

» GEOCACHING



Geocaches come in all sizes, nano being the smallest, which are often hidden in plain sight but camouflaged to match their surroundings. Moses FLF, with his four-legged companion Moses, touts geocaching as a fun mind game, that involves physical activity. (Bruce Bumstead/Brandon Sun)

high-tech hide-and-seek

BY JOANNE F. VILLENEUVE

What happens when scavenger hunting is combined with technology? Geocaching happens!

In fact, searching for caches has become a global pursuit.

Caches can be inconspicuous or blatantly in the passerby's sightline — hidden under a sign, suspended from a tree branch or attached by a magnet on a metal object, in the forest or in an urban setting.

Like a treasure, they can be a tiny container, with an equally tiny log book hidden within, or they can also hold trading items like inexpensive gadgets, toys, pens, pins, geo coins and travel bugs — dog tag-like medallions, with a serial-number tracking system allowing their travels via geocaching, to be monitored.

"If I were to put a travel bug into circulation, it would typically have a mission. In Florida, I picked up a couple and their mission was to travel to every state in the United States and every province, and I can track throughout the world where it goes," said the recently retired Moses FLF, whose real identity is never disclosed, as is tradition among geocachers.

"The anonymity is part of the game."

The log booklet, always part of a cache, is meant to record the names of those who find it and the dates, before the cache is returned to the exact spot where it was

discovered, most often with the treasure swapped with another.

"The objective for all of these (caches) is to get to as many places as possible."

Geocachers who choose to hide such treasures must not only register the co-ordinates, send it to an official reviewer, but most also live near the cache to maintain it.

Some fanatics of geocaching will go to great lengths to find a cache, some to greater extremes — on a mountain side, at the Arctic Circle, at the bottom of a lake — than most.

Of many sizes — as small as a bullet usually for an urban hiding spot or as big as a bucket for out in the countryside — a cache is the destination for the many whose hobby was invented, purely by chance, in 2000.

That year, the unscrambling of the Global Positioning System — originally designed for use by the U.S. Department of Defense with satellite guidance to help with navigation — was enacted by former president Bill Clinton.

This move enabled this handy gadget to be used by the public.

Using a portable GPS unit, today's treasure hunters follow co-ordinates to registered caches and piece together clues to help them locate the hidden object.

"I actually got involved in it accidentally. Two years ago, Friends of Riding Mountain Park put on a little geocaching seminar at the wilderness

centre. They had put six geocaches out, they gave you the (hand-held) GPS unit to use for the day. They gave you an overview of GPS, how it works, how it relates to maps, and how the GPS unit fits into that. Then, off you went with a partner and found some geocaches," Moses FLF said.

The GPS systems available today can get geocachers within four to 10 metres from their quarry, after which it is up to the individual or group to figure out the clues and spot the item, which is camouflaged or painted to make the hunt

more interesting.

Though the first person to find a new cache is sometimes rewarded with a prize within, depending on the size of the cache, this "first-to-find" status is significant in a geocacher's record.

"It's a fun activity that gets you out, typically walking, and it's kind of a mind game. You have to be thinking about it. So, you're exercising your body and your mind," said Moses FLF.

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May 10: Flash Mob Event

WWFM III will take place May 10, 2008, from noon sharp to 12:15 p.m., at Dinsdale Park. The precise location will be e-mailed to participants. For newcomers, just look for the large gathering of people.

ITINERARY:

- **11:45 - 11:59 a.m.** — Participants: Wait patiently in your vehicles or stroll around the area. STAY AWAY from ground zero until the signal is given. As much as you can, act like a muggle, pretend not to know each other or give any indication that something is about to happen. At 11:59:30 a.m., we will reach ground zero with the bucket. This is the signal for the Flash Mob Event to begin. Everyone now makes their way to ground zero.
- **Noon** — Log sheets will be handed out for those who did not bring their own. Bring your own writing instrument. Sign individual log sheets and drop them in the collection box. Mingle. Trade travel bugs and coins. Share stories. Brag. Take pictures. Make arrangements to meet elsewhere, or to find the various caches in the nearby area.
- **12:05 p.m.** — FTF Prize draw
- **12:08 p.m.** — First of two attendance prize draws
- **12:10 p.m.** — Assemble for a group photo, and assemble FAST. Listen to the photographer for directions. Group photo is taken.
- **12:13 p.m.** — Group photo has been taken and draw for second attendance prize takes place.
- **12:15 p.m. sharp** — Wait for it — don't go anywhere yet ... then LEAVE the area quickly and in different directions. Meet elsewhere if desired. The log sheet bucket will be packed up right at 12:15 p.m. If you don't get to it in time you can't log the event.

If everything goes right we will have several people coming out of nowhere and gathering for 15 minutes, holding a geocaching event, and then disappearing. This could be lots of fun and should have a few "muggles" wondering what the heck just happened!

For those muggles who are more than a bit curious, there will be information sheets that will hopefully inspire them to learn a little more about geocaching.

» submitted

A geocaching nano-cache can be incredibly hard to find when it is no larger than a watch battery.

« GEOCACHING: FUN OF ALL AGES

Brandon geocachers gearing up for global flash mob

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"It can be challenging. There are some that I've gone to and never found, as much as I hate to admit that."

