

Alcoholus Lubricatum's Hunt Tale

First site visit 29th December 2021 am (MJS)

At this point the instructions referenced by the ADFGVX decode read as follows:

East from CCL PM Oak
[something from the Xmas postcards]
[something from page 13]
Path south or take track
Second tree

We could see various numbered footpaths and bridleways to the south of Cold Christmas Lane, and a promising sounding James's Wood in a plausible location.

After parking in Thundridge I started walking east towards the meridian tree.



Getting warmer...

I observed the meridian oak tree and the meridian post, seasonally decorated.



I tried walking south from the first pathway east of the oak tree, towards James's Wood.



The wood itself was almost entirely fenced off and didn't contain suitable hiding places, but I found a suitable pair of trees, arguably between a path and a track (between the wood and a field). The second tree had plenty of fine hiding places for treasure, which the setters

unfortunately neglected to utilise.



At the point of taking this picture, the actual treasure site was about 50m behind me, but I decided to take a closer look at the paths around James's wood. A while later, after trying out some of the other paths from CCL east of the oak tree, it was time to head back.

Second site visit 29th December 2021 pm (SPL)

A second expedition was made on the afternoon of 29 December after the phrase THIRTEEN STEPS had been decrypted and the steps in question identified on Google Maps, thus fixing the correct southbound path. Looking at the map and overhead imagery, the western end of the small copse directly to the south of the steps seemed to be the most likely location for the necessary two trees.

It rapidly became clear that the footpath across the field was impassable due to having been ploughed, so I used the track to the east to access the copse.



The western end of the copse, while containing several trees with possible hiding places, turned out to be completely under water and was quickly eliminated. I then investigated the eastern end of the copse, but there were no obvious “first” or “second” trees, and the trees there lacked any suitable hiding places.

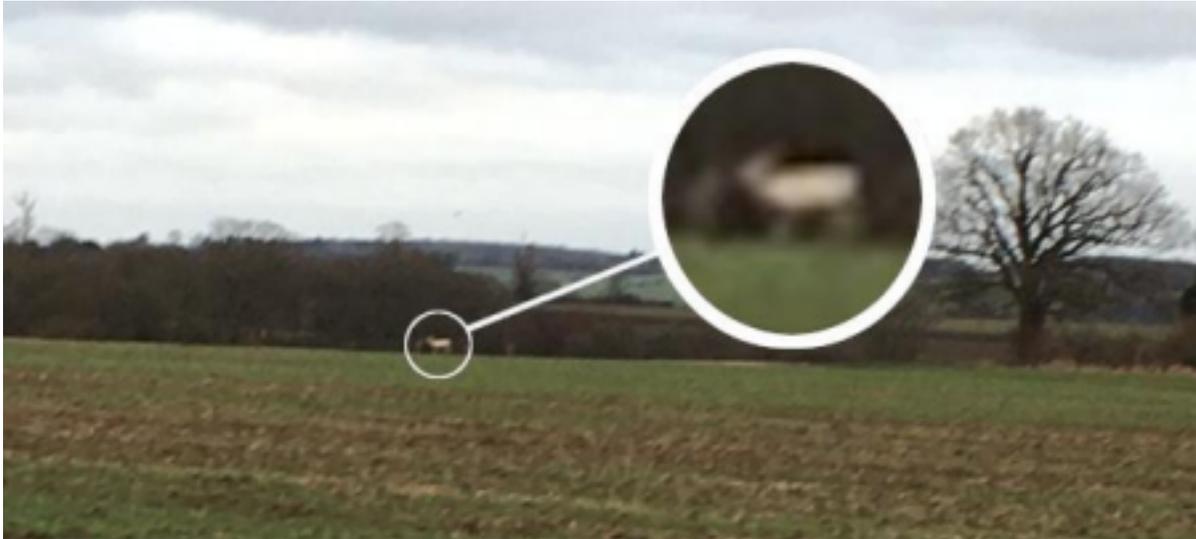
Finally, I checked the trees and bushes near the top of the steps in case the treasure had been hidden much closer to the steps than expected, but again, there were no obvious hiding places and no trees which could be regarded as “first” or “second”, and by this time the light was fading fast, so I called it a day.

Third site visit 30th December 2021 pm (MO)

After these two unsuccessful trips the team pored again over the maps and aerial images of the area. Eventually we narrowed down the likely possibilities to just a small number of trees, all more or less on the path that runs towards Cold Christmas from the north end of Musley Hill in Ware.

It'd be a breezy 30 or 40 minutes' stroll over lush rolling pasture, I estimated... but I hadn't reckoned with the mud! As each step sank deeper into the ground it looked like it would be more like two hours of squelching, which would have brought us close to dusk. We were on the point of giving up; a fine drizzle started to fall from the increasingly leaden sky and trickle

down our increasingly damp necks.



But just at that moment, far in the distance, we caught sight of the celebrated 'White Stag of Stevenage' (celebrated by the *Daily Mail* at any rate). As Robert Baden-Powell said:

The White Stag has a message for you... [it leads you] in the joy of the chase to new and fresh adventures, and so to capture happiness

That seemed something worth having, so we decided to carry on.

At our current state of decoding the messages we had '..C.ND TREE' from page 6 of the hunt. Although this was clearly 'SECOND TREE', one of our team had helpfully pointed out that it could read 'ASCEND TREE'. I certainly wasn't planning on any ascents of any trees whatsoever until I had exhausted all other possibilities, although some of the trees did offer tempting hiding places only accessible by climbing them.

After a little rootling in and around a couple of wrong trees, we eventually spotted the box — not visible from the track, but fairly conspicuous once you are on the correct side of the tree, trespassing in the adjacent field.



We thought that we had made a slow start on the hunt, many of the team having other commitments this year that they felt they should prioritise, such as recovering from certain infectious diseases. We were therefore both delighted and surprised to find that no-one seemed to have got there before us.

[Note from another team member: I'm not sure the two team members with covid would describe it as 'commitments this year that they felt they should prioritise' :-)]



So another hunting year passes and yet more swag gets crammed into the already overflowing *Alcoholus Lubricatum* trophy cabinet. Our thanks to the Urban Marsupial Orchestra for a most entertaining and very Christmassy hunt, and a fine tribute to James Medhurst.



Congratulations!

*Wishing you a very
lyrical Christmas*

*from the
Urban Marsupial
Orchestra*

