

Frequently Asked Questions About Geocaching

If you don't find the answer you're looking for here,

What is Geocaching?

Geocaching is an entertaining adventure game for gps users. Participating in a cache hunt is a good way to take advantage of the wonderful features and capability of a gps unit. The basic idea is to have individuals and organizations set up caches all over the world and share the locations of these caches on the internet. GPS users can then use the location coordinates to find the caches. Once found, a cache may provide the visitor with a wide variety of rewards. All the visitor is asked to do is if they get something they should try to leave something for the cache.

How do you pronounce Geocaching?

You pronounce it Geo-cashing, like cashing a check.

Are there any other names for Geocaching?

The GPS Stash Hunt, Global Positioning Stash hunt is interchangeable. Geocaching has become the standard for the game, however.

The word Geocaching broken out is GEO for geography, and CACHING for the process of hiding a cache. A cache in computer terms is information usually stored in memory to make it faster to retrieve, but the term is also used in hiking/camping as a hiding place for concealing and preserving provisions.

So what's the big deal? You gave me the coordinates so I know where it is. Seems pretty easy.

It is deceptively easy. It's one thing to see where an item is, it's a totally different story to actually get there.

What is a GPS device?

A GPS unit is a electronic device that can determine your approximate location (within around 6-20 feet) on the planet. Coordinates are normally given in Longitude and Latitude. You can use the unit to navigate from your current location to another location. Some units have their own maps, built-in electronic compasses, voice navigation, depending on the complexity of the device.

You don't need to know all the technical mumbo jumbo about GPS units to play Geocaching. All you need to do is be able to enter what is called a "waypoint" where the geocache is hidden. We're working on a section to help you set up your own GPS unit to play. In the meantime, feel free to ask questions in our [online forums](#) .

How do GPS devices work?

If you're interested in finding more information about Global Positioning Systems, check out [GPS: The New Navigation](#) by PBS. They have an excellent Shockwave and/or web page that explains how GPS works!

So if I have a GPS unit, someone can track where I am (and where I'm going)?

No! GPS devices do not actually broadcast your location. The satellites using radio frequencies actually broadcast *their own* position. Your GPS unit takes that information to figure out where you are (triangulation).

Unless you have a tracking system implanted by aliens, you should be safe from the satellites above. As an extra precaution, however, you can put aluminum foil on your head to deflect the "gamma" beams.

How much does a GPS unit cost, and where can I get one?

GPS Units can range from \$100 to \$1000 depending on the kind of capabilities you are looking for. The author uses a [Garmin eTrex](#) , which runs for around \$100, and can get you to within 20 feet of any geocache (depending on the location). The next step is one with a built-in electronic compass, has topographic maps, more memory, etc.

For more information, check out our [guide to purchasing a GPS unit for Geocaching](#) .

You can usually find GPS units at any boat supply store, and some camping stores keep GPS units on hand. You can also purchase them online through [Amazon.com](#) and camping supply companies.

A good, basic GPS unit is the [Garmin eTrex GPS](#), or [Magellan GPS 315](#) .

How do I use a GPS unit for Geocaching?

If you need to get a basic instruction on how to use a GPS unit, try the book [GPS Made Easy : Using Global Positioning Systems in the Outdoors](#) .

To play, you'll need to know how to enter waypoints into your GPS unit. We're currently working on instructions for each particular GPS unit. In the meantime, your GPS should come with instructions on how to enter a waypoint. If you have any problems, try the [online forums](#) . There's always someone to help.

What are the rules in Geocaching?

Geocaching is a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, the rules are very simple:

1. Take something from the cache
2. Leave something in the cache
3. Write about it in the logbook

Where you place a cache is up to you.

This is neat! How do I hide a cache?

[Click here to read a brief tutorial on how to place your first cache](#) .

What is usually in a cache?

A cache can come in many forms but the first item should always be the logbook. In its simplest form a cache can be just a logbook and nothing else. The logbook contains information from the founder of the cache and notes from the cache's visitors. The logbook can contain much valuable, rewarding, and entertaining information. A logbook might contain information about nearby attractions, coordinates to other unpublished caches, and even jokes written by visitors. If you get some information from a logbook you should give some back. At the very least you can leave the date and time you visited the cache.

Larger caches may consist of a waterproof plastic bucket placed tastefully within the local terrain. The bucket will contain the logbook and any number of more or less valuable items. These items turn the cache into a true treasure hunt. You never know what the founder or other visitors of the cache may have left there for you to enjoy. Remember, if you take something, its only fair for you to leave something in return. Items in a bucket cache could be: Maps, books, software, hardware, CD's, videos, pictures, money, jewelry, tickets, antiques, tools, games, etc. It is recommended that items in a bucket cache be individually packaged in a clear zipped plastic bag to protect them.

