

Geocaching

Barbara Schlatter and Amy Hurd wrote an article in the September, 2005 edition of *JOPERD* entitled Geocaching: 21st Century Hide and Seek. In her abstract, she explains that geocaching is "...a unique opportunity to combine a love of the outdoors and a love of technology into a healthy, creative activity that can be done by individuals, groups, schools, and recreation agencies. This increasingly popular activity can be enjoyed by those who wish to further investigate their own city or by more adventurous persons who want to search for caches in remote backwoods locations."

We find geocaching to be an excellent physical education activity that uses technology, geography and science to encourage students to be physically active in the outdoors. It requires computer skills, critical thinking skills, and varying amounts of physical exertion to find hidden treasures that serve as motivators to get people outside and active.

You need two things to go geocaching: a computer connected to the World Wide Web, and a Global Position Satellite receiver (GPS). Geocaching begins by finding the location of a hidden cache by accessing www.geocaching.com. You then type in the zip code of the area you want to explore to find the location of the cache.

Having chosen the cache you want to find, enter the coordinates on your GPS, and follow the direction arrow on the GPS to the cache site. The last few feet are usually the hardest, as you have to use your critical thinking skills and the clues provided by the hider of the cache to find it.

Garmin and Magellan are the two leading makers of GPS units, and each producer makes several different models appropriate for geocaching, ranging from under \$100 to over \$400. We find the Garmin e-trex to be both economical and accurate enough to use with our classes. All GPS units do a lot more than you need to know to find a geocache. The following steps cut through the stuff you don't need to know, although as you get better with your GPS, you might find some of the other functions very helpful.

If you have a GPS unit other than the Garmin e-trex, the basics are pretty much the same as you will read below, but you will use different steps to enter the coordinates of the geocache, and you might use different screens to find it. Here are the basic directions to find your first geocache with a Garmin e-trex.

1. Go to the Geocaching Web Page: www.geocaching.com
2. In the upper right corner of the home page, enter zip code of where you want to look for a cache. You'll probably be surprised that there are geocaches very near you.
3. Pick a cache that sounds interesting. Click on it.
4. Log in. The first time you do this, you'll have to sign up. It's free. When you sign up, pick a nickname for yourself. It's permissible to use your real name, but most geocachers use a nickname. Since you may want to record the caches that you've found, you can do it more anomalously by using a nickname.
5. Having selected the cache you want to hunt for:

- a. Write down the coordinates, or enter them into your GPS.
 - b. Write down and pay attention to the cache's name (it often gives clues to help you find it).
 - c. Look at the encrypted hint if you want to (it gives a clue to its location).
 - d. Look at the cache logs if you want to (they also give clues).
6. Enter the coordinates for the cache you want to find on your GPS, go outside and follow the GPS to the cache. It's suggested that you start with a topo map to get an idea of basically where you should start walking or looking. This is probably a good idea if you're going into the wilds to find the cache, but if it's nearby, it's not necessary.

Using the Garmin e-trex – to enter coordinates

1. Turn it on
2. Press “page” until you get to the menu
3. Use the up or down arrow to “mark”
4. Press “enter”
5. Press down arrow to coordinates
6. Enter
7. Press down arrow to the number you want to change
8. When at desired #, press “enter”
9. Use the up or down arrow key to find desired #
10. Continue changing numbers until you have the proper coordinates
11. Use down arrow to get to “OK” at the bottom of the screen
12. Press “enter”
13. Remember the number of the coordinates you just entered

Using the Garmin e-trex - to find the cache

1. Press “page” until you get to the menu
2. Use the up or down arrow to “waypoints”
3. Press “enter”
4. Use the up or down arrow to select the waypoint you just entered
5. Press “enter”
6. This should take you to the “review waypoint” screen; “Go to” should be highlighted.
7. Press “enter”
8. Follow the compass arrow, paying attention to the distance
9. Remember that the GPS is accurate to about 30 feet. When the GPS says you've arrived, you're probably very close, but you're probably not right on top of the geocache.
10. When you get very close, look around, using clues

Basic Rules:

The fun of geocaching is finding the treasure. The treasure box is usually a Tupperware box filled with stuff (a golf ball, a political campaign button, a plastic lizard,

etc.) and a log book that you should sign when you find it. When you find the cache, it is permissible, even expected that you'll take something from it. You should also bring something to put in it. Some caches are the size of a shoe box, others as small as a 35mm film canister. Obviously the micro-caches will not have room for anything but a small log book.

The cache cannot be buried, but it may be very hard to find. When you find it, and after you've opened it and signed the log, don't move it. Put it back exactly where it was. Also don't let a non geocacher (called a Muggle) see you find it or return it. They just wouldn't understand.

Use common sense to be safe when geocaching. Make sure someone knows where you're going and when to expect you to return – especially if you're going into the wilds to find a cache. It's always best to take someone with you. And if you're going into the wilds, be sure you've got the stuff that all wilderness goers need: flashlight, sun protection, extra clothing and food, first aid supplies, extra water, and items to make a fire.

Resources:

www.geocaching.com. This is the site that lists the location of the caches.

Groundspeak can be found at www.Groundspeak.com. Groundspeak was started in the year 2000 to manage Geocaching.com, the global headquarters for the sport of geocaching. Groundspeak continues to develop tools to help GPS enthusiasts create unique adventures in the real world.

Buxley's Geocaching Waypoint (www.brillig.com/geocaching) has some interesting stuff about geocaching, although as of September 2007, the most recent entry to this site was from January 2006.