

Finding Their Way How Geocaching Is an Adventure for All, Including Teens

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If the mere mention of the term “geocaching” has you searching through an online dictionary to find its meaning, then lemme break it to you, you are definitely a muggle. If you have heard the term “geocaching” before and are not quite confident about what in the world that techie-sounding word could

mean, then you are a muggle. If you have ever considered the possibility of geocaching but have not been adventurous enough to do so yet, then yup, you’re still a muggle. If you have no clue as to what a muggle is, shame on you; have you not picked up a *Harry Potter* book before?!

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Not that this is an article about the realms of the *Harry Potter* world, not at all. But if you are a geocacher, you definitely get the point. And if you’re completely lost before we have even gotten started on the topic, don’t worry, it happens all the time.

You do not need to concentrate on the four cardinal directions just yet. Simply read on and learn more about this mysterious, but not really secretive, network of technology based on hide and seek hunts many teens—and librarians just like you—are becoming a part of.

To Begin With, What in the Heck Is Geocaching?

Although geocaching is a sport generally unheard of, it has been around for over a decade with almost half a million geocaches hidden worldwide. Most would describe this adventure as a modern hybrid between a scavenger hunt and a treasure hide and seek. Though, what you are looking for is not a treasure you will get to keep, or anything materialistic, for that matter . . . but at least you can boast online about your geocache finds.

Geocaching is an outdoor activity that uses a GPS (Global Positioning System) device to not only seek but also hide waterproof containers referred to as cache that are hidden all around the world. Many have compared this sport to other activities, including benchmarking, trigpointing, orienteering, treasure hunting, letterboxing, and waymarking.

A GPS device obtains signals from satellites and can be used for many purposes, including finding currently updated maps, finding walking or driving directions to random destinations, finding current traffic conditions,

discovering popular destinations (restaurants, stores, etc.), and accessing alternative routes.

With a GPS system, anyone familiar with using a map, following directions, and using the internet has the potential to become a geocacher. Yes, that means you too. And, once you have become a geocacher, you can officially declare that you are no longer a muggle of the geocaching realms.

What Exactly Is a Muggle?

You'd think that teens are the only ones who would enjoy referring to others as muggles, but that is not the case. Take for example, us two adults way past the point of puberty referring to you as a muggle, just to emphasize that is what you are in the world of geocaching.

In the world of Harry Potter, a muggle refers to those people who are non-magical. So, when it comes to geocaching, a muggle refers to those who are mere spectators to someone's geocaching adventures and have no clue as to what is actually occurring. In other words, a geo-muggle is a non-geocacher. According to geocaching.com, geo-muggles are "mostly harmless," but that can be disputed.

Now That You Know What a Muggle Is . . .

You're probably wondering how teens get involved in this high-tech sport that you're not exactly sure you know how to partake in yourself. It might sound overwhelming because usually anything that sounds techie has the potential of being so, but geocaching isn't as difficult as it may sound. As long as you have a GPS-enabled device, know the

four cardinal directions and have access to the Internet, and then you're all set.

The excitement of treasure seeking is something that lasts a lifetime. Geocaching is a great activity for teens to become involved with because not only will it give them practice using coordinates and reading a map, but it may also have them researching to discover details about the local geography and history of the area they will be geocaching in.

What Would a Teen Be Doing with a GPS Device?

Obvious question. We knew you'd bring out the tough questions! Something else that's obvious and you certainly must have noticed: many teens carry a smartphone nowadays. Through smartphones, teens have access to free GPS and geocaching apps in their marketplace. Once these apps are downloaded onto their phones, teens can easily type in their geocache destination to receive navigations and maps directing them to their desired geocache search. In other words, they simply use their phone.

Other types of GPS devices teens might use are handheld receivers, outdoor receivers, and sports receivers. We recommend trying out the GPS as a group for first-timers because it might take some practice to become acquainted with for those who have never used a navigational device before.

How To Get Started with Your First Geocache

A web search for geocaching will point you to various free member sites with more details on this sport, as well as with

detailed maps of caches hidden worldwide. A couple of popular and easy to use sites are www.geocaching.com and www.opencaching.com.

