

## **Burying a Treasure**

**By Maximilian Steinbeis**

**Translated by Stefan Tobler**

Come in. Please memorise this information. That will save me time and you money. My advice comes at the rate of one troy ounce of gold per hour. You would not want to waste that on preliminaries.

You have decided to secure your life's work before the coming disasters. Congratulations. That shows courage and determination. You will have need of both character traits if you are to carry out your plans.

What you do not have is know-how and experience. I have both, and can allow you to benefit from them. That comes at a price. But it is easy to imagine how costly any mistake or clumsy move could be for you. In comparison, I offer value for money.

You can expect the following here: I will go over the basics of burying a treasure. Then you will be in a position to start to work out the difficulties that lie before you, what you have to bear in mind and what decisions you must make.

Listen. Take your time to think about what you hear. Then set up an appointment with my office. We can then arrange everything else.

Your first step: to turn your money into gold.

Enjoy this step. It is a real adventure to turn everything you have into gold. Enjoy the moment you step into your branch of the bank, smiling calmly at the CCTV camera, and say to the friendly man at the counter that you would like to end the swindle which he and the institution employing him have been subjecting you to, to sell all your shares, to liquidate all your assets, and right now, please.

I cannot stress enough: all of them. Everything you have.

You might be tempted to make compromises. You might think: what if everything turns out differently? You might be tempted to diversify. To spread your risk. Not to put all your eggs in one basket.

Do these phrases sound familiar to you?

They are just what your bank's adviser has always spouted, aren't they? Am I right?

Don't give in!

I know the temptation is great. But you have to resist it.

Think about the time when the state will throw off the ties of its debts, tearing itself free and starting to satiate the lust for power which has grown over decades. Think about the time when all your money will once again become what it really was all along: a colourfully printed pile of paper.

Listen to what I'm saying: everyone will have to pay, unless they have put their property beyond the reach of the state.

And there is only one way to do that: gold, stashed underground.

Oh, I don't underestimate the sweetness of the poison the adviser will drip on your outstretched tongue. He is well trained. He will take care not to oppose you openly.

Of course, he'll say. Good idea these days, gold, he'll say.

He will help you. He will make himself useful. In his own way he is trying to do the best for you.

We could offer you this Market Index Certificate, he'll say, or that commodities fund. Or why not mining shares? And if it's to be actual gold, then at least put it in this safe deposit box in our safe. Don't give yourself the headache of keeping it. Avoid the risk. Look how safe this is, look how coolly the solid plating shines, look how fixedly the laser sensor of our electronic security system keeps watch, listen how silently the stainless steel bolts as thick as your thumb sink into their shafts. It can only be opened with a 15-digit code which the world's most powerful computer would take a thousand years to crack.

Listen: on the day of reckoning the state will ask the banks who is renting their safe deposit boxes. And officials will ring your doorbell, they will have armed support, and they will accompany you to your box and ask you in all

seriousness to open it. They will be permitted to use force if you don't cooperate. And they will just take your money.

So: don't listen. Don't smile. Don't answer any questions. Don't say anything other than your wish to have what is yours, right here, right now.

The nice adviser, who always went out of his way to help you, he'll survive. He might look a bit confused and blink at you with sad brown eyes.

These are your last few seconds as his customer. He is saying goodbye. Soon he will have disappeared, have withdrawn into the branch, which is kept at the optimum conditions for sales and painted in calming pastel tones and where a herd of people are already waiting patiently for his advice.

He will hold out his hand. Don't shake it!

Have him pay out your fortune in 500 Euro notes.

Some banks sell gold themselves. They order it for you. How practical, you might think. It takes the hassle out of it for you and you get it all nicely wrapped up and delivered to your door for free.

Let me repeat: you should not accept anything the bank offers. If you don't take that to heart, it is pointless for us to work together. In that case I would prefer to use my scarce time for something else. I'm serious.

There is a law in Germany which requires every large sale of gold to be registered with the authorities. You can imagine why.

What use is it to you if your treasure is safe underground but you yourself are in prison?

