

Geocaching – using multi-billion dollar satellites to find hidden items



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What is geocaching? It's an outdoor game that's free to play, and involves literacy, thinking and exercise. People make 'caches' – containers usually holding a small log book and other items. These caches vary from a finger nail size metal nub, through to a 35mm camera film container (the most popular), to tupperware and beyond. And many caches are particularly creative.¹

Caches are hidden in public places: in woods; under rocks; magnetically attached to benches; behind railings; even on top of mountains or underwater. Just about anywhere the public has legal access to. Every country and continent (including Antarctica) has geocaches. The highest is located near the top of Mount Everest, while the lowest is 7,000 feet under the Atlantic Ocean. Most, however, are accessible by a bit of walking in sensible clothes.

Players check a geocaching website (² is the most popular) to locate the rough location of a cache. The cache creator may have left other clues, cryptic or straight, in the website description. The cache hunters use the GPS on their mobile phone or other device to 'home in' on the area of the cache. They forage and, if they find it, sign the log book and log the find on their online geocaching profile.

I've never heard of it!

Geocachers are wary about publicising caches, in case non-players ('muggles') interfere with caches. And there are a lot of these caches around – over 1.7 million and rising, with over five million people actively hunting. In addition, there are related activities called Letterboxing and Waymarking.³

Benefits

A game doesn't need to have benefits; it just needs to be fun to play. However, geocaching is both fun and comes with benefits, many of which map onto the school curriculum in interesting ways.

These include:

- Literacy: a primary need of geocaching. Players need to be able to read and interpret cache descriptions, puzzles and clues.
- Maths: homing in on a cache requires coordinate and distance calculations.
- Geography: geocaching makes

Gaming

The latest news on games in libraries

you aware of the landscape and features around you and the cache.

- Urban environment and history: many urban caches are associated with buildings or man-made landmarks, requiring observation and clue-solving.

There are also health and social benefits. For example, looking for geocaches involves some exercise, and teamwork is often crucial in figuring out and finding the more difficult geocaches. There's an increase in self-esteem, and a sense of achievement and satisfaction, at finding a geocache. But the best way to discover the benefits is simply to start geocaching.

How can libraries get involved?

Some libraries allow caches to be concealed in their grounds (e.g. ⁴, ⁵) or inside the building (e.g. ⁶, ⁷, ⁸, ⁹), while others form local caching teams or put on demonstrations.¹⁰

Consider hiding one or more geocaches around, or inside, your library. Tie in the descriptions and location puzzles with aspects of using the library, so hunters will need to learn how to use a library in order to find the geocaches.

Organise or facilitate group trips to nearby geocaches. Ask people who make and hide geocaches to present to interested patrons.

Tie in a book display around local geocaches (which patrons can identify through using the library PCs). For example, if there's a geocache in a

local church, connect information about the geocache with any books you have on the church history.

Put a cache inside every branch of a county library, as one public library system in Ohio has done¹¹ to raise awareness of, and footfall in, the various branches.

Develop your own scavenger hunt, such as the one based around Chicago Public Library,¹² so teens (and adults) learn more about their local community.

Inform staff. Then, see what happens. Your geocaching activities may attract young or old people, families, or groups of teens.¹³

And finally... CILIP

Not surprisingly, London contains several thousand geocaches. While there isn't (yet) a geocache inside CILIP Headquarters on Ridgmount Street, there are (at least) 65 geocaches within one mile of the building. So, if you're early for an event there, or fancy a bit of exercise and satisfying puzzle solving during a meeting break, get hunting!

Reference links

- 1 Creative caches: <http://is.gd/caches>
- 2 Geocaching.com: <http://geocaching.com/>
- 3 Idaho Librarian: <http://is.gd/IdahoLibrarian>
- 4 Hannibal Free Public Library: <http://is.gd/CachelnLot>
- 5 Norton Library: <http://is.gd/Norton>
- 6 Fox Cities Public Library: <http://is.gd/CachelnLib>
- 7 Charlevoix Public Library: <http://is.gd/Charlevoix>
- 8 Olathe Public Library: <http://is.gd/Olathe>
- 9 Oak Park Public Library: <http://is.gd/OakPark>
- 10 Ringtown Area Library: <http://is.gd/GeolibTalk>
- 11 Cuyahoga County Public Library System: <http://is.gd/Cuyahoga>
- 12 Chicago Public Library: <http://is.gd/Scavenger>
- 13 Crystal Lake Library: <http://is.gd/CrystalLake>

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Items inside a geocache found by librarians in Iowa.