Searching for caches online is fun to map out, especially when the idea of cache seeking becomes a stakeout to keep muggles out of the loop. Not that muggles are "the bad guys," but when people are curious as to what you are searching for, they might end up snooping around after you're gone and move or take a cache from its original position—which is a bad thing. Once a cache is "disturbed," other geocachers will have difficulty finding it when it is not located at its proper coordinates. When caches are moved from their coordinates, obviously this changes the coordinates in which they will be found.

A cache generally consists of a container with a logbook that geocachers will use to sign in. Sometimes it has a trinket or "treasure" that geocachers can look at, but not remove or keep. Many caches with trinkets have a history or story behind them and are of sentimental value to its owner. Stories behind your finds can be read online once the geocacher has logged into their online account to report a found cache.

Different types of caches include the typical cache (must include a logbook for visitors to sign in their names), multicaches (after finding the first cache, the seeker will then go on to discover coordinates for other caches . . . a logbook will usually be included with the last cache), and mystery or puzzle caches (the seeker will have to solve a puzzle to find the appropriate coordinates of this cache), among many others.

Some caches may be found in hard-to-reach places such as underground spots or on top of roofs or treetops, while others are visible but can be easily overlooked when one isn't particularly searching for it. They also come in various shapes and sizes, some smaller than your pinky fingernail and others the size of your car.

When going on a hunt, it is wise not to use your fanciest clothes because you might end up hiking, climbing, jumping, digging, or crawling to reach your cache.

With all the thousands of caches out there, the challenge is on!

Geocaching Terminology Is Fun To Use around Muggles!

Not only are you using abbreviations and slang words, but most people won't understand what you are saying. Some of our favorites, which we found on the www.geocaching.com website are BYOP (Bring Your Own Pencil), CITO (Cache In Trash Out . . . which also happens to be an environmental approach to geocaching, cleaning up the area you have visited for a cache), Ground Zero or GZ (when you have reached the exact location of a cache), Muggle (taken from the *Harry Potter* series, and is referring to someone who's not a geocacher), and TFTC (Thanks For The Cache, which is usually written into the logbook when a geocacher has truly enjoyed the cache).

Books To Promote!

The best part about geocaching is that you can easily incorporate many books to fit into the theme of road trips, outdoor sports, technology, vacation destinations, photography, and treasure hunts, among others. Our favorite books to share are *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Geocaching* by the

staff of geocaching.com, *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives: An All-American Road Trip*. . . *With Recipes* by Guy Fieri and Ann Volkweira, *Local Treasures: Geocaching Across America* by Margot Anne Kelley, and *4-H Guide to Digital Photography* by Daniel Johnson.

You can also easily set up a display with geocaching resources available at your library, such as atlases and maps.

Add a Craft and Add a Personality to Your Program

While introducing teens and other muggles to the world of geocaching, have them prepare a craft that could come in handy in their endeavors. Crafts you might have teens prepare include personalized geocaches and logbooks.

To prepare the personalized geocaches, provide teens with old containers (such as Pringles pop cans, peanut butter jars, or water bottles) and have teens decorate them with glitter, permanent markers, tempera paint, or other art supplies. Don't worry about this being too much of an expense because you will most likely be using materials that are already handy at your library. Likewise, for the logbooks, teens can decorate notebooks using old magazines, construction paper, glue, glitter, paint, and more. These books will serve as their personal logbook or journal for keeping track of their geocaching experiences.

Not Your Typical Approach to Technology for Teens

Sure, technology can be found in sports, what with score boards, announcement speakers, lighting, televisions, and such. But when one thinks of sports, one doesn't generally think of an activity concentrated around technology. It is pretty safe to say that when one thinks of an activity focusing on technology, one imagines a teen sitting in front of a computer screen playing online games that challenge their minds. Doesn't sound too sporty-like. But then again, times have changed.

With geocaching, you will see those teens in front of a computer researching their caching destinations, but you will also later have them in the outside world and will be getting them out of their seats for a bit of sunshine. You are providing teens with a manner in which to combine the best of both worlds, technology and recess.

Additionally, introducing teens to the world of geocaching not only allows them to learn techniques and tricks of using navigational devices to coordinate their finds but also provides them with a challenge they can share with their families, as well as letting them know about resources readily available at their local public and school libraries that are not traditionally used for educational outings.

In short, don't be a muggle! Get your library and your teens to give geocaching a try. YALS

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