

# Guide to Finding a Cache

## Step 1 – Researching the Cache

Before leaving home research the area you are headed to. Keep in mind that distances can be deceiving. When you're using your GPS unit to find a cache, the unit only knows how close the site is as the crow flies (a direct line). You may be a mile from the cache, but there may be a river to be crossed and you need to locate the nearest bridge or to get to a cache on a mountaintop you may involve 3 miles of switchbacks, – you get the picture. Because of these situations, it is best to have a good map that includes topography with you.

1. Buy a map of the area from [e-TrailMaps.com](http://e-TrailMaps.com) for those caches that are not on a trail or close to a road. Topographical maps (which show features of the land like hills, streams and steep terrain) are best, so you can get a good idea of the terrain you'll be crossing. You'll also know whether to bring your Honda Civic or rent a Land Rover.
2. For car geocaches (ones you can drive to and walk a short distance), use MapBlast. Geocaching.com provides you with a link to MapBlast so you can get directions to that location. Make sure to zoom in on the location to make sure it's near a road. MapBlast can only get you so far!
3. If you have a good knowledge of the area, you can navigate only using the GPS unit. This is best when the area is small. This is also the most challenging, but is not recommended for your first hunt.

You'll most likely need to do all three things to prepare and reach the geocache, though our experience has shown different combinations for each cache. I'd always start with one of the online map sites first to get an idea of the area, then decide on whether you need to buy a map or use what you have.

If it is your first time, it's also OK to read the stash notes, look at a picture of the cache, or read other people's experiences finding the cache on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). Some caches may be visible from 20 feet away, while others, in more trafficked areas, may be buried under some rocks (or in one case, in a World War II bunker!). Getting within a mile or two of the site isn't usually too difficult – it's the last mile that'll get you every time.

## Step 2 – Preparation

Preparation is key for any kind of outdoor activity, but you can never stress enough how important good preparation is and to follow safety rules. Keep these tips in mind when searching for a cache:

1. Have a buddy with you! Never go off into the woods or remote locations without a partner, especially when Geocaching. (We don't want you focusing on your GPS unit and walk off a cliff). It's great fun, so think about planning a camping trip around the stash hunt with your family or friends.
2. Many of the caches are off-trail, so make sure to be aware of your surroundings. If you're concentrating on your GPS unit, look around you occasionally for holes, bears, unseen trails, cliffs, etc.

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3. Bring plenty of drinking water and keep yourself hydrated. Do not drink directly from a stream! For some of the more difficult or lengthy trips, bring a water filtration system. You can get them at most camping stores. Bring food depending upon the length of the hike.
4. Let someone know where you are going and when you are coming back. See Trail Safety information elsewhere on this website.

### Step 3 – The Hunt

Now you're ready for the hunt.

1. It should be pretty straightforward to get within a mile or so from the cache (unless it's deep off-trail). If you've done your initial research, follow the map more than the GPS unit (although we keep ours on the whole time).
2. If you're using USFS roads (US Forestry Service) as reference points, the signs for each road can be pretty small in size. Instead of horizontal street signs, they're vertical brown signs that have white writing running vertically. Usually they're close to the ground. Sometimes they may be difficult to read.
3. It's always good to have a compass on hand if your GPS unit doesn't have one.
4. When you leave your car, mark its location as a waypoint! This sounds silly, but once you get deep into the cache hunt, it's easy to get disoriented. We've learned this from experience!
5. When you get close to the geocache (within 300 feet, which is the length of a football field), make sure to check your GPS unit signal. Sometimes the signal will have an error between 25-200 feet depending on the accuracy of your GPS unit and the strength of the signal. As you get closer to the site, don't concentrate as much on the directional arrow in your GPS unit as the distance to the cache waypoint (as shown on your GPS unit) as it decreases.
6. For the last 30 feet, use your GPS to direct your buddy in the direction of the cache. In some cases we've had good luck circling the site with the GPS unit to find a good area to search.
7. The final few feet is the hardest. It helps to think like the person who hid the cache. If there are stumps around, investigate around its base. Check in between rocks or under low hanging tree branches, etc. Some stashes, especially in high traffic areas, are pretty ingeniously hidden, so it helps to know what type of container is being used.

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## Step 4 – The Find

Huzzah! You found the cache! Congratulations! Now what?

1. Usually you take an item from the cache and leave an item in return. Enter your name, the date and the experience you had into the log book. Some people prefer to just enter their name into the log book.
2. Make sure to seal the cache and place it back where you found it. If it had some rocks covering it, please replace them. It's pretty straightforward.
3. Remember that waypoint we suggested you create where your car/trail was located? Use that now to get back! You'll be glad you had it. Use the GPS unit to locate the waypoint you created when you started and follow it or backtrack using the track your GPS unit created to locate the cache. Either method will work.
4. When you get home, e-mail the person who hid the cache and let them know you found it! They're always happy to know the condition of their cache and to know that people are seeking out their geocache.

Great work! After several trips to geocaches in your area, you'll be ready to place your own. Welcome to the exciting world of Geocaching!

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