



Geocaching: Coordinating Adventure and Fun!!

2027 KAFCE Education Program Year

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Use with Hearth Fire #20: "Making Plans to Travel"

GPS coordinates - people use them practically every day!! Planning a trip? Pull up the handy Google map for travel information. Talking on your cell phone? GPS helps coordinate the jump from one cell tower to the next. Farmers use GPS for precise placement of fertilizers and seeds in their crop fields. Ranchers and wildlife conservationists use chip devices to count and track the movement of animals out on the range. GPS coordinates are helpful for many business and personal uses. How about using them for adventure and fun??

Geocaching is a fun outdoor adventure activity that uses GPS technology to help people find hidden treasures based on clues posted on the Internet. An activity enjoyed by people of all age groups, the main appeal of geocaching includes travel, experiencing the outdoors, physical exercise, and the thrill of finding hidden objects.

Educational Goals:

1. To introduce members to a hobby that promotes mental and physical health.
2. To share basic information needed to find a geocache.
3. To list resources available to support the hobby of geocaching.
4. To understand that geocaching is an activity that connects people of all ages and cultures.

Suggested Activities:

1. Host a "Find and Seek Event" at a local park for adults or families.
2. Use geocaching as an educational tool to explore natural resources in your area.
3. Explore caches at your nearest state park.
4. Set a personal or FCE group goal to find x# of caches this year.

Part 1. History of Geocaching:

Navigation has been an important element for explorers throughout history. Sailors looked to the North Star for guidance; Lewis and Clark followed river basins, and treasure seekers had access to maps marked with a big X. The art of geocaching uses navigation to find treasure capsules which are often located right under our noses!!! It all started with the development of ground positioning satellites or GPS.

Much like the ancient mariners who looked to the stars for guidance, we are using celestial bodies to guide us. In the 1970's, the U.S. Department of Defense launched a series of space satellites for military use. It soon became apparent that this technology could greatly aid commercial entities, and in the year 2000, these positioning capabilities were made available to anyone with a GPS receiver or a smartphone anywhere in the world. To test the accuracy of the satellites, in May of 2000 a bucket of small items was hidden near Portland, Oregon. A GPS device was used to record the location of the bucket and the coordinates uploaded to a website. GPS enthusiasts were encouraged to find the bucket or cache in what was called the Great American GPS Stash Hunt. Within three days members found the stash using their GPS receivers and, because of the thrill of discovery, the location-based game of **geocaching** was born. A website was developed to compile the coordinates of all the hidden stashes. Data for 2026 shows that there are over 3 million hidden caches in more than 190 countries all over the world -- waiting to be discovered!

2. What is a Geocache?

A geocache can be anything that another player has hidden in a specific outdoor location. **It's very likely that you've been walking or driving past a place for years without knowing there was a geocache hidden nearby.** The person wanting to hide a cache has official guidelines they must follow which are found on the geocaching website. Basically, they select a weatherproof container, put inside the container a log book and any other treasures they want to include, hide their cache in an accessible location, and then get their cache's coordinates uploaded to the geocaching website. Permission must always be obtained before hiding a cache on private property. The cache creator will also design a cache page online to provide clues or important information intended for players looking to find that specific cache.

Geocaches can vary drastically in size, type, and appearance. Some are obvious and easy to see, while others are camouflaged and harder to find. The more cleverly disguised stashes make the hunt more interesting, and also prevent these caches from being accidentally discovered or damaged by the public. In general, there are 4 sizes of geocaches including: micro, small, regular and large. In addition, there are many types of caches ranging from simple buckets or boxes to more sophisticated ones which involve solving some sort of puzzle, trading knick-knacks or SWAG, or sharing "trackables" (items with tracking devices meant to travel from cache to cache). Some caches, called Earth Caches, are educational, urging players to visit places with significant geological features. In appearance, geocaches can resemble anything from a box, to a magnetic pipe, to golf balls, or a knothole in a tree. Advanced players can also hunt for virtual caches. A trip to www.geocaching.com or one of the other geocaching websites will provide more information on geocaches. **All caches will have a logbook for players to sign so they can prove that the cache has been discovered!**

3. An App for a Treasure Map

You don't have to make or hide a cache to enter this free treasure hunt. The thrill of discovery is open to everyone!! History tells us that many of the great treasure seekers actually failed to find their objective. Thanks to GPS, hidden treasures today are much easier to find than in days gone by. In fact, one of the greatest things about geocaching IS how easy it is to find a cache. All you really need is a GPS-enabled smartphone to download the official Geocaching app and register for a free basic membership.

Once registered you will visit the map section of the Geocaching website and enter your current zip code to be able to search by location. You will see a number of **geocaches** pop up in the area you've chosen, each with a difficulty rating from 1 to 5. If you are just starting out, choose an easier cache until you get familiar with the game. Some of the harder caches do require an advanced membership fee to open the coordinates, so they are not free. You get to choose which level of membership you want and which cache you will be hunting for. Click on the cache that interests you the most and prepare to navigate to its location. The official [Geocaching YouTube Channel](#) has a number of instructional videos that teach players everything from proper etiquette to finding and hiding their first cache, and there are plenty of other online resources that provide helpful information as well.

