

ATH 2015

A Setter's Perspective

1996	0
2000	3
2015	?

As a setter I have history, perhaps best summed up by a Pablo quote from 1996 *“If that's how difficult you think ATHs should be then you've had an easy time of it so far”*. During that hunt no team found the treasure box and extra clues had to be issued. 2000 was a better year when 3 teams were successful. So what would I consider a successful outcome for 2015?

Recent years have seen the number of teams finding the treasure box exceeding those who did not. This is great when you are a competitor. The satisfaction of uncovering the box in the middle of the night after a tramp across a muddy field far exceeds the disappointment of discovering that your team is way off a podium place. Several past setters were generous with their advice about how I should set ATH2015. Most advice was quite possibly casual fishing to try and see what was coming but I did take one piece of advice to heart. *“Dave, it's about time we had a hard one and you are just the man for the job.”* At the time I took it as a compliment but as I write this I am not so sure.

So the tone was set for ATH2015. It was going to be hard. I was greatly helped by the team I gathered around me to set the hunt – they were much more hard line than I was *“... if they cannot work that out they should not be competing ...”*.

We knew that the poster contained insufficient information to find the treasure but as the roll out of the main hunt approached I was beginning to have doubts about its difficulty. Surely it was too easy. All ATHers had to do was spot a few dots, solve a trivial modulus 25 code and wander about a small wood looking for a shiny new bird box. OK a few emails were necessary and the answers to some questions but anyone can draw a circle so surely all teams would find the box? At other times I would think that it was too hard. What chance did they have in the Wood? As one team pointed out it is 100,000+ square metres. We knew that the circles did not intersect on the box but the setting team felt that most intersections were on the right side of All Saints Road and any self-respecting ATH team would be drawn to the out of place shiny bird box. I had a backup plan to include detailed instructions but the prospect of teams of people rushing through Croxleyhall Wood in the dead of night pointing TV remotes at trees was irresistible. To share in the excitement we had bugged the bird box so that I got an SMS message (a text on my phone) whenever a TV remote was detected by the bird box.

It was with trepidation that a week after the poster we published an apparently inconsequential letter suggesting a problem with the hunt and delaying further publications for 12 hours. At midnight I could see copies of the letter flying across the world. This was very satisfying, they want to do our hunt. What was not quite so satisfying was that a mistake had crept into the letter that took a couple of hours to remove. We also had our first taste of the intensity/obsession/commitment of ATHers to the task in hand. About 20 minutes after

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midnight I got an email asking if we could bring forward the delayed publication. I replied in the negative. An hour later I got a call from the same team. Eight of them had gathered together for dinner and planned to spend all night working on the hunt and I had messed up their plans. During the hunt there were a lot of calls and emails from ATHers who were keen to let me know that I had specifically discriminated against them. As a competitor in the future I plan to be more tolerant of the setter – well perhaps not as they have always discriminated against me in the past...

Just over 3 days into the hunt at 10:40 on Monday morning we got our first SMS message. I waited patiently for the call to say that the treasure had been found but nothing. Had the technology failed, perhaps I had not cured the fault whereby sunlight seemed to activate the electronics. The same thing happened the next day and again on Wednesday but this time we did get a call to say that the treasure box had been found.

It was a great relief that the box was found so early. We then knew that the technology was OK, local wardens had not removed the bird box and treasure and that even if the hunt had errors they were not sufficient to stop the treasure being found. I was rather disappointed that a team had found the treasure box in a little over 5 days. My team of setters had been working hard on getting the hunt ready for most of the year and I had been researching it for more than 10 years before that.

I reconciled myself to the fact that we had made it too easy and awaited a deluge of successful entries. However, there was not another SMS message until New Year's Eve, more than a week later. The second team uncovered the treasure box on New Year's Day and they were the last team to find it. Three other teams made unsuccessful and repeated forays into the wood and I suspect they do not agree that it was too easy.

Set against my previous hunts this one was easier than one and harder than the other. Set against recent hunts most teams certainly found it harder. Judging success is subjective. My team certainly had great fun setting this ATH and it gave us a Christmas off from the hunt. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect was the intensity/obsession/commitment of the ATH teams taking part – they really want to solve your hunt (and win!).

I look forward to being back on the competitors' side of the fence in 2016 and I have resolved to be nicer to the setter.