



Photo by John Jernigan



Photo by John Jernigan

**“AFTER THEY TOLD ME ABOUT GEOCACHING, I LOOKED INTO IT AND BECAME HOOKED ON THE ACTIVITY MYSELF”**  
*—Brian McKay*

# A 21ST CENTURY QUEST

**LOOK CLOSELY** at that spider sitting deathly still next to a strange-looking rock. Be sure to take a peek under the rock, too. You may find a cache—the reward in the sport of geocaching that is often described as a game of **“HIGH-TECH HIDE AND SEEK.”**

By Mary Ann DeSantis

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

### HINTS FOR FIRST-TIME GEOCACHERS

1. Go to geocaching.com and register for free. Put in the ZIP code of where you would like to search.
2. From the list that appears, select traditional geocaches with a Level 1 difficulty and easy terrain.
3. Notice the description of the container size. First-timers may want to look for large caches that are easier to spot than the miniscule “bison tubes.”
4. Look to see when the geocache was last found. If it was found a week or so ago, it’s most likely still active. If several months have passed since anyone logged a find, chances are it’s missing.
5. Send the coordinates to your GPS unit or smartphone. You may also want to print a copy of the geocache description and any hints. Automobile GPS units do not work well for geocaching.
6. Pack your bug spray, sunscreen, tweezers to remove cache logs from tiny spaces, spare GPS batteries and water before heading outside for your family-friendly adventure. Sturdy walking shoes are also a must.





**“GEOCACHES TAKE YOU TO INTERESTING PLACES WHERE YOU MEET INTERESTING PEOPLE”**

—Jim Smith

Photo by Mary Ann DeSantis

to find a specific cache in each state, including Alaska and Hawaii.

“The final cache was hidden in the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C.,” he says. “It was a great ending to the adventure.”

Ocala’s McKay says that geocaching gives people an opportunity to get outside and see new scenery.

“People tell me all the time that they didn’t know some Ocala parks even existed until they went there looking for a cache,” he says.

**GEOCACHING BEGAN AS A**

hobby in May 2000 when the first geocache appeared only a day after the U.S. government officially removed “selective availability” from GPS satellites that were used primarily by the military. Civilian GPS units became more accurate than previously permitted. Dave Ulmer of Beavercreek, Oregon, hid a container filled with books, videos and a slingshot in the backwoods and posted the coordinates on the Internet with a challenge “to go find it.”

That single Internet posting led to the phenomenon of geocaching; although, in the early days, it was called a “GPS stash hunt.” Mike Teague, the first person to find

**LEARN TO BE A GEOCACHING GURU**

The City of Ocala offers geocaching workshops for anyone who wants to learn more about the sport. Scheduled workshops for individuals will begin again in the fall season, but if you have a large group, you can make special reservations now. Contact the Park Operations Center at (352) 368-5500 for more information.



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Ulmer’s stash, began posting online posts of coordinates around the world and documented them on his personal Web page.

In September 2000, the geocaching.com site began when Web developer Jeremy Irish stumbled upon Teague’s page and realized this new hobby combined his interests of treasure hunting and using tech-gadgets. Irish and Teague worked together to improve the cache-hunting experience for people who were just learning about GPS technology.

Now that geocaching applications are available for smartphones, the hobby is growing even faster and into new frontiers. Searching for caches has moved beyond trails and landmarks into cyberspace and below the sea. Virtual caches do not contain a traditional box or logbook but are usually an object that must be described to the cache’s originator.

For example, a plaque located at the posted coordinates may have a date or name that finders would identify.

Even more challenging are the underwater geocaches that scuba divers began hiding a couple of years ago. Underwater geocaching follows much the same rules as the land-based game but definitely has more challenges. Caches must be submersible and able to withstand water pressure and corrosion. And underwater geocachers often must sign a waterproof logbook to prove they were really there.

No matter where a cache is located, the basic rules remain the same for geocachers as they did in 2000.

“Find it, sign the logbook, put it back together and hide it where you found it,” Smith told beginners at a recent workshop in The Villages. “And if you take something from the

container, like a coin or trinket, be sure to leave something in return.”

While some newbie geocachers may question the necessity of actually signing logs before posting the find on geocaching.com, both Smith and Seger emphasize that the sport is on the honor system.

“If you cheat, you are cheating only yourself,” says Smith.

Seger adds, “In this sport, you police yourself. It’s a lot like golf in that respect.”

**WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

- geocaching.com
- ocalafl.org/recpark

**TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

**BISON TUBES**

Micro or “nano” geocache containers, usually made from anodized aluminum. The tubes hold only a tiny roll of log paper.

**BYOP**

Bring Your Own Pen/Pencil. An acronym often used by cache owners to communicate to other geocachers that you will need to bring your writing utensil to sign the logbook.

**CACHE**

A shortened version of the word geocache.

**CITO**

Cache In Trash Out is an ongoing environmental initiative supported by the worldwide geocaching community. Since 2002, geocachers have been dedicated to cleaning up parks and other cache-friendly places.

**GEOCACHE**

A hidden container that includes, at minimum, a logbook to sign.

**HITCHHIKER**

An item placed in a cache that has instructions to travel to other caches. Sometimes, they have their own logbooks attached.

**MULTI-CACHE**

The first geocache holds clues to find a second cache and the second one holds clues for a third.

**TRADITIONAL CACHE**

A basic container that includes a logbook and may or may not include trade items. A traditional cache is found at the coordinates given and involves only one stage.

Source: geocaching.com

**LETTERBOXING**

**THE LOW-TECH VERSION**

Letterboxing is another family-friendly scavenger hunt activity that has been around more than 150 years and uses clues and references to landmarks embedded in stories or nursery rhymes. Many geocaches in this area are hybrids, meaning they are a combination of a geocache and letterbox.

A letterbox contains a unique rubber stamp (often made by the person who hid the box), an

ink pad and a logbook or journal. Letterboxers have trail names and carry their own rubber stamp to use on the box’s logbook and inversely stamp their own personal journal with the letterbox stamp.

A couple of years ago, a friend and I wanted to combine our two favorite hobbies: hiking and rubber stamping. Letterboxing was an activity that seemed designed for us, and we’ve searched for the

well-hidden boxes throughout Florida and Georgia. One of my first letterbox finds was in Ocala’s Veterans Memorial Park on Silver Springs Blvd. Today, my personal journal is filled with unique and artistic stamped impressions that are fun to look through and remember my travels.

Just like in geocaching, you will find the lists of letterboxes online and can filter for a specific area to search. And don’t think

that high-tech accoutrements have left letterboxing enthusiasts behind. Smartphone apps are available so you can access clues to letterboxes from anywhere.

**FOR INFORMATION, VISIT LETTERBOXING.ORG.**