

Finding your First Geocache

Step 1 – Research

Your outdoor geocaching adventure starts indoors with preparation and online research. Search Geocaching.com for a geocache that will meet your immediate goals and interests. Are you looking for an adventure for the entire family? Perhaps an afternoon in a dog-friendly park? Make sure that you review the cache [attributes](#) since these icons serve as a helpful resource as you select your first geocache to find.

As you select a geocache, keep in mind the following:

1. Have you considered the [difficulty and terrain ratings](#) of the cache? We suggest choosing a 1/1 difficulty and terrain rating for your first geocache find so that you can learn how geocaches are placed. Remember, geocaches are hidden but not buried.
2. Consult the surrounding maps of the area. Is this an urban or rural cache and how will this change your preparation? Do you have the right maps to help support you in the cache search? Road maps may be more than adequate within a city but topographical maps, which show land and water features, may be more useful elsewhere. Topographical maps will tell you what terrain you will encounter.
3. Keep in mind that distances can be deceiving. Understand the difference between distances as the crow flies (a direct line) versus true distance of travel. You may be a mile from the cache according to your GPS device, but there may be a river or other obstacles in the way. It is up to you to find the best route to the cache, remembering to respect the environment and practice [Cache In Trash Out](#) along the way.
4. Once you are close to the cache location, you can navigate using your GPS device. For instance, if you are in a small park, you can try to simply follow the GPS arrow. In a large park, this method may be challenging so follow the established trails as much as possible while still keeping the GPS arrow heading the general direction of the cache location.

Our experience has shown that preparation and research will vary for each cache. Many people find that they begin with the online maps to get an idea of the area, and then decide to supplement with a detailed paper map. The cache page itself is a rich source of information and may include an encrypted hint. Previous finders may have uploaded photos, or may have included clues in their online log. Be careful though; too much information may inadvertently ruin the surprise for you.

Step 2 – Safety Tips

As with any outdoor activity, it is important to be prepared. Here are a few helpful tips:

1. Make sure to tell someone where you are going and when you intend to return. Going into a forest or remote locations without a partner is inherently dangerous. Geocaching is great fun, so think about planning a group hike with your family or friends around the geocache adventure.
2. Pay attention to your surroundings. It is easy to focus on your GPS device and forget to look around you. (Please believe us, there is a reason why [this shirt](#) is so successful.) Being conscious as to where you are walking will not only ensure your personal safety but will also respect the environment.
3. Pack your pack. Bring along a compass, map and extra batteries in case your GPS device fails. No matter the terrain or length of time on the trail, it is always a good idea to set out with extra clothing, food and water.
4. Be mindful of the local environment, especially during seasonal changes. Is the area prone to poison ivy or poison oak? What about bugs or dangerous animals? Not sure of the area in which you are heading? Ask a question in the [regional geocaching forums](#). Local geocachers are happy to help support you.

Step 3 – The Hunt

Now you are ready to find your first geocache!

1. As you leave your car or a well-marked trail, make sure to mark its location as a waypoint! It may sound silly, but once you get focused on the cache hunt, it's easy to get disoriented. Use the waypoint to guide you in your safe return.
2. It should be pretty straightforward to get within a mile or so of the cache location. If you have done your research well, you should also feel good about knowing the best method of getting to the cache location. We suggest that you keep your GPS device on the entire time even if you may occasionally lose signal from overhanging trees, mountains, large concrete structures, etc.
3. When you get close to the geocache (within 300 feet, which is the length of a football field), check your GPS device's signal strength. Sometimes the signal will have an error between 25 - 200 feet. Concentrate more on the overall distance decreasing and less on the arrow as you get closer to the final location.
4. The final 30 - 100 feet can be the most difficult. It helps to think like the person who hid the cache. If there are stumps around, investigate around the base. Check for an unnatural pile of rocks. Some geocaches, especially in highly populated areas, are

cleverly hidden with ingenious camouflage, so it helps to know something about the container used. Is it bigger than a shoebox or small like a film canister?

Step 4 – The Actual Find

Hurray! You found your first geocache. Congratulations! Now what?

1. Take note of the style and method of this hide. Where did this geocache bring you? Enjoy the location.
2. Sign the logbook with your name, the date, and a few words about your experience.
3. If you trade for items, remember to trade for something that is of equal or greater value.
4. Make sure to seal the cache and place it back exactly where and how you found it. If it had some rocks covering it, please replace those.
5. Use the waypoint you created as a helpful guide for your return.
6. When you get home, log your experience online by going back to that cache page and using the links provided. The cache owner is automatically notified of your log and is always happy to know about your adventure, the condition of their cache, and any environmental factors. Upload photos to share your experience visually with other geocachers.

