

# EXPLORING: HOBBIES

## Geocaching



**Prerequisite:** A Cadet must have earned the **GPS merit badge** before being awarded the **Geocaching merit badge**.

### PURPOSE

To stimulate a boy's mind and challenge him in a puzzle-solving experience while engaged in wholesome outdoor activity.

### LEARNING

1. A simple search on Goodsearch, Google, or other search engine will result in a list of geocaching sites. In most cases, [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) is the best site for learning about geocaching, but for further info you can go to: [www.navicache.com](http://www.navicache.com), [www.terraching.com](http://www.terraching.com).

- a. Search the geocaching site with your Cadet to get the answers for questions a, b, c, and d.
- b. On May 2, 2000, at approximately midnight, eastern savings time, selective availability was removed from a government controlled satellite system making pinpoint positioning information available to the general public.

2. Definitions

*Cache:* Any container that meets the rules of the listing site.

*CITO:* Cache-In Trash-Out is an ongoing environmental initiative supported by the worldwide geocaching community. Geocachers are encouraged to pick up any litter they see while they are looking for caches and dispose of it properly. Also, special CITO events are held that focus on removal of invasive species, revegetation efforts or building trails.

*DNF:* Did Not Find — used to describe an unsuccessful geocache search.

*Trade Item:* Anything inside a cache or used to trade for other items in a cache.

*Traveler or Travel Bug:* An item that is passed from cache-to-cache or geocacher-to-geocacher and whose progress is tracked by the listing site.

*Waypoint:* Any point on earth whose coordinates are known and used as a reference.

*Logbook:* The item contained in all caches that allows finders to record their find of that cache. It does not have to be an actual notebook. Any writable surface will do.

*Muggle:* A non-geocacher. Usually this term is used after a non-geocacher looks puzzled when befriending a geocacher searching for a cache, or when a non-geocacher accidentally finds a cache.

*Container:* The box or other watertight item that contains the cache contents. Popular containers are ammo

boxes, waterproof plastic boxes, 35mm film cans, & pill bottles.

*Hide:* The actual location of the cache, specifically how it is hidden from the casual observer.

*FTF:* First-To-Find — Many geocachers consider being the first to find a new cache a special event.

*Geocoin:* A special traveling item which is a specially minted coin. Used as an ordinary traveler or as a collector's item.

3. Geocaching Safety

a. The number one rule is: Never go out geocaching on your own! All Cadets must be accompanied by an adult.

The number two rule is: Be cautious! Most caches are camouflaged or very well hidden. This means they could be in a tree, in a hollow log, or some other hard to get to place. Never place hands into a hole or crevice that can't be seen into. Use a flashlight or the rod and mirror attachment in order to get a better look. Always be alert for spiders and snakes. And always pay attention to the terrain. It is easy to be looking at your GPS or smart phone rather than where you are walking. Only check your GPS and smart phone while you are standing still. If in doubt about how you'll be able to get to or reach a cache — save it for another day.

b. A geocachers checklist of safety items includes:

- 1) GPS handheld unit
- 2) small flashlight
- 3) small first aid kit
- 4) spare batteries for gps and flashlight
- 5) extension rod with a mirror attachment (perfect for checking places where snakes or spiders may be lurking)
- 6) gloves (useful for moving thorns and extracting caches)
- 7) sturdy walking shoes or hiking boots
- 8) water
- 9) small compass and map of the area
- 10) cell phone

4. Caches and Geocachers

a. Depending on the site, caches may have different names. From [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com), some names are:

- *Traditional cache:* This is the original geocache type consisting of, at minimum, a container and a logbook or logsheet. Larger containers generally include items for trade. "Nano" or "micro" caches are tiny containers that only hold a logsheet. The coordinates listed on the traditional cache page provide the geocache's exact location.

