

In the downtime - GEOCACHING = ADVENTURE!

By Geoff Young

Make the most of your posting and get into Geocaching, it is the new sport spreading the world. "What is Geocaching?"... I hear you ask. Well it combines "geo" geography and "cache", a term used for hidden treasure. Put them both together and you have the newest and hottest outdoor activity going.

The goal of Geocaching is to locate hidden treasure from latitude/longitude coordinates found on websites such as geocache.

Geocache: www.geocaching.com

The treasure consists of neat stuff, stored away in hidden watertight ammo containers or plastic boxes. Caches are hidden in the wilderness, parks and even urban locations accessible to the public. How the caches are hidden depends on the skill and creativity of the one doing the hiding. Some are straightforward and easy to find, others take a bit more thought, preparation, and time. A terrain and difficulty score, between 1 – 5 (1 being the easiest) is calculated for each cache.

WARNING!

**GEOCACHING IS EXTREMELY
ADDICTIVE**

To get started you will require a handheld GPS unit (I started with a cheap Garmin model) and access to the internet. Log onto the Geocaching website listed above and download the co-ordinates and clues for the caches you are interested in searching for. Load this information onto your GPS, and then simply set off for your adventure with the family.

Our family started Geocaching in February 2008 after being posted to RAAF Williamstown. Being new to the area we found Geocaching a fantastic way to explore Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and Nelsons Bay. Through Geocaching we have discovered some of the most spectacular sites and best kept secrets of the area including beautiful scenic lookouts, fantastic parklands and stunning gardens. Not to mention the oodles of interesting little facts about the local area that we may never have otherwise stumbled upon.



Our family team (MADSTARS) have found Geocaching a great way to get out and about and discover what the beautiful Hunter region has to offer. My wife maps out where we will head for the day – it might be off to the Hunter Valley Vineyards, or Newcastle CBD, or perhaps closer to home in the Bay area. We select a few caches that we are interested in then download

the coordinates onto the Garmin GPS. It is a good idea to take note of any clues, maps and general info for each cache you have selected. I have a two year old daughter who is ‘Miss Little Adventurer’ through-and-through, she loves spending the morning out Geocaching and her eyes light up when she finds a hidden treasure. Sure to have a toy for her!

Our adventure starts with driving to the general vicinity of the cache; this is typically a beautiful park, wilderness reserve, or point of interest. Then the real adventure and excitement begins by using the GPS to find the exact area the cache is located. This is usually accurate to within a 9 meter squared area (depending upon your GPS). At this point you may find you need to review the information or clues to determine the exact location.

There are a few general rules once you locate the cache. You must sign the log with the date and your code name. You are welcome to take an item from the cache, but it is '*good manners*' to replace it with an item of equal value. We take a bag of small toys with us and let our "geotoddler" pick a toy from each cache we find and then let her choose something from our trove to replace it with, thus creating a recurring treasure for the next person.

For an inexpensive day out that offers the family quality time together and a chance to experience the great outdoors you cannot beat Geocaching. It is a fantastic way to discover and explore a new area once posted. Geocaching is an international sport/game with 620,612 caches located worldwide, you are bound to find caches in just about every town and city in the country, not to mention abroad. So go ahead do something different this weekend and go Geocaching.

If anyone would like to find out more information on Geocaching head to the website or email myself Flying Officer Geoff Young (MADSTARS), or Flight Lieutenant Jason Keir (Pensive Travellers). We will be more than happy to help with any questions or information you require.

Happy Geocaching!

Editor's Note: You can find email addresses for Geoff and Jason on the Defence internal email address directory.