

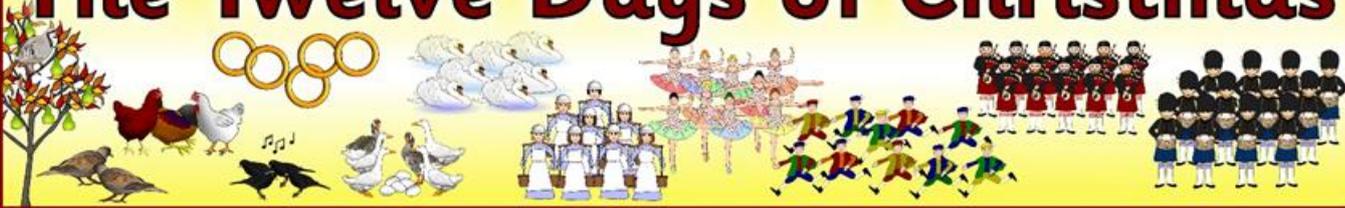
PABLO ATH 2021

PSYCHOLOGICALS

CHRISTMAS VISITS



The Twelve Days of Christmas



A Cold Christmas Day Walk

This year's Pablo ATH has turned out to be more complex than it looked at first sight. Most of the themes were quite obvious early on, and we had soon worked out the general area of where the treasure is hidden, but getting a detailed instruction out of the various puzzles was a very tricky and time consuming affair. In previous hunts we often had a series of photos from the actual route to the treasure site which made it easier to narrow things down and sometimes even to find the treasure without having the full instruction. This year, however, we had just one photo and that only gave us the starting point for the trail. Cold Christmas was very clearly the location to visit, and the Greenwich Meridian and a guy called Humphrey seemed to be important. With the possibility of another "stay local" lockdown on the horizon, we decided to make an investigative visit to Cold Christmas. And what better day to choose than Christmas Day.

With just a few snippets of instructions solved at that time, we focused our search for clues on the area west and north of Cold Christmas. We parked our car very close to #16 Cold Christmas Lane, which the wordsearch puzzle on page 1 had told us to look at. We had already noticed the monkey puzzle tree in the front garden on Google streetview. The fence had been replaced since, and the number 16 was no longer visible, but the tree was still there. Whether the tree closest to the fence is a pear tree could not be established at this time of year.



We had a Humphrey theme in the hunt and figured out that it must relate to Sir Nigel Hawthorne, who used to play Sir Humphrey Appleby in "Yes Minister" and who had lived at a country house called Fabdens just off Cold Christmas Lane. We also had a puzzle about flight departures (which we couldn't solve completely). And the Greenwich Meridian seemed to be important. With that in mind we started our walk with a visit to the churchyard in Thundridge to see if we could find Nigel Hawthorne's grave. We saw many interesting gravestones, but there was no sign of Nigel's.

Our next point of interest was the old haunted church of All Hallows and Little Saint Mary. After a quick stop for a box full of ducks (a geocache) we followed Old Church Lane and soon the ruins of the church came into view. We checked a few trees around it because one of the few instructions we had solved by then said "second tree". Needless to say that we passed and searched many trees along our walk.....

Because of the flight departure puzzle and the prime meridian theme our next destination was the area by the small airfield due north of Cold Christmas. We had plotted the prime meridian on Google Earth and noticed that it touched a woodland just east of the airfield. We passed a mysterious old metal tank near the airfield and searched around it, but couldn't see anything suspicious. On we went to the woodland ahead, which was "fenced in" by a vicious hawthorn hedge with only very few animal tunnels leading into it. We followed the edge of the woodland and about halfway along there was suddenly a path going in. And after going along that for a few metres we spotted a blue oil drum. Was this a clue? Was this the reason for the puzzle about the oil fields? This looked like a very promising location.

The problem here was that there were many small trees, and only one that looked interesting enough as a hiding place. However, apart from some soggy leaves there was nothing in the cavity. Because of the Christmas theme we thought it would be neat to have a proper Christmas tree as the treasure location, but conifers were quite rare around here. We backtracked out to the field and walked to the north-west corner of the woodland, which sits right on the prime meridian, at least according to our phone GPS. There were a few larger trees and easy access to them, but all we found were a surprising number of empty shells of Roman snails.

At this point we decided to turn around and head back towards Cold Christmas Lane, following the Greenwich Meridian long distance trail and crossing the River Rib at the ford just east of "Humphrey's house" Fabdens. The word "ford" was in the wordsearch on page 1, and although it meant prison in the context there, we thought it might also be a small clue for the route to the treasure. Once we had crossed the river we turned east and followed the water along the Hertfordshire Way. I suppose it's a bit optimistic to call this bit a path at this time of year. If you enjoy ankle deep sticky mud that adds some extra weight to your boots then this is the place for you. We had seen some trees by the river on satellite view, right on the prime meridian again, but when we reached them we were presented with a thorny thicket and no way to get to them, apart from with a boat maybe.

