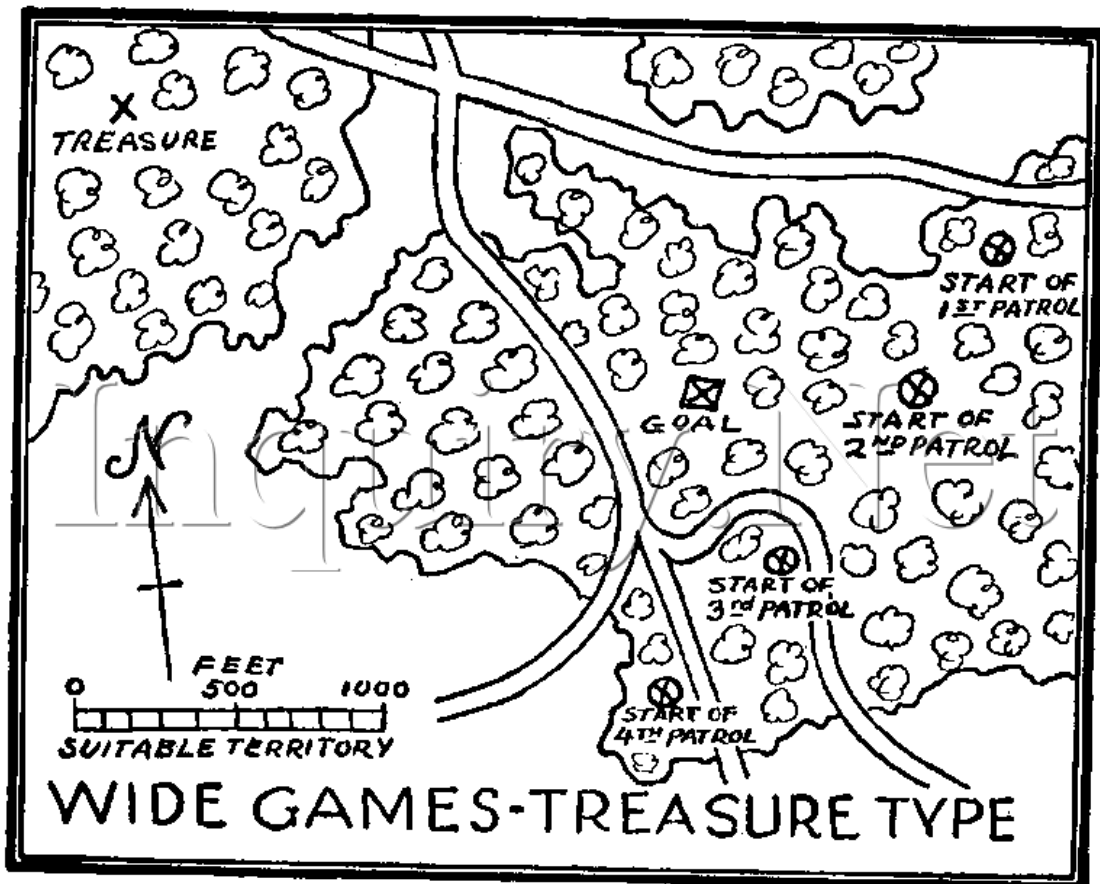


# Comparative Analysis of 3 Treasure Hunts



MA Games Design  
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# Comparative Analysis of 3 Treasure Hunts

The 'Treasure Hunt' as a game type is what I will be exploring in this analysis. I will look at different genres in which it is played and look at the similarities and differences as they occur. I am interested in exploring how a treasure hunt can be used to create interesting and valuable experiences in an urban context using a cross medial approach. After introducing each of the 3 games I will be analyzing them using a range of benchmark features. In this analysis I have looked at treasure hunts where a physical environment is part of the game as opposed to a purely web-based or video treasure hunt.

## Introduction

Treasure Hunts are games where players try to find certain objects by unravelling riddles, solving clues and/or meeting challenges. The goals can be various: finding a prize, arriving at a location, locating an object. The reward can be the discovery itself or the end object. Teams or individuals can play against each other; even an individual can play against herself. The level of game play can be varied to suit different audiences and the locations where it can be played are endless. All these factors make it a hugely malleable type of game. It has also been said that the "pre-digital" treasure hunt is the first form of the pervasive game<sup>1</sup>. In this analysis I will take three examples of very different treasure hunts and examine how these different aspects are implemented in the playing of the game.

