowned Scottish author Iain Banks, his books, his cars, his music list and his search of the perfect dram on a Scottish whisky tour. In Germany only hardcore science fiction readers know Iain Banks. One of our team members' son happens to own two books of him. Banks was a great writer who passed away too early. Naming an asteroid after him is certainly wonderful but having an Iain Banks puzzle - and such a nice one - is really awesome..

We had no idea that Scotland, only slightly larger than hard-drinking Bavaria, with half the inhabitants, produces so much raw spirit! The distilleries' challenging names with a smattering of letters, Bunnahabhain, Auchentoshan, Laphroaig will remain in our memories for a very long time.

Quite amusing and remarkable were the funny names of the star constellations, like KISS HIP OF DANCING QUEUE or NINJA DISPLAY ARENA. They got even better when they were decoded to King Quience of Haspidus or Djam Seriy Anaplian.

Finally we would like to thank you for composing such a highly complex work of a puzzle, for ruining our Christmas holidays and for keeping us puzzle addicted. Thanks also for the lifesaving deadline!

Best regards

Team Quinta Essentia

Bernhild, Frank, Roswitha, Sven

Tale 6 – The Famous Five

The poster gave us the hint that this treasure hunt would be about whisky; clearly this meant that we needed to arrange a holiday on the west coast of Scotland, where we could sample the local produce and get into the right mood to tackle the hunt. So as I start to write this on New Year's Day we are in a cottage by the sea on the remote west coast of the Isle of Islay, with the full selection of (eight) Islay malt whiskies available for sampling.



First task was to visit the eight working distilleries on the island to search for clues. So we toured Ardbeg, Bowmore, Bruichladdich, Bunnahabhain, Caol Ila, Kilchoman, Lagavulin and Laphroaig – see pictorial evidence. We also encountered the construction works for the new Ardnahoe distillery – being built between Caol Ila and Bunnahabhain. Sadly no sign of a Logica 'L' at any of these sites, and indeed all but Laphroaig were closed to visitors for the Christmas/New Year holiday period.





Recognising the Kildalton Cross on page 2, we travelled to the south east corner of the island to check for treasure boxes in the grounds of the ruined Kildalton Church. Unfortunately again we found nothing, other than a good quantity of wood for cottage fire.

We returned via the Islay House Estate to collect a few bottles of Islay Ales and to check whether the local staff knew anything of treasure being buried in these parts. Yet again we drew a blank but we consoled ourselves with a glass or two of Nerabus.



Tale 7 – Apopheniacs Anonymous – Captain’s Log

Prime Possibilities

One of the great aspects of Pablo’s ATH each year is the opportunity to get out in the fresh air and find new parts of the countryside, hopefully combined with a nice walk, a relatively simple exhumation of a Tupperware box and a celebratory pint in a local Red Lion. So the Setter’s tantalising offer of *a small box (or two or three or more)* seemed to offer plenty of possibilities. As usual, all we had to do was answer everything, identify everything and knock off those codes as quickly as possible. Easy.

All seemed to be going reasonably well and it was with great excitement that a pre-Christmas breakthrough with the prime number code starting yielding tantalising glimpses of success, including MONUMENT, WELLIES and the all-important MARKED WITH L. An evening’s rearrangement of the primes quickly (ish) gave us five useful pieces of intelligence, two of which were a bit weird (HER RINGS?, HT TORP INN?).

A Christmas Day Walk

We were already on the trail (sic) of the Ridgeway, so mention of following a path away from a monument gave immediate hope that the monument in question sat atop Coombe Hill. So while many were tucking into turkey with trimmings and excitedly waiting for the Queen to analyse another annus horribilis, we were already hot-footing it to Buckinghamshire in the rain. It couldn’t be this easy could it?

As ever on arrival at a potential ATH site there is some trepidation as to who else might be there. Two other cars in the car park had to be from other teams and couldn’t possibly be locals out walking their dogs. A group of five or six folk determinedly hunting for trees with three trunks also caught the eye, so we headed off at a pace towards the monument. The monument in question ought to have rung bells from 2007, but strangely didn’t until well after the sixth bench had been located, the Lion-Herring trapped and the penny had dropped over HER RINGS. D’oh.



Still, no time like the present to catch more fish. Highly likely that all four sets of instructions relate to Lion-Herrings that are all close to Coombe Hill right? We still had no idea about the Torp Inn or which holy building to track down, but Elrond’s house had to be Rivendell, and a few miles up the road in a town called The Lee was just such a house, according to the ever reliable Rightmove. And so it was, not long later, that we were parked up outside a house that looked suspiciously like, well, a big house. Cunningly it had a long drive and what are the odds of us finding a house with a drive, so this had to be the place. However after three attempts of marching up the driveway only to be met with incredulous stares from a family eating their Christmas pudding we decided to beat a retreat. Perhaps there was more than one Rivendell.

Tracking Down Elrond

By now we had confidently concluded that the four sets of directions deduced from the prime code related to the four former ATHs referenced on the poster, namely Fool on the Hill (Coombe Hill – tick), Sherlock Holmes (Cookham Quarry Wood), Melting Brain (Christmas Common) and George Orwell (Wallington). Some map searching located another promising Rivendell and an NT Car Park close to Quarry Wood and we were soon en-route to Berkshire, buoyed by a recent breakthrough with the star trails and the knowledge that A CHALK FARM DUNE pointed remarkably close to Quarry Wood.



The recovery of the Quarry Wood Lion-Herring turned out to be about as regulation as they can be, with perfect instructions (we still hadn't dug out the previous hunt instructions by then) leading to the fork in the path, the signpost and the plastic box in a pile of leaves. Two down, two to go, although a further search of the nearby woods yields no wobbly fence posts or troughs.

