

Engage in Modern Treasure Hunts With Your Smartphone

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Credit: Dreamstime

Who doesn't like a good treasure hunt? There is a modern day version of the treasure hunt called "geocaching." Someone hides something, provides a few clues online, and then others seek out the item. You can even keep the treasure and leave your own treasure behind, but geocaching is more about the hunt than the end reward.

To start on your adventure, visit the [Geocaching website](#). Here you can learn about what geocaching is all about, etiquette, resources, etc. No matter where you live in the world, there is likely a geocache within a reasonable distance. As of summer 2011, there are currently over 1,430,000 active geocaches!

There are many ways to locate a cache nearby, so you can choose the method that best matches your level of experience and allows you to best enjoy the hunt. If you've got a mobile phone, it may be the best tool you can use to assist you on your first hunt.

Your First Geocache

There are many geocaching related apps available for [smart phones](#). On an Android phone, a free 'unofficial' app called c:geo connects to the [geocaching.com](#) website, making it easy to get a list of nearby geocaches, as well as providing tools to help you locate it.

In the c:geo app, selecting the "Nearby" button creates a list of geocaches within range of your current location, based on your phone's GPS coordinates. In some areas, there may be more than 20 geocaches within a few miles! Choosing one nearby, the app gives you extensive info about it, including:

- The size of the cache
- Has it ever been found by anyone else
- The difficulty rating for finding it
- When was it hidden
- What are its coordinates
- Some clues of nearby markers
- An inventory of its contents
- A logbook of others that looked for/found it

If you want a challenge, you can simply start with the coordinates and an old-school method of finding them, or you can opt to use a tool like the c:geo app to help find it. c:geo gives you an on-screen compass that points you in the direction you should be headed, tells you your distance from the cache, and displays the coordinates of where you are and where you need to be.

Found It!

Despite the ease of the tool, it can still be a challenge locating a geocache. The difficulty rating gives you an idea of what to expect, so if you're going with a child you may want to start with an easy one.

The one I went after had a difficulty of 1.5 on a scale of 5, so fairly simple. It was in a wooded area, which may have affected the accuracy of the [GPS readings](#) I was getting. I hunted around a number of trees, digging through brush, and finally, after 20 minutes or so in the immediate area, found the cache. It was a camouflaged Tupperware container, about 6"x6"x2", with a number of trinkets and a logbook and pencil inside to add your name and the date you found it. The one I found had a toy car, simple jewelry, plastic action figures, etc. You can take something from the cache if you like, as long as you leave something of equal or greater value. I left behind a child's necklace, won at a fair, and took only the experience of finding it. I'll definitely be looking for more - next time with increased level of difficulty!