

## UK Metamorphosis

We started well on the much-anticipated ATH2021. We made short work of the Poster, or so we thought. We began to get bogged down with the Advent Calendar. Some of the opened doors would have best been left closed. However, this was just a preliminary dance before the big event, and historically not too important, so we were not downhearted.

10<sup>th</sup> December and the hunt is out! 14 pages, 185 pictures, 60 questions and 16 Lyrical Cards. Shouldn't be a problem, we are good at questions and experts in Google Reverse Image search. Time for the team to get stuck in. Again we started well with image identifications pouring in. I departed for a wedding in Donegal on the 15<sup>th</sup> confident that we were on track.

Internet access in Donegal is good but between wedding and family commitments I could see that initial enthusiasm had waned and we were not making significant progress. By the time I returned on the 19<sup>th</sup> with a very bad head cold I was concerned, we seemed to be floundering. Too many of the pictures were not succumbing to Google, the questions were more cryptic than Bitcoin and we all wished the cards had never been opened.

It was a few days later that an email from Arthur & his three Agathas, asking the setters if they could join up with another team, was mistakenly sent to PablosATH.com. As non-native English speakers, they were Germans based in Germany, they were feeling exposed when tackling the English idioms. As secretary to the Past Setters I received this email and forwarded it onto the setters without another thought. The setters responded that it was a bit late to get such a request but suggested that I might contact them. I had given the setters access to my team's shared website and they had probably seen how badly we were doing.

My initial reaction was *"we don't need any help; we are a proudly effective team with a great track record"*. But of course, above all other considerations, we want to find the treasure and at that stage I could see no possibility of us getting close. Also, when I looked at their track record it was much better than ours. Over the last couple of years we have been 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> whereas they have been 12<sup>th</sup>. So on the evening of December 22<sup>nd</sup>, a day after their initial email, we had negotiated a method of joint working and started sharing what we had.

The next day I packed the car ready for an early start on December 23<sup>rd</sup> when I would head north for a canal boat Christmas. The joint team began work and I think it was soon clear that the native English speakers did not have much of a clue about tackling the English idioms either.

Internet access on a canal boat travelling between Crewe, Wolverhampton, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent is not as good as Donegal, especially in mile long tunnels, but it was adequate given my minimal contribution.

Come Boxing Day our German friends made a breakthrough and **PATH SOUTH OR TAKE TRACK** emerged from the Departures Board. We were on our way; it would only be a

matter of time before the remaining instructions were revealed. Some of the images that we previously could not identify were finally falling to other search engines, TinEye, Yandex, Bing, Pinterest, etc were all being applied to a hard core of resistant artwork. The setters seemed to have taken a perverse delight in picking stills from obscure YouTube videos. Annoyingly, by the end of the hunt there were still a few unknown images.

We made steady, if unspectacular, progress over the next couple of weeks until early on Friday morning, 3 days before the hunt finished. We finally appreciated what all the meridian nonsense on page 14 was all about and EAST FROM CCLGM OAK was revealed. Two hours later we had *east from Cold Christmas Lane Greenwich Meridian oak*.

Now the team really was motoring. Friday evening we cracked the first part of what we called the Logic Code on page 10 (Find X and Y,  $L \ni AB$ , ...). X was **Cold Christmas** and it was then that we realised that Cold Christmas had come up all over the place in the hunt, so we really had found the treasure location.

About 1am on Saturday we cracked page 6 to reveal **SECOND TREE** and by noon Google Maps was showing us two trees near the Prime Meridian at Cold Christmas. Unfortunately it was raining hard in Hertfordshire, it was an hour's drive away, two trees near a village was not a lot to go on and the light would be gone in a few hours. So against all our hunter's instincts we resolved to set off early on Sunday.

Saturday night we made real progress on the cryptic crossword clues and revealed **ROTATE AROUND TOP RINGS**. Unfortunately we could not find how to use this information, we weren't rotating as much as going round in circles.

So we set off on Sunday as planned, more in hope than expectation. We knew from a Google Maps reconnaissance that we would have to park well west of Cold Christmas. It was as we walked toward the village that we found that internet access in Hertfordshire was up to Donegal standards. The team had cracked the word search grid to reveal:

- **so we want to give you a bonus point**
- **after you have found the treasure**
- **on the walk back at your leisure**
- **go west to Ware you've seen**
- **outside of number sixteen**

So when we came across a sign for Footpath 16 on the edge of the village we had final confirmation that we were in the right place. After that, much to our surprise, we walked straight to the treasure location. It was a great relief to find it with much virtual rejoicing amongst the team and across Europe and the Middle East.

With the team reenergized by the treasure find a lot of work on polishing our entry happened on Monday, right up until 9pm when our entry went in.