- *Multi-cache* (offset cache): A multi-cache (“multiple”) involves two or more locations. The final location is a physical container. There are many variations, but most multi-caches have a hint to find the second cache, and the second cache has a hint to the third, and so on. An offset cache (where you go to a location and get hints to the actual cache) is considered a multi-cache.
  - *Project A.P.E. cache*: In 2001, fourteen geocaches were placed in conjunction with 20th Century Fox to support the movie Planet of the Apes. Each cache represented a fictional story in which scientists revealed an Alternative Primate Evolution. These caches were made using specially marked ammo containers. Each cache had an original prop from the movie. Only a few Project A.P.E. caches exist today.
  - *Mystery or puzzle caches*: The “catch-all” of cache types, this form of geocache may involve complicated puzzles that you will first need to solve to determine the coordinates. Mystery/puzzle caches often become the staging ground for new and unique geocaches that do not fit in another category.
  - *Letterbox hybrid*: Letterboxing is another form of treasure hunting using clues instead of coordinates. In some cases, the letterbox owner has made their container both a letterbox and a geocache and posted its coordinates on Geocaching.com. If there is a stamp inside a letterbox hybrid, it is not an item intended for trade; the stamp is meant to remain in the box so that visitors can use it to record their visit. To read more about letterboxing, visit the Letterboxing North America web site.
  - *Wherigo™ cache*: Wherigo is a toolset for creating and playing GPS-enabled adventures in the real world. By integrating a Wherigo experience, called a cartridge, with finding a cache, the geocaching hunt can be an even richer experience. Among other uses, Wherigo allows geocachers to interact with physical and virtual elements such as objects or characters while still finding a physical geocache container. A Wherigo-enabled GPS device is required to play a cartridge. Learn more at Wherigo.com.
  - *Event cache*: An event cache is a gathering of local geocachers or geocaching organizations to discuss geocaching. The event cache page specifies a time for the event and provides coordinates to its location. After the event, the cache is archived.
  - *Mega-event cache*: A mega-event cache is an event cache that is attended by 500+ people.
- Mega-events offer geocachers a day of planned activities. There are often several days of additional activities surrounding a Mega-Event. These large events attract geocachers from all over the world and are often held annually.
- *Cache-in trash-out event*: Cache-in trash-out is an activity intimately tied to geocaching. While searching for caches, geocachers collect litter along the trails and properly dispose of it. Cache-in trash-out events are larger gatherings of geocachers that focus on litter clean-up, removal of invasive species, revegetation efforts or trail building.
  - *EarthCache*: An EarthCache is a special place that people can visit to learn about a unique geoscience feature of our earth. EarthCache pages include a set of educational notes along with cache coordinates. Visitors to EarthCaches can see how our planet has been shaped by geological processes, how we manage its resources and how scientists gather evidence to learn about the earth. For more information about EarthCaches, visit <http://www.earthcache.org/>.
  - *Groundspeak headquarters cache*: The headquarters cache is located at Groundspeak HQ in Seattle, WA. Geocachers interested in visiting HQ to log the cache should send an email to [contact@groundspeak.com](mailto:contact@groundspeak.com).
  - *GPS adventures maze exhibit*: A GPS adventures maze cache represents attendance at the GPS adventures maze exhibit or a regional variation of this exhibit. GPS adventures mazes are designed to teach people of all ages about GPS technology and geocaching through interactive science experiences.
- b. The accepted sizes of caches are:
- *Micro*: Less than 100ml. Examples: a 35 mm film canister or a tiny storage box typically containing only a logbook or a logsheet. A nano cache is a common sub-type of a micro cache that is less than 10ml and can only hold a small logsheet.
  - *Small*: 100ml or larger, but less than 1L. Example: A sandwich-sized plastic container or similar.
  - *Regular*: 1L or larger, but less than 20L. Examples: a plastic container or ammo can about the size of a shoebox.
  - *Large*: 20L or larger. Example: A large bucket.
- c. Difficulty in finding or getting to: The difficulty scale for caches varies by site, geocaching.com uses a 1–5 scale for overall difficulty and 1–5 scale for terrain. Each cache has both difficulty and terrain ratings (see next page).

