



Geocaching on Girl Scouts of North East Ohio Property

Activity Overview

The purpose of this packet is to provide information about the exciting hobby of Geocaching. For Girl Scout Juniors and older, it expands further on the Junior Geocaching badge. For older girls who are interested in this fun activity, it has the information you need to get started. GSNEO **encourages you to supply your own "tech", however if that is not possible, we do have a limited number of GPS's for rent. If you are interested in renting, please contact the Program Department at programs@gsneo.org a minimum of 2 weeks prior to your outing.**

What is Geocaching?

Geocaching is an activity that involves hunting for hidden things using GPS coordinates. You can use a GPS or a smartphone. Each physical cache has a paper log to sign, and can include other things such as SWAPS or trackables. GSNEO has a list of all Geocaches located at Camp Timberlane, Camp Ledgeswood, and Camp Sugarbush. For more information on the Geocaches found at our camp properties, you can ask your Camp Coach or contact the Program Dept. by emailing programs@gsneo.org. All geocaches on GSNEO property are not to be publicized on geocache websites, as they are intended for Girl Scouts only.

Where does that word come from?

The basis of the word is from the French "cache," which basically means storing things. You might have seen the word in connection with computer storage or heard about it when studying the fur-traders and explorers in early American history. It is pronounced "cash".

What is the history of Geocaching?

Geocaching has roots in letterboxing. In 1854, a man hid a jar with stamped postcards in Dartmoor, England and asked whoever found it to mail the card to him. That was the beginning of **"letterboxing," which involves hunting for hidden boxes that contain logbooks and rubberstamps.** There are over 20,000 letterboxes in the United States.

Geocaching is much younger, but more widespread. It began in May 2000, when the government **removed "selective availability" from the GPS system. GPS stands for Global Positioning System** and uses satellites. It was made available for civilian use on May 2. The first cache was hidden the next day, and by May 6 it had been found twice. There are now millions of Geocaches placed worldwide.

Who hides them?

The caches that are available at GSNEO properties are hidden by other troops in North East Ohio.

What should we watch out for?

This is an "at your own risk" activity. Whatever could happen while you're out hiking could happen when you are Geocaching. You could fall, get poison ivy, get stung, get cut, etc. Don't do something dangerous just to get a cache. If you think it is dangerous, step back and go for another. Be aware of your surroundings. There is a Geocaching t-shirt and bumper sticker design that shows a geocacher staring at their GPS as they walk right over the edge of a cliff. You might not be near a cliff, but there might be a hole to step in. Some caches are simply not appropriate for all cachers.

Caches near a high bluff might not be the best choice if you are easily distracted or lose your balance. Some caches are camouflaged. **Never touch anything like that without an adult's permission.** You should not have to dig to find a cache, and you should respect the environment, whether man-made or natural. If you have any doubt about your ability to get the cache safely, skip it and choose another cache to seek.

What are "GPS coordinates"?

If you have a globe, it might help to pull it out for this section. Do you remember what those lines dividing the earth are called? The ones that go around the earth parallel to the equator are called latitude, and the ones that circle the earth the other way are called longitude. Any point on earth can be pinpointed by its latitude and longitude. As you go further away from the equator, the degrees latitude increase. However, one degree of latitude **covers approximately 69 miles. That's** a pretty big area. So the numbers to pinpoint an exact location have additional digits.

Activities

The five steps of the Junior Geocaching badge involve:

1. Preparing for your adventure
2. Learning to use a GPS receiver
3. Making a trade item
4. Going on a Geocaching adventure
5. Taking part in a travel-bug's travels

This is a great way to divide up learning about Geocaching, so we will use that general model here and expand on it.

1. Learn About Caching

The first step preparing for your adventure involves learning about Geocaching. GSNEO encourages you to visit Geocaching.com, having a Geocacher talk to you about her activities, attending a Geocaching event, or simply read through this packet with your troop. Go through this packet **including the "terms" before you head out caching.**

2. Learning to Use GPS

If you have a car GPS, it can be used, but it is not ideal. Hikers often have a handheld GPS or apps for their smart phones, and these are better. Some handheld GPS devices are designed specifically for geocachers. If you find you enjoy the game of Geocaching and are interested in **purchasing a GPS, one of the best features to look for is "paperless Geocaching."**

If you are using smartphones, different brands of phones have different apps available. There are **apps other than the "official" ones that many geocachers use and love. Sometimes there is a free** and a paid version. The free iPhone app from Geocaching.com will allow you to find only easier caches and only a few near you. The paid version of some apps can run about \$10, which is expensive for an app, but much cheaper than a dedicated GPS.

Some technology will have you follow a dot on a map. Others will show your GPS coordinates. It's pretty simple to figure out how to watch a moving dot on a map, but what if you only have numbers? In that case, it will help to look at the map associated with the cache listing on the website to see a general area and find out where to park near the cache. Once you have arrived at your closest parking to a cache, you are really looking at the ENDS of your coordinates. By the time you have parked near the cache, your first numbers are usually right. The final numbers (the minutes) are where the detail is, and are what will get you to the spot where you need to search. If

you just have coordinates to watch, it can be like a giant game of hot/cold. Watch the numbers on your GPS increase or decrease as you walk. Is your target coordinate number larger or smaller than where you are? Which direction should you go?

Once you have gotten to where your coordinates take you, look around. Remember, you are using satellites. Sometimes atmospheric conditions, large amounts of metal or heavy tree cover can affect your satellite readings. Those coordinates may take you right to a tree where the cache is in a knothole; or you might end up 20 feet away. If there is a clue with the cache page, or information in the cache description that might help you find the cache, use it to help you at this stage.

