

Cache It If You Can: The Basics of Geocaching and GPS Tools for the Hunt

Modern technology has taken traditional scavenger hunts and hide-and-seek adventures to an entirely new level. Today, a growing community of nearly 4 million people from all walks of life have caught on to a new high-tech version of scavenger hunting called **geocaching** – an exciting, outdoor adventure game that uses global positioning system (GPS) technology as its foundation. RadioShack, a leading retailer and information source for GPS devices, has prepared a Crash Course Guide to get help people get involved in this fun new activity.

What is Geocaching?

Geocaching was born in 2000 when the U.S. Government opened up GPS signals to civilians and enabled them to precisely pinpoint locations on the ground. The name joins the prefix *Geo*, for Earth or geography, with *cache*, for a hiding place for temporary storage. As such, geocaching is a unique, interactive scavenger hunt where individuals and organizations may hide caches, or items, anywhere in the world and share the location of these items – pinpointed within a few feet by coordinates – with people on the Internet. Other geocachers then use those coordinates to find the hidden cache, which may contain a small reward, and leave another reward in its place for others to find. And so the hunt continues.

Geocaching is a fun and challenging activity, whether hunting solo, with friends or as a family. Groundspeak, the company that runs www.geocaching.com, estimates the majority of Americans have a cache within 20 miles of their home, so the game is accessible to virtually anyone with a GPS device, patience and some imagination.

How it Works

There are two different ways you can join the game: hunting for a cache or hiding your own. While the challenges range from easy to quite difficult, the basic steps are simple.

Hunting for an existing cache:

- 1) Visit an online mapsite such as www.geocaching.com to identify a game to play.
- 2) Prepare to seek the cache by dressing appropriately, packing any necessary supplies you'll need (e.g., maps, food, water, supplies) and notifying friends or family as to where you're going.
- 3) Consider what other electronic equipment you may need to complete the challenge, such as a digital camera or camera-enabled wireless phone for documentation purposes, 2-way radios for staying in touch with fellow geocachers, flashlights for low light situations, extra batteries so you don't lose power and even digital recording devices to help quickly document your hunt.
- 4) Once you locate the cache, follow the instructions, such as taking something, making a picture for online posting, leaving something or signing a log book.
- 5) Document your experiences in the logbook at www.geocaching.com.
- 6) Variations of geocaching have already caught on. One called "waymarking" involves finding or leaving benchmarks. Learn more at www.waymarking.com.



Hiding a cache:

- 1) Research a cache location.
- 2) Prepare your cache.
- 3) Place your cache, making sure it's well hidden from accidental discovery.
- 4) Report your cache placement on www.geocaching.com.
- 5) Maintain your cache and track results of geocachers who find it and report online.

To begin, you will need a GPS receiver. This is an electronic device that can accurately determine your approximate location within several feet (through longitude and latitude coordinates) and help you navigate from one location to the next. While a car GPS receiver can take you to the general vicinity of a cache, a portable unit works best. Some GPS receivers, such as the [Mio Digiwalker C320](#) from RadioShack, will work as dual purpose devices, allowing you to use it in your car or detach it for use as a hand-held device.

Using a GPS unit, you can arrive within a few feet of the cache, and then it's up to you to find it! Keep in mind that it's not always obvious; clever geocachers are known to hide caches under fake rocks, high up on ledges, and concealed in other tricky locations. Look for clues online before you begin your hunt and prepare yourself for the unexpected by bringing along maps or even a compass to help with the final few steps. Once participants retrieve a cache – which typically includes fun rewards such as disposable cameras, toys, trinkets and even gift certificates – they are expected to leave something in return. It's this mutual atmosphere of discovery and camaraderie that keeps the game fresh and exciting.

Choosing a GPS Unit

Geocaching novices should look for a GPS receiver that is easy to use and fit for rugged, outdoor use. With prices dropping and features rising, GPS receivers are within reach of just about anyone who wants one. Key features and accessories to consider include:

- Channels – A receiver with 12 parallel channels will provide the most accuracy.
- External antenna jack – This allows you to mount the GPS unit inside your car.
- Memory – Detailed maps consume a lot of memory space. Make sure your GPS unit can accept a memory card, or has at least 8MB of storage.
- Screen size – A large, color screen helps define map features. Remember that screen sizes are measured diagonally.
- Power source – Although many GPS devices use an internal battery source such as a lithium ion battery, don't forget extra batteries or a mobile power adapter (sold separately).

Now, geocachers also have the option of hunting with one of the new GPS enabled wireless phone, such as certain [RAZR phones](#) by Motorola. Simply download the [Trimble® Geocache Navigator™](#) - the first fully featured geocaching application for wireless phones – and subscribe to this optional service to join in the fun.

For more information on a broad range of car and portable GPS devices that can get you started, visit www.radioshack.com or visit one of RadioShack's more than 6,000 neighborhood locations – where you don't just buy stuff, you do stuff.