

# X Marks the Spot

By Ian Joynes

'Well that's another one fixed' Pete groaned, stopping to switch off the heavy asphalt compactor to mop his brow. 'It is for now anyway' he added. 'I wonder how long that one's going to last. It's ridiculous, I've never seen so many pot holes before, the road's in a terrible state, needs totally re-laying if you ask me.'

'I totally agree' Ted sighed, collecting up the orange striped cones and slinging them back on the truck. 'It feels as if we're just wasting our time. No doubt we'll be back out here again tomorrow.'

The number of call outs to repair pot holes around Longden Road did seem to be reaching epidemic like proportions. Ted and Pete, members of the council patching crew, were out attending to them on a virtually daily basis. Locals had even nicknamed them 'Pot Hole Pete' and 'Tarmac Ted' they were such a familiar sight in the area, digging up the road more often than even the gas company cared to do.

'I wouldn't mind, but the weather hasn't really been that bad this year has it' Ted remarked from under his hard hat and bright high viz jacket. 'It's normally the frost that does all the damage. Oh well, this keeps us in a job I suppose.'

'I think we can call it a day now' Pete smiled. 'Back to the depot to get cleaned up. Do you fancy a pint afterwards? My throat's as dry as a council sand bag.'

'Mine too' Ted laughed. 'Mine too.'

Suitably degreased and showered, there was a distinct smell of Lynx Africa in the air as the pair journeyed back together into town.

Though late afternoon, Pride Hill was still bustling with chuggers and last minute bargain hunters.

Suddenly, a voice ambushed them from out of a nearby shop doorway. 'Can I interest you in a treasure trail map for a pound?'

'No thanks' Ted scoffed, not wishing to delay his pint any longer than absolutely necessary.'

'Go on, I'll have one off you' smiled Pete, seeing the disappointed look in the young street hawker's eye. 'What did you say it's for again?'

'It's a local treasure hunt. If you can solve the clues, and find the buried treasure, there's a thousand pound prize to be won.'

Searching his pockets for change, Pete gave the young girl a pound and stuffed the map into his pocket next to his wallet, without much more than a polite cursory glance.

'It's a waste of a pound if you ask me. You're a soft touch' Ted teased. 'There's always someone along here trying to part you from your hard earned cash if you let them. You need to learn to say no a bit more often.'

'Well, being as you think I should be a bit more assertive, then I'll let you get the first round in' Pete grinned. 'Let's try in here.'

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The duo were promptly back at the yard next morning, getting suited and booted for another busy day of asphaltting. But instead of being handed their work schedule for the day, they received an unwelcome message from a smirking rival crew member, Rick.

'The gaffer wants to see you both in his office. Something about not being satisfied with your standard of work.'

And unfortunately, he was right.

'I'm putting you two on gardening duties for a few weeks' the gaffer growled. 'You can help out with the planting in the Dingle. None of your pot holes seem to be lasting more than a couple of days. I'm moving Rick and his team onto Longden Road for a while instead, to see if they can do any better.'

'But surely... ' Pete began to argue.

'Look, you're lucky I'm not suspending you both. You can either go and help out in the park's department or I'll have to take this down the disciplinary route. Please yourselves, it's entirely up to you.'

'So it's your way or the highway' Ted mumbled sarcastically under his breath.

'What was that?' the gaffer questioned, looking up angrily from behind the mountain of paperwork on his desk.

'Nothing' Ted replied solemnly.

'Okay, let's see if Rick can do any better than us' Pete conceded, trying to appease the situation between them. 'My bet is that he won't be able to. There's something strange going on in Longden Road, some of those holes have been a lot deeper than you'd normally expect to see. Something peculiar's happening, but I just can't fathom what.'

They left the gaffer's office a little disgruntled.

'Told you didn't I' a beaming Rick taunted as they stepped back out into the yard.

'Don't let him get to you' Pete snapped. 'He's not worth it. Anyway, he's the one that's going to be knee deep in ghastly smelling asphalt this morning, while we enjoy the beauty and fragrances around the Dingle. I know where I'd much rather be working. Besides, I doubt whether he'll do any better than we've been doing.'

'Twenty quid says my pot holes will stay filled longer than yours' Rick goaded.

'You're on, twenty quid says they don't' Pete replied with an air of confidence. 'Come on Ted, let's get ourselves off to the Dingle. We've got a few flowerbeds to attend to. I don't think we'll be needing our hard hats today though' he added with a wry smile. 'Maybe a bit of sun tan lotion instead.'

Despite still being hard work, the Dingle was a much more pleasant place to be working, emptying the flowerbeds of blooms having gone to seed, ready to be replaced again in a few weeks' time.

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It had been a lovely few days, quite a change from being out amongst the traffic. Indeed, both Pete and Ted were quite enjoying their time in the Dingle.

But Rick was not so happy. His team had been grafting extra hard for several days now in Longden Road, yet every morning fresh pot holes had been appearing, and the gaffer no better pleased. In the end an overnight covert team had been despatched to see if they could shed any light on what was happening.

'You won't believe this' an excited Ted exclaimed, putting his phone down as they broke for lunch. 'I've just had a call from the gaffer. 'Where's that treasure map of yours?'

In my wallet, I think. Here it is' Pete puzzled, rummaging through his pockets and handing it over.

'The gaffer had someone out watching Longden Road last night and guess what? Along came this guy wielding a pick axe, who then started digging several holes in the road. He got himself arrested, then admitted everything. He's a treasure hunter, convinced that the treasure mentioned on your map is buried somewhere under Longden Road. Apparently, if you fold the map over on itself and hold it up to the light, then the letter X shows through from the other side of the map across Longden Road.'

'Let me try' Pete gasped, snatching it back and studying it for himself a few moments. 'It doesn't seem to work for me' he concluded. 'I can see what you mean about the letter X showing through from the other side, but it's nowhere near Longden Road' he remarked a short while later.

'Here, you're doing it wrong' Ted interrupted, grabbing it back. 'You need to fold it the other way round. Let me show you.'

'Doh, I see what you mean now' Pete laughed. 'I could see the letter X like you said, but it was showing here in the Dingle, over by the statue in the water over there.'

'What did you just say?' Ted gasped in disbelief.

'I said it was showing the treasure to be buried over there in the water.'

'That's what I thought you just said' Ted replied, close to choking on his sandwich.

For a few seconds they just stared at each other grinning, before racing over toward the statue of Sabrina the Roman river goddess like mad men possessed.

'There must be something hidden here somewhere' Pete gasped, before diving in and splashing around amongst the goldfish.

The sight of two park wardens thrashing around in the water must have bemused most of the bystanders enjoying the normally tranquil setting.

Luckily, the shallow depths meant they were able to constantly keep ducking their heads below the waterline with ease, eventually resurfacing with a small metal box embossed with the word 'Treasure Chest.'

Levering it open in front of a gathering crowd, a small scroll inside confirmed their success and how to claim the prize.

The jubilant, if now rather somewhat soggy pair, made their triumphant return back to the depot to share in their good news.

'Well at least the pot holes should stay filled a while longer now' Ted remarked to the gaffer.

'You obviously haven't heard have you' the gaffer grinned. 'The Gas Board have got permission to start digging up the road again from next week. There's going to be temporary

traffic lights up there for several weeks now. No doubt it'll be in a right state again afterwards, but I think I know just the men for the job.'

The End