

## 'Geocaching' in group fieldwork

**Prof. Brian Walley**, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queens University, Belfast. BT7 1NN. email: [b.whalley@qub.ac.uk](mailto:b.whalley@qub.ac.uk)

**Level** Any **Group size** Any (sub-groups of 2-4)

### Technology requirements

Sufficient GPS instruments to provide one between 4 (ideally). Serial/USB lead to link to computer to upload the waypoint co-ordinates.

### Skills required

Knowledge of basic GPS functions.

### Rationale

'Geocaching' is the activity of using a GPS to find 'treasure' at a location. Small groups of students locate the 'treasure', and carry out an activity at that location. The treasure may be a geographical feature or landscape view. The essence is a self-guided field trip with minimum staff interventions. It is possible to visit groups at random to make sure they are observing the right things as necessary.

### Teaching method

In this activity, a GPS instrument is given to each group. Each will have the pre-entered GPS locations of 'waypoints' that you want the students to visit. Depending upon the nature of the activity, the points can be in a set order or they can be visited in a random order. The small groups, navigate to the points and make observations, draw or sketch the 'treasure' there. This can be discussed in groups in the field as well as post-trip. The treasure found can be integrated with other finds or be the product at a few sites. The information/treasure can be relocated (and shared) in a report, poster or as part of a further exercise.

### Benefits

A large group (perhaps a coach load of 50) can be distributed over a field area and work independently. Students learn about how to use a GPS instrument and what 'waypoints' and co-ordinate schemes are. They also learn about the specific features of interest at the field site. Individual and group active involvement and discussion produces a result rather than a set of notes they copy down for not much purpose. If a student misses a field trip (say, through illness) they can repeat the activity on their own (location permitting).

### Pitfalls

Instruction on the use of GPS instruments before students get to the field site is advised. Waypoint co-ordinates should be loaded in advance and it should be ensured that they are there for subsequent use (as they may have inadvertently been erased).

Comment [WM1]: Why?

### Evidence of effectiveness

Students improve their GPS skills, which are surprisingly poor. Peer instruction and enhanced teamworking is evident. Students are required to actively engage in the field visit.

**Advice to others**

It might be necessary to build group/teamwork activities into the teaching programme - do not expect students to work as a team from the beginning. Use the final assessment activity to check on the visits and make sure students know this will be done. Link the whole activity into a purposeful end product or assessment.

**References**

The Geocaching Association of Great Britain : <http://www.gagb.org.uk>  
Geocache UK: <http://www.geocacheuk.com>