It just proves the power of the team over the power of the individual, or more accurately the power of two teams over one.

David Kee

### German Mingling allowed

Just shortly before Christmas - having an enthusiastic start with the poster and the calendar - we found all those English idioms, wordplays and megacryptic crossword clues a hard nut to crack. Working, thinking and puzzling in a foreign language is extremely hard for us and we really longed for some native speakers, preferably native speakers who are fond of puzzling because a native tongue is worthless if thinking outside the box is not interesting and boring for him.

We got lost somewhere between the leafiest woods, christmas garlands and unbreakable ciphers - with smoking heads and with only one single idea what we could ask for christmas. We would ask for a key. And we got... a Kee.

It was even better: we didn't get one Kee, we got a whole Kee-Team. At that point it wasn't clear for us that we came to work with a legend - we counted 35 continuous years of participation and even several activities as a setter. But that was after sending in our entry. Our deep respect and profound admiration, Dave and Team. We feel honoured. Back to christmas. As you know, we celebrate the Holy Eve on 24th - having a delicious dinner with Christmas Pie (of course Cornell Recipe), Cordon Bleu, Chicken Shack and yum yum jello with a bowl full of parmesan cheese - liquidly accompanied by a twelve pack of Budweiser. Sounds delicious? It was. On the first day of Christmas we found one airport. We took off at Baden-Baden Airport with our boardingpasses, right in time for the holiday departures (we have been there anyways for solving a timetable) and checked in for the famous "historical meridian line hopping". Captain Flint and his stewardesses (bizarrely they were eight maids) cared for our well-being - Anders Celsius was our tour guide and Cedric, the ideal geriatric, was on board for musical and lyrical entertainment. Initially this part should have been taken over by Johnny Cash, but he was attending another voyage with Sue.

On the second day of Christmas we found two trees. And obviously we preferred the second one. On the third day of Christmas we realized the "three" in our former team name is wrong. Roswitha was not on board, but so was Manni. Manni is now an Agatha. He is fine with it.

On the fourth day of Christmas we did some bird watching on wires, telephone booths and snooker tables. And we had 36 fantastic views of the Arctic Archipelago, which we celebrated with 36 gallons of gin. Lord North came on board our plane and it was him, who drank "take away 1 first" gallons on his own.

The fifth day of Christmas was just Wham! We all had a karaoke night at Novaya Zemlya. Unforgettable our version of Nirvana's "Smells like Teen Spirit" - we felt so young again... putting out our turkey legs and playing air guitar. Okay, we don't talk about our interpretation of "A fairytale in New York", which was more of a nightmare. Believe it or not, we didn't have gin that night. (We had vodka.)

On the sixth day of Christmas we played tennis with our friend Marcel, the capuchin monkey. Game, set and match! We didn't have a chance. Dan, Dan, Daaaaan! Not even Dan could help. Maybe we better should try armwrestling with Chas and Dave in Inner City.

On the seventh day of Christmas we were invited to see the New Year in. It was a huge party with formal sit-down affairs and strictly enforced smoking rules. Bring your own pipe! I found myself seated between an incomplete answer and Eratosthenes' sieve. Conversation ran sluggishly ... mostly incomplete answers. To find more amusement I changed to the smoking area, where I could choose my place either beside Naked Neck from Orpington, Lord Infamous or Paul Gascoigne, who was crying without ceasing. Paul only stopped when we started to play charade. Due for my nightcap I finally sipped gin with Titti before falling asleep.

On the eighth day of Christmas we all had a killer hangover and had eight aspirin.

On the ninth day of Christmas we've been ordered to take a bath. With GOD. Water temperature was 9°C, which was spellbinding freezing. Truth be told, glacial.

On the tenth day of Christmas our crew reached Bear Island near Spitsbergen. Jane Eyre came on board for a cup of tea. Or was it gin again? She started chattering and nearly couldn't stop talking about Gateshead. A hilarious afternoon. As a farewell gift she gave us one important advice: X marks the spot!

On the eleventh day of Christmas we met a girl born in Uist eleven years ago. She was wearing a crocodile hat with lily-like flowers and had extremely unusual inner ears. This accidental meeting was quite distracting. So - as you can imagine - we had some gin for calming down.

On the twelfth day of Christmas Frank, James and William returned home. And so did we.

What an exceptional tour this was - from UK and Germany to Christmas Island! We traveled so far with our joint team, had so much fun, so many ideas, so many red herrings, so much gin and so little sleep. Together we found a footpath 16, a CCLGM oak and a second tree with a treasure. It doesn't get any better! A huge thank you to all of our "mingled" team and - deep bow - to the Marsupials.

Andie Mayr

Mary, Mary, in January,  
How does your puzzle solve?  
With arctic hares, and polar bears,  
Cold christmas lane to evolve.