



Designing a Treasure Hunt Activity

by Ian Healey

The idea of going on a 'Treasure Hunt' is exciting and you will want to meet or exceed the potential participants expectations. Having some treasure at the end should help! However a good Treasure Hunt should be as much about the journey and the experiences along the way. This article is about some of the ideas and logistics of setting up and running a Treasure Hunt Activity considering the following aspects:

- Activities and the outcomes you want them to achieve
- Time available
- Participant numbers, age and ability range
- Location, route, durability and environmental impact

Looking at each of these areas in turn I am going to attempt to describe in more detail what I came up with and some of the lessons learned. Hopefully the generic aspects will allow you to consider the key requirements to designing a fun and rewarding learning experience with your own groups.

Activities and the Outcomes I Wanted Them to Achieve

The outcomes to achieve were based on the three core areas of development that the Outdoor Centre I work at focuses on – personal development, team work and environmental awareness.

In terms of development outcomes I tried to pay some heed to multiple intelligence theory as developed by Dr Howard Gardner. I believe my treasure hunt contributes to the development of all except for musical intelligence.

Gardener's Multiple Intelligences

- linguistic intelligence
- logical-mathematical intelligence
- spatial intelligence
- musical intelligence
- intrapersonal intelligence
- bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
- interpersonal intelligence
- naturalist intelligence

<http://www.multipleintelligencetheory.co.uk/index.aspx>

My treasure hunt has four point scoring challenges, three en route and a final challenge. Participants work in sub groups of four to attempt these.

Two of the challenges are located at permanently placed equipment caches where they have to open a locked box with the relevant problem solving equipment in. These challenges are specifically focused at spatial intelligence and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

The third challenge is an environmental scavenger hunt that focuses naturalist intelligence on top of the existing subliminal immersion of the whole experience. Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence are developed intrinsically through the whole event along with aspects of linguistic intelligence.

The Final Challenge: 'Sudoku Code' - at the end of the hunt is a simple four numbered Sudoku puzzle. All individuals have a chance to have a go at it and the fastest correct finisher



earns additional points for their team. Four of the number boxes on the Sudoku are highlighted and provide a four digit code for an electronic combination coded safe that houses the treasure.

Final points are awarded to each sub group for leadership, navigation and team spirit during the Treasure Hunt. Each member of the sub group takes it in turn to lead the way using colour-coded pages of instruction in the shared briefing pack. Where information needs to be communicated to the entire group it is written in a different colour and must be read aloud to all. The treasure provided is souvenirs from our Tuck Shop and is given as prizes – first, second and third place for each sub group.

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may not be the most worthy outcome they will have achieved but it is a very specific skill they will have developed.

A short way in I have a marked 100m distance that they must use to establish their pacing for this distance. The navigation instructions in their pack repeatedly refer to going 100m, 50m etc. and knowing how far this is becomes a key navigation tool. The final 1,500m of the journey is on a photo trail with photos taken at 100m intervals plus a couple of additional ones for clarity at key areas.

Under many photos I have added brief notes of additional navigation information as well as the accumulative distance from the start. NB I have a summer set of photos and a winter set

as the vegetation looks quite different in different seasons. The photo trail develops observational skills along with other intrapersonal skills required when sharing a single set of photos as part of a group that you are leading.

I designed the event to hopefully offer its own small contribution towards a holistic and balanced approach to personal development. Wider aims would include a contribution towards:

- Individuals appreciating the benefits of participation in healthy leisure activities such as walking
- Engaging more with the natural environment
- Adopting a positive attitude to challenge and adventure
- Developing personal and social skills etc.

Time Available

An important consideration is the amount of time you have available to set up a Treasure Hunt Activity. Many hours of work have gone into preparing and improving my Treasure Hunt but if this is averaged out over the use it gets then it's quite acceptable in terms of the work commitment versus the benefits. Sometimes it is being used five times a week and it's now been operating for three years and requires little ongoing maintenance work.

If you are designing something for just a one off session you can keep things a lot simpler by accompanying the participants. This gives you the ability to make dynamic changes to the route and activities according to how things go on the day. You can afford to be a little less prepared if you're leading it and are happy to 'wing it' when things don't quite go as planned!

