

T IN SEARCH OF TREASURE



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Many people – from pirates to archaeologists – have devoted their lives to a quest for hidden treasure. This may mean one person alone, looking for small items, or it could involve organised groups, searching for objects of great historical importance.

Treasure-hunting is an exciting idea, but how often do people strike it lucky?

*This extract from an information book about treasure-hunting, **Treasure Seekers** by Jane McIntosh, explains some of the different reasons why people become excited by the prospect of discovering hidden treasures.*



Treasure-hunting



Left: Metal-detecting – one of the more popular forms of treasure-hunting

Two emotions motivate the majority of treasure-hunters. One is the desire to get rich quick: the same feeling that drives people to bet on sporting events or buy lottery tickets, week after hopeless week. This is generally not greed: more the fulfilment of dreams. Who does not wish to be rich? Treasure-hunters sometimes do strike lucky, just as some people win the lottery, but often the time, effort and money invested are greater than the material rewards. So why do it? Probably because of the excitement.

Treasure-hunting is an adventure, a searching for clues and a following of trails, along paths often richly littered with the earlier adventures of others. There is mystery: the search for something which is known to exist, or the existence of which is suspected. There is the mystique of the treasure, often based on the stories that go with its original discovery or concealment – for example, the history of those whose burial chambers were filled with valuables, such as the young Egyptian king Tutankhamun or the Chinese emperor Shi Huangdi, who was buried with life-sized models of his complete army. The plight of people caught up in natural disasters a long time ago such as the victims of the eruption of

the volcano Vesuvius at Pompeii, or the unfortunate people who went down with the *Titanic*, adds to the mystique of lost valuables.

Another attraction is the mystery of treasure stashed away and never recovered, for example, pirate gold. Stolen after years of careful planning or taken on the spur of the moment, the treasure had to be concealed and the pirates' tracks covered before it could be retrieved and enjoyed. Often misadventure overtook the pirate before he could return, yet somehow the details of the treasure were passed on, shrouded in ever-greater secrecy.



Above: An old map may be the starting point for a lifetime's quest for lost or hidden treasures

But before the adventure comes the preparation. There is more to treasure-hunting than going out with a metal-detector. Careful planning is essential: finding out what to look for and where, obtaining appropriate licences, gaining permission and researching the laws on different kinds of treasure – both looking for it and dealing with it if you strike lucky. Some people become so absorbed in their hobby of treasure-hunting that they end up devoting their lives to it. For others it remains a pastime. But for all, there is the heady thrill of the quest.

Treasure Island is an adventure novel by Robert Louis Stevenson which was first published in 1883. In this extract, Long John Silver, a pirate who has a wooden leg, and his men are on the last stage of their hunt to find buried treasure. They are racing to find Captain Flint's treasure, which, according to the map they have, is buried near a tall pine tree on an island. The story is told by Jim Hawkins, a boy they have taken prisoner. So that he cannot escape, Jim is tied to Long John Silver.

Treasure Island

It was fine open walking here, and our way lay a little downhill. The pines, great and small, grew wide apart; and even between the clumps of nutmeg and azalea, wide open spaces baked in the hot sunshine. Striking, as we did, pretty near north-west across the island, we drew, on the one hand, ever nearer under the shoulders of the Spy-glass Mountain, and on the other, looked ever wider over the western bay.

The first of the tall trees was reached, and proved the wrong one. So with the second. The third rose nearly two hundred feet into the air above a clump of underwood; a giant of a vegetable, with a red column as big as a cottage, and a wide shadow around it in which a small army could have manoeuvred. It was conspicuous from far out at sea both to the east and west, and might have been entered as a sailing mark upon the map.

But it was not its size that now impressed my companions; it was the knowledge that seven hundred thousand pounds in gold lay somewhere buried below its spreading shadow. The thought of money, as they drew nearer, swallowed up their previous terrors. Their eyes burned in their heads; their feet grew speedier and lighter; their whole soul was bound up in that fortune, that whole lifetime of extravagance and pleasure, that lay waiting there for each of them.