With his faithful companion — a white dog also named Moses — at his side, he walks in various neighbourhoods in Brandon, with his GPS and Black Berry in hand, to ensure the caches he has hidden are at the co-ordinates he originally registered, while taking whatever opportunity arises to seek others' caches.

Interestingly, he is somewhat secretive when checking his caches as "muggles" or outsiders of the geocaching circle might disturb the cache and ruin the opportunity for others to locate it.

"They'll sometimes find a cache and, not knowing what it is, they'll just take it or destroy it. So, we have to be careful what we disclose," he said.

This endeavour, which can be a bit competitive, is easily done year long, in town as it is in rural or forested areas.

For those who are environmentally conscious, geocachers have a credo: CITO — Cache In Trash Out.

If garbage is found near a cache site, geocachers understand that it is their responsibility to remove and discard it appropriately.

There is no fee to join this growing pastime nor is there an age limit.

Hogger Jeff and his family — his wife, a.k.a. Boss Hogg and two of his kids, a.k.a. the Piglets — are completely enamoured with this way of discovering landscapes in this area and beyond.

"If you're old enough to use a GPS, you're old enough to do geocaching. It just depends how you get from cache to cache," said Hogger Jeff, adding that he and his crew have found in excess of 280 caches in the last year and a half and have hidden 13 so far.

Some geocachers have found but a handful of caches, whereas others have travelled extensively, to



The geocaching tools of the trade, including GPS units, a Black Berry, identity badges and logbooks.

extreme locations and have thousands of finds and hides to their credit.

He has discovered that geocaching is a great family activity that appeals to his wife and his 13-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter.

"They enjoy going out and it's a way for us to do things together. I also have a 25 year old son in Winnipeg that I've got into it and he and his girlfriend have really embraced it," said Hogger Jeff. "What we really like about it is when we travel, we go to places that we're not familiar with. There will be geocaches there and it allows us to see where cachers in different cities will place their little treasures and it gets you to places that you normally wouldn't see as a normal tourist."

For instance, his son found a virtual cache while visiting New York: Instead of finding a treasure in the cache, there were co-ordinates within the container, which sent him up to the Empire State Building and he had to record what he saw from the observation deck.

Next Saturday, for the first

time in this part of the world, Brandon and area geocachers are invited to participate in an event that has become a global trend — a flash mob.

A concept developed by a New Yorker in 2003, the flash mob started out with a handful of people to whom he had sent e-mail messages and requested they gather at a specific spot, at a specific time, do something unusual, but only for a very brief duration.

This growing trend has no underlying dangerous motive: It is simply an invitation for people to assemble, who are then instructed to proceed with a united goal, then, just as quickly, disperse.

Adopting the flash mob concept, geocachers around the globe have been gathering in up to 83 locations for WWFM (world-wide flash mob.)

Last Nov. 10, more than 4,300 geocachers around the globe were involved in the

second of these WWFMs.

On May 10, Brandon will be put on the WWFM map as the geocachers here gather, hang out together for 15 minutes, then go their own way.

"In the span of that time, there's going to be a couple of draws. You have to sign a log sheet and drop it in a bin to prove you were there, then, there's a picture taken. All of the pictures, from flash mobs all over the world, are put together and find out how many attended in that 15 minutes span," said Moses FLF.

This event will count as one find on the participants' online records.

Though this local rush mob event is designed for registered geocachers, individuals interested in learning more about this pastime will be welcome and information will be handed out.

"It's not a secret or exclusive group," said Hogger Jeff, who organized the local edition of WWFM III.

Geocachers who are registered on geocaching.com can gather information about caches in their area or along the routes they plan to take while holidaying, log in the caches they have found, give details about those they have hidden, and find out about geocaching events like picnics, meetings and now, flash mobs.

The main costs of geocaching are the GPS units, which are now relatively inexpensive — \$100 units can guide travellers and geocachers within four to 10 metres of their destination — and gas if a cache is outside the city limits.

Details about geocaching in Manitoba are available at mbgeocaching.ca.

» jvilleneuve@brandonsun.com



Hogger Jeff and his crew find a more difficult cache cleverly hidden on a string inside a field marker. He, his wife Boss Hogg and his kids, the Piglets, are all involved in these high-tech scavenger hunts. (Bruce Bumstead/Brandon Sun)

In Brief

MUSEUM OPENING AT THE SITE OF WOODSTOCK CONCERT

BETHEL, N.Y. — A new museum is opening June 2 at the site of the 1969 Woodstock concert.

The Museum at Bethel Woods, located about 90 minutes north of New York City, will offer exhibits, personal stories, multimedia experiences and programs about the 1960s focusing on everything from music and fashion to political protest.

The original three-day festival epitomized the era's "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" counterculture while drawing 400,000 people to hear Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Joni Mitchell, the Who and many other performers.

The Museum at Bethel Woods is part of the larger Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, an outdoor performing arts centre and complex with an eclectic concert series and other events. Performers scheduled for this summer include the "True Colors" show with Cyndi Lauper and the B-52s, Ringo Starr, the New York Philharmonic, Donna Summer, the Klezmatics, the Boston Pops and many others.

Tickets for the museum are on sale now from <http://www.BethelWoodsCenter.org> or Ticketmaster at 845-454-3388.

» The Associated Press

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