

Activity C2 Hosting a Geocache

Introduction:

Invite the world to your door – stash a cache! Now that you have introduced your students to the Geocaching game (see activity *B5 Geocache Hunting*), your group members will probably want to create their own cache. They'll pick out a suitable cache container, enclose a logbook and cool trade items, locate an interesting local site, then stash their cache! They will post the location coordinates and information about their cache on the *geocaching.com* website. And then see who comes to visit!

Time Involved: variable

Materials Needed:

- GPS receiver(s) to mark your cache location.
- Cache container with logbook, pen & pencil, trade items.
- Internet access to post your geocache site.

Getting Started:

Before involving your students, reacquaint yourself with the Geocaching game, its variations, and the many resources available. Explore the <http://www.geocaching.com/> website. Check out the *Getting Started* page. Be sure to review *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)*, *Hiding your first Geocache*, *Guidelines for Cache Listings*, and the on-line form *Report/Edit a Cache Listing*. If you haven't done so already, create your free account with geocaching.com. Search the listings for caches in your area to avoid duplication. Gather some maps and think about a few local sites that might be suitable, but involve the group members in the site research, analysis, and final selection.

See "*Preparing GPS Receivers for Group Activities*". Note that receiver default settings usually are hddd°mm.mmm (degrees and decimal minutes) and datum WGS 84. These are also the same settings used for Geocaching waypoints. Make sure that you are aware of the datum for any maps that you are using.

Do the Activity:

Hosting a geocache can be broken down into five steps:

1. Finding a great cache location.
2. Preparing your cache container and its contents.
3. Hiding your cache and using GPS to mark its location.
4. Posting the information about your cache on the *geocaching.com* website.
5. Checking for visitors and maintaining your cache.

See below and on the *geocaching.com* for detailed suggestions and resources for each of these steps. Involve your students to the greatest extent possible in all five steps.

They'll have some novel ideas for the cache location and some unique trade items for its contents. Concealing the cache in its new home is great fun, along with marking its location with their GPS receivers. Posting the cache information on the website is an interesting internet techno-experience. And checking the logbook and the website postings for new visitors to your cache is always exciting.

Background Information

Hiding Your First Geocache

Adapted from Groundspeak Inc.'s geocaching.com website:

Step 1 - Research a cache location

Geocaching is just like real estate - location, location, location! When thinking about where to place a cache, keep these things in mind:

- Will it be easy to get to? - If it is only a couple hundred feet from the highway, there's a strong chance someone may plunder it. Try to find a place that will take a bit of time to get to, preferably on foot.
- Will it be easy to find? - If it is too visible, or too close to busy roads, trails, etc. there's a good chance someone may stumble upon it. Several of the original caches were discovered this way, but the people who found it were nice enough to leave them there (or participate). But don't make it too difficult! If you hide it well, give hints on geocaching.com as to the location.
- Will it be on private or public land? - If you place it on private land, please ask permission before putting it there! If you place the cache on public lands you need to contact the managing agency to find out about their rules. You will be in violation of federal regulation by placing a cache in any area administered by the National Park Service (US). The National Park regulations are intended to protect the fragile environment, and historical and cultural areas found in the parks.
- Does it meet requirements to be listed on the website? - Make sure to review the guidelines at: <http://www.geocaching.com/about/guidelines.aspx>

You are ultimately responsible for the cache so make sure you know the rules for the area where your cache is being placed.

You'll want to place a cache in a place that is unique in some way. The big reward for geocachers, other than finding the cache itself, is the location. A prime camping spot, great viewpoint, unusual location, etc. are all good places to hide a cache.

Note: Please be respectful of the areas you are thinking about placing the cache. For example, if it's the location of the spotted owl, or off-trail with delicate ground cover, keep in mind that others will be walking in these areas.

Please do not place caches on archaeological or historical sites. In most cases these areas are highly sensitive to the extra traffic that would be caused by vehicles and humans. If you find a cache in one of these areas please remove it and replace it a safe enough distance from the site to

ensure that the site will not be impacted by people searching for the cache and unknowingly traveling over or through a site.