Long John Silver hobbled, grunting, on his crutch; his nostrils stood out and quivered; he cursed like a madman when the flies settled on his hot shiny countenance; he plucked furiously at the line that held me to him, and, from time to time, turned his eyes upon me with a deadly look. Certainly he took no pains to hide his thoughts; and certainly I read them like print. In the immediate nearness of the gold, all else had been forgotten; I could not doubt that he hoped to seize upon the treasure, find and board his ship the *Hispaniola* under cover of night, cut every honest throat about that island, and sail away as he had first intended, laden with crimes and riches.

Shaken as I was with these alarms, it was hard for me to keep up with the rapid pace of the treasure-hunters. Now and again I stumbled; and it was then that Silver plucked so roughly at the rope and launched at me his murderous glances.

We were now at the margin of the thicket.

'Hurry, mates, all together!' shouted Merry; and the foremost broke into a run.

And suddenly, not ten yards further, we beheld them stop. A low cry arose. Silver doubled his pace, digging away with the foot of his crutch like one possessed; and the next moment he and I had come also to a dead halt.

Before us was a great excavation, not very recent, for the sides had fallen in and grass had sprouted on the bottom. In this were the shaft of a pick broken in two and the boards of several packing-cases strewn around. On one of these boards I saw, branded with a hot iron, the name *Walrus* – the name of Flint's ship.

All was clear. The cache* had been found and rifled; the seven hundred thousand pounds were gone!

**cache* – hidden treasure

In 1922, the tomb of the Egyptian king Tutankhamun was opened for the first time and the treasure inside revealed. The archaeologist Howard Carter was the first person to see inside the tomb, and this extract from his diary describes the amazing sights that met his eyes.



Into the Tomb of Tutankhamun

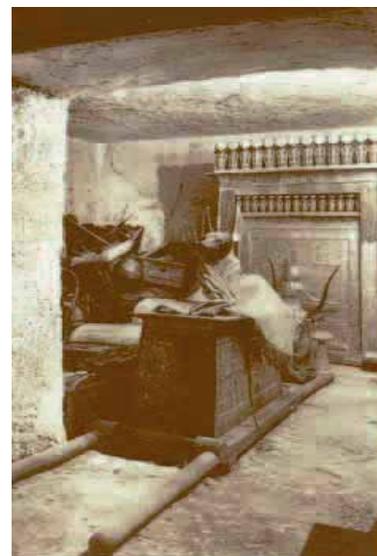


Above: Howard Carter

At first I could see nothing, because the hot air escaping from the burial chamber caused the candle flame to flicker. Presently, however, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist: strange animals, statues and gold – everywhere the glint of gold.

For a moment – an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by – I was struck dumb with amazement, and when they, unable to stand the suspense any longer, enquired anxiously, ‘Can you see anything?’ it was all I could do to get out the words, ‘Yes, wonderful things.’ Then widening the hole a little further, so that we could see, we inserted an electric torch.

Imagine how it appeared to us as we looked down from our spy-hole in the blocked doorway, casting the beam of light from our torch – the first light that had pierced the darkness of the chamber for three thousand years – from one group of objects to another, in a vain attempt to interpret the treasure that lay before us. The effect was bewildering, overwhelming ...



Above: The entrance to the treasury

Gradually the scene grew clearer, and we could pick out individual objects. First, right opposite to us – we had been conscious of them all the while, but refused to believe in



Left: *The untouched Burial Chamber seal*

them – were three great gilt couches, their sides carved in the form of monstrous animals with heads of startling realism. Uncanny beasts enough to look upon at any time: seen as we saw them, their brilliant gilded surfaces picked out of the darkness by our electric torch, their heads throwing grotesque distorted shadows on the wall behind them, they were almost terrifying. Next, on the right, two statues caught, and held, our attention: gold-kilted, gold-sandalled, armed with mace and staff, the protective sacred cobra upon their foreheads.

Right: *One of the statues found in the tomb*



These were the dominant objects that caught the eye at first. Between them, around them, piled on top of them, there were countless others – exquisitely painted and inlaid caskets; strange black shrines, from the open door of one a great gilt snake peeping out; beds; chairs beautifully carved; a gold inlaid throne; a heap of curious white egg-shaped boxes; beneath our eyes, a beautiful lotus-shaped cup; on the left, a confused pile of overturned chariots, glistening with gold; and peeping from behind them, another portrait of a king ...

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