

'Geocaching' becoming popular among GPS owners

By Leif Isfeld,
Summer Reporter

"It's the most fun you can have using 30 billion dollars worth of military hardware without blowing anything up"

When The Pas resident Ray Young bought a hand-held GPS this March, he wanted to find different ways to use it. Someone referred him to the website "geocaching.com" and he's been hooked on geocaching ever since.

Geocaching is essentially a modern-day, technology-driven treasure hunt very similar to "letterboxing."

You are given a set of coordinates and other information about a hidden cache on the internet. You plug the coordinates into your hand-held GPS and use it to

guide you to within roughly 20 feet of the cache; usually a small, hidden container. You then search the area to find it.

Geocaching has only been around since 2000, when the U.S. Government officially removed "selective availability" from the Global Positioning System satellites. This allowed civilian GPS units to be far more accurate than they had been before.

The stage was set for the beginning of geocaching. Within days, a GPS enthusiast hid a container in the backcountry of Oregon then posted the coordinates on the internet encouraging others to "go find it!"

Since 2000, the hobby has taken advantage of the internet to gather an international

following. There are said to be hundreds of thousands of geocaches the world. In Manitoba there are now more than 800 geocaches.

Thanks, in large part to Ray Young, there are currently 29 geocaches in and around The Pas to find; three of which have yet to be found by anyone.

"It's addicting," said Young, "It's the most fun you can have using 30 billion dollars worth of military hardware without blowing anything up."

Part of the hobby's appeal is that once you find the cache, you take something, leave something and sign a logbook that's kept inside to prove you were there.

The major problem facing a cache are people known as "geo-muggles" or just muggles, a term taken from the Harry Potter series for those who don't know magic.

"The big thing is when I hide something, the average person seeing one of these walking by, we call them muggles; what they do is have a tendency to destroy it or steal it. So the objective is to have the cache in the open, but keep the muggles from ruining it."

Like many other geocachers, Young has begun to plan his trips around geocaching.

"The search takes you places you'd never think of going. Guys are hiding them in interesting places."

Some geocaches in northern Manitoba are accessible only by snowmobile or boat. There's even one accessible only by flying in or by winter road at St. Theresa's Point.

Young has already been to events where geocachers gather to socialize and, of course, search for caches.

In fact, Young put on an event in The Pas this past weekend. He expects more events might even draw some of the tourists that come through town.

With a seemingly infinite number of caches to find in all sorts of interesting places, it's understandable how geocaching could be come an obsessive hobby.

"Be careful if you start," Young warned, "Because you won't be able to stop."

Some examples of containers used as caches.

Ray Young searches for a "geocache" with his hand-held GPS, while other geocaching enthusiasts look on.



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Public Notice for Canadian Producers

Cover Crop Protection Program (CCPP) now accepting applications for 2005 and 2006

Agricultural producers who were unable to seed commercial crops in the spring of 2005 and/or the spring of 2006 due to flooding and excessive moisture may be eligible for federal assistance through the CCPP. Coverage will be provided to all eligible producers, regardless of whether they are covered under production insurance.

In 2007, the CCPP will begin operating as part of a long-term solution to spring flooding across the country and will only be available to producers enrolled in production insurance. In the interim, assistance is available to help offset the costs of restoring and protecting agricultural soil damaged by excessive moisture.

The deadline for 2005 and 2006 claims is August 31, 2006.

Eligibility

Applicants:

- Canadian agricultural producers or entities who were unable to seed commercial crops in the spring of 2005 and/or the spring of 2006 due to flooding and excessive moisture.

Land size:

- All affected acreage in excess of 10 acres (four hectares) will be eligible for program payments.

Payments

Eligible applicants will receive \$15 an acre.

CCPP application forms will be directly mailed to production insurance clients who made claims concerning field flooding in 2005 and/or 2006. Applications are also available upon request by calling Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada at 1 800 667-8567, or by visiting the web site at www.agr.gc.ca

