

Geocaching: Introducing the World's Fastest Growing "Sport"

At any given time, there are ten to twelve satellites orbiting in space above you – part of a set of twenty-three satellites rocketed into orbit by the United States government to form the Global Positioning System (GPS). Its purpose is simple – to pinpoint any location on earth with a high degree of accuracy. Originally intended for exclusive use by the military, the scrambled code protecting the satellite signals was turned off in May of 2000.

That declassification eventually gave rise to what is now termed "geocaching" (*geo* meaning "earth", *cache* meaning "container"). Some people call it a sport while others call it a hobby. Whatever it's called, it's the perfect meeting of technology and the great outdoors. Anyone who owns a GPS (Global Positioning System) receiver can join the fun. In a nutshell, it's a real-life treasure hunt where players search for and find containers cleverly hidden by other players. Here's how it works.

First, a geocacher creates an account at www.geocaching.com and logs in. Next, the player conducts an online search for caches in the area (usually searched by zip code). The geocacher then makes note of the longitude and latitude coordinates that are given and travels to the location to begin the search. At the location, the GPS receiver will get the player within twenty to thirty feet of the given coordinates. Next, the player commences the search. Cache containers come in all varieties – camouflaged test tubes hidden in trees, 35mm film canisters hidden in light posts, ammo boxes in bushes, coffee cans inside fake birdhouses, sports bottles under logs, medicine bottles hidden in fence posts, hollow bolts on guardrails – there's a plethora of possibilities!

Once the player finds the container (and refrains from screaming "I found it!"), he or she opens the container and signs the logbook inside with his or her geocaching nickname and the date of the find. If the container is large enough to hold trade items (coins, fast food toys, trinkets, party favors, key chains, etc.), he or she may take an item and leave one of similar value inside the cache for the next person. The treasure hunter then replaces the cache exactly as it was found so that others can find it later.

Sometimes, a geocacher won't find a cache. This can be because of several reasons:

- the player just simply overlooked it
- the coordinates listed (or the coordinates given by his or her GPS receiver) were inaccurate
- another player moved it slightly
- the cache got "muggled"

When a player returns home, he or she logs the find (or the "did not find") on the cache's webpage and leaves a brief note about the find (usually thanking the owner for hiding the cache). When the note is submitted, the player is credited with a find and a copy of the log entry is sent via email to the cache's owner.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of geocaches hidden worldwide. If you live in an urban area, chances are there are several geocaches hidden in parks, cemeteries, and roadsides within just a few miles from you! As the game continues to grow, so do additional tools (like Google Earth) that can be used to assist in geocaching adventures.

There are additional and specific rules, vocabulary, and playing pieces involved with geocaching. But the basic process is just as it was outlined above. Oh, and aside from purchasing a GPS receiver, the game/sport/hobby is free!

Name: _____ Date: _____

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1. Why do you think the word "sport" is enclosed with quotation marks in the title?
2. If there are 23 satellites in the GPS system, why are only 10 to 12 above you? Where are the other ones?
3. According to the text, what does the word "plethora" mean?
4. When a player finds the cache, why would he refrain from screaming "I found it!"?
5. What is inside a cache?
6. If a cache has been "muggled," what do you think has happened to it? (Hint: Think of Harry Potter's use of the term "muggles.")