

# *Geocaching to Promote Scouting*

Geocaching is an entertaining adventure game for GPS users, with hundreds of thousands of active members in more than 200 countries. It is a modified treasure hunt using GPS coordinates to locate the prize, or cache. There are numerous public geocaches hidden around your community, probably very close to where you live. Finding many of these treasures involves taking beautiful hikes and, perhaps, puzzles to solve.

What could be a more natural partnership than Scouting and geocaching?

Pathfinding has been part of Scouting from its very beginning. GPS technology provides an augmented compass and measuring system, which is an essential part of the increasingly technology-oriented lives of this generation. Remember, however, that GPS technology simply is updating an old and traditional Scouting skill; the older methods should not be forgotten. Map and compass skills are an invaluable supplement to any GPS use, and the importance of these skills should be reinforced whenever possible. Most importantly, the Scouting's values, including "fun with a purpose," are paramount to any Scouting activity.

## ***How Does GPS Work?***

The global positioning system receivers (GPSRs) use signals from satellites to find a location. There are 24 satellites which make up the GPS network broadcast radio signals that a GPSr can receive. Once the receiver has received a minimum of three satellite signals, it can calculate its location coordinates. The more satellites the GPSr has tracked, the more accurate its calculations will be. The signals are subject to interference and will affect the GPSr accuracy as well. Overcast weather, power lines, trees, buildings, steep canyons, and valleys all can affect the signal strength and therefore change the accuracy of the GPSr readings. A GPS unit will be most accurate when the user has a clear, unobstructed view of the sky and horizon.

In addition, no GPS unit has 100 percent accuracy, and it will rarely lead you to the exact spot. Usually, the accuracy is 20 feet or less—and that's the *radius*—so there is easily an area with a 40-foot diameter to search. Thus, once you've reached your search point, there is usually still some searching to do. Take care that you don't get frustrated. Hints are invaluable!

GPSRs have limitations for use.

- Your GPS arrow points you "as the crow flies," which might not be the best route.
- You may lose signal.
- Your accuracy may be very low.
- The receiver's batteries can die.
- You might have programmed in the wrong information.

GPSr themselves testify to the importance of map and compass skills!

### ***The Challenge***

The goal is to find \_\_\_\_\_ geocaches.

Go out in the open where there is good GPS reception.

Let me remind you of some rules:

- All team members should stay together until you reach the area of search.
- Do not run. There is no need to get injured.
- Remember the principles of Leave No Trace, and do not tread on things you shouldn't (gardens, private property, etc.).
- Attempt to involve everyone on the team. Everyone should have a responsibility.
- Each team has a troop guide (staff member) as its chaperone. **Do not ditch the troop guide.**

The team should begin traveling in the direction the GPSr arrow indicates. You may need to MOVE to get the directional arrow to change.

**Waypoint One:** The first

**Waypoint Two:** The second

**Waypoint Three:** The third

**Waypoint Four:** The fourth

**Waypoint Five:** The fifth

How do you think geocaching can augment the Scouting program? Possible answers include:

- It's a lot of fun.
- It adds variety and novelty to many existing events (hikes, camporees, etc.).
- Both programs love and support the outdoors.
- It allows us to use our brains as well as be outdoors.
- Both get us all away from the TV and video games!
- Geocaching is fun. It can be coupled with advancement and team-building exercises.
- It leads to the discovery of new places one might not visit otherwise.
- Geocaching can add pizzazz and variety to advancement requirements.
- It's a great recruitment tool. Older youth love the sport!

- It's also good for retention of youth members. When they have fun, they stay in the program.
- Geocaching is a great way to showcase Scouting to the public. For example, the Cache to Eagle series, where public caches are hidden at the sites of Eagle Scout service projects for the public to find.

### ***Geocaching Rules and Etiquette***

Rules for hiding caches hold for private Scout events as well as public caches.

**As with any Scout event, rule No. 1 is safety.** Boys are likely to be excited about finding the cache and may or may not use common sense to get to it, so take care that you don't place a cache that in any way leads them into a dangerous situation. This includes the following obvious rules:

- Stay far away from road traffic and railroad crossings.
- Don't place a cache higher than 6 feet or require any dangerous climbing to reach it.
- Don't require Scouts to swim to reach the cache.
- Public caches are often magnetic containers stuck onto electrical switch boxes. Common sense says to avoid these as well.
- Always enforce the buddy system.

### **Rule No. 2 is to respect the environment.**

- Never bury a cache in the ground. You can place a pile of sticks or rocks over it, however.
- Avoid sensitive ecosystems. Remember that hunters will make a beeline for the cache and might trample vegetation in the vicinity. Place caches so that they can be reached by existing trail access.
- Don't place caches in archaeological or historic sites.
- Don't deface any object, natural or manmade.
- Many geocachers hide small caches in lightpost bases, sprinkler heads, etc. These should be avoided, as we don't want the Scouts ripping up all the bona fide hardware looking for the loose or "fake" one.