## The Games

### 1. Outdoor Treasure Hunt for British Boy Scouts

[http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/games/mackenzie/outdoor/treasure\\_hunts.htm](http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/games/mackenzie/outdoor/treasure_hunts.htm)

The first game is a simple, low-tech treasure hunt, one of many developed for British boy scouts in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to giving the boys a compelling outdoor bonding experience, these are a great way to train path-finding skills and deductive powers.

#### How does it work?

The game I have found it is without a story or any role playing but could be easily, and most probably was, given a story making the boys pirates, polar explorers, ancient Incas or whatever with a relevant adventure to experience and attributes to match.<sup>2</sup> In this game teams (patrols) compete against each other. They start off together, each with a copy of the first clue and with instructions to return in two hours. One clue is given and the other 6 are picked up as they are solved along the way. They must solve navigation and item clues and decode a word puzzle to negotiate their way to the end where the first to arrive back in base camp with the "prize" is the winner. It would have been played in an outdoor camp situation in rural England.

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<sup>1</sup> Pervasive game: A location-based game (or location-enabled game) is one in which the game play somehow evolves and progresses via a player's location. Thus, location-based games almost always support some kind of localization technology, for example by using satellite positioning like GPS. ...

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for details

## 2. The London Rainbow Cache designed by Roderick Howie

<http://www.geocaching.com/map/default.aspx?guid=118a86a2-ad8a-4421-ae12-dfc3a6b2284c>

That is a geo-caching treasure hunt<sup>3</sup> that takes you to different locations, off the beaten track, around central London. It is created for visitors or Londoners who want to explore some less known spots. This game uses a system of virtual caches, each of which has a connection to the colours of the rainbow. The 7 stages must be completed (and logged) in any order before an eighth, physical cache can be found.

### How does it work?

You can use [geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) to find the locations of the hunt and the clues beforehand. Or, you can use a smartphone with GPS and the Geocaching App to locate the caches and clues as you go. You receive clues to navigate yourself to a historic location or point of interest. The example below is from **The London Rainbow Cache 1 - Red**

“Not far from this coloured place lived a well known doctor of literature. The location is well sign posted. From the co-ordinates, follow this coloured beast north for about 100m. Then turn right and walk about 45m. Turn right again, walk through the arch and then a couple of dozen paces south and the information you require is to be found on your right.”

Once you have found the location you are asked some relevant questions.

- a. Who was the doctor?.
- b. What year was he born?
- c. What year did he die?”

Often there will be additional hints.

To claim the find you upload pictures of all the finders and you send an email to [forenamesurnameborndied@howeasy.org](mailto:forenamesurnameborndied@howeasy.org). If your answer is correct you will get an email back immediately and you can log your find. Then is also then possible to post photos and forum comments to the geocaching website.

Finally the answer to each cache will help you find the eight cache.

“To locate the final cache use the year the doctor was born = ABCD and the year he died = EFGH.

C = position "W1"

B-H = position "N6"

The same mechanics are used for each cache.

## 3. The Lost Ring

Game director, Jane McGonigal. Developed by AKQA for McDonald's and the International Olympic Committee for the 2008 Summer Games.

[http://olympics.wikibruce.com/Beginners\\_Guide](http://olympics.wikibruce.com/Beginners_Guide)

Because initially this game was launched under the motto “Find the Lost Ring” I am defining this as a treasure hunt. This is where a treasure hunt can turn into a quest i.e “save the world” which makes it also a full-blown adventure game. This is

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<sup>3</sup> For more information read Geocaching Appendix 2

arguably the first global ARG<sup>4</sup>, “allowing players to combine fictitious and real world elements using a range of digital and social media. Players are involved in determining what happens in the game and a real live person (called the Puppet Master or PM) controls how the story goes based on the interactions that happen”, according to the Lost Ring wiki. This gives the game a potentially deeper level of complexity and wider range of possibilities for interaction and involvement.

### Brief Overview<sup>5</sup>

“There's a history to the Olympics that's been hidden for centuries - A series of events dating back to Ancient Greece that were somehow mysteriously erased and have long since been forgotten.

Fast forward to today, Six individuals, ancient Olympians, wake up in late February..., in various... [Labyrinths](#)...with [amnesia](#), blindfolded, and with a tattoo on their arms saying [trovu la ringon perditan](#), or “Find the lost ring” in [Esperanto](#) .

Now the six are seeking our help to find out who they are, where they're from, what their purpose is, and just what the heck is going on around here.

Expect to dig into legends, talk to people from various parts of the world, solve puzzles, research things online, learn about Greek mythology, study ancient Greek lore and philosophy - ...

Join with others around the world, communicating across language barriers - even learn [Esperanto](#) if you like - in an attempt to help our six amnesiacs 'save the world'.”