Back to Where it All Began

Although we were now certain that the four Lion-Herrings matched the four previous hunts from the poster, the remaining instructions were somewhat trickier to place. We could have taken the view that there was now no point in finding them, but apopheniacs are also detail-oriented control freaks so those lions needed to be tracked down. We still didn't know what the Torp Inn (or RP Inn) was, and couldn't find a 1930s bridge online in either Christmas Common or Wallington. However with enough daylight available after the Quarry Wood visit, a quick reconnaissance trip to Christmas Common was in order.

It seems like a nice little town with a nice little (very busy) pub - Pablo chose well – but there was no Torp Inn, 1930s bridge, holy building or stream to be found down any of the muddy lanes. Not even a sniff. Something was amiss, but we didn't know quite what. There was nothing for it but to check out Wallington, but that would have to wait for another day.

Stealing Lead

Being impatient, another day turned out to be the next day, and a short trip up the A1 soon lead to the somewhat secluded village of Wallington, which in St Mary's Church had the very considerable selling point of a holy building. It turned out that we weren't the only ones attracted to that holy building. With parking space at a premium in the village, a short walk along the main road took us past several laminated signs saying something along the lines of "Look out for strangers near the church because they'll be stealing lead from the roof. If you see anyone call the police". Curtains were also twitching near to the church and after a third fruitless circumnavigation of the building looking for relevant paths that merged, some of the locals were coming out on neighbourhood watch duties. Time to beat a herringless retreat and scratch heads further as to where those last two Lion-Herrings were hanging out.

Applying Common Sense

While some of us were scouring the home counties in search of lions, others applied common-sense to the problem and identified that the likely locations of our two remaining Lion-Herrings were Ayot St Peter and the Hillingdon Trail at Ruislip, locations of the Snakes & Ladders and Connections hunts and destinations of two of the star trails. We were so confident now that these were the herring locations that our attention shifted to actually finding the treasure, having made further significant progress with the star trails and a compelling theory now known internally as AbboTheory#137 which said that the location of the treasure had to go via a Lion that was neither red nor gold. This could only be Pitstone Hill.

Pea Souper

When we have the bit between our teeth and are certain of a treasure location, there's no stopping us. In truth, we weren't fully sold on AbboTheory#137 but it was the best we had. And so it was that an expedition party of two set off in the fog to conquer Pitstone Hill. The London fog was bearable, but by the time we'd reached Buckinghamshire it was a real pea-souper. To go along with the problem that we could barely see our hands in front of our faces, we also had the other slight difficulty of not really knowing what we were looking for as the pesky NSsEW code has still not been solved. Still, how hard could it be to find a fencepost in the fog in the countryside?



Quite hard. Although after a couple of hours in the mud of Pitstone Hill we felt we could now write a small monograph on the subject of fencing – single or double strand barbed wire, wrapped around or stapled to the post, size of mesh and other characteristics. We'll be publishing our findings after the hunt. Cutting an already long story short-ish, the fence posts looked cunningly similar to the photo in the hunt, but no matter how many posts we wobbled, we couldn't find that elusive L.

If At First You Don't Succeed ...

... bring reinforcements. So determined were we not to head to Devon that no matter how many signs we found pointing us west, we determined that the treasure would be on Pitstone Hill, even if it wasn't. So a larger team was sent back out into the slightly less foggy fog a week later for a more extensive survey of the area, now taking in the real Ridgeway – we hadn't actually been on it in the earlier fog – Grim's Ditch (dyke), where we thought for a while we'd lost an apopheniatic, Aldbury Nowers, Howlett's Wood and the environs of Stocks Golf Club. During the day, we successfully located two red kites, a very promising large trough at the corner of the dyke (where it turns), a lot of yellow markings on trees and some beautiful Belted Galloway cattle that had been invisible in the fog on our previous visit. We were now more certain than ever that we were in the right place, and the more we struggled to find the requisite fence post, the more certain we became that it was here. Somewhere. Probably.

With winter light failing, fog again descending and stomachs rumbling we had to make a second unsuccessful retreat from Pitstone Hill.

Collecting The Lion-Herring Set

ATH time was now running out and Pitstone Hill had failed to yield a Tupperware box so our completer-finished tendencies lead us finally to Ayot St Peter and Ruislip to collect the final two Lion-Herrings. After earlier difficulties with the locals in Wallington, Ayot St Peter turned out to be quite the opposite. The locals were friendly and the route from the church of St Peter easy to follow into Gregg's wood where the mythical three-trunked-tree was found, complete with the by now familiar Lion-Herring card.



So, onwards to Hillingdon, where surely West Ruislip tube station car park would be empty on tube strike day. It was, but it was also a tenner per day to park. No thanks!

With rain falling heavily over west London, it was handy that setters past and present had warned about bringing wellies. Just a shame they were left in the car. The Hillingdon Trail had by now been decoded from HT TO R PINN (the River Pinn, not Torp Inn!) and it was all now about intercepting the Trail as close as possible to the 1930s bridge, which by now we knew was an aqueduct. This actually turned out not to be too tricky, once Ruislip golf course was navigated (repeat, NOTHING to do with golf). However the ankle-deep mud and muck around the canal feeder trough really did warrant wellies. In amongst the natural and man-made detritus was the familiar box and Lion-Herring card. The location looked familiar too – matching exactly the photo on page 10 of the hunt.



So, four herrings out of four but no treasure. Maybe next year.

Setter's Notes: So near yet so far away.....

By getting to Pitstone Hill car park and setting off along the Ridgeway, the Apopheniacs got within 10 paces of the treasure.....

Their response?

Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

Tale 8 – Alcoholus Lubricatum

We were impressed that you managed to get a puzzle clue on national radio.

Take a listen to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b086s7dk> from 02:45 to 04:55 (and for added amusement notice where the postcode is).