GEOCACHING & LIBRARIES

AN ADVENTUROUS PAIRING

by Jenn Bishop
Maitland Public Library

Today's libraries are more than just buildings full of books. Maybe I'm a bit of a romantic, but if you ask me, libraries are collections of adventures packed into travel-sized containers. They are dedicated to serving the members of our communities who come in seeking an escape from their day-to-day lives. In this, Geocaching and Libraries have a lot in common.

Example of a waterproof cache

Geocaching in Movies & TV
- Finding 'Ohana (2021, PG, directed by Jude Weng)
- Splinterheads (2009, R, directed by
- Brant Sersen)
- Tracker (2007, NR, directed by Alex Bica and Xander Bryant)
- G.P.S. (2007, R, directed by Eric Colley)
- Campfire Kiss (2017, TV-G, directed by James Head)

WHAT IS GEOCACHING?

Geocaching is a worldwide scavenger-hunt-style game that uses the Global Positioning System's satellites to lead players to a hidden container or secret location. GPS was originally used as a military tool. Selective Availability (SA) was a way for the government to purposefully restrict the accuracy of GPS signals used by civilians. On May 2, 2000, the US government ended SA, to make GPS more available for civil and commercial use worldwide.[1] Geocachers call this "Blue Switch Day," the day the "Big Blue Switch" was flipped.[2] GPS Enthusiasts took advantage of this newly increased accuracy. They hid stashes for others to find, sharing the coordinates on internet message boards as a way to test their personal GPS receivers. The next day, May 3, 2000, Dave Ulmer hid his first "stash," a 5-gallon bucket full of trade items, outside Portland, Oregon.[3] Mike Teague was the first person to find this stash and began compiling a list of stash locations on his personal website.[4] The hobby quickly grew, and by September 2000, the official Geocaching website launched with the world's first 75 hides.

Today, geocaches come in many sizes and styles. Some are easy to find; many are cleverly disguised to blend into their surroundings. The basics for all geocaches are the same: You first view a cache listing on the geocaching.com website or app. Then, you use the coordinates listed to navigate to the specified location. Search for the geocache, and once you find it, log your experience online. Most geocaches are hidden outdoors in parks and parking lots, but the possibilities are vast.

1. Office of the Press Secretary, "Improving the Civilian GPS"
2. Sadly, there is no actual Big Blue switch.
3. Ulmer, Dave, "GPS Google Group"
4. Archive, GPS Stash Hunt (Geocache) Homepage

TYPES OF CACHES

The four most common library-related caches are typically one of these types: [5]

- **Traditional:** A water-tight, or other appropriate, container with, at minimum, a paper log to sign. Larger containers will usually have a pen and small trinkets that can be traded. The container may be the size of a pea, or as large as a building. It may be easily identified, or camouflaged for more difficult hides.
- **Multi-Cache:** These hides are traditional style hides that have more than one stage, and usually require a player to use information they find along their way to lead them to the final spot where the container will be hidden.
- **Event Cache:** A geocaching-related meet-up, 30 minutes or longer, for players to engage in a common activity or share stories about their caching experiences. This is a great way to introduce new players to the social side of the game. Examples could include crafting geocache containers, hosting a book talk with the author of a geocaching-related book, or having a geocaching-related movie watch party.
- **Mystery Cache:** This cache style requires players to solve a puzzle to get the needed coordinates for the hide. The puzzle may be easy or difficult. It might need to be completed before leaving home or could include a "field puzzle" on-site.

I work at the Maitland Public Library in Maitland, FL. We currently have a multi-cache style geocache that takes searchers on a tour of our historic building. They must navigate every room and space, looking for clues that lead them to a call number. Hidden amongst the Florida History section of our collection is a hollowed-out car repair manual that was rebranded with a new cover to blend in and celebrate over 125 years of our library's history. Geocachers have traveled from as far away as Sweden to find our cache! Several local geocachers have remarked how much they love our space and have returned to drop off trade trinkets and traveling items in our cache.

5. "FAQ."

TIMELINE OF GEOCACHING AND LIBRARIES [5]

MAY 3, 2000
GCF: The Original Stash
Following "Blue Switch Day" Dave Ulmer hides a five-gallon bucket outside Portland, Oregon. This would become the first geocache.

MAY 13, 2001
GC94A: Swimming with Porcupines
The first geocache utilizing library resources is hidden in Nova Scotia, Canada near the Halifax Regional Library.

JUNE 15, 2001
GCCA8: Library
A precurser to Little Free Libraries, this geocache was hidden near Nümbrecht, Germany to act as a book-swap location.

