

Muddy Christmas in Epping Forest

10 Start at my blue plaque. Head N



2 take signed footpath West



3 follow path to right by fence. Cross road



4 Head down to L. Note runged tree and bench to R



5 After a boggy furlong (220 yards) notice no nuts or spoons



6 Take main path up WNW a hundred rods (550 yards) to clearing with a post



7 Sharp right into wood. Continue to bank



8 From truncated tree widershins (to left) for thirty yards



9 Look for a tree with very many trunks



11 One chain (22 yards) back from keyhole inside tree CXCIXLVII (tag no. 19957)



Our team is always keen to get the outdoor part of Pablo's ATH done as soon as possible after publication, so that we can relax a bit over the festive days and then focus on solving the missing bits. But this year the teaser poster gave us a lot of possible themes and we researched many topics which then did not come up in the main hunt at all. So we didn't have any idea of where we might end up although we'd actually mentioned Ruth Rendell on the 22nd November!

While studying the trees and other waypoint markers in the photos, we proposed very early on that we might have to visit either Hampstead Heath or Epping Forest. The area looked well maintained with wide paths and old trees. Unfortunately we chose to look around Hampstead Heath first, but couldn't spot anything interesting on Streetview and other photos available online. It wasn't until we spotted the "DEB DE N" in one of the Exif codes that our focus changed to Epping Forest.

We knew Debden was near the edge of the forest and one of the instructions seemed to indicate that the bicycle was on a pub or cafe. So we looked for pubs along the edge of Epping Forest on the Debden side and the first one we checked on Streetview turned out to be the correct one! And with the help of the decoded instructions and a map it didn't take long to find the lion and also photos of the fishing platform at Baldwin's Pond and the clearing with the pole.



Unfortunately by that time it was already mid-afternoon on 22nd December and none of us were close enough to get there before dark. We had to wait until the next morning, but in the meantime we researched the location of the pub and the lion and finally made the connection to Ruth Rendell and also the Lester sisters.



Two team members, their spouses and a thematic canine met at the lion at sunrise the following morning and set off to follow the waypoints. At first it was easy going, until we reached the runged tree where it all got very boggy and every step had to be judged carefully.

After a bit of a delay we arrived at the fishing platform and learnt what the “no nuts and spoons” was all about. Do people really use spoons for fishing? I guess they are similar to blinkers. Anyway, we continued our walk along the aptly named “Clay Ride” and soon



arrived at the clearing with the post and spotted the next tree and the sharp right turn towards the Lost Pond which we had on top of our list as the most likely location for the box (especially as the message on page 1 told us that we’d be near water).



A few more boggy puddles to avoid and then we saw the truncated tree and the bank straight ahead. When we had almost reached the pond we suddenly spotted some people coming from the direction that we were meant to be going next. And among them two familiar faces. They were members of team Alcoholus Lubricatum and they told us that they had just retrieved ticket #1. Oh no! We were so close! Maybe we should have gone in the dark after all, but we all thought that the task of finding the correct tree would have been very difficult then.

After a little chat with the other team, we followed the instructions to the impressive tree with the “very many trunks” and found the “keyhole”. As we weren’t quite sure how to interpret the next instruction, we spread out in all directions and checked various tree tags for the correct number. Eventually we got the correct one and found the “red” (pink really....) box hidden under leaves. We quickly took ticket #2 and put the box back in its hiding place. Then we took some photos and walked over to a nearby old Geocache. While we were there we realised that we hadn’t really read the instructions in the Pablo box properly. What if we had missed some important clue or instruction? So we went back and grabbed the box again, and this time took photos of everything inside and sent them to our members who were following us from their desks. There didn’t seem to be anything unusual. “Send an email to the setters”, ok, no problem. A pack of Silver Oreos, which the other team had taken away, and at the time of writing this we still don’t know how Oreos fit into this hunt.



12. On way back pass bench to bike if thirsty



On our way back to the car we made a little detour to the Foresters Arms pub, which was still closed that early in the morning. Luckily the mud was so wet that it literally dripped off our boots and we didn’t end up with a few extra kilos of clay on our feet. We were wondering about the use of some old measurements in the instructions, i.e. chains, rods, furlong, especially as the distances given did not quite correspond with the actual distances walked on the ground. But at the time we were happy enough to have found the box and to not have slipped and landed in the mud.

Two of our team members returned to the site on 5th January to look for ATHEXIT. We'd noticed that the actual distances walked didn't quite match those in the decoded instructions so decided to pace out 100 rods (about 502m) from the Fishing notice (which mentions 2 rods) to see where they ended up. The post in the clearing is after about 420m, then the path carries on in a straight line. Bizarrely, at exactly 502m, they found a group of trees garlanded in the remains of some red string. They had a good look in these trees but found nothing. They decided this is just pure coincidence, but it did get the heart rate going for a short while. They rechecked the treasure box (next ticket was 13), then it was off to the Foresters Arms for a drink.



measured distances:

- runged tree - two trees : 50 metres ~55yds
- two trees - fishing sign: 170 metres ~ 186yds (1 furlong = 220yds)
- fishing sign - clearing with post: 420 metres ~ 459yds (100 rods = 550yds)
- clearing - truncated tree: 220 metres ~ 240yds
- truncated tree - keyhole: 35 metres ~ 38yds
- keyhole - final: 10 metres ~ 11yds (1 chain = 22yds)