What shouldn't be in a cache?

Use your common sense in most cases. Explosives, ammo, knives, drugs, and alcohol shouldn't be placed in a cache. Respect the local laws. All ages of people hide and seek caches, so use some thought before placing an item into a cache.

Food items are ALWAYS a BAD IDEA. Animals have better noses than humans, and in some cases caches have been chewed through and destroyed because of food items in a cache. Please do not put food in a cache.

Where are caches found?

The location of a cache can be very entertaining indeed. As many say, location, location, location! The location of a cache demonstrates the founder's skill and possibly even daring. A cache located on the side of a rocky cliff accessible only by rock climbing equipment may be hard to find. An underwater cache may only be accessed by scuba. Other caches may require long difficult hiking, orienteering, and special equipment to get to. Caches may be located in cities both above and below ground, inside and outside buildings. The skillful placement of a small logbook in an urban environment may be quite challenging to find even with the accuracy of a gps. That little logbook may have a hundred dollar bill in it or a map to greater treasure. It could even contain clues or riddles to solve that may lead to other caches. Rich people could have fun with their money by making lucrative caches that could be better than winning the lottery when you find it. Just hope that the person that found the cache just before you left a real big prize!

Can I move a cache once I find it?

Unless there's a note in the cache containing instructions on moving it to a new location, don't move the cache! Responsible cache owners check on their caches occasionally and would be alarmed to find theirs missing.

An alternative would be to have a hitchiker, which is an item that you can move from cache to cache. An example of this is a candle that has travelled from Australia to Arizona, and a Mr. Potato head that leaps from cache to cache. All you need to do to create a hitchiker is to attach a note to it for folks to move it to a new place.

You can also purchase a [Groundspeak Travel Bug](#) , which is a hitchiker you can track through this web site.

Are there any variations in the game?

YES! We strongly encourage it, actually. Geocaching is a game that constantly reinvents itself, and the rules are very flexible. If you have a new idea on how to place a cache, or a new game using GPS units, we'd love to hear about it.

Some examples -

- Offset Caches - They're not found by simply going to some coordinates and finding a cache there. With the Offset Cache the published coordinates are that of an existing historical monument, plaque, or even a benchmark that you would like to have your cache hunter visit. From this site the cache hunter must look around and find offset numbers stamped/written in or on some part of the marker site, or continue based on instructions posted to geocaching.com
- Multi-caches - The first cache gives coordinates (or partial coordinates) to the next location, or multiple caches have hints to the final cache.
- Virtual caches - A cache is actually an existing landmark, such as a tombstone or statue. You have to answer a question from the landmark and let the "cache" owner know as proof that you were there.

How long do caches exist?

It all depends on the location of the cache and its impact on the environment and the surrounding areas. Caches could be permanent, or temporary. It's up to the cache owner to periodically inspect the cache and the area to ensure that impact is minimal, if not nonexistent. When you find a cache, it's always a good idea to let the cache owner know the condition as well.

Periodically, Geocaching.com will review each cache to ensure that everything is still current. We cannot guarantee that a cache will exist at any given time, but we'll do our best to ensure the list is as current as possible.

If you do find that a cache is missing/defaced, please let the cache owner know as soon as possible!

If I post a new cache, how long does it take to be listed on the web site?

Because each cache is reviewed by a volunteer, it may take up to 2 days to have your cache posted to the web site. Usually it takes much much less time - but be patient! Someone will review your cache shortly. It does take longer on the weekends since we receive a larger volume of caches during this time.

Does Geocaching.com (or a volunteer) physically check the cache before publishing it?

We wish! We'd love to head out to all those countries and states to check on each and every cache to ensure that they are placed properly. Based on the growth of the sport, however, this would be impossible. If you're not sure about a cache, wait for someone else to check on it and report back to the site.

Before a cache is posted, volunteers check the page for inaccuracies, bad coordinates, and appropriateness before posting the cache to the site.

What do I do if I find out that a cache has gone missing?

If you visit a cache location and the cache is missing, always make sure to log the cache as "not found" on the web site so the cache owner knows. If you notice that the logs show an unusual number of "not found" logs, please inform this web site so we can check on the cache page. The cache can be temporarily disabled so the cache owner can check in on it. Sometimes, though rarely, when the cache owner cannot be contacted we can either allow folks to adopt the cache or have the cache removed completely from the site. We rely a lot on the geocaching community to let us know the status of caches in their area.

Do you have an FRS/PMR channel to find out if other Geocachers are in the area?