Along with your smartphone and geocaching app, there are a few tools that will come in handy on your treasure hunt especially if the cache is a tricky one. Some items to include in your "Geobag" include: pen/pencils, paper, plastic baggies, tweezers, gloves, a small mirror, a magnetic tool, a flashlight, and an army knife. Because you will probably be outdoors, your water bottle, a hat, sunscreen and bug repellent are also suggested. Always let someone know where you are going. Other than these basic essentials, geocaching simply requires a good sense of adventure!!

4. Steps to finding Treasure

When you click onto a cache icon, you will open the log page that gives specific information about that cache. The cache name, identification number, type and difficulty are all listed, and also the size and a brief description of what you can expect to learn or find while searching for the cache. The GPS way points will be given. Hints from the cache creator may be included, and there will also be comments from the last seekers who found or did not find the cache. To use your phone's GPS, click on the navigate button to walk into the geocache's general area. As you get closer to the "X " that marks the spot, you will need to use the clues given and your own observational skills to find the hidden treasure!

After you have found the cache, you will need to pull the logbook out of the cache and sign your name. If there is a trinket or treasure hidden in the cache you may take it or trade it for "swag" or a treasure of your own to be left in its place. You may want to take a picture of the cache, and then return the geocache to its hidden spot with the paper logbook tucked back inside. Be courteous -- always leave the site as clean and undisturbed as possible to be fair to the next treasure hunter.

You will also want to go back to the log page on the geocaching app to document your experience. Take time to write a few notes that will help others in their hunt for the cache and say thank you to the cache creator by leaving the acronym TFTC, which means "Thanks For The Cache".



5. A Kansas Treasure Map

Geocaches are everywhere! There are stashes located in every county and along every major road in Kansas. The more urban an area, the more hidden stashes, but there are caches in rural areas also. City, RV, and state parks are good places to find buried treasure. There is most likely a cache within walking or driving distance of where you are now!! Some people make geocaching a side venture when on the way to an appointment or travel destination. In southern Kansas, one person was in town for a medical appointment and found a geocache in the parking lot right in front of their car! For other treasure seekers, finding their next cache IS the reason for choosing their travel destination. Set your own goals for your journey of discovery. For example, one goal might be to find all the caches in your county; or to find ten caches before your next birthday. Like the Alaskan Gold Rush, the excitement of finding treasure is addictive. Once you've become familiar with the game, you'll want to keep on finding fun!!

Did you know that the oldest active geocache in the world is found in Kansas? In May of 2000, a GPS enthusiast hid a container with a logbook under a rock near the Mingo exit off of Interstate 70 in western Kansas. He was the seventh person to register GPS coordinates to the official website that first year. Since that time, the other six sites have gone inactive, so Kansas has a claim to geocache fame! When geocaching celebrated 25 years of outdoor adventure in 2025, hundreds of people from all over the world made Mingo (GC30) their destination so they could sign the logbook and attend the Mingo Madness celebration!!

6. Treasure Seekers:

Whether by yourself or with a group of friends, a day spent searching for a geocache will yield rewards much greater than the value of the hidden swag. Along with bragging rights for a successful find, reconnecting with nature is healthy for the body, mind and spirit. Deciphering clues and solving the mystery of a treasure's location stimulates the brain. Although geocaching is the perfect activity for individuals of any age, the 55+ survey finds that the majority of the game's participants are retired singles or couples who have embraced geocaching as a hobby they can do together. This age group has more time and the desire to travel to new places, and geocaching gives them ideas for interesting destinations to visit. Geocaching also has a social aspect as you meet other enthusiasts in person at a cache site or block party, or recognize common cache names on the geocache website.

Geocaching is an outdoor activity that can add an exciting new dimension to your life. Use this hobby as a way to discover something new - near your home or clear across the country. There's no need to wait until a mysterious pirate map falls into your hands, because GPS makes navigating to the treasure location a snap. If the idea of searching for buried loot has ever appealed to you, then you should try geocaching, where you not only find treasure, but many other benefits as well --- including fun!!!

Resources:

"A guide to geocaching." Groundspeak (2007). www.geocaching.com/articles

"How to Get Started Geocaching, Everything you need to know about trying the location-based treasure hunt," by Paige Triola, *Popular Mechanics*: Oct 26, 2019

"Geocaching in Natural Resources: Fun with Forests around Us," *Mississippi State University Extension*, 2020

"Hide & Seek. Welcome to Geocaching.", by Chris Harris, *55+ Life Magazine*, August 1, 2023

"Celebrate 25 years of geocaching," *Geocaching HQ*, January 14, 2025

"Finding Fun," by Erin Mathews, *Northwest Kansas Today*, Summer 2025

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