Glossary of Terms

The Geocaching.com glossary is always changing. If you have suggestions for future additions, please [contact us](#).

Archive

Archiving a cache removes the listing from public view on Geocaching.com. This action is usually taken when a cache owner does not intend to replace a cache after it has been removed. As an alternative to archiving, the cache owner can temporarily disable their cache if they plan to provide maintenance on the cache or replace the container within one month.

Attribute

These are icons on a cache detail intended to provide helpful information to geocachers who wish to find specific types of caches. These icons represent unique cache characteristics, including size, whether the cache is kid friendly, if it is available 24 hours a day, if you need special equipment and more. Attributes are also a tool to help you filter the types of caches you would like to search for when building a Pocket Query (see [Pocket Query](#)). Learn more about [Attributes](#).

Benchmark

Using your GPS unit and/or written directions provided by NOAA's National Geodetic Survey (NGS), you can seek out NGS survey markers and other items that have been marked in the USA. See [benchmark hunting](#) for more details.

Bookmark List

A Premium Member feature that can be used to group cache listings in whatever way you like. You may want a bookmark list of caches you intend to find this weekend, or perhaps an "all-time favorite" list you can share with friends.

BYOP

Bring Your Own Pen/Pencil. An acronym often used by cache owners to communicate to other geocachers that you will need to bring your writing utensil in order to sign the cache logbook.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, administers millions of acres of America's public lands, located primarily in 12 Western States. The BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Learn more at www.blm.gov.

Cache

A shortened version of the word geocache. (See [Geocache](#)).

Caches along a Route

A Premium Member feature that allows you to identify caches along a specific route for quick and easy geocaching. You can choose from routes already created by other geocachers or use Google Earth to build your own unique trip.

Charter Member

During the very early years of Geocaching.com when Premium Memberships were first offered, they were called Charter Memberships to thank those who supported the web site. Be sure to thank the Charter Members you meet on the trail since the site would not be here today without them.

CITO

Cache In Trash Out is an ongoing environmental initiative supported by the worldwide geocaching community. Since 2002, geocachers have been dedicated to cleaning up parks and other cache-friendly places around the world. Learn more at www.geocaching.com/cito.

Datum

A datum is something used as a basis for calculating and measuring. In the case of GPS, datums are different calculations for determining longitude and latitude for a given location. Currently, Geocaching uses the [WGS84 datum](#) for all caches. Many maps still use NAD27, which can cause confusion if your GPS unit is set to NAD27. Always check your GPS to ensure that WGS84 is the datum before entering a cache coordinate into your unit.

DNF

Did Not Find. An acronym used by geocachers to state that they did not find a cache. This is also a type of online log on Geocaching.com and is useful for alerting cache owners of potential issues. Cache owners who repeatedly receive "Did Not Find" logs should check to see that their cache has not been removed.

D/T

Geocaches are rated in two categories, each designated on a 5-point scale. Difficulty relates to the mental challenge of finding a cache and terrain describes the physical environment. A 1/1 difficulty/terrain rating would be the easiest cache to find, while a 5/5 difficulty/terrain rating would be the most difficult.

EarthCache

This is one of several unique cache types. An EarthCache is a cache that promotes geoscience education. Visitors to EarthCaches can see how our planet has been shaped by geological processes, how we manage the resources and how

scientists gather evidence to learn about the Earth. For more information about EarthCaches, visit <http://www.earthcache.org/>.

Event Cache

This is one of several unique cache types. Events are gatherings set up by local geocachers and geocaching organizations to meet players and to discuss geocaching.

FTF

First to Find. An acronym written by geocachers in physical cache logbooks or online when logging cache finds to denote being the first to find a new geocache.

GC Code

A unique identifier associated with every geocache listing. The GC Code starts with the letters "GC" and is followed by other alphanumeric characters.

Geocache

A container hidden that includes, at minimum, a logbook for geocachers to sign.

Geocaching

Geocaching is a worldwide game of hiding and seeking treasure. A geocacher can place a geocache in the world, pinpoint its location using GPS technology and then share the geocache's existence and location online. Anyone with a GPS unit can then try to locate the geocache.

Geocoin

Geocoins work similarly to Groundspeak Travel Bugs® (see [Travel Bugs](#)) in that they are trackable and can travel the world, picking up stories from geocache to geocache. Geocoins are often created as signature items by geocachers and can also be used as collectibles.

GPS

GPS stands for Global Positioning System. It is a system of satellites that work with a GPS receiver to determine your location on the planet. For more information on GPS, [FAQs](#).