Step 2 - Preparing Your Cache

First, you need a container. Anything water resistant, snow resistant, etc (depending on your climate), will do, but geocachers have had good success with plastic buckets, tupperware (or rubbermaid) containers, ammo boxes, or unused sewer pipes (really!). You'll also want to invest in some zip-loc baggies to put the items into in case your container leaks.

Whatever the container, make sure to mark your cache so that someone who doesn't play can figure out what it is. Most folks mark the container with Geocaching.com, the name of the cache, and any contact information they feel is necessary. More info is better than less.

Next, you'll need a logbook and a pen. A small spiral notebook does the trick. Make sure to put a pen in the cache as well! The author always forgets to bring one when searching for a cache.

(If you are in an area where the temperature dips below freezing, make sure to bring a soft lead pencil to place in the cache. Pens tend to freeze and are rendered useless :)

It's also recommended to have a note to welcome the cache finder and let them know what it is all about (if they accidentally found the cache). A letter you can use is available on the Geocaching website.

Lastly, you can put goodies in the cache. It's recommended, but not necessary! Some ideas of items to give as gifts:

- Disposable camera - Put one in and ask everyone to take a picture of themselves and put it back in the cache. Later you can develop the photos and place them online.
- Inexpensive toys - play-doh, silly putty, action figures, etc.
- CDs, VGA Cards, gift certificates, dollar bills, gold bars, etc.

It's up to you what you want to put in your cache, budget permitting. If you are a Dot com millionaire, I would hope you would pony up a bit of cache (err cash), but most of us can spend less than \$10 to place a decent cache.

Do not put food in a cache! Critters have better noses than we do, and will bite, nibble or swallow your cache in an attempt to get to the goodies. Bottled water is a good alternative (and refreshing to geocachers).

Step 3 - Placing Your Cache

When you reach the location to place your cache, the hardest part (depending on the model of your GPS unit, the terrain, etc), is getting exact coordinates from your GPS unit. It all depends on how visible your cache is, but you'll need to get the coordinates as close as possible to the cache.

Some GPS units have the ability to do averaging, but if yours can't, the best suggestion is to take a waypoint, walk away from the location, then return and take another waypoint. Do this around 7-10 times, then pick the best waypoint (I've done this with a Garmin eTrex on a cache)

Once you have your waypoint, write it in permanent marker on the container, the log book, and make sure you have a copy to bring back with you. Write a few notes in the log book if you like, place it in a zip-loc baggie, and place it in the container. Make sure to secure the container with a rock, etc, to decrease the chance of it blowing, floating, or being carried away.

Please do not bury the container unless you have express permission of the landowner or manager. If the cache is far enough away from trafficked areas, your cache should be fine. An exception would be covering the cache with dead branches, bark, etc. to conceal the container.

Step 4 - Report the Cache

Once your cache is in place, go to <http://www.geocaching.com/hide/report.aspx> to fill out the on-line report that asks for the location, nickname, type, size, and other information about your cache. Once you are done, click on the button at the bottom of the page to send it for review. You will receive a confirmation if your cache report was successfully submitted.

Step 5 - Maintain the cache

Once you place the cache, it is your responsibility to maintain the cache and the area around it. You'll need to return as often as you can to ensure that your cache is not impacting the area, and ensure that the cache is in good repair.

Once people have visited the cache, inquire about the cache and their opinion of the location. Does the area look disturbed? Are visitors disrupting the landscape in any way? If you have concerns about the location, feel free to move or remove it from the area.

Resources

- Groundspeak Inc. <http://geocaching.com>
- Waymarking <http://www.waymarking.com/>
- EarthCache <http://www.earthcache.org/>
- CITO <http://www.cacheintrashout.org/>
- Geocaching – more links <http://www.geocaching.com/links/default.aspx>

Note: Comments and suggestions regarding this activity and other components of the Virginia 4-H GPS curriculum are appreciated. Please contact Mike Clifford at: mjc4h@vt.edu / 804-561-5411 / 11131 Amelia Springs Rd., Jetersville, VA 23083