

Geocaching: Safety Activity Checkpoints



Geocaching is a recreational outdoor activity that centers on the use of a Global Positioning System (GPS) and maps. Geocachers seek out caches (waterproof containers containing logbooks) that have been hidden just about anywhere in the world, whether in urban areas, in the wilderness, in tree roots and so on. As treasure hunters in an international game of hide-and-seek, participants use geocaching.com to select cache locations and communicate with other geocachers.

Geocaching often involves lengthy city walks or day hikes in the woods. Depending on the location of a cache, participants are prepared for more strenuous activities. If incorporating backpacking, canoeing, and/or rock climbing into a geocaching activity, reference the appropriate Safety Activity Checkpoints to ensure proper safety precautions are taken, including the presence of a qualified instructor(s). Because of the challenging nature of GPS operation and the ciphering of numbers and data, geocaching is not permitted for Girl Scout Daisies unless they're working with older girls and adults as part of another outdoor activity. Geocaching is appropriate for Girl Scout Brownies so long as the time duration is not excessive and girls are looking for basic cache hides.

Know where to participate in geocaching. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions. Also, when on private or government property, follow all posted rules, guidelines and etiquette. Geocaching.com outlines locations that are prohibited for placing a cache.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that Handicaching.com provides to people with disabilities.

Geocaching Gear

Required Gear:

- GPS device

Recommended Gear:

- Sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses
- Portable drinking water
- Cell phone
- Clothing appropriate for the activity and weather
- Notebook and pen or pencil

- Swag (or “stuff we all get”), which is the items that geocachers place into caches—usually small plastic toys, key chains, sunglasses—for other geocachers to take once they’ve located a cache. Topographical and/or standard map of geocaching area
- Daypack to carry personal belongings
- Hiking boots for wilderness areas, or comfortable and sturdy walking shoes for urban environments
- Whistle

Prepare for Geocaching

- **Communicate with council and parents.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Girls plan the activity.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** For the recommended adult-to-girl ratios please see the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*. For a large group of girls participating in geocaching, it is recommended that girls organize themselves into small groups.
- **Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** The geocaching instructor has experience and skill in teaching/supervising geocaching, topographical-map reading, and proper usage of GPS devices and has documented experience according to your council’s guidelines, as outlined in *Volunteer Essentials*. For geocaching activities that involve caving, rock climbing, and similar activities, refer to the appropriate Safety Activity Checkpoints for details about instructor credentials and/or skill sets. The instructor reviews the rules and operating procedures with girls before geocaching.
- **Compile key contacts.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Select a safe geocaching location.** Learn about the terrain of a geocaching site by learning about the Difficulty/Terrain rating (D/T) on the cache page of geocaching.com. The ratings, which range from 1/1 to 5/5, measure the level of difficulty for finding a cache at a designated location. A terrain rating of 1 typically means the cache is accessible for people with disabilities. Keep in mind that a GPS device provides a direct line measurement from the starting point to a destination; a GPS does not include the distance around path obstructions such as bodies of water.
- **Dress appropriately for the activity.** Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces that may become entangled in activities.
- **Develop a geocaching curriculum.** Encourage girls to plan the details of a geocaching trip, and develop a geocaching curriculum that includes lesson plans that cover elements such as the purpose of the activity, skills necessary, safety considerations, diagrams to aid with comprehension, and navigational resources.
- **Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of soft tissue and bone injury, and hypothermia. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from Emergency Medical Services response time, ensure the presence of a first-aider with Wilderness First Aid. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training. On the Day of Geocaching
- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the geocaching activity, check weather.com or other reliable weather sources to determine if weather conditions are appropriate. If severe weather conditions prevent the activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open, flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with heads between them.
- **Use the buddy system.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Girls learn about geocaching.** Girls develop skills about GPS use, latitude and longitude, and reading maps. Ideally, each girl is able to use her own GPS, or two girls share a GPS. When more than three participants share a GPS device, it becomes more difficult for girls to actively participate in the geocaching activity.

- **Practice safe geocaching.** To prevent injury when searching for caches, inspect areas with care before trekking into potentially dangerous locations or placing hands into unknown nooks and crannies such as ground holes, ponds, creeks, or urban buildings and structures. Be on lookout for sharp edges, animals, insects, and garbage.

Geocaching Links

- Geocaching—The Official Global GPS Cache Hunt Site: www.geocaching.com
- Geocaching with NaviCache: www.navicache.com
- TerraCaching—For Love of the Hunt: www.terracing.com

Geocaching Know-How for Girls

- **Cache in, trash out.** Like the Leave No Trace initiative, geocachers are encouraged to leave caching sites cleaner than they found them. Geocachers are invited to participate in International [Cache In Trash Out](#) events, which are worldwide clean-up efforts.
- **Find a benchmark.** Using a GPS or directions provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Geodetic Survey, you can seek out NGS survey markers and other items that have been marked in the United States. Visit www.geocaching.com/mark to learn more.