My Treasure Hunt was designed for groups led by a visiting leader who hasn't done the activity before and also for mature young people or adults who are unaccompanied. With that in mind it needed to be thoroughly organised to minimise problems occurring. After each of the first few sessions I reviewed the activity with the group and leader to get feedback as to difficulties that had had such as route finding and made tweaks and revisions.

For a two and a half hour session I came up with a route for a journey that was 3km long. As a walk on its own, allowing for navigation, it takes a group approximately one hour but added to this are a number of activities along the way. I occasionally run around the route checking everything is ok and can do this in a spare half an hour.

All my groups need to return for a set meal time and are not popular with the cooks if they are late back. In the Group Leader's briefing pack is a schedule of expected times for different legs of the journey and activities so that they can monitor their progress against time available. A time shortcut can be made by missing out one or two of the last activity challenges rather than shortening the route.

My firm recommendation is to make navigation and route finding straightforward so that getting lost is not an issue. I have never had groups return to tell me it was too easy so don't worry

about patronising them with the most detailed instructions, maps and photos possible. The activity challenges other than navigation or interpretation of route finding clues can be brought in to stretch them.

The briefing pack I provide for the group leader (usually a visiting teacher) has extra photos in it showing key navigation points such as vague path junctions etc. and is even more comprehensively 'idiot proof'! As many leaders haven't done the route before they are often concerned about getting lost with children in their charge and welcome having an easy to follow route.

The front cover of the Brief is an annotated map way-marked with the route, the back cover is a satellite image similarly annotated. Those with map skills could follow the route entirely by the map if they needed and those without could do it entirely from the comprehensive directions and photos. Combining it all they shouldn't get lost!

Participant Numbers, Age and Ability

A Treasure Hunt can be done with very young children using ideas similar to an 'Easter Egg Hunt' or String Course Orienteering. I wanted mine to work with a group of 12 accompanied nine year olds up to the occasional adult group. I printed instructions that require a minimum nine year old literacy level but don't patronise adults. The challenges were designed to be similarly universal but can be differentiated for age/ability if required.

My treasure hunt is only accessible to able bodied people as it purposely includes some small paths and cross country bits through the woods to maximise the interest of the journey. A treasure hunt in an urban environment could easily be designed with wheelchair accessibility in mind and some natural environments that are carefully chosen could also be planned into a route suitable for disabled participants.



Location, Route, Durability and Environmental Impact

Fortunately the outdoor centre I work at is in the heart of the Forest of Dean surrounded by mixed woodland that is largely unfrequented by other people. I wanted my Treasure Hunt to take advantage of this beautiful and 'natural' setting and looked for a route that would optimise the outdoor environmental experience.

Due to our enviable location groups are able to walk out from the Centre and finish back at it eliminating the need for any transportation. If your organisational base is not so well located you may choose to offset the carbon footprint of vehicle transportation against another suitable venue that provides a greater impact on the group's development of environmental awareness. If doing this you can consider a one way trip where they get dropped at one location and picked up from another.

My advice is to get to know the area you want to use very intimately. This allows you to choose the best possible route taking in as many interesting areas and scenic paths etc. as possible as well as avoiding any hazards. It also allows you to carefully choose appropriate sites for hidden caches of activity equipment for team challenges along the way. I chose to do a figure of 8 route but a simple loop shape is just as adequate. If you are not leaving equipment caches permanently in location you may wish to consider placing them close to vehicle access for easy dropping off.

The Treasure Hunt I developed has been used by over 2,000 participants in the last three years. This in itself creates issues of sustainability that need to be considered. One part of the route that was originally cross country and without a recognisable path now has an obvious path created from all those feet. Depending on potential level of use you may need to consider carefully the other users/residents in the area you set the route to minimise any

potential conflict/impact. Positioning of any permanent equipment caches and activity challenge sites needs to be particularly carefully planned to be as discreet as possible.

My 'treasure' box used to be hidden in the forest and was bolted to a breeze blocked wall of an old mine building. Unfortunately after about a year it was discovered by the curious and subsequently vandalised in attempts to break into it! I have now re-sited it to the front garden of the Centre which is not quite so evocative but does coincide with the end of the trail and also makes loading treasure into it a lot more convenient.

The printed briefing information, directions, photo trail etc are all laminated into a booklet for durability and to cope with the environment. By the time they get too tatty they usually need printing out again with minor alterations and updates.

Happy Treasure Hunting! ■



Author Notes:

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Photographs: all from the author.

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