



Communication Protocol:
GEOCACHING
A Guide from Geocaching.com and
Groundspeak for Parks and Law Enforcement



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What is Geocaching?

Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices. The basic idea is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, outdoors and then share your experiences online. Anyone can use coordinates found on Geocaching.com to locate geocaches.

Geocaching encourages healthy lifestyles, exercise and outdoor appreciation through technology. Many communities and parks host geocaching programs and have seen visitation increase as a result of such programs.

Geocachers are of all age groups and pursue their hobby with a strong sense of community and support for the environment. The geocache listing guidelines published at [Geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) state that geocaches should be placed with adequate permission, be labeled as a geocache, remain family-friendly and should not be buried, among other requirements. A volunteer reviews each cache listing before it is published on the site. We recommend getting to know your local Reviewer, with whom we can connect you. Our team of Reviewers is very knowledgeable and can assist you should an issue arise.

You can review the complete guidelines at <http://www.geocaching.com/about/guidelines.aspx>.

Document Intent

With the growing popularity of Geocaching, it is important to ensure that you are familiar with the activity and understand how to proceed if issues arise. This document outlines the suggested steps and directions to:

- I. Identify Currently Placed Geocaches
- II. Receive Updates on New Caches in Your Area Using Pocket Queries
- III. Remove a Geocache
- IV. Contact a Geocache Owner
- V. Post a Note to Indicate a Disabled Geocache
- VI. Contact Groundspeak

Groundspeak is the company that owns and operates www.geocaching.com. Please be aware that other websites also list geocaches. This document refers only to geocaches listed on www.geocaching.com.



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I. Identify Currently Placed Geocaches

To determine if an object you have found is a geocache listed on Geocaching.com:

1. If you do not already have an account, create one for free at www.geocaching.com/Membership. You will need to create a username and password. The process is simple and requires only a valid email address to begin. Since your username will be visible to the community, we suggest you choose one that is associated with your agency or office, rather than your actual name. Example: Seattle Police 827. You can then put relevant information on your profile page.*
2. Log in to www.geocaching.com.
3. Search for geocaches from the homepage or go directly to <http://www.geocaching.com/seek>.

There are several ways to search for a geocache, including by:

- Address (this will find the caches nearest to the street address entered)
 - Postal Code
 - State (United States Only)
 - Country
 - Coordinates (this will be the most accurate search)
 - Keyword (a word found in the cache name)
 - Area Code (United States Only)
 - GC Code (a unique serial number assigned to a specific geocache for identification purposes; it looks like this: GCXXXX)
 - Found by Username
 - Hidden by Username
4. Enter the known information in one of the above listed options and click "Go" or "Search." Please enter information into only one field.
 5. View the Results page. Your search will take you to a results page that lists all geocaches in the specified area and nearby vicinity. To view the results on a map, click the "Map It" icon in the upper right corner of the page. All geocaches within the map area are represented by an icon. You can drag the map around or use the zoom function in the upper left corner of the map to expand your search area. Park boundaries are embedded in the map in green so that park personnel can easily see whether a geocache falls within their recreational area.
 6. Click on a geocache icon on the map to see information including geocache name, GC Code, and creator username. Click on the geocache name to view the page associated with that geocache; this page includes the exact coordinates and full description of the geocache.

If you are a parks representative, speak to your co-workers. If you are law enforcement officer, speak to the landowner or land manager. Was permission provided to place a geocache at the identified location? If so, great. If not, you can contact the cache owner to discuss the placement (see section IV) or remove the cache by following the directions in section III.

* A sample profile page for parks departments can be found at coord.info/PR3H3RW. A sample profile page for law enforcement can be found at coord.info/PR3H3ZH. You need to be logged in to Geocaching.com to view these pages. Screenshots are also attached as an appendix.

This document was last updated in September, 2011.



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II. Receive Updates on New Caches in Your Area Using Pocket Queries

Pocket Queries are a feature used by Premium Members of Geocaching.com. They can help you remain up-to-date on caches in your park or precinct. This is an optional method you can use to monitor your area.

Groundspeak will provide a complimentary Premium Membership for parks and law enforcement personnel. To obtain a Premium Membership, create a free Basic account on Geocaching.com and send your username and employment credentials from your work email to contact@groundspeak.com. Then follow the steps below.

