

Outdoor Physical Activity: Geocaching

Geo-- What?

Think of it as a high-tech, real world treasure hunt, geocaching (pronounced "jee-oh-cash-ing") is a fun, family-friendly activity that gets you outside exploring your community and beyond. Geocaching requires both your mind and body to find the caches. The word "geocaching" comes from "geography" and the word "cache," which means a place to hide something.

Each cache is marked by its GPS (Global Positioning System) coordinates, which you find online and enter into a hand-held GPS device or smart phone with the geocaching app installed. There are almost 2.7 million caches worldwide, in both rural and urban settings, making it very likely there are several near you.



A Brief History of Geocaching

Geocaching was born in May 2000, made possible when the US government took down satellite navigation's "selective availability," which limited the accuracy of GPS to anyone without the appropriate military or government credentials.

Once selective availability was dismantled, navigation by GPS became more accurate and accessible to all citizens. In September 2000, the website www.geocaching.com was born.

Since then, the number of geocachers and geocaches has grown exponentially. Today, there are almost 2.7 million geocaches worldwide and over 6 million geocachers.



What Is a Cache?

Caches range in size from “micro” (less than 100 ml, such as a 35 mm film canister) to “large” (20 liters or larger, such as a large bucket), and they are typically camouflaged so you have to search for them when you reach the correct GPS coordinates. There are even “nano” sized containers, which are smaller than your fingertip! All containers used for caches are weatherproof and contain, at minimum, a logbook for recording your find. You also record your find online. Most caches, except the very smallest (the nanos and micros), also contain a pen or pencil for recording in the log, and trinkets for trading.



Who Can Geocache?

Anyone can! Geocaching is a great activity for children and adults that requires you to use both your body and your mind. The excitement of searching for and finding a cache appeals to people of all ages. Caches are described by the difficulty of the terrain for reaching them and the difficulty of finding it once you reach the destination. If you do not have a lot of experience in the woods, start with caches in easier to reach areas.

Make sure you are prepared for the weather and the terrain, especially for the caches in more remote areas. You should know how to use a map and compass to reach caches in more difficult terrain. You also need to understand geocaching etiquette before heading out.

While every geocaching website or organization has its own specific guidelines for play, the generally accepted rules are:

- Do not endanger others
- Minimize the impact on nature
- Respect private property
- Avoid public alarm

What Is CITO?

Cache In Trash Out® is an ongoing initiative of the geocaching community to leave the areas around caches better than they found them. These efforts include picking up trash, rebuilding eroded areas, and trail maintenance.

While there is an annual CITO weekend every year, geocachers are encouraged to CITO on every hunt by picking up any trash they find on the way.



What You Need to Get Started

1

An account on a geocaching website. You need an account to find the location of the caches near you, information about the cache, the level of difficulty of the terrain and finding the cache, as well as to log your find, hide and publish your own caches, and many other tasks and information about geocaching, including geocaching etiquette. There are several geocaching websites, but www.geocaching.com is the original and most popular. It is free to set up a basic account; a premium account costs \$30 per year. There are also regional geocaching clubs that may offer social activities and geocaching events.

2

A handheld GPS device (they range in price from \$30 to over \$1000) or a geocaching app for your smart phone (free for an introductory app; or \$9.99 for the full featured app). Make sure you know how to use your GPS or smartphone app before you head out to search for your first cache.

3

Map and compass and/or knowledge of the area where the cache is hidden. You probably don't need a compass for most urban caches, but you definitely do for those hidden in the woods. Your GPS will point you a straight line between you and the cache you are looking for, but that isn't necessarily the easiest or safest route for getting there.

4

Pen or pencil to record your name in the cache's logbook, and a small notebook for you to keep track of your finds.

5

Trinkets, called "trades" in geocaching lingo, to exchange with those in the cache. Trinkets are small, inexpensive toys or gadgets. Always leave a trinket of equal or greater value than the one you take.

6

Other recommended items: flashlight, water bottle and snack, cell phone, extra batteries for your GPS, appropriate clothing for the weather and terrain, as well as a rain jacket or extra layer.



Related Activities

Letterboxing is similar to geocaching except it does not require a GPS. You use clues found online or shared by word of mouth to find the letterbox, which contains a stamp and a log book.



Letterboxers carry their own stamp and logbook. When you find a letterbox, you stamp the logbook in the letterbox with your stamp and also stamp your book with the stamp in the letterbox.

Click [HERE](#) for more information.

Orienteering is a sport that combines racing with navigation using a map and compass. Courses can also be enjoyed as a walk in the woods. There are both race-day courses and permanent courses. Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse all have a local orienteering club.

Clubs in other communities, as well as information about orienteering, can be found [HERE](#).



For More Information

This is just a brief overview of geocaching. For more information, visit these sites:

- www.geocaching.com
- www.brillig.com/geocaching
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geocaching
- www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/gps-geocaching
- www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/geocaching-kids
- www.treadlightly.org/full-tread-lightlys-tips-for-responsible-geocaching
- www.geocaching.com/cito

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