Fortunately there are shops, normal shops. They sell precious metals. Coins, old collector's items, but also newly minted coins. You can enter these shops without so much as a 'good morning'. You can silently count out notes on their counters and point to what you want. You don't even need to open your mouth. No one ever finds out about how you changed your money, just like if you were buying eggs, petrol or a new raincoat.

And you're allowed to. It is completely above board. However, there is an upper limit of 15,000 Euros. Above that the seller has to report the transaction.

Overcoming this difficulty is a question of time more than anything. You have to chop your money up into 14,999 Euro portions and then change these

portions in a number of shops for gold. One after the other. Today one in Hamburg, tomorrow one in Berlin, the next day one in Munich. We know reliable merchants. We will give you a route plan. We will fetch you and your money in an armoured car direct from your bank. We will drive you around the Republic, from one precious metals merchant to the next. Depending on the size of your wealth, you should allow two to three weeks for this phase.

Then your tour is done. You have got to know Germany, perhaps better than you would have liked. Over endless hours on the autobahn you have become friends with Frank and Thorsten, the two drivers with martial arts training and firearms licences who have accompanied and protected you on your journey and who in the end, once you got used to their physical appearance, proved to be pleasant company.

You have had a bath, a good sleep and fortified yourself with a hearty buffet breakfast.

Then you have returned to your hotel room and slung the sports bag onto your bed. Frank and Thorsten had not let it out of their sight for the whole journey. You unzip it so you can clearly see what it holds.

Now pause for a moment.

You have lying in front of you what is yours. Everything you own is lying there in the form of a compact cuboid made up of surprisingly small and flat tranches of a matt yellow colour.

Are you disappointed? Did you think that there would be more?

Rubbish. You are forgetting that you are dealing with gold. Lift up one of the bars. Yes, do it. It's yours.

It will feel unexpectedly heavy. Gold weighs more than twice as much as iron. Gold is heavy. Which means it does not take up much space. That is one of its great advantages. You can literally carry around an emergency ration in a hollow tooth. You can (if you tend toward criminal negligence) keep a small fortune under a loose floorboard.

But that is not all. The real wonder is how completely indestructible this metal is. It will survive anything, however horrific the natural catastrophe. It always remains what it is. Other metals form alloys, react with oxygen, that

corroding giver of life, come out in blisters of crumbly rot-coloured rust and of scabby salts, dissolve in the damp, come off in clay, come apart and break down – but not gold. Where you bury it is where you will find it in ten, one hundred or one thousand years. It will shimmer in its own unique yellow colour, given to it as if as a sign of its miraculous nature, as freshly as on the first day, in ten thousand or a hundred thousand years, perhaps slightly pressed out of shape by the grinding and kneading movements of the earth it lies in, but unchanged, not ruined, as if it were neither part of time nor the world.

On one condition: that no one has dug it up.

You have now taken the first step. The second one follows: you need the right place.

It is important that it belongs to you. If you don't have a piece of land yet, buy one. Buy any piece of agricultural or wooded land. Not less than one hectare. Ten would be optimal. That does not cost much. And you do not want to have to the landowner claiming your treasure later.

One more thing (and this might surprise you): it really does not matter what kind of ground it is. You should of course avoid swamps and sand, but apart from that one site is as good as the next. It is of no importance whether the ground contains clay, gravel, topsoil or whether it is damp or dry, bare or overgrown.

Another question is vital: how easily can the site be found?

It always sounds so easy in books: an isolated spot in the wood; a distinctive tree; the tip of the shadow of the highest branch at twelve noon. But that is children's games.

Within two years a clearing can grow over, the branch die, the tree be uprooted and the site where the treasure is buried have lost the key and, for your purposes, no longer be a site but a drop of water in the ocean, a breath in the wind, just nothing, and your treasure is everywhere and nowhere, gone, dissolved, no more.

That cannot be allowed to happen. Otherwise why bury the treasure at all?

The dilemma is always the same: the hiding place must on the one hand be impossible to find, else it is not secure; on the other hand, it has to be findable, else you have lost the treasure.

To solve this dilemma, you need four parameters: identification, markers, a code and a key.

