

## Geocaching

*A modern take on the traditional family treasure hunt* by Sarah Husselmann

If you're stuck in a rut during the school holidays or simply looking for a new outdoor activity for the entire family, geocaching may be just the thing. This high-tech treasure hunt using global positioning system (GPS) devices starts and concludes on the internet. For those with techie children, the use of technology alone should be enough to get them hooked.

### How does it work?

Geocaching is a treasure hunting game, also referred to as a sport, where participants retrieve GPS coordinates from the internet and navigate to the outdoor location using a GPS device (Garmin, TomTom). The aim is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, and then log adventures online. Since September 2000, geocaching has grown from 75 geocaches to over 860,000 active geocaches worldwide. It is estimated that there are between 2 and 3 million active geocaching participants around the world. Use it as an excuse to visit your local park or to venture further afield and explore new areas.



### How did it start?

Geocaching was made possible following a decision by the US government in May 2000, to switch off a feature that had historically degraded GPS accuracy – this meant that civilian users of GPS devices could pinpoint locations up to ten times more accurately.

The announcement caused great excitement among GPS enthusiasts. One enthusiast chose to test the accuracy by navigating to a hidden container using coordinates recorded on a GPS unit. He called the idea "The Great American GPS Stash Hunt" and posted coordinates on an internet GPS users' group. The rules for those who found the stash were: "Take some stuff, leave some stuff." His container was hidden in the woods near Beaver Creek, Oregon and contained a logbook, pencil, and various prize items including videos, books, software, and a slingshot.

Within three days, two people had used their own GPS receivers to find the container, and shared their experiences online. Throughout the next week, others began hiding their own containers and posting coordinates. The "GPS Stash Hunt" mailing list was soon created to discuss the activity and during this time a new name was proposed: geocaching.

### Want to take part?

- ~ Register for free at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)
- ~ Under "Search for Geocaches" type your postcode, or town. This will display a list of caches.
- ~ Click on the cache name to display coordinates of the cache's location, additional information about the location, difficulty rating, clues and hints.
- ~ Print the page to take with you, and if you're unfamiliar with the area pack a map just in case.
- ~ Tap the coordinates into your GPS device and follow the directions until you reach "ground zero" – to geocachers this is the point where your GPS device shows that you have reached the location
- ~ Look around you and if necessary use the additional clues and hints to find the cache, you will usually be looking for a small plastic weatherproof container.
- ~ Be discreet – Geocaching etiquette says you shouldn't let non-geocachers, see what you're doing.
- ~ Found it? Once you find the container, open it and enjoy your victory. All caches contain a log book but many contain prizes and other small objects. If you take something, leave something of the same value.
- ~ Go home and log your visit on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)
- ~ Didn't find it? If you didn't find it, go online and log that too, try again or try a different cache.



Once you're in the swing of it, why not place your own cache? It can be very exciting for children to maintain the cache and track visits online. Further details on getting started, what GPS device to use and regular geocaching events can be found at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). From toddlers to teenagers and beyond, geocaching has created a global community of treasure seekers – you probably pass a number of geocaches every day, on your way to work or on the school run, perhaps it's time to take a look.

### Trackable Items

Some geocaches contain trackable items such as Geocoins and Travel Bugs. These items have unique IDs and their location and activity is logged on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). Many coins travel the world as they are passed from geocache to geocache and their online history tells an exciting story.



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