GPS Adventures Maze Exhibit

This is one of several unique cache types. An exhibit cache represents geocaching participation at the GPS Adventures Maze Exhibit. The GPS Adventures Maze is a traveling educational exhibit designed to teach people of all ages about navigation, GPS technology and geocaching. www.GPSMaze.com.

GPSr

Slang for a GPS receiver. Equipment to receive GPS signals for use in navigation.

GPX (GPS eXchange Format)

A specific file format available when creating a Pocket Query. A Premium Member feature, the GPX file format has specific geocaching information that can be used by supporting applications.

Ground Zero (GZ)

The point where your GPS device shows that you have reached the cache location. At Ground Zero, you are zero feet (or zero meters) away from your destination.

Hitchhiker

A hitchhiker is an item that is placed in a cache, and has instructions to travel to other caches. Sometimes they have logbooks attached so you can log their travels. A [Travel Bug](#) is an example of a hitchhiker.

Latitude

Latitude and longitude create a [waypoint](#). Latitude is the angular distance north or south from the earth's equator measured through 90 degrees. (Listen to [this mp3](#) for an entertaining way to learn about longitude and latitude (thanks to [ACME](#))).

Letterbox(ing)

Letterboxing is similar to Geocaching, but you use a series of clues to find a container. Once you find the container (or letterbox), you use the carved stamp from the box, stamp your personal logbook and return that stamp to the letterbox. You then use your carved stamp and stamp the letterbox's logbook. See [Letterboxing North America](#) for more information.

LOC

The original download format for the search results page on Geocaching.com.

Locationless (Reverse) Cache

This is one of several cache types which are no longer available for creation on Geocaching.com. Instead of finding a hidden container, you are given a task to locate a specific object and log its coordinates. A scavenger hunt of sorts, it involves collecting waypoints of various objects around the world.

Locationless caches have evolved into [Waymarking](#). Waymark categories are similar to how locationless caches were listed on geocaching.com, but you can now search for the locations in each category.

Longitude

Latitude and longitude create a [waypoint](#). Longitude is the angular distance measured on a great circle of reference from the intersection of the adopted zero meridian with this reference circle to the similar intersection of the meridian passing through

the object. (Listen to [this mp3](#) for an entertaining and non-technical way to learn about longitude and latitude (thanks to [ACME](#))).

Markwelled

When a response to a new post in the forums points you to a similar topic in the past. Based on the user [Markwell](#).

Mega-Event Cache

This is one of several cache types. A Mega-Event cache is similar to an Event Cache but it is much larger. Among other considerations, a Mega-event cache must be attended by 500+ people. Typically, Mega Events are annual events and attract geocachers from all over the world.

Muggle

A non-geocacher. Based on "Muggle" from the Harry Potter series, which is a non-magical person. Usually this term is used after a non geocacher looks puzzled after befriending a geocacher searching for a cache, or when a non-geocacher accidentally finds a cache. Geomuggles are mostly harmless.

Multi-Cache (offset Cache)

This is one of several cache types. A multi-cache ("multiple") involves two or more locations, the final location being a physical container. There are many variations, but most multi-caches have a hint to find the second cache, and the second cache has hints to the third, and so on. An offset cache (where you go to a location and get hints to the actual cache) is considered a multi-cache.

Mystery or Puzzle Caches

This is one of several cache types. The "catch-all" of cache types, this form of cache can involve complicated puzzles you will first need to solve to determine the coordinates. Examples include complicated ciphers, simple substitutions, arithmetical quizzes and clues cleverly hidden within the graphics, Due to the increasing creativity of geocaching this becomes the staging ground for new and unique challenges.

NAD27

Stands for North American [Datum](#) 1927. The precursor to [WGS84](#). Many maps still use the NAD27 datum , so always check before using a GPS unit with a map.

Pocket Query (PQ)

A Premium Member feature, a Pocket Query is custom geocache search that you can have emailed to you on a daily or weekly basis. Pocket Queries give you the ability to filter your searches so you only receive information on the caches you want to

search for in either a GPX or LOC format. This feature lets you download up to 500 caches at one time.

Project A.P.E. Cache

This is one of several cache types. In 2001, twelve geocaches were placed in conjunction with 20th Century Fox to support the movie *Planet of the Apes*. Each cache represented a fictional story in which scientists revealed an Alternative Primate Evolution. These caches were made using specially marked ammo containers. Each cache had an original prop from the movie. Only two Project A.P.E. caches exist today.

Reviewer

Volunteers from all over the world who publish the cache listings on geocaching.com.

ROT13

Hints for geocaches are encrypted using a simple format where each of the letters are rotated 13 characters up or down in the alphabet.

