Cocos Island
Introduction
- No area in world reputed to harbour as much treasure as small island, inspiration for literature
- Countless treasure maps, if all of them accurate, one would find gold with every hit of spade on small 9.2 km² island
- Even though more than 300 expeditions, all that was found 6 pieces of gold

Geography, Flora, Fauna
- UNESCO world heritage site, declared Costa Rican national park in 1978 and 1 of ten best scuba diving spots
- Surrounded by treacherous oceanic currents
- Heavy rain 10 months of year, rest rains several times a day
- Thick jungle
- Hard to find because perpetual mist, only accessible in North
- However, conveniently placed and served passing ships for fresh water supplies since discovery by Spanish in 1535
- Mainly birds and red ants
- Only few mammals, most of which rats
- 400 years captain fumigated ship
- Domestic European pig – since 1793

Treasure Origins
- English buccaneer Edward Davis – ‘Bachelor’s Delight’, 1684
- Used Cocos Island as headquarters, raided South American coast for 20 years from there

- Benito Bonito with ‘Relampago’
- Escaped English authorities from Caribbean by sailing around Cape Horn
- 1819 – Spanish consignment of gold from Mexico City to coast on mule back – massacred military escort, obtained gold
- when crew was captured, confessed night before execution that gold was on Cocos Island

Treasure of Lima
- 120 million pounds, lost since 1821
- Hoarded by Catholic Church for centuries,
- Gold from Peru dispatched to Spain, silver from mines of Mexico treasure stolen from the natives
- Made Lima one of wealthiest cities of world
- By C19, rebellions of repressed people forced Spanish authorities to abandon province after province, withdrew to Lima
- Simon Bolivar’s troops advancing from North, General Jose de San Martin crossing Andes from East
- Decided to transport treasure on ox back from cathedral to port of Callao, 5m away
• Only ships in harbour: warship to defend Lima and Mary Dear under William Thompson and 14 crew members
• Thompson was well-known independent trader
• Asked to take treasure on board and cruise beyond horizon until situation was decided
• 6 Spanish soldiers and 2 priests on board for protection
• Last time treasure was ever seen
• Crew captured by Spanish frigate close to main land
• Claim Mary Dear and cargo sunk
• Spanish didn’t believe because found dead bodies of soldiers and priests
• Most likely: turned pirate, buried gold on closest uninhabited island, split up before going back to gather it, set ship ablaze because couldn’t go to port without treasure
• Crew tortured and unanimously confessed that buried treasure was on Cocos Island, couldn’t say where because couldn’t read write or navigate
• All hanged except Thompson and 1st mate, who were made to lead Spanish
• Escaped into jungle, Spaniards ran out of supplies and left
• Viceroy of Lima sent 2 more unsuccessful expeditions in ensuing months
• Thompson and mate stayed on island for 6 months until British whaler ‘Captain’ picked them up, believing they were innocent survivors of ship wreck
• Disappeared for 20 years, until in 1845 dying man Thompson in Newfoundland confessed to guy called Keating and gave him directions, Keating drew first of many treasure maps

Search for the Treasure of Lima
• No year passed without people going on the long and costly journey to Cocos Island
• Big story in newspaper
  - Companies were built with promising names such as ‘Cocos expedition’ (SF 1854), ‘Hidden Treasure Company’ (New York, 1873)
  - 1935 – President Roosevelt was cruising the waters in vicinity on USS Houston and gave crew permission to go digging for couple hours, nothing was found, but Roosevelt caught 132 pound swordfish that was stuffed and hung up in White House
  - 1968 – Costa Rican government decided to stop giving permission for treasure hunters to preserve environment, but treasure hunt continued illegally – people employed lobster fishermen to take them to unguarded south shore
  - 1982 – Munich adventurer Reinhold Ostler arrived with 3 friends and 1000 cans of beers donated by Munich brewery
    • modern metal detectors – useless, because hunters left tons of pickaxes, shovels, cans
**August Gissler**

- Most determined treasure hunter, stayed on island for almost 20 years from 1889-1908
- Obtained map from friend married to Hawaiian woman
- Wanted to look for treasure methodically and dug complex system of underground tunnels
- Needed money, asked Costa Rican government for permission and built Tobacco Plantation
- Impressed with his determination and organisation, Costa Rican government allowed him to establish German colony in 1897
- 6 families and his wife Clara joined him, however condition for farming bad and within 3 years everyone left except August and Clara
- Stayed there alone for 2 years until ammunition run out and tools wore out, built boat, navigated to mainland in 3 days – only to return shortly after
- Interview in New York Times
- Spent rest of life impoverished in New York
  - Last words: “I’m sure there is great treasure in the island. But it will take a lot of time and money to unearth it. If I were young, I would start again from the beginning.”

**Other pirate treasure**

- Not surprising no treasure was found because despite the popular conception, pirates very rarely obtained treasure, even less frequently buried it
- Whatever loot, wanted to exchange it as quickly as possible into money
- Pirates went to closest ‘safe port’ where could harbour and trading partners didn’t mind pirates
- Spent it straight away because knew life would end on the gallows
- Time of Spanish treasure galleys long passed when pirates were most powerful, Lima is great exception
- During ‘Golden Age’, only raw material on board ships, sugar, tobacco
- Difficult to determine what was on board pirate ships, because no official record
- Only sunken pirate ship that has ever been discovered was Samuel Bellamy’s ship Whydah which sank in storm near Cape Cod 1717
- Survivor of crew claimed that there were between 4.5-5 tons of silver, gold, gold dust, and jewellery on board
- Though more of 200’000 individual pieces of the ship have been discovered, only little of treasure was retrieve

- Only known pirate William Kidd
- Buried small case of treasure on Gardiner’s Island, Long Island
• Removed by governor and send to England as evidence against him in trial
• Kidd insisted until his execution that he hid other treasure somewhere in the ‘Indies’ (Caribbean)

**Conclusion**
- Buried treasure is only a cultural product supported by literature (Stevenson, Treasure Island)
- Because of publicity of Cocos Island through myths about buried treasure, people are now able to draw attention towards environmental conservation