### How does it work?

Throughout a six month period from February 29 till August 2008, leading up to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the game was played by more than a million people across 100 countries. It was a cross media experience involving, posters, puzzles, wikis, videos and more, on line and off. It was also a game with a mission. According to Jane McDonigal The Lost Ring “was all about giving gamers worldwide the opportunity experience the best of the Olympics firsthand, ... There were two main parts to this mission. First, the global hunt for the Lost Ring Codex and the Sixth Ring, which we hoped would bring players worldwide together, give them a spirit of global collaboration and unity.... Second, the revival of the Lost Sport of Olympia, which gave players the chance to train for real and compete with a team at a world-class level in an alternate reality Olympic sport.”

Finding the rings and the codex, hidden in 27 historic building across the world as well as the playing of the Lost Sport of Olympia uncovered a symbol that unlocked the portal to a parallel universe, creating a union that saved the world from devastation.

## The Benchmark Features

On the following pages I have taken what I consider to be 7 of the most relevant features for all three games and put the different aspects for each of them into a table for a good overview. At the end I will look at what kind of insights this analysis gives us.

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<sup>4</sup> Alternate Reality Gaming is, according to [CNET](#), “...an obsession-inspiring genre that blends real-life treasure hunting, interactive storytelling, video games and online community...”

“These games are an intensely complicated series of puzzles involving coded Web sites, real-world clues like the newspaper advertisements, phone calls in the middle of the night from game characters and more. That blend of real-world activities and a dramatic storyline has proven irresistible to many.” Read more in Appendix 2.

<sup>5</sup> [http://olympics.wikibruce.com/Beginners\\_Guide](http://olympics.wikibruce.com/Beginners_Guide)

<b>Benchmark Feature</b>	<b>Boy Scouts</b>	<b>The London Rainbow Cache</b>	<b>The Lost Ring</b>
<b>Target Audience</b>	Boys varying in age from 8-14 members of the Boy Scouts, from varied backgrounds probably same region Interested in an engaging and skill testing experience as part of a team Willing to commit to the game and to the suspension of belief	Adults, young adults, families visiting London and London inhabitants Interested in a fun, adventurous experience that helps them to explore London, off the beaten track Interested in a casual game that they can move in and out of Tech savvy, Internet and smart phone available	Young adults with disposable time Interested in engaging and sharing with others, on and offline Relatively intelligent or well-educated Tech savvy, heavy users of internet, mobile media, and social media Willing and able to commit to the game and to the suspension of belief
<b>Storytelling and Role Playing</b>	Many stories possible: pirates or Indian scouts, Incas or explorers looking for a lost treasure Can involve role playing and dressing the part with attributes to match Storytelling role playing intensifies the game play pleasure, find the treasure and become the hero	No story and no role playing in this geocaching, treasure hunt giving it a casual and accessible character Story telling possible in other versions Sometimes on the geocaching forum participants create stories on the fly to add to the experience Level of involvement moderate	Epic adventure story: help the ancient Olympian amnesiacs find their identity and purpose, find the Lost Ring Codex and the Lost Ring, thus working together to save the world in an ARG setting Part of big -international- event, the Summer Olympics Thriller, drama, working worldwide to solve the mystery Fictitious characters play an important role in disseminating information, i.e. the amnesiacs, historians, doctors Once involved in story allows for participation in a huge community and playing the role of a journalist, Olympian, scholar, treasure hunter, and so on Highly interactive, audience participation is essential in moving the game forward