### Difficulty Scale 1–5

- 1) *Easy*: In plain sight or can be found in a few minutes of searching.
- 2) *Average*: The average cache hunter would be able to find this in less than 30 minutes of hunt.
- 3) *Challenging*: An experienced cache hunter will find this challenging, and it could take up a good portion of an afternoon.
- 4) *Difficult*: A real challenge for the experienced cache hunter; it may require special skills or knowledge, or in-depth preparation to find. May require multiple days / trips to complete.
- 5) *Extreme*: A serious mental or physical challenge. Requires specialized knowledge, skills, or equipment to find cache.

### Terrain Scale 1–5

- 1) *Handicapped accessible*: Terrain is likely to be paved, is relatively flat, and less than a ½ mile hike is required.
  - 2) *Suitable for small children*: Terrain is generally along marked trails, there are no steep elevation changes or heavy overgrowth. Less than a 2 mile hike required.
  - 3) *Not suitable for small children*: The average adult or older child should be OK depending on physical condition. Terrain is likely off-trail. May have one or more of the following: some overgrowth, some steep elevation changes, or more than a two mile hike.
  - 4) *Experienced outdoor enthusiasts only*: Terrain is probably off-trail. Will have one or more of the following: very heavy overgrowth, very steep elevation (requiring use of hands), or more than a ten mile hike. May require an overnight stay.
  - 5) *Extreme*: Requires specialized equipment and knowledge or experience (boat, 4WD, rock climbing, SCUBA, etc.), or is otherwise extremely difficult.
- d. Geocaches may be and are found just about anywhere. If the Cadet can think of it, there's probably a cache there. Exceptions are state game areas, or areas within 150 feet of a railroad, expressway, or school playground.
- e. These are basic guidelines followed by almost all geocachers. Be sure your Cadets know them and understand their importance.

#### Basic Rules for Geocaching

- #1 • If you take something from a cache, leave something of equal or greater value.
- #2 • Write in the cache logbook.
- #3 • Respect the environment and private property.
- #4 • Log your experience at geocaching.com.

### 5. Rules for geocaches

- a. Geocaches usually have at least two things to be considered geocaches: A weatherproof **container** of some kind which also contains a **logbook** for finders to record their visits. An exception is a virtual cache that does not have a container (just finding the location is the cache — such as a scenic overlook).
- b. Geocaches may only be placed on **land** which is accessible by the public and for which **permission** is obtained to place the geocache.
- c. Geocaches cannot be placed in certain areas that concern public **safety**. These areas include (but are not limited to) automobile bridges, railroads, school yards, industrial complexes and power plants.
- d. Geocaches must not contain dangerous or illegal items such as **weapons**, **matches or lighters**, **fire-works**, or **drugs**.
- e. Geocaches also should not contain items such as food or drinks that attract **animals**.

### DOING

1. Have the Cadet search the geocache.com website for the nearest geocaches and list them here.
2. Now it is time to actually look for some geocaches. Either take your Cadet/cadre on a geocaching trip to your local caches or arrange for their parents or trusted adult to take them on an outing.

When the Cadet finishes this section, verify that the information entered matches the information on the geocaching website.

Suggestion: Geocaching is a fun cadre-level activity. Working on this as a cadre group badge is probably the best way to earn this badge. At the least, more eyes searching means more caches found.

3. It is not necessary to register the cache with the listing site. Placing the cache on the club meeting grounds and having the Cadets try to find it can be a very rewarding activity.

If you do list the cache on the listing site, remember that you are responsible for maintaining the cache according to the site rules.

A cache that is not maintained is called “geotrash” and is considered one of the worst things that a geocacher may do. It pollutes the environment and causes land managers to ban geocaching from their lands.

Also, the owner of the cache is responsible for answering questions about the cache and performing maintenance on a timely basis.

If you are not willing to do this, place a temporary cache that will be removed as soon as this badge is completed.