

Finding the treasure – the short version

The treasure was hidden in a hollow in an old tree near the Lost Pond (Blackweir Pond) in Epping Forest, near Loughton.

We found it by first all realising that references to Ruth Rendell were scattered throughout the pages of the Hunt. We had also realised that one picture on each of pages 2 to 12 probably illustrated the route to the treasure. On 1st January, Tim noted that she had lived at 45 Millsmead Way in Loughton, where the house has a blue plaque. Using Google Maps he then found that there was an alleyway just around the corner on Sedley Rise, heading towards Epping Forest, and that it could well be the one pictured on page 2. He also found a picture of Baldwin's Hill Pond, comparable to the one on page 5. Later that day Tim also found a picture of the Foresters' Arms, with the page 12 bicycle above the door.

Nancy and Garry live in St Albans, just over 20 miles away, so they set out on January 2nd. After three and a half hours of slithering up and down slopes and tramping through the woods, they had found the locations on pages 2 to 8, 10 and 12, but not those on pages 9 and 11.

They returned on the 3rd, and after an hour's fruitless search around the Lost Pond, Nancy found the page 11 treasure tree, and they retrieved card number 8. They never did find the tree with the hole in it that is pictured on page 9. This was all done before the detailed instructions were decrypted.

Finding the treasure – the long version

Garry's reports after trips to the woods.

02 January

Yet another trip when I think we were so close, but failed! Maybe I'm getting too old for this.

From Google Earth, there didn't seem to be much parking on the east side of the wood, so I headed for the car park where the Beech Trail crosses the A104 - see <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/sports-events-and-activities/Documents/beech-trail-epping-forest.pdf>. Unfortunately that car park is currently shut, but there is another one about a quarter of a mile north up the A104.

We quickly found the crossroads where the Beech Trail meets the path coming up from Baldwin's Hill Pond, and confirmed that it was the location pictured on page 6. Reasoning that we should be heading roughly towards the Foresters' Arms, I took the dotted line path on the map that runs off to the NE. After a mile or so we admitted defeat, and turned back.

We met three Forest Wardens, so "Can I ask you a question? It's going to sound strange. We are looking for treasure....". They weren't able to help. However they did say that no one else had asked them about this, and if anyone did, they would say the treasure had already been found! One of them did tell us that the metal tags were on historic, preserved trees, and carried their GPS location. [In fact, it is an index number into a database, which would then give the location.]

We went back to the crossroads, and decided we might as well have a look at what we thought was the first part of the route. So we traced the route backwards from the crossroads, all the way to Ruth Rendell's house. The area round Baldwin's Hill Pond is an absolute mud bath, and the two slopes on either side of it are lethally slippery. I can see why the setters warned about mud. It is positively dangerous - it would be very easy to slip on the slopes and break a leg. If you are going there, either wear wellies, or boots/shoes and trousers that you don't care much for.

So we had a look at RR's house - didn't take a photo. But the lion is in front of a house between RR's and the alleyway. My photo of it is not good, because it was taken on the move with my phone - the owner was hanging about outside, and I didn't much like the look of him.

Anyway, we went back in to the woods, back to the crossroads. This time we turned left down the dotted line path that goes the "Loughton Camp" text on the map. And after a while we gave up again.

Returning to the crossroads, there was only one path that we hadn't explored - the minor one leading towards the Lost Pond. And as soon as I looked at it... well, see my page 07 picture. We could have saved ourselves a couple of hours and much slithering about in mud. We went down that path, and eventually

came to the page 8 tree, on the edge of the Lost Pond. My picture isn't from the same angle as the one in the ATH, but it is the right tree - I did find the correct angle.

We went round the pond a couple of times, and explored beyond it, but couldn't find the trees on pages 9 and 11. Very many of the trees in that area are tagged, and there is a lot of holly around, but we couldn't find anything. And then a family came and started a picnic under the page 8 tree. A noisy picnic - I wasn't listening, but Nancy said at one point someone was shouting about having grouse sandwiches!

So we called it a day. We'll see what the weather is like tomorrow - looks like rain overnight, clearing during the morning.

It's a mystery why the lion is out of order, on page 10, whose featured author we have yet to discover.

03 January

We went back to Epping Forest this morning. There had been overnight rain, but it had stopped, and we knew that we weren't heading for the mud bath parts of the wood. We went straight to the page 8 cropped tree beside the Lost Pond, and started searching again.

After an hour or so, we hadn't found anything, and despair was setting in again. We had split up, and suddenly my phone told me that I had missed a call from Nancy - coverage is patchy in the woods. She told me to come and meet her beside the cropped tree, where we had started searching.

She took me round the corner, no more than thirty paces - and there was the treasure tree from page 11! As I expected, it was an old tree with a hollow area in it, which was slightly above my height. So I reached up and over, groped blindly in the hollow area, and immediately my fingers closed on something artificial and smooth! It was an empty beer bottle.

So I went round the back of the tree, where the ground was higher and I could see into the hollow area, which was completely filled with leaves. There's only one thing to do in such circumstances - stick your hand straight in, and grope about. I quickly found the box.

Just the expected numbered tickets inside it, together with the usual instructions from the setters. And a Christmas card from Alcoholus Lubricatum, although with no indication of when they had been there. No other cards from other teams, even though we were number 8. I didn't look through them all, but the tickets immediately under ours had the same design on them - unlike last year, when I recall they all had different James Bond book covers.

So I left the treasure tree as I had found it, including carefully replacing the beer bottle.

And we still haven't seen that tree with a loop in it that is on page 9 of the ATH! It ought to be between the page 8 cropped tree and the treasure tree - and there are a couple of large trees there - but although we spent a fair amount of time looking for it, we never found it.