<b>Game environment</b>	<p>Outdoors as part of a scout camp or scouting event</p> <p>Part of developing survival and tracking skills, the more challenging the environment the better the game</p> <p>Geography is a character in the game</p>	<p>The environment is the focus, giving the clues and potential solutions</p> <p>Drives the game forward</p> <p>The city is the character in the game</p> <p>Exploring and discovering its secrets gives game play pleasure</p>	<p>Expansive, cross media, offline and on</p> <p>Live events (games, meetings) take place in more than 100 countries</p> <p>More than 8 languages are used, codex's are found in 27 cities</p> <p>Virtual events (movies, podcasts, chat sessions) take place online and via mobile connections</p> <p>multimedia and social media are used</p> <p>The mix of media and the number and variety of locations is part of the international scope and intensive involvement necessary to participate</p>
<b>Player Patterns</b>	<p>Played in teams so collaboration important</p> <p>First person role playing when story is adopted</p> <p>Players have no influence on outcome</p>	<p>Individual or multi-players possible, no competition</p> <p>User-generated content on caching site via photos, comments and rating</p> <p>Become part of international geocaching community</p> <p>Players have no influence on outcome</p>	<p>Individuals or teams must contribute to the international game community via event participation or online media to play</p> <p>Serious commitment necessary</p> <p>User-generated content in form van wikis, blogs, podcast, movies, etc.</p> <p>Audience participation is essential and the players influence the development of and the outcome of the game</p> <p>Everybody wins</p>
<b>Game Mechanics</b>	<p>Has a 2 hour time frame which intensifies play</p> <p>Played in a linear fashion</p> <p>Goal is clear beforehand, find the last location and bring whatever you find to the base camp, also sense of achievement</p> <p>Exact outcome to be discovered</p> <p>Clues are discovered and solved along the way or navigational or involve</p>	<p>No time limit, can be played in one day or over a longer period of time</p> <p>benefits the casual character</p> <p>Can be played in a linear or non-linear fashion</p> <p>Goal is clear, find the 8<sup>th</sup> physical cache</p> <p>Exact outcome unknown</p> <p>Rules are simple, known upfront and enforced by the logging system</p>	<p>Played over a 6 month period, propelled by mysteries to be unravelled in order to accomplish missions</p> <p>Must be solved before the Summer Olympics which adds to intensity</p> <p>27 Codex's must be found in order to move to the next chapter (round)</p> <p>There are subplots and mysteries to be solved as well</p> <p>Goal is not clear at the outset as is not the</p>

	decoding puzzles Rules are simple, self-facilitated Game is straightforward but the clues form the challenge	Each cache must be found and solved to be logged, all 7 caches must be logged to discover the final cache Easy to play, a casual game	exact outcome Goals unfolds as the story evolves which adds to the mystery but demands more engagement There are evolving rule sets as it is an ARG and they develop with the game The puppet master enforces the rules and monitors the progress Ongoing research involved Challenging
<b>Media Use and Technology</b>	Must bring 'The 10 Essentials': A map and compass; extra clothing; first-aid kit; flashlight, batteries, bulb; knife; matches or fire starter; sunscreen and sunglasses; water; and snacks. Boy Scouts or the camp will have these things	Internet for geocaching website GPS receiver for tracking the cache or smart phone with GPS and Internet Geocaching app Digital camera Smartphone possession of is rapidly increasing but still only a minority people, 25 % of Americans GPS receivers? i.e 17 % of Americans Maps, analogue or Google map	Cross media approach means fast access to Internet, use of social media (i.e. YouTube, Flickr, blogs) and social networks Heavy use of Internet Mobile phone, camera, movie camera, apps Willing to travel and train for Lost Sport of Olympia
<b>Why play</b>	Part of the scout experience and ethic to which they are already committed To some degree external a captive audience at camps Appeals to boys love of action and adventure	Gives a trip to London an adventurous edge Become part of geocaching community Opportunity to put some hard and software to use: smartphones and apps Interested in history Easy and free	Become part of an epic adventure with a worldwide community Huge appeal to users of social media and social networking Connected to Summer Olympics which already has a huge audience Massive sense of achievement Final events on worldwide television and internet broadcast Immersive Free (funded by McDonalds, coining the term dark marketing)

## Conclusions

In creating this analysis I have regarded the Treasure Hunt as a game type more than a genre using the following definition “*game type as a description of game play, and game genre as a description of the narrative content of the game.*”<sup>6</sup>

As flows from the analysis of the games certain elements are the same.

- There is a treasure to be found.
- It can be found by unraveling clues, completing challenges, solving riddles and/or decoding puzzles.
- The goal may be of value or the sense of achievement may equally important.
- The game environment is of great importance.
- Curiosity, exploration and puzzle solving are essential.

At the same time it also offers a huge range of possibilities in how it is played and can also incorporate different game types.

- It can be played in teams, individually or in a multiplayer context.
- Modern technology can be used, or not.
- Physical treasure hunts are arguably always cross media to a certain extent. This can be expanded to massively rich and complex ARGs involving off and offline immersive media experiences, or be kept very simple.
- Role playing is possible, adds to the intensity of involvement but also puts up a threshold.
- Elements of a strategy game can be mixed in.
- Rules can set from the start or they can evolve during the game.
- Rules can be self-facilitated or enforced by a Puppet Master.
- Games can be created that allow for a major audience participation and influence with user-generated content playing an important role.
- The development time can be limited or left open.
- The game can be played in a linear or a non-linear fashion.