### **Rule No. 3 is to respect private property.**

- Get permission from land managers to use parks, Scout camps, etc., for your events
- Do not put caches on national park land, national wildlife refuges, etc. These are currently not allowed. Local laws and policies vary, so check with any relevant agency before placing caches.
- Caches in or near military installations are not allowed.
- Caches are not allowed on elementary and secondary school property.
- Avoid sites that could be deemed potential or possible targets for terrorist attacks. These include but are not limited to highway bridges, dams, government buildings, and airports.

**Rule No. 4 is to be a positive ambassador for Scouting.** As with all else we do, cache using the Scout Oath and Law.

We want Scouts to go above and beyond the regular guidelines. It only takes one or two groups who don't follow the rules to give all of BSA—and geocaching—a bad name. There is a growing concern about Scout troops who set up caches and then abandon them, or who have unsupervised kids who trash the area. Don't let this be your group. There are a number of ongoing negotiations to open up state parks, open-space districts, etc., to geocaching, and we can help this effort by doing our best to be good geocaching citizens.

### ***Etiquette***

- Practice Cache In and Trash Out (CITO) – always carry a trash bag and remove litter along your route.
- Follow Leave No Trace guidelines in the natural environment. This doesn't mean you can't find or place a cache near a trail in the woods. It does mean that we follow all LNT guidelines, especially in the wilderness.
- Be careful of the area around the cache – don't trample the grounds, rip up all the sprinkler heads, etc in your frenzy to find the cache
- Follow all laws and Regulations – never enter private property without permission
- Write an entry in the logbook at the cache.
- Take a toy, leave a toy. Items are there for fun and for trade. Try to leave something of equal value to what you take for yourself
- Respect other visitors around the area.

### ***Recruiting and Public Relations***

GPS use can greatly enhance the Venture patrol or high-adventure program. Older youth love the large-event format and can master more complicated types of caches, such as multipart caches or those with puzzles that must be solved to get the correct coordinates for the actual cache.

Running geocaching events is a great way for troops to recruit and retain older members. High schools will often sanction these events, which can be a foot in the door to show large non-Scouting groups how much fun the Scouting program can be.

### ***Cache In Trash Out Program (CITO)***

Remember our Good Turn for America and the value that Scouting service brings to the community. The CITO program is an easy way for units and councils to help the environment while having fun.

The CITO program is a wonderful way to merge Scouting, Leave No Trace, and geocaching. Scouts and other geocachers are encouraged to bring out any trash they find while geocaching, thus enhancing the sport (and Scouting) in the eyes of the park system and the public. CITO events are simple, easy-to-arrange park

cleanup and service events, usually coupled with a small geohunt. There are often public CITO events sponsored by local geocaching groups, or a unit or council could sponsor an event, which can be listed for free on geocaching.com and provide yet another fun and free way to promote the positive values of Scouting to the community at large.

### ***Travel Bugs***

A travel bug is a small item with a registered dog tag that travels around the world. These bugs often have a mission—for example, a travel bug Scout toy may have the mission to visit as many councils as possible before a trip to Gilwell Field in England. One travel bug, “Back to Gilwell,” has already traveled thousands of miles over many continents in its quest to return to Gilwell Park in England. This is a lot of fun, and each one of these brings Scouting into the minds of the public.

## ***Geocaching References***

### ***General Resource Information***

<http://www.geoscouting-info.com>

### ***The Geocacher’s Creed***

<http://geocreed.info/>

### ***Geocaching Description***

<http://www.geocaching.com/faq/>

### ***Guide for Finding Caches***

<http://www.geocaching.com/about/finding.aspx>

### ***Guide for Hiding Caches***

<http://www.geocaching.com/about/hiding.aspx>

### ***Guide for buying a GPS unit***

<http://www.geocaching.com/about/buying.aspx>

### ***Glossary of Geocaching Terms***

<http://www.geocaching.com/about/glossary.aspx>

### ***Cache In Trash Out***

<http://www.cacheintrashout.org/>

## ***Rules of the Game***

- All team members should stay together.
- Do not run. There is no need to get injured.
- Remember the principles of Leave No Trace, and do not tread on things you shouldn't (gardens, private property, etc.).
- Attempt to involve everyone on the team. Everyone should have a responsibility.
- Each team should have a troop guide (staff member) as its chaperone. Do not ditch the troop guide.

## ***Geocaching Rules and Etiquette***

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- Follow all laws and regulations. Never enter private property without permission.
- Write an entry in the logbook at the cache.
- Cache items are there for fun and for trade. Try to leave something of equal value to what you take for yourself.
- Respect other visitors around the area.

## ***The Geocacher's Creed***

When placing or seeking geocaches, I will:

- Not endanger myself or others.
- Observe all laws and rules of the area.
- Respect property rights and seek permission where appropriate.
- Avoid causing disruptions or public alarm.
- Minimize my and others' impact on the environment.
- Be considerate of others.
- Protect the integrity of the game pieces.