

Intro to Geocaching

Presented by John Krout



What is Geocaching?

- **GEO**=Earth
- **CACHE**=hidden container
- Invented by a Portland Oregon hiker who, like his hiker friends, owned a hand-held GPS receiver.
- He hid a box in the woods, and used his GPS receiver to determine the map coordinates of that hidden box.
- He sent the coordinates by email to his hiker friends, and challenged them to find the box.
- His hiker friends loved the challenge!

Geocaching.com

- The web site includes a page for each and every geocache, including cache name, identifier, coordinates, description, terrain and difficulty rates, date of creation, and cache owner.
- You can search for and map geocaches by ZIP code or town name. Each cache icon is a link to the cache web page.
- 2.7+ million world-wide geocaches; 1+ million in the US.
- Hidden in forests, parks, parking lots, and on city streets.
- All caches contain a log book or log strip which you sign.
- The web site lets you type a log entry on the cache web page.

Why should you care?

- Hiking is good physical exercise.
- Searching is good *mental* exercise. When near to a cache, ask yourself this: Where would I hide it?
- You can meet other geocachers and share stories.
- You can help a cache owner by reporting problems at a cache: for instance, wet log book, insects have invaded, coordinates are wrong (off by 40+ feet).

Why should you care?

- Geocaching is a great way to break up a long road trip: often caches are placed close to interstate exits.
- Kids are *fascinated* by geocaches containing **trade goods a.k.a. swag** including kids toys.
- Most states permit geocaches at highway rest stops. Stretch your legs.
- Geocaches are welcome in state parks. Sometimes, state park staff place geocaches in parks.
- Caches are often hidden in places that are out of the way, historically interesting, or simply beautiful.

How I got started

- I have been a map collector for most of my life.
- I read an article about geocaching in the November 2002 edition of *Recreation News*.
- I bought a hiking GPS receiver and began finding geocaches in March 2003.
- My family found geocaches that year on vacation in Delaware and in West Virginia.
- I have found geocaches in 44 US states while traveling.
- Hiking to find geocaches has improved my health. Heart rate is down, blood pressure is down.

Geocaching Jargon, part 1

- **Geocache:** a hidden container, with details on a page on [geocaching.com](https://www.geocaching.com)
- **Geocaching:** the process of finding geocaches
- **Geocacher:** a person who finds geocaches
- **Muggles:** everyone else
- **Muggled:** the status of a stolen or missing geocache
- **Premium:** a cache with coordinates visible only to cachers who pay for a Premium account.

Who creates geocaches?

- Geocachers create geocaches.
- Often they do so as a way of giving back to the geocaching community.
- The creator of a geocache is known as a Cache Owner (CO).
- A Cache Owner has a responsibility to keep the cache in good working condition – provide a new log when the old one is full, mildewed or drenched, for instance.

Getting started on Geocaching.com

- Create your own free account
- Each account requires you to provide an **account name** (19 characters max), a **password**, and an **email address**
- After you log in, you can search for caches in any city, town, county, parish, zip code, etc.
- Geocaching.com will show you a list of caches, and a map of caches.
- Each cache symbol on a map is a link the cache web page.

geocaching.com demo

Cache size ranges

- **Large:** 5+ liters – examples: sealed bucket, aircraft ammo box
- **Regular:** 1 liter (about 39 oz) to 5 liters (about 1.5 gal) – examples: ammo box, gallon plastic jar
- **Small:** 100 ml to 1 liter – examples: big Bison tube, matchstick holder, tin for lozenges or tobacco
- **Micro:** below 100 ml – examples: tiny bison tube, 35mm film bottle



Typical cache containers

- Metal ammo box
- Plastic ammo box
- Plastic containers for food.
- Pelican and Otter cases (very expensive)
- Bison tubes



Fabulous Fakes

- Some geocache containers are hidden in plain sight but ***do not look like containers***
- Fake mail box on pole or building
- Fake rock keyholder
- Fake lawn watering head keyholder
- Fake electrical junction box on pole or building
- Fake red reflector on chain-link fence

Usual hideouts for caches

- Guard rails
- Road signs
- Lamp post skirts
- Knotholes (I hate micros in the woods)
- Hollow trees and fallen trees
- Tree limbs

Trackables

- Trackables are items that exist to be **moved from cache to cache**. Some have specific travel goals.
- These can be purchased online or in person at Geowoodstock and other large events.
- AKA **travel bugs, geocoins**.
- Some are ornate.
- Each bears a unique tracking identifier issued by geocaching.com