3. SWAPS

The third step of the Junior badge, making a trade item, focuses on the SWAG/SWAPS aspect of Geocaching. What is SWAPS? **Some say it stands for** "Special What-cha-ma-call-its Affectionately **Pinned Somewhere**". Caches that are large enough usually contain a selection of various trinkets and toys. If you find a cache with a SWAP inside and you see something you would like to have, simply trade for it with an item you have brought with you.

GSNEO SWAP rules include no food or candy (animals try to chew into the container to get to it), keep it small child appropriate (no lighters, knives etc.), and nothing that will change with the weather conditions. Many cachers place small bottles of bubbles from the party favor section in caches, but those can freeze and burst in cold weather, and then everything else is soaked when it warms back up. When picking out toys to carry as a trade item, take a little time to think about it. **Are you going to want to put toy vampire teeth in your mouth when you don't know who else has handled them? Or a whistle that some stranger might have blown? If you don't think you would want to take it, don't place it. Also, it is considered nice to trade "as nice or better."**

4. Go Caching!

Going on a Geocaching adventure is the fun part! For more information on the Geocaches found at our camp properties, you can ask your Camp Coach or contact the Program Dept. by emailing programs@gsneo.org. All geocaches on GSNEO property are not to be publicized on geocache websites, as they are intended for Girl Scouts only. See the listing of types of caches included in this packet for more information.

5. Trackables

The final stage in the Junior Geocaching badge is to take part in a trackable's travels. You might think the final stage should be to hide a Geocache, but that is not something you should do unless you plan to maintain it for years. If you would like to place a Geocache on GSNEO camp property, fill out the letterboxing/geocache application found on gsneo.org and return to the Program Department for approval. Troops are not allowed to place any letterboxes/geocaches on GSNEO camp property without this approval.

If you and your troop choose to place a geocache on GSNEO property, there are a few things that you must remember:

- All troops who wish to place a Geocache must have completed or are working towards their Geocacher Badge.
- All troops who wish to place a geocache on GSNEO property must receive approval from Girl Scouts of North East Ohio. To find the Letterboxing/Geocaching Application, visit gsneo.org
- All geocache must be clearly labeled.
- **Geocache must not exceed the size of a child's shoe box.**

- Letterboxes and geocaches hidden on GSNEO property are for Girl Scout use only.
- Geocaches left on GSNEO property are not the responsibility of any agent of GSNEO.
- All Girl Scout Troops are reminded to follow all GSUSA Safety and Activity Checkpoints.

Cache Types

- Traditional: The basic cache type, a traditional cache must include a log book of some sort. It may or may not include trade or traceable items. A traditional cache is distinguished from other cache variations in that the geocache is found at the coordinates given and involves only one stage.
- Multi-cache: This variation consists of multiple discoveries of one or more intermediate points containing the coordinates for the next stage; the final stage contains the log book and trade items.
- Mystery/puzzle: This cache requires one to discover information or solve a puzzle to find the cache. Some mystery caches provide a false set of coordinates with a puzzle that must be solved to determine the final cache location. In other cases, the given location is accurate, but the name of the location or other features are themselves a puzzle leading to the final cache. Alternatively, additional information is necessary to complete the find, such as a padlock combination to access the cache. Sometimes they are part of a challenge such as finding a cache in every county in the state before going for the final cache.
- Night Cache: These multi-stage caches are designed to be found at night and generally involve following a series of reflectors with a flashlight to the final cache location.
- Letterbox Hybrid: A letterbox hybrid cache is a combination of a geocache and a letterbox in the same container. A letterbox has a rubber stamp and a logbook instead of tradable items. Letterboxers **carry their own stamp with them, to stamp the letterbox's log book and inversely stamp their personal log book with the letterbox stamp.** The hybrid cache contains the important materials for this and may or may not include trade items. Whether the letterbox hybrid contains trade items is up to the owner.
- Virtual: Caches of this nature are coordinates for a location that does not contain the traditional box, log book, or trade items. Instead, the location contains some other described object. Validation for finding a virtual cache generally requires you to email the cache hider with information such as a date or a name on a plaque, or to post a picture of yourself at the site with GPS receiver in hand.
- Earthcache: A type of virtual-cache which is supervised by the Geological Society of America. The cacher usually has to perform a task which teaches him/her an educational lesson about the earth science of the cache area.
- Event Cache: This is a gathering organized and attended by geocachers. These include Cache-In Trash-Out (CITO) Events, which are a coordinated activity of trash pickup and other maintenance to improve the environment.
- Other types: There are other seldom seen cache types, including GPS Adventures Maze Exhibit, Wherigos and Webcams.

Terms

- Cache/Geocache – A box or container that contains, at the very least, a logbook.
- CITO – (Cache In Trash Out) and refers to picking up trash on the hunt.
- Geosense – Something experienced cachers develop –where they think of likely hiding places and look for stuff out of place. You often see logs where someone writes that their coordinates were off, but they used their geosense to find the cache.
- Geoswag/Swag (stuff we all get) – The items that can be found in some larger caches. No FOOD, and keep it safe for little kids.

- Geotrail – a path beaten into the plant growth in area of cache. Can often give you a clue as to where **to find cache if it is “just off the trail.”**
- GPS Coordinates – are based on Latitude and Longitude, in degrees, hours, minutes. This part **of the world will have “N” and “W” coordinates. Usually, it is the last three numbers you are** really watching at GZ.
- GZ – (Ground Zero or Geo-zone) refers to the general area in which a cache is hidden.
- TFTC – (Thanks For The Cache) This is often used at the end of logs to thank the cache owner.
- Urban/Rural – Caches can be in parking lots or at the end of long hikes.