

The Geocaching Experience

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Young people! They think of everything! When I explained this month's Knoxville Parent theme, my intern's eyes (Chelsea Craig) lit up as she came up with what turned out to be an even better idea than my own. But I thought I should first "experience" her idea, this new (to me) phenomenon called "Geocaching [jee-oh-kash-ing]." It was only a two-block walk from my office, but boy what a "rush!" Read more about it below in Chelsea's first publication! I think families everywhere will love this exciting and adventurous way to "get moving!"

It's time to get your family outside and on the move as springtime has finally arrived! Geocaching is an activity that your entire family can enjoy.

"Geocaching is a real-world, outdoor treasure hunting game using GPS (Global Positioning System)-enabled devices."¹ Using the GPS or smartphone as a treasure map, geocachers navigate to a set of coordinates and look for a hidden container (geocache). After creating an account with geocaching.com, families can locate caches hidden all over Knoxville!

Geocaches often contain trinkets like coins or small figurines that seekers can take and then replace. The caches also contain dated logs of signatures and messages from previous finders. It can be a very surreal feeling discovering signatures from 2001 on an entry log that includes signatures from 2013. What a thrill to realize that someone else found the same treasure box in the same spot twelve years ago!



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Not only does geocaching give families opportunities to get a bit of fresh air and exercise, it also provides a chance to explore parts of Knoxville they've never seen. Geocaches are often placed in locations of historical significance. They allow families to learn about the city in which they live. A couple of Knoxville users called "Ol' Fogies" have created a

series of caches around the city entitled “Discover Knoxville.” The aim of the series is to help highlight sites in Knoxville and Knox County that bear cultural and historical significance.

In March, I visited Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. While I was intrigued by the numerous tourist attractions including zip-lining stands, mirror mazes, challenging miniature golf courses, and fudge shops (yummy), what I really wanted to do is get into the mountains and enjoy the natural beauty. I went to the geocaching website, found three sites and set out to find them. Usually, when I drive through the mountains, I rarely leave the main road. But while geocaching, I was able to find several beautiful places I would never have seen otherwise. In one spot, I found a cache that was 10 years old! The list of signatures of others who also found the cache was lengthy.

To get your family’s geocaching adventures started, first visit geocaching.com. Simply create an account and review the email you will receive once you sign up, as it explains everything and even includes two short videos. Return to the main geocaching website and log in. Enter the address of the area you wish to search for geocaches and follow the directions. It’s that easy.

Whether you are looking for a brief stroll or a climbing adventure, geocaching is the fun way to go. Each geocache is sorted by level of difficulty and terrain, so you can choose an adventure based on your family’s desires. Geocaches are always available, any hour of the day, any day of the week. So what are you waiting for?

PS: Chelsea and I actually found a geocache on the corner of Gay Street and Cumberland Avenue during my first geocaching experience! We opened the container, signed the long list, removed our “treasure” and left a shiny penny in its place and replaced the geocache. Maybe your family will be the first to find it. Good luck on your geocaching adventures!

