



Reel 2151 - The PATHfinders

The story of the PATHfinders team is almost inseparable from that of the ATH itself. In 1985, Paul Coombs ("Pablo") approached Geoff Beeson, then Logica Sports & Social Club secretary, with the idea of a Christmas puzzle to keep his family and others occupied during the dark winter days, when the shops were closed, the four TV channels were showing repeats and everyone was forced into an enclosed space, with different opinions on what was a comfortable temperature, all fuelled by alcohol and overeating. To make this quiz more appealing, some graphics were needed, so enter Brian Jackson, who had done the advertising poster for a previous Logica pub treasure hunt (forerunner of the ATH) and who in his spare time had been drawing illuminated letters and trying to emulate the style of classic 1950s EC comics.

Pablo and Brian had met previously on Friday nights at the Fitzroy, a regular if not mandatory end-of-week Logica occurrence, and in late 1985 Geoff brought them together for a chat and to work on what became The Melting Brain. Given how little time they had, they used scissors and Pritt to splice together Brian's existing artwork, 26 new symbols for a simple substitution code, and the ATH words that Pablo had typed out. They then spent a December Saturday at the Great Portland Street office (courtesy of Geoff's key) photocopying the hunt onto A3 sheets (completely deleting GPS of copy paper and toner within 8 hours) before going to Etes for a celebratory meal. The completed hunts were distributed throughout the Logica offices the following week, along with an advertising poster. Since Brian didn't have any other involvement in setting the questions, he entered the hunt himself (it was the only way to guarantee a copy of the answers, for which he also provided the artwork) - thus becoming the first PATHfinder team member to enter the ATH.

The response to this first Logica Armchair Treasure Hunt was OK but not outstanding, so when Pablo began sounding out the LSSC for funds the following year, the initial reaction was lukewarm. However, since Pablo and Brian had already spent some time working on the theme, they were able to go into the committee meeting with most of the finished artwork, which contributed to a positive outcome. It's likely that Pablo would have published it anyway, but without the prize funding it probably would have ended there. (And indeed, it nearly ended the following year when they couldn't get clearance for the "Who killed Philip Hughes?" idea that Pablo had for a whodunnit ATH.)

The collaboration continued on the George Bernard Shaw and Chess themed hunts; for the latter, Brian recalls driving Pablo around the route, taking photos on which to base the route drawings, devising the 25-character chevron and square code, and buying a book on Lewis chessmen from the British Museum (which he still has as source for the cover and other illustrations). Then, in 1990, Pablo decided he wanted to enter the ATH himself, so Rod Fine volunteered to have a go. Brian drew most of the artwork in a Dutch hotel room, while on a 15-month assignment in Rotterdam. The following year's hunt was set by Steve Hames, with Pablo, Brian and Dave Harding submitting separate entries. As far as we can tell, this was Dave's first attempt at the hunt, despite having worked with the others on the Advance project some years earlier. All three then ended up at Speeding Logica (a joint venture with BA in Feltham/Hounslow), where Pablo and Brian put together the 1992 hunt. As a result, the box was buried the suburban village of Feltham, near two other Logica offices, Cobham and Leatherhead. It was their final and also their most collaborative effort, with the artwork being instrumental to the hunt rather than a decorative adjunct.

Dave's legendary talent for bringing people together saw the team build in numbers, as he recruited members from both Logica and his eventual employer, eReaders. Our purple patch was in the mid-to-late '90s, with four 'first finds' in a row, and several best solutions to code. Helmed by Dave and Pablo, the team went by a variety of names: The Armchair Mob; Trailers; The Team; Trivial; Six Spades; Six Spades; The Upper of Butterflies). Following Pablo's untimely passing in 2007, we entered his posthumous hunt as THE PATHfinders - a contraction of Pablo's Armchair Treasure Hunt finders - the name our team is still known by today. Dave was very pleased with this clever tribute to his old friend! Team members also periodically set hunts, with Dave and Pablo's epic pub-armchair master "Fact or Fiction", two characteristically innovative solo efforts from Pablo, and Phil and Brian's homage to Space and Deep Purple.

VIEW-MASTER

ATH XXX MKH
BIO MKH BJ PGS
TO M P D MMXVI

211 349 1009 1220 975 186 249 234 1675 248 111 549
257 1040 511 131 1150 1601 352 179 3214 264 1001
1570 1012 376 1049 670 5121 501 1022 156 1041 572

After 30 years of hunting, it is difficult to pick highlights: every hunt has been enjoyable in its own way. We admit a certain fondness for the pre-internet days: Saturday mornings spent in warm, hushed libraries poring over atlases, almanacs, dictionaries and encyclopedias, trying to answer questions or crack codes; lunchtimes situated in bookshops browsing the works of Orwell, Chandler and Sayers, trying to conceal the excitement as previously meaningless phrases from the hunt suddenly made complete sense. For several years towards the end of the Millennium we had some success using DEC's Altavista search engine to answer questions and make connections until, one December morning at work, several questions that had defeated Altavista were easily answered by a team member using some new site called "Google", and the era of questions that could be answered over Christmas dinner was over. That said, the "kick" of solving something online is just as great, though it is heartening that analogue methods are sometimes still more efficient than digital, particularly when it comes to sorting pictures, assembling giant jigsaws, constructing snakes and ladders boards, and so on.