Decryption Key

A|B|C|D|E|F|G|H|I|J|K|L|M

N|O|P|Q|R|S|T|U|V|W|X|Y|Z

(letter above equals below, and vice versa)

Signature Item

An item unique to a specific geocacher that is left behind in caches to signify that they visited that cache. These often include personal geocoins, tokens, pins, craft items or calling cards.

Spoiler

A spoiler is information that can give details away and ruin the experience of something. For example, telling someone the end of a movie before they see it. In geocaching, a spoiler gives away details of a cache location and can ruin the experience of the find.

SWAG

An acronym often referred to as standing for 'Stuff We All Get.' It includes the trade items left in caches by geocachers.

TFTC

Thanks For The Cache. An acronym written by geocachers in physical cache logbooks or online when logging cache finds.

TFTH

Thanks For The Hide

TNLN

Took Nothing. Left Nothing. Usually written in cache logbooks by geocachers do not trade for material contents in a cache.

TNLNSL / TNSL

Took Nothing. Left Nothing. Signed Logbook / Took Nothing. Signed Logbook.

Traditional Cache

This is one of several cache types. This is the original cache type consisting, at a bare minimum, a container and a logbook. Normally you will find a clear container or ammo box containing items for trade. Smaller containers, called micro caches are usually too small to contain anything except for a logbook. The coordinates listed on the traditional cache page are the exact location for the cache.

Travel Bug®

A Groundspeak Travel Bug is a trackable tag that you attach to an item. This allows you to track your item on Geocaching.com. The item becomes a hitchhiker that is carried from cache to cache (or person to person) in the real world and you can follow its progress online. Learn more at <http://www.geocaching.com/track/faq.aspx>.

USDA Forest Service (USFS)

The U.S. Forest Service, an agency within the Department of Agriculture, administers 191 million acres (77.3 million hectares) of National Forests, Grasslands, and Prairies. These public lands are generally geocaching-friendly, with exceptions of designated Wilderness Areas, and other specially designated botanical, wildlife, and archaeological sites. The phrase "Caring for the land and serving people" captures the Forest Service mission of achieving quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use concept to meet the diverse needs of people. The [Information Center in the agency's national headquarters](#) has been a Washington D.C. Virtual Geocache since August 12, 2001.

UTM

"Universal Transverse Mercator" coordinate system. This is an alternative to the standard [WGS84](#). UTM uses grids overlaying specific areas of the Earth's surface and divides the Earth into 60 zones.

Virtual (cache)

This is one of several cache types which are no longer available for creation on Geocaching.com. A virtual cache is a cache that exists in a form of a location. Virtual caches have no cache container; the reward for these caches is the location itself and sharing information about your visit. Virtual caches are now considered [waymarks on Waymarking.com](#).

WAAS

WAAS stands for Wide Area Augmentation System, but that doesn't really describe what it is. Garmin has [an excellent description on WAAS](#).

Watch List

A watchlist is a list of users that are watching a specific travel bug or cache. Each user receives a copy of each posted log via email.

Waypoint

A waypoint is a reference point for a physical location on Earth. Waypoints are defined by a set of coordinates that typically include longitude, latitude and sometimes altitude. Every geocache listed on our website is a waypoint. Geocaching.com generates a unique "GC Code" associated with every geocache listing.

Webcam Cache

This is one of several cache types which are no longer available for creation on Geocaching.com. These are caches that use existing web cameras placed by individuals or agencies that monitor various areas like parks or road conditions. The idea is to get yourself in front of the camera to log your visit. The challenging part, however, is that you need to call a friend to look up the web site that displays the camera image. You will need to have them to save the picture to log the cache. If you are a tech savvy, you can also use a wireless modem and save the image yourself on a laptop.

Webcam caches are now in the [Web Camera category on Waymarking.com](#).

WGS84

The most current geodetic [datum](#) used for GPS is the World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS84). The significance of WGS84 comes about because GPS receivers rely on WGS84. Geocaching uses the WGS84 datum by default. We also use the format HDDD MM.MM, which is a standard for GPS receivers (like the eTrex).

HDD means Hemisphere and degrees. MM.MM are minutes in decimal format. If you have any questions, you can either [visit the forums](#) or [contact us directly](#).

It is critical that the format be correct, otherwise geocachers will be unable to find your cache!

Wherigo™ Cache

This is one of several cache types. Wherigo is a toolset for creating and playing GPS-enabled adventures in the real world. By integrating a Wherigo experience, called a cartridge, with

finding a cache, the geocaching hunt can be an even richer experience. Among other uses, Wherigo allows geocachers to interact with physical and virtual elements such as objects or characters while still finding a physical geocache container. A Wherigo-enabled GPS device is required to play a cartridge. Learn more at Wherigo.com.