

Maze History – Backgrounder

Provided by Maize Quest[®]

Hugh McPherson, Maze Master

A Brief History of Mazes

The classic story of the maze comes from Greek mythology. When King Minos of Crete defeats the city-state of Athens, he demands that the Greeks send him seven maidens and seven strong youths as a tribute every year for him to sacrifice to the monster called the Minotaur. The king kept the Minotaur in his country because he was afraid that if he killed it, he would anger the god Poseidon. To prevent the Minotaur from running amok in Crete, King Minos had Daedalus, a renowned inventor at the time, design and build the labyrinth, an elaborate structure to corral the beast.

Theseus, son of the Greek king, traveled to Crete disguised as one of the youths to be sacrificed. He was determined to put an end to the Minotaur and stop the need for sacrificing all the young people from his country.

When he arrived, Theseus caught the eye of Minos' daughter Ariadne who learned of his plan. Fearing she would never see Theseus alive again, Ariadne gave him a ball of golden thread to unwind so that he could retrace his steps and find his way out of the labyrinth.

The successful Theseus killed the beast, followed the thread, escaped the labyrinth and subsequently became the hero of Athens and, upon the death of his father, the king.

Observations from a modern Maze Master

Hugh McPherson, Maze Master and founder of Maize Quest offered the following observations taken from the Greek myth:

“A clever inventor designs a structure that doesn't bar the beast from escaping directly, but instead, confuses the surly beast. Only smart, thoughtful people can escape a labyrinth.

“Moral I: Strength will not triumph over brains in a maze.

“Moral II: Always develop your strategy and a plan, before you begin to solve the problem.”

Recorded history reveals information about mazes

Archeological evidence shows that the Egyptians built a labyrinth-like structure around 3,600 B.C. It was not designed to be a prison, trap or game, but was instead a temple or administration building so large and precisely laid out that it was simply confusing for the people to find their way once they were inside it, especially in the dark.

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Labyrinths are prevalent in every culture, especially South American, Native North American and European cultures. Used as decoration on pottery and coins, labyrinths also appear on rock carvings dating as early as 1000 B.C.

Labyrinths in churches appear as early as 300 A.D. in El Asnam, Algeria. As with most church labyrinths, the one at El Asnam is laid out in mosaic tiles and used for a meditation walk.

Hedge and garden mazes grew in popularity in Europe from the 15th to 17th centuries. At this time the general public began to gain access to maze gardens.

With the distinct feature of being renewable annually, the cornfield maze emerged in the 1990's as the newest form of the art. The first Maize Quest opened in 1997. The resurgence of maze popularity comes mainly because of the twist on entertainment that mazes provide. While today's entertainment industry relies on passive activities such as viewing the performance of others or sports-related activities such as mini-golf, mazes provide entertainment that is participant-based. Maze visitors make choices and interact with each other as they solve the puzzle.

Maize Quest mazes concentrate on augmenting both the fun and the educational value of the maze by including games as part of the experience. Not only do visitors explore to find the exit, they learn about pirates, African animals, the Australian outback and much more depending on the individual maze's theme. Visitors get to customize their experience by choosing the number and type of games they play and the length of time they stay. Maize Quest mazes deliver customized entertainment for the masses.

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