Often the most memorable moments are those involving teamwork - an ATH team is certainly more than the sum of its parts; how often have we seen individual team members stumped by a problem, only for them to solve it after a few minutes' discussion and sharing of hunches? Perhaps our most exciting 'find' was on the 2010 hunt; by the final Friday evening, we had made no progress on either location or direction, and it looked like we'd finish empty-handed. But that evening, a chain of discoveries by different team members led to the team pulling an all-nighter to extract the directions from Project Gutenberg. After 'walking' the route on Google Earth to check their accuracy, these instructions were handed over to the morning shift (Dave Harding), who drove to East Hagbourne, to the south of Didcot, and retrieved ticket number one from the box just before 11am.

The pinnacle of any hunt, for those privileged to live close enough, is the actual trip to the box. This can range from a big jolly outing with team members and families (such as the trip to Ashridge Park in 1997 with our much-missed team-mate Miles Whitehead - his young children enjoyed searching for the box, though we were not very impressed with our concept of 'treasure'!), to two or three team members meeting up in a lane or pub car park (memories of Pablo rolling up in his old sports car), to a solitary, speculative expedition, slugging through the kind of farmer's fields that turn feet into balls of mud, clutching half-solved directions, hoping for divine inspiration before the winter sun sinks below the trees and puts the box beyond reach. Even with complete directions, there is always the slight fear that it may be a red herring or, worse, locked (as it was in Herstoncoeur).

Any prize money is put towards the team's traditional post-hunt curry in the Great Nepalese restaurant at Euston. Apart from some new, rather odd metallic menus, it hasn't changed in over 20 years, right down to Fay Mashler's 1990s restaurant review for the Evening Standard, still proudly displayed on the wall. The staff must think us a strange lot, as we hand around the various artefacts from that year's ATH, or reminisce about prior hunts. Where once our prizes paid for all our curries, with nothing left over for a round or two of Kingfishers, these days they barely cover the pre-meal popovers. Younger and/or brighter teams have gradually pushed us down the leader board, though we welcome this as a sign that the hunt is healthy and attracting new participants. Our main problem is finding enough time, with work and family responsibilities getting in the way of the serious business of treasure hunting. It's true that the ATH does require a big commitment, one that can, just occasionally, generate a certain tension in the wider household. This almost-imperceptible conflict is summed up perfectly by this memorable quote from a team member's wife: "Could you put that down for a minute, and watch your children open their presents?"

The sad loss of our inspirational captain and organizer Dave Harding in 2015 means we have now said goodbye to three of the brightest and most enthusiastic ATHers, over the past few years: Miles, Pablo and Dave. Despite that, the team goes on, and will continue to enter hunts as long as there is still someone with the time, energy and ideas to set them. We still have a core of around 8 members (plus a few 'social' members), with contributions varying depending on workload, family commitments, Christmas holiday plans, and overall interest in the hunt theme. Most of us (even Dave!) have questioned why we put ourselves through it, or have suggested that we 'might take a break next year'. But we are always back for more! December, like treasure hunt jingles; driven on by the pleasure of applying our brains to something more interesting than work, the magic of seeing a few letters of plaintext appear after untold failed attempts, and the prospect of visiting the site in some far off park or wood and hearing the unmistakable dull thud of trowel on Tupperware.

THE GREATEST SYMPHONY

- 01 HAYDN - 101st
- 02 MOZART - 35th
- 03 MENDELSSOHN - 4th
- 04 HAYDN - 94th
- 05 BEETHOVEN - 3rd
- 06 HAYDN - 104th
- 07 HAYDN - 83rd
- 08 SCHU... - 8th
- 09 BRUCKNER - 4th
- 10 MENDELSSOHN - 3rd
- 11 MAHLER - 1st

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A SYMPHONY

FLIGHT ITINERARY
Craiova, Romania
Nuafo'u, Tonga
Kazi Nazrul Islam, India
Arusha, Tanzania

SEE PICTURES
"COME TO LIFE"



For a Wonderful Christmas
View-Master pictures that "come to life"

Restock Chemistry set

- Christmas drinks
Iodine
Americium
Thorium
Tungsten

ATH Full English (more than just bacon)
TAH, AHH, HAT, HAT, TAH, ATT, AAH,
AHT, AAA, TAH, ATH, TTH, TTT, HAT

Play script: "The Silver Key"
Scene 1: A restaurant in London NW1
ERATOSTHENES: "51.529181, -0.132677"
BLAISE: "Hdulvtz vnyltyy"
WHEATSTONE: "Ags rorg bum dv"
HILT: "Please include me in that, Charles!"
JULIUS: "Dg AAA slfwuidh qzvwud rhoduh qxqwlx devrragrlwpx. Sduyd suhplxp sulpx uhhwpx qxqwlx plvlw dg: dwksdwkllghur dw jpdlo grw frp."

Thought for the day
"Coma Ansa Ex Defa
Va Mo Fa Lomera"
Every second counts:
XMUTESCNRNEOH
#000000 (more)
#7851A9
#480082
#9400D3
#6F2DA8
#614051



Christmas card list

- McBatz (last saw in 1990)
Locke (2000)
Odysseus (2004)
Kubic (2010)
Frisk (1989)
Vromsky (1997)
Henderson (2015)
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Amersham | Chesham |
| Pimlico | Regent's Park |
| Hanger Lane | Seven Sisters |
| Old Street | Southgate |
| Heathrow Terminal 4 | Epping |
| South Ealing | Ealing Broadway |
| Watford | Rickmansworth |



Opera Info
The Ring (Haymarket, Her Majesty's theatre) - the first full performance of Wagner's cycle was given here in 1882, and