Yes. The community has decided on channel 2 as the primary for both FRS and PMR, and 12 as the alternate FRS (Family Radio Service) channel and 8 for the alternate PMR (Europe). FRS and PMR radios are longer distance walkie talkies, like the Motorola Talkabout.

Finding your first Geocache

Step 1 – Researching the Cache

Keep in mind that distances can be deceiving. When you're using your GPS unit to find a cache, the unit only knows how close the site is as the crow flies (a direct line). You may be a mile from the cache, but there may be a river in the way, or a near-vertical climb involving 3 miles of switchbacks, or a mountain – you get the picture.

1. Buy a map of the area from your local camping store for those caches that are off a trail or too remote to drive close to. Topographical maps (which show features of the land like hills) are best, so you can get a good idea of the terrain you'll be crossing. You'll also know whether to bring your Honda Civic or rent a Land Rover.
2. For car geocaches (ones you can drive to and walk a short distance), use MapBlast. Geocaching.com provides you with a link to MapBlast so you can get directions to that location. Make sure to zoom in on the location to make sure it's near a road. MapBlast can only get you so far!
3. If you have a good idea of the area, you can navigate via the GPS unit. This is best when the park is small. This is also the most challenging, and is not recommended for your first hunt.

You'll most likely need to do all three things to prepare and reach the geocache, though our experience has shown different combinations for each cache. I'd always start with one of the online map sites first to get an idea of the area, then decide on whether you need to buy a map or use what you have.

Since this is your first time, it's also ok to read the stash notes, look at a picture of the cache, or read other people's experiences finding the cache. Some may be visible from 20 feet away, while others in more trafficked areas may be buried under some rocks (or in one case, in a World War II bunker!). Getting within a mile or two of the site isn't usually too difficult – it's the last mile that'll get you every time.

Step 2 – Preparation

Preparation is key in any kind of outdoor activity, but you can never stress enough the importance of preparation and safety. Keep these tips in mind when searching for a cache:

1. Have a buddy with you! Never go off into the woods or remote locations without a partner, especially when Geocaching. We don't want you focusing on your GPS unit and walking off a cliff. It's great fun, so think about planning a camping trip around the stash hunt with your family or friends.
2. Many of the caches are off-trail, so make sure to be aware of your surroundings. If you're concentrating on your GPS unit, look around you occasionally for holes, bears, etc.
3. Bring and drink plenty of water, and don't drink directly from a stream! For some of the more difficult trips, bring a water filtration system. You can get them at most camping stores.
4. Let someone know where you're going and when you're coming back.

Step 3 – The Hunt

Now you're ready for the hunt.

1. It should be pretty straightforward to get within a mile or so from the cache (unless it's deep off-trail). If you've done your research, follow the map more than the GPS unit (although we keep ours on the whole time). It's inevitable that you'll lose signal from overhanging trees, mountains, etc.
2. If you're using USFS roads (US Forestry service), the signs for each road can be pretty small in size. Instead of street signs, they're brown signs that have white writing running vertically. Usually they're close to the ground. Sometimes you may have to backtrack on the road to locate them.
3. It's always good to have a compass on hand if your GPS unit doesn't have one.
4. When you leave your car, mark its location as a waypoint! Sounds silly, but once you get deep into the cache hunt, it's easy to get disoriented. We've learned this from experience!
5. When you get close to the Geocache (within 300 feet, which is the length of a football field), make sure to check your GPS unit signal. Sometimes the signal will have an error between 25-200 feet. Don't concentrate as much on the arrow as the distance decreasing, as you get closer to the site.
6. For the last 30 feet, use a compass or direct your buddy in the direction of the cache. In some cases we've had good luck circling the site with the GPS unit to get a good area to search.
7. The final 30-100 feet is the hardest. It helps to think like the person who hid the cache. If there are stumps around, investigate around the base. Check for a pile of rocks. Some stashes, especially in people-trafficked areas, are pretty ingeniously hidden, so it helps to know the container they used.

Step 4 – The Find

Huzzah! You found the cache! Congratulations! Now what?

- Usually you take an item and leave an item, and enter your name and experience you had into the log book. Some people prefer to just enter their name into the log book. It's an accomplishment enough to locate the cache.
- Make sure to seal the cache and place it back where you found it. If it had some rocks covering it, please replace them. It's pretty straightforward.
- Remember that waypoint we suggested you create where your car/trail was located? Use that now to get back! You'll be glad you had it.
- When you get home, email the person who hid the cache and let them know you found it! They're always happy to know the condition of their cache and it's nice to know that people are looking for them.

Great work! After several trips to geocaches in your area, you'll be ready to place your own. Welcome to the exciting world of Geocaching!