NOVEMBER 2, 2001
GC25F0: Geisel Library
The first geocache hidden inside a library is located at the Geisel Library on the University of California San Diego campus. This cache is still active today!
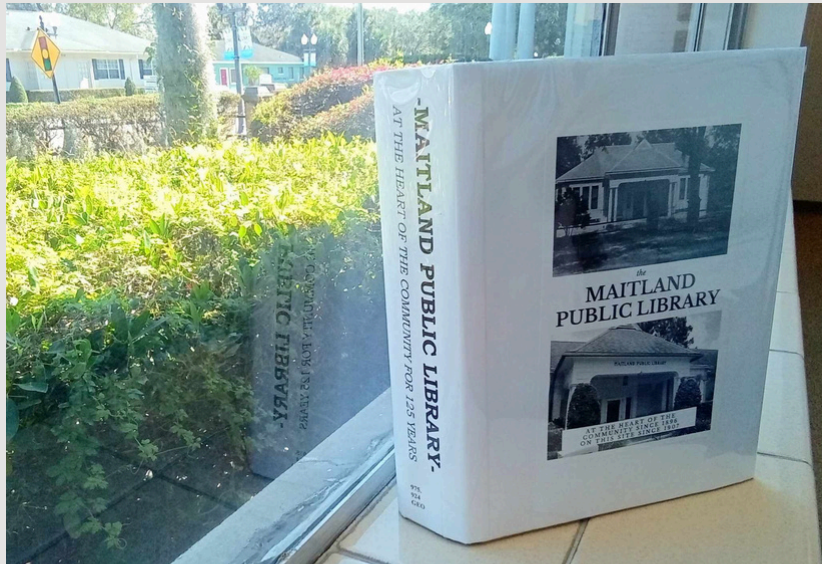
OCTOBER 22, 2002
GC9F2D: The Envelope Please, Desk Top Edition
The first geocache hidden inside a library in Florida is placed at the Leroy Collins, Leon County Main Public Library in Tallahassee, FL. This cache is also still in play.

Geocaching in Libraries

Maitland Public Library's hidden cache

CACHES IN LIBRARIES

Geocaches, for the most part, require little interaction from staff. Once a physical cache has been placed, someone would need to monitor the email attached to the hide. When cachers log that they have found your geocache, you'll receive an email with their online log. Occasionally, a designated member of staff might need to perform maintenance to ensure the container is in good condition and that it is still hidden as intended. We keep bookmarks and small items, like silly bands or erasers, as tradable items in our cache. Occasionally, these goodies may need to be restocked, but generally, the cache keeps itself. How you decide to structure things is completely up to you. You can even count geocache logs as participation in a passive program in your user statistics.

With nearly 2 million active geocachers in the world, it shouldn't be difficult to create a buzz in your area. Many regions have dedicated clubs of cachers who would be more than happy to help you introduce the game to your patrons. My local group, CFLAG – Central Florida Area Geocachers, have had geocaching-related movie watch parties in our Community Room. They are planning more events to discuss cryptography and how to approach puzzle-solving as it applies to geocaching.

The upcoming 2024 Collaborative Summer Library Program theme is "Adventure Begins at Your Library." Geocaching can be a great way to bring adventure to your patrons, both on-site and beyond!

Many library collections may already have the most popular geocaching books, but here are some titles to consider adding if you are thinking of bringing geocaching to your library.

- *Geocaching for Dummies*, by Joel McNamara
- (978-0764575716)
- *How to Puzzle Cache* (Second Edition), by Cully Long
- (978-0997348897)
- *501 Geocaches to Find Before You Die – U.S. State Version*, by Gary Slinkard (979-8772492345)
- *Geocaching Challenges: The Game Within the Game*, by Jesse & Kristi Lunsford (978-1092294966)
- *The Joy of Geocaching: How to Find Health, Happiness, and Creative Energy Through a Worldwide Treasure Hunt*, by Paul & Dana Gillin (978-1884956997)

Resources
1. Dave Ulmer, post to "GPS Stash Hunt," Google Groups, May 3, 2000, 3:00:00 AM., https://thewebdesignforum.co.uk/topic/4553-htmlcss-books-n-blogs/?p=40893.
2. "FAQ," Geocaching.com website. https://www.geocaching.com/sites/education/en/frequently-asked-questions
3. "GPS Stash Hunt (Geocache) Homepage" https://web.archive.org/web/20000621194709/http://www.triax.com:80/yngwie/gps.html.
4. Improving the Civilian Global Positioning System (GPS)." The White House, May 1, 2001. The White House. https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/textonly/WH/New/html/20000501_2.html