Virtual Field Trip

Custom-built geocaches

- Fake birdhouse
- Two plastic bottle necks glued together, with a plastic screw cap on each end
- PVC pipe with screw-threaded end cap
- Custom-machined metal cylinders
- 3D-printed containers, such as hollow “wooden branch” and “acorn”



Oddball geocaches

- **Flashlight:** log paper is inside the battery compartment
- **Portable CD Player:** log paper is a label on a CD inside the player
- **Plastic insects:** abdomen is a bison tube
- **1940s fire truck:** log book is inside a cylindrical metal water line
- **Used plastic shotgun shell** in the New Mexico desert



Interesting hideouts

- Deep inside a standing hollow tree:
lanyard or chain provided to lift up the geocache
- Cache is tethered high on a tree: untie the tether so the cache comes down, pull and tie the tether to restore the cache to its high perch
- Indoors: Painted Desert Inn, National Park visitor centers, public libraries
- On the vertical face of a waterfall (in an Otterbox)
- Three feet down a cliff on the Eastern Continental Divide (Bear Rocks, Dolly Sods wilderness, Monongahela National Forest)

Hazards around some geocaches

- Wasp nests in guard rails or lamp post skirts
- Insects generally, including the **vampire trio**:
mosquitoes, ticks, fleas
- Poison ivy
- Wild raspberry (lots of thorns)
- Holly tree leaves
- Spider webs
- Junked cars: rusted metal edges, broken glass
- Trash

Keeping Insects Away

- I am a magnet for the **vampire trio**
- **Permethrin** is an insecticide spray for clothing
- I spray my hiking pants with Permethrin. It lasts more than a month, or until the next pass through the clothes washer.
- When I am ready to hike, I pull my socks up over my pants cuffs, and spray the socks and hiking boots with DEET or Picardin
- If gnats are present, the I spray my hat with DEET or Picardin.

What's in my Geo backpack?

- First aid kit, including lidocaine spray can
- Water bottle or Gatorade bottle
- DEET or Picardin spray can
- Lightweight windbreaker, umbrella, poncho
- Trade goods (small and inexpensive)
- Repair materials for geocaches: duct tape, pens, replacement log books, zipper seal plastic bags to protect log books
- Flashlights, inspection mirrors, hand shears
- Power bank battery to recharge smart phone or tablet



Geocache Jargon part 2

- **FTF:** First to Find
- **CO:** Cache Owner
- **TFTC:** Thanks for the cache
- **P&G:** Park & Grab – cache close to parking
- **C&D:** Cache & Dash – same as P&G
- **GZ:** Ground Zero – location of a cache
- **Swag:** trade goods inside a cache

Social events for Geocachers

- **Event caches** list date, time and place for geocacher gatherings
- **Geowoodstock** is an annual event drawing 4,000+ attendees.
- Attendance at an event counts as a cache find, if you sign the event log book.
- Sometimes, events introduce new caches, and attendees can be the first to find those new caches.

Bragging points

- First to Find
- Total Find count above 1,000
- Find the oldest cache in a state:
VA: Burke Lake Park,
DE: Trap Pond State Park,
KS: Mingo
- Find Caches in Four or more US States in One Day
VA, WV, MD, and PA on I-81 (just 44 miles!)
CT, MA, VT, NH on I-91 (just 65 miles!)



Geocaching Apps

- Nobody buys a hand-held GPS receiver anymore for geocaching.
- Download a free Geocaching app for your smartphone or tablet.
- You will need to tell the app your geocaching.com account name and password.
- Geocaching apps use three data sources:
geocaching.com for coordinates of cache locations around you
GPS satellite radio signals to determine your location
Online maps to show your location and cache locations
- For iOS: **GeoCaches**; for Android, **C:Geo**

Geocaching apps

- In forested areas with no cell tower nearby, it is valuable to provide alternative ways for the app to access maps and cache details.
- **Offline maps** are available for free from mapsforge.com. Storage on your phone takes roughly 6 gigabytes for the lower 48 US states.
- The app itself provides the ability to **store cache details on your phone**. Storage space per cache is roughly 30 kilobytes.
- Consider using a ***retired* smart phone** to run your geocaching app, to minimize battery use on your current smart phone.

The End Questions?

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