The site itself, of course, should not be in any way conspicuous. That would mean that its special position and particularity are obvious to everyone. In times like these, when every taxi driver is burying his twenty ounces somewhere or other, no one should entrust their treasure to a place like that. I know people who visit one conspicuous spot after another with a gold metal detector. They make a good enough living from it.

No, you have to create the site's identifying character. You have to give it its particularities. You have to choose elements of the terrain and give them a value as markers, so that together they identify the spot.

These markers should be lasting. A tree is better than a post. A stone is better than a tree. A hill is better than a stone.

The more markers you have, the greater the risk that one will fall victim to the elements, rot, disappear, and with it your whole marking system. You can identify any spot, centimetre-perfect, with just three markers. Don't choose fewer, but also not more than three.

Make use of trigonometry. The laws of the angles and lengths of a triangle's sides are immutable. Use them.

And don't touch GPS coordinates. You want to be able to find your treasure even when the satellites up there have long stopped sending their signals.

Of course you have to encode your set of markers. The code can and should be complicated. You do not have to know it by heart. You will certainly have to write it down or in some way record it. So take full advantage of the black arts of cryptography. However, you should limit yourself to analogue technology. The last thing you need in the times that are coming is to be dependent on software and computing when they break down.

And with that we come to the fourth parameter for successful burying of treasure: the key.

Forget everything you think you know about treasure maps. Stick to Edgar Allen Poe, who admittedly also wrote a lot of rubbish, but left us with at least one piece of advice we should take to heart: what is in plain view is most hidden.

Not that I would not suggest that you simply leave your key in a box on your mantelpiece. That would be arrogantly careless. Unlike Poe's detective, there is no one you need to impress.

The point is that your key does not itself need its own hiding place. It should be embodied in open, easily accessible things. Look out of your window: your town's network of streets is a mine of material from which you can extract any number of keys. The route from A to B. The angle of a junction. The length of each section of road in metres. And they are long lasting: even in Hiroshima the network of streets remained intact to some degree.

Classic works of literature and music are also suitable. Combine them. If your key is made up of a number of keys, which only work when put together, then it will be much stronger.

You get the picture: this is where you can give your personal preferences free rein. Your favourite poem. Pop songs from when you were young. Your route to school. Your first sweetheart's address. Be as sentimental as you like. Here you are allowed to be. The more personal the better. Your memories and feelings are not easily trespassed on by anyone else. They are secure inside you. And they are easy to memorise.

You have to set up these four parameters yourself: identification, markers, code and key. I cannot do this for you. If I did, then I would know where your treasure were buried. And neither you nor I want that.

Up to this point the challenges are intellectual in nature. The ones which follow demand other capacities.

You cannot dig a hole on your own that is deep enough for a treasure. So you need a second man – not more than one, but that one you definitely need. It can be your son or grandson, if you have one who you can trust absolutely and who is physically strong enough for such hard work. It can also be your daughter or granddaughter, under the same conditions. A sibling: never. Nor your wife. That does not work.

If you do not have a suitable progeny, then you need a helper. And this helper brings with him a problem, which you will have to face.

I am not referring to the question of finding a suitable man. We can do that for you. There are enough strong young men around who are happy and thankful to be offered a job like this. That is not the problem. I will come back to the problem.

We will give you your tools: shovels, picks, a bucket, rope and – the most important part – two baskets with straps so that you and your helper can each carry on your backs 650 troy ounces of gold. That is enough for most fortunes. And in any case you should not bury more than that in a single place.

650 troy ounces are more than 20 kilograms. That is quite a weight on your back. You have to be able to carry that one or two miles without becoming overly tired. Train for it, if need be.

Arriving at the hiding place, your hardest work is still to come. You have to dig a hole at least 2.5 metres deep.