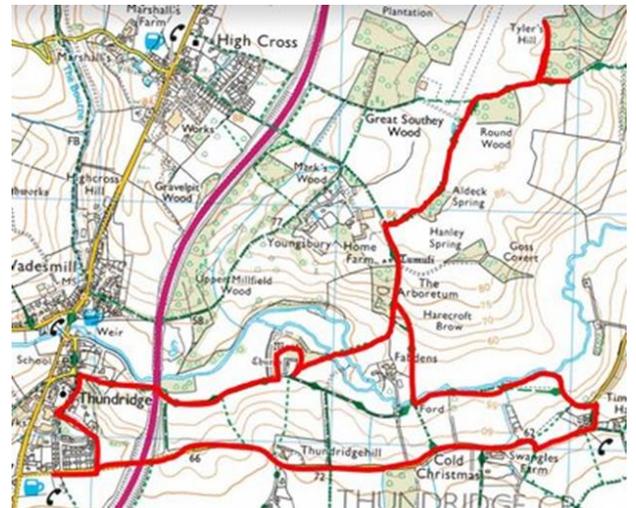




Daylight was fading fast, my husband's stomach started to growl and "hangry mode" started to appear (he's not a puzzle solver but enjoys the site visits...usually...). We had been walking for about 3 hours by then, a bit longer than I had anticipated (husband had expected a "park and grab" kind of excursion).... We continued uphill and into Cold Christmas village itself. Soon we spotted the nicely decorated postbox and had a quick look around it. We even walked up those 13 steps and searched on either side along the top for a short while. But by that time we hadn't solved the "box by hedge" and "13 steps" puzzles yet. Following Cold Christmas Lane we then stopped at a little "waterfall", a drainage pipe with water gushing out of it. A good place to try and wash off some of that sticky mud. There was another footpath going south at that corner and we had a quick look at the top of the bank before moving on to the Greenwich Meridian pillar and the little oak tree that is pictured on page 14. The pillar was decorated with a Christmas hat, but we felt the location was too overlooked by houses and didn't search the trees above thoroughly.



We made one final stop by the village sign on the western entrance to Cold Christmas, where we spotted a rather large and promising looking tree with many possible hiding places. It was next to a farm called SWANgles, and there was a sign for the Greenwich Meridian trail too. Alas, there was nothing to be found. As it was getting quite dark by now, and we had to walk back along a narrow road without streetlights and any pavement, we decided it was best to give up and hurry back to the car. The car where we had left the food, thinking we wouldn't be spending nearly 4 hours in fresh air (or icy wind as my husband would call it) and damp woodlands. Did I mention the mud? We passed the gate to Fabdens and had a quick scan for anything worth exploring, but there were just a lot of unremarkable trees and a few concrete blocks that reminded us of LEGO bricks. A final wave to the monkey puzzle tree, some quick snacks and then we were on our way back home to try and solve more of these fiendish puzzles. After a big Christmas meal. Swedish ham. Sven would approve.



Nick and Mary's Boots on the Ground

Our first attempt was on Sunday 2nd January at about 13:00. First we parked at the far end of Cold Christmas lane and started to walk towards the 13 steps noticing the Monkey Puzzle tree at 16. We then thought the walk to the 13 steps would take an age so returned to the car and found a little verge to park on just past the steps. Searching around the steps, post-box and notice board found nothing. Up the top of the steps behind the hedges we walked both left and right and also checked the telegraph poles (OLD LINE) as these could be described as trees. we did find a little cutaway in the hedge which had about six large logs inside and checked all these. To the left we also found a green box lying in the open and even looked under this. Also noticed that the Christmas trimmings had been removed from the post-box and Meridian marker.



Our second attempt on the final day of the hunt 10th January, we arrived at Cold Christmas Lane and parked in the place closest to the 13 steps. After another brief look around the steps, we took the gravel track south to the two trees our team had noticed on Google maps. Passing a couple of Fir trees and a very leafy bush (LEAFIEST) which we checked around, but nada. Carrying on to the two trees which were behind a very bushy hedge, and checking both trees the second had a perfect hole between the roots and even using my 1000 lumen torch did not find anything. We also wanted to check out the small copse, just to see if there were any prominent trees in it, but it was just waterlogged and nothing stood out. Looking towards the treasure site it just appeared to be a bush and a tree, so didn't bother going further, Close but no cigar.