What gives it even more potential in my opinion is that it can be adapted for many genres. Often it is developed as an adventure game with a narrative to match but equally possible it can take become a mystery or detective story or travel into the realm of fantasy or even a drama or science fiction, depending of course on the target audience and the goal of the game. In addition the very simple basic structure that is at its heart can become much more complex and layered, incorporating different media, allowing for high level of audience influence, creating an even more pervasive and immersive experience. Or it can be kept simple, making it accessible for those only interested in a casual game that involves no role playing at all.

As I suggested in the beginning it is indeed an extremely malleable game type that can be successfully adapted for arrange of situations, goals and target audiences.

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<sup>6</sup> Game Type and Game Genre By Lindsay Grace

## Appendix 1

### 2. Treasure Hunt

(where only one clue is given and the others have to be picked up).

[http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/games/mackenzie/outdoor/treasure\\_hunts.htm](http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/games/mackenzie/outdoor/treasure_hunts.htm)



Patrols start off together, each with a copy of the first clue and with instructions to return in two hours.

**1st Clue:** A piece of paper with , "Try what a little heat will do" written on it.

*Explanation:* Under the message was the second clue written in milk (or lemon juice) which is brought out by heat.

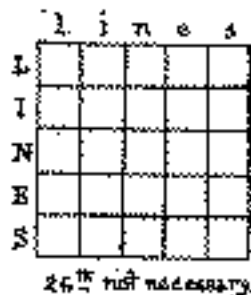
**2nd Clue:** "Follow the sun's way for 50 yards to the arrow's mother."

*Explanation:* 50 yards west was a yew tree (from which arrows are made).

Pinned to the yew tree was the 3rd clue which said:

**3rd Clue:** "EeleSeEsSsLIEnLeEeLsLIEdEs, EsInLsNe EsLsNe SnLsEeEs, liLIEsLs. LnNiSILs EsInLsEnLs."

*Explanation:*



From the top, left-hand corner, from left to right, the squares spell A, B, C and so on to Y. As the clue states Z is not necessary. The clue reads "Sixty yards east, then ten west, gate. Clue there." Pinned by a drawing pin *beneath* the bottom spar of the gate was the 4th clue which said:

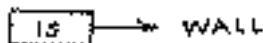
**4th Clue:** Find a red stone, find a rustic seat. Both can be seen from here. Midway between is further help. (Please replace this clue)." Which proved to be

**5th Clue:** Scout signs in the form of twigs laid thus:



*Explanation:* The clue means: "Go this way for 25 paces," which gave the

**6th Clue:** Scraped on a path:



A message was hidden behind a loose stone in a wall in direction of arrow saying:

**7th Clue:** "Tree with unnatural fruit 75. Bring fruit." (Replace clue.)

*Explanation:* An apple (the Treasure) attached to a fir tree. As no direction was given, Scouts had to make a circle 75 yards round the clue till they found the unnatural fruit.

## Appendix 2

### Geocaching

This is one of hundreds of geocaching games to be found on <http://www.geocaching.com/> or via the Geocaching app. Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices or smart phones. The basic idea is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, outdoors and then log and share your experiences online. Geocaching is enjoyed by huge numbers of people from all age groups, who often have a strong sense of community and support for the environment.<sup>7</sup> There are dozens, if not hundreds, of cache variations, these are some of the main ones:

- **Virtual caches** exist only as a location. Coordinates lead to a particular spot of interest. Geocachers who find the location log their find and often must answer a question about the location in order for the find to count.
- **Multi-caches** are a series of caches connected to one another.
- **Letterbox hybrids** combine two different traditions of treasure hunting. The owner of a letterbox hybrid provides both coordinates to a geocache site and hints or puzzles to a letterbox site.
- **Mystery caches** can include hints or puzzles that geocachers have to solve in order to find the geocache's coordinates. Listed coordinates for mystery caches usually mark a point of reference, such as a place to park or begin, but not the location of the cache itself.<sup>8</sup>

### Alternate Reality Gaming

Alternate Reality Gaming is, according to [CNET](#), "...an obsession-inspiring genre that blends real-life treasure hunting, interactive storytelling, video games and online community..."

*"These games are an intensely complicated series of puzzles involving coded Web sites, real-world clues like the newspaper advertisements, phone calls in the middle of the night from game characters and more. That blend of real-world activities and a dramatic storyline has proven irresistible to many."*

These games (which are usually free to play) often have a specific goal of not only involving the player with the story and/or fictional characters but of connecting them to the real world and to each other. Many game puzzles can be solved only by the collaborative efforts of multiple players, sometimes requiring one or more players to get up from their computers to go outside to find clues or other planted assets in the real world.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.geocaching.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://adventure.howstuffworks.com/outdoor-activities/hiking/geocaching6.htm>