There are experienced buriers of treasure, people in no way given to sentimentality, who persist in believing the theory that sooner or later time will bring every treasure to light. That time does not suffer a treasure to remain in the earth forever. That it goes against nature for gold to be in the dirt, for something special to be in what is common, for this Something Else to be disguised as Nothing. And that in the end it will be washed out by the rain, ripped out of the earth by a storm along with the harbouring roots of the tree at whose foot it is buried, sliced by a plough and thrown up to the surface among black clods of earth. That it will lie there, sparkling in the light, bright and yellow, not changed at all, like new, on view for whoever has the luck to come by and have their eyes open at the right moment.

That might be superstition. I will refrain from making a judgment.

What is important is this: 2.5 metres.

Today there are very powerful metal detectors, and technology is always moving forward.

2.5 metres. More is good. On no account less.

Two strong adult men will take around ten hours to dig a hole 2.5 metres deep. Take account of that in your planning. You have not got a single minute to waste, if you want to fill in the hole by the break of day.

In your basket you will find drinks and concentrated energy food. Take a break of fifteen minutes every two hours. It won't help if you and your helper become tired and hungry and slow down.

Now here is something important: have your helper work at the bottom of the pit. He stands at the bottom and fills up the bucket. You stand at the top and pull up the loose earth.

Speak as little as possible with him. In most cases he won't be able to speak German anyway. But all the same: avoid eye contact. Be curt with him. Pay no attention to his groaning, his sweating, his grunting attempts at contact. Avoid eating your packets of energy food with him, and for God's sake don't share them.

What you will have to do is hard enough as it is.

After ten hours' hard physical work with someone it is very hard not to form some bond. He is shovelling away down there, you are pulling the loads up. A certain rhythm will develop. His movements will be timed to match yours. He hacks away while you pull the bucket up, then he shovels while you wait for the bucket to fill, then you pull it up as he grabs the pick again. After one or two hours you are working together like a well-oiled machine. There is something intoxicating in this. As in a dance, one movement flows into the next. Like a four-armed animal you are eating into the ground down to a depth of 2.5 metres. The two of you are even breathing in the same rhythm in the dark. Your muscles are filled with the same warm, blood-flooded pain – he down at the bottom, you up at the top.

And in the end you have to kill him.

There is no way to make this an easy task. For most people it is by far the hardest part of the whole operation.

And you have to do it on your own. We can prepare you as much as is possible. But in the end you have to be ready to lift the shovel, to swing its steel blade far back and, at the moment when the man at the bottom is emptying his

shovel into the bucket and the muscles in his neck relax, to have it fall on a particular spot on the back of his neck.

We will practice that. You have to get it right first time.

If you hesitate, even unconsciously, because what you are about to do scares you, because you are aware of the man down there and his smell, his torn T-shirt, his bared teeth, his body so warm steam is coming off it – if you brake as you bring the shovel down, then you might only injure him. And then everything will be much, much more difficult.

Done properly, the blow with the shovel will turn the man out like a light bulb. He will fall down and die. All you have left to do is to fill in the pit, once you have lowered in the treasure of course. You should allow about one and a half hours for that in total.

Then you will be standing in front of the filled-in pit. If everything has gone according to plan, it will just be getting light. Day will be dawning in the East.

You will notice that you are full of a strange euphoria. You will notice that this dawn is having the oddest effect on you. You will feel freer and lighter than you ever have before in your life. Jump up and down! Whoop it up! Tear your clothes off! No one is watching you. There is no one for miles around. Let your feelings run away with you.

But don't forget that you still have to walk back to your car. You also have to carry the tools on your own this time. You should do this while still buoyed up by the euphoria.

Once at your car, on no account just drive off. In your current state you are a danger to yourself and others. Fold your seat back and sleep.

It will be a deeper, more dreamless sleep than you have had in a long, long time. The thing that was keeping you awake, that had you tossing and turning, unable to rest, all those countless nights until now, is now safe under 2.5 metres of gravel, clay and mud.

You will wake up after eight, ten or twelve hours. It might even be dark again. Your limbs are stiff and hurt. Your skull feels as if it has been trampled around on, from the inside.

Now drive off. Get back on the road. Insert your car into the stream of traffic. Immerse yourself in the world again. Speed up. Hold the steering wheel with both hands. Don't take your eyes off the road. Breathe in and out. Deep, regular breaths.

You are free.