

# Geocaching Hobby for Young and Old

With background on the new hobby of geocaching, I'm Calhoun County Game Warden Mike Mitchell.

Treasure hunting has intrigued societies for centuries. Today we have a modern version of it in Calhoun County. This modern-day adaptation uses easy-to-get technology, is inexpensive and is appropriate for people of all ages. Instead of looking for real treasure, this hobby has you looking for your peers' trinkets. This new approach is a growing hobby called geocaching. It pronounced Geo-caching, like cashing a check.

Geocaching is a free real-world outdoor style of treasure hunting where one searches for "caches" anywhere. Even in our rural area, they abound. Often hunting is done with the assistance of a GPS device, although nowadays a simple app on a smartphone also does the trick.

Thousands of hobbyist geocaches may be found all around the world. An estimated four million people participate in the pastime, which began in 2000. There are at least fifteen in Calhoun County alone, with many dozens more in surrounding counties. There are an estimated 1,750,000 in the world.

The basic idea is to find hidden containers, called caches, which are outdoors and found subtly in "plain sight" in public places. They might be as small as a scroll of paper in between two bricks, or as complex as a watertight container found just below the water's surface. Geocachers have a protocol where you respect all trespassing laws, only take an object if you leave an object of equal or greater value, and leave a note in a logbook when you find the geocache.

It is a great activity for people of all ages. In one area training class recently, grandparents were especially interested in the activity, as it tied together enjoying the outdoors, having an adventure, learning area history, exercising at one's own pace and being with grandchildren. Caches are often tied into historical areas, and many people come into Calhoun County as daytrips from surrounding larger areas.

Geocaching is a fun activity for all ages, and is a great learning opportunity for youngsters. It also gives the chance to learn more about our surroundings, not to mention the opportunity to get some exercise.

"I learned about it and immediately found it to be a great hobby and way to spend time with my family," remarked one recent new geocacher. His wife and he had greatly enjoyed their time looking for caches, learned a lot along the way and even set out two new ones.

The technology side of geocaching is not as daunting as it may seem at first glance. A handheld GPS, a smart phone with a GPS or geocaching app, or even printing web site

information at home can be used to start the journey. One example of many is the Groundspeak's Geocaching App, which ties together a GPS device for a smartphone, along with tips, message boards, maps and even the ability to filter what to look for based upon its closeness, size or terrain difficulty. That same company also has the website [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com), which is a great resource.

Another concept of geocaching is that of protecting caches from muggles. The idea, borrowed from J.K. Rowling's books, is to keep bystanders from accidentally stumbling onto geocaches and vandalizing them or throwing them away. Smart geocachers wait until nobody is around before they start their search for a specific cache.

So the next time you're looking for a fun outside adventure, consider geocaching as a great way to explore locations near and far, bring friends together and have a modern-day treasure hunt.

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