GEOCACHING: Introduction to Geocaching

ASK
Have you ever been on a treasure hunt or scavenger hunt? How can new technology help you find the treasure? Have you ever heard of geocaching? In this section you will learn about finding treasures through the sport of geocaching.

INVESTIGATE
To understand geocaching, it is important to know what a cache (pronounced cash) is. You can find the word cache in a dictionary and discover it has several meanings. Basically, a cache is something that is hidden. (In geocaching, the actual hiding place may also be referred to as a cache.) Geocaching is an outdoor high-tech scavenger hunt that can involve people and places all over the world. Geocaching uses GPS technology. If you like the idea of hunting for treasure, then geocaching can be lots of the fun for you!

Caches consist of toys, souvenirs, coins, or just about anything that someone can find. The item or items are usually placed in a waterproof container and hidden. It is customary when taking something from the cache to leave something else behind. A logbook is included for those who find the cache to record their names, the date the cache is found, and what they took from the cache and what they left. Cache sizes can vary from very small to very large. Examples of small caches include a watch battery, a film canister, or pill bottle. Small to medium caches may be the size of a peanut butter jar, small margarine tub, Tupperware container, or Ziplock® bag. Large caches may be as big as a five gallon bucket.

Special items called “travel bugs” (TB) or geocoins may be hidden in caches. These items are meant to move from cache to cache. The person who initially places the travel bug or geocoin will leave specific goals for the item’s travel such as move the fastest and farthest or travel to a specific country or location. If you are lucky enough to find a travel bug or geocoin, log it and take it to another cache. Each geocoin or travel bug has a number on it; without that, you cannot register your trackable find online. When you register a trackable item, you can track it every time it moves to another cache.

Many geocaches are placed around the world, and new ones are hidden daily. You can discover caches while traveling on vacation or there are probably geocaches near where you live.

Some caches are very cleverly hidden, such as in a log, hallowed out rocks or softballs, under mulch, under bridges, or hanging by fishing line in a tree. With experience you will learn to have keen eyes for geocaching.

Geocaching is challenging! Since geocaching is accomplished with GPS receivers you may have problems with interference and the satellite signals. This happens if you are too close to a building and the signal bounces around, giving a false reading (called building bounce). Interference can also occur if you are too close to a large body of water, causing the signal to bounce around. Trees, leaves, and clouds can interfere with the satellite signal. Migration may also affect your geocaching success. Migration is when someone moves the cache to another location without recording it. You need to be aware of these possible interferences but don’t let them stop you from having fun with geocaching!

Geocaching Tips
Depending on where the geocache is located, it is important for you to be protected from risk factors. Never go to isolated locations alone, and be sure to take a cell phone. Read about cache attributes and prepare for the terrain and for the weather; wear appropriate clothing and pack bug spray or other items if needed. It is always good to take extra batteries for the GPS receiver, and a pen or pencil so that you can write on the cache’s logbook if there is no pencil in the cache (some are too small).
To be a good steward of the environment and to provide community service, some geocachers take plastic bags and gather trash. This is called CITO, meaning Cache In Trash Out.

CREATE

• List items you might use for a cache.
• Design a cache.
• Research the sport of geocaching and record what you learn.

DISCUSS

• What did you learn about geocaching?
• Was it easy or difficult to think of items to use for a cache? Explain.

REFLECT

• Is geocaching a sport you would like to try? Explain.
• How can you involve others in geocaching?
• How is Geocaching different from a scavenger hunt?