1. Visit Geocaching.com and log in with your username and password.
2. Select "Pocket Queries" under the "Your Profile" tab in the navigation.
3. Click on "Create a new Query".
4. Enter a name for the Query so it is easy to identify.
5. Choose which day of the week you'd like to have the Query emailed to you. You will not receive an email with the results if a day of the week is not selected.
6. Select how often you would like the Query to run.
7. Enter the number of caches you'd like to receive – up to 500.
8. Keep "Any Type" and "Any Container" selected to ensure you get all geocache listings.
9. Under "That," select "Is Active" and leave all other boxes unchecked.
10. Keep the Difficulty and Terrain rating unchecked in order to receive all listings.
11. Scroll down to "Origin" and select the option that will offer the best center point for the area you'd like to search. Inputting coordinates for the center point will provide the most accurate results.
12. Enter the radius around the center point that you would like to search.
13. Leave the "Placed During" options unchecked for maximum results.
14. Leave all attributes unchecked.
15. Under "In the format," you'll have the choice of either the GPX or the LOC results. GPX results will offer more information on the cache listing, including hints and logs. If you'd prefer to receive only the coordinates to the cache location, select TopoGrafix LOC Format from the drop-down menu.
16. Click "Submit Information".

How to download the Pocket Query results to your GPS:

Pocket Query results sent to your email will be in a zip file that contains two GPX exchange files.

1. Save the zipped GPX exchange file to your computer.
2. Download EasyGPS or another software application that manages GPX files at <http://www.geocaching.com/waypoints/default.aspx>.
3. Open the GPX files from EasyGPS or a comparable software application.

You can view cache listings in EasyGPS, click on the GC Code in the cache description to be taken to the cache listing on Geocaching.com, or send the results directly to your GPS when it is plugged into your computer.

If you have any trouble with this feature, please feel free to contact our U.S. office at (+1) 206.302.7721 or contact@groundspeak.com.



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III. Steps to Remove a Geocache

IMPORTANT: If you determine that a geocache placement is inappropriately or illegally placed, please take the following steps to remove it and ensure that geocachers will not continue to seek it:

1. Send a message to the Cache Owner on Geocaching.com to let them know that they must remove the geocache in a timely fashion. If you have already physically removed the geocache, it is important to communicate the removal of the geocache to the Cache Owner (see section IV).
2. Notify Groundspeak, the parent company of Geocaching.com, via the contact information at the end of this document. In your correspondence include the geocache name, GC Code (GC****) or any information you can provide to assist us in identifying the specific geocache. We can then find the geocache listing and determine whether it needs to be permanently removed from the site.
3. To ensure that other geocachers will not actively search for the geocache in the interim period before it is removed or archived, post a note on the geocache listing stating that it has been physically removed. Section V provides instructions on doing this.

If you have any trouble with this feature, please feel free to contact our U.S. office at (+1) 206.302.7721 or contact@groundspeak.com.

IV. Contact a Geocache Owner

Geocache placement guidelines require a Cache Owner to maintain his or her geocache. If you remove a geocache without communicating your action to the Cache Owner, he or she will believe that the geocache has accidentally been removed and will likely place another geocache in the same location.

To ensure open communication and understanding, please email the Cache Owner and state the specific reason for the removal of the geocache. We also suggest that you provide contact information in case the geocacher has additional questions or concerns. Geocaches often contain items of sentimental value for geocachers, so you may want to retain any items found in a geocache. The owner will appreciate the opportunity to reclaim items, especially the logbooks.

To Contact a Geocacher:

1. Log in to Geocaching.com with your username and password.
2. Go to the geocache listing page for the applicable cache.
3. At the top of this page, click on the cache owner's username – next to "cache by."
4. You will be directed to the owner's profile page, where there is a "Send Message" link. Click on the link, enter a message in the box provided and click "Send Message".

If you have any trouble with this feature, please feel free to contact our U.S. office at (+1) 206.302.7721 or contact@groundspeak.com.



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V. Post a Note to Indicate That You Have Acted On a Geocache

To Post a Note:

1. Log in to Geocaching.com.
2. Go to the geocache detail page for the applicable cache.
3. In the top-right corner of the page, click "log your visit."
4. From the "Type of log" drop-down menu, select "Write note."
5. Enter the date that you asked Groundspeak to remove the geocache listing from the website.
6. Enter a note stating that you have physically removed the geocache and a brief explanation of why it was inappropriate so that others do not repeat the mistake.
7. Click "Submit log entry".
8. The text you write will be sent to the Cache Owner and any geocachers who are subscribed to this cache page. Your message will also appear on the cache page.

If you have any trouble with this feature, please feel free to contact our U.S. office at (+1) 206.302.7721 or contact@groundspeak.com.

VI. Contact Groundspeak

When contacting Groundspeak about an inappropriately placed geocache, please include the geocache name, GC Code (GCXXXX) or any information that you can provide to assist us in identifying the correct geocache.

Email contact@groundspeak.com or call our U.S. office at +1.206.302.7721. We are open during regular business hours, Pacific Standard Time.

Groundspeak Inc.
837 N 34th St , Suite 300
Seattle, WA 98103



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Appendix A: Sample Profile Page for Parks Departments

<http://bit.ly/5k0yZs>

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Hello, **PQMaster** (Sign Out)
😊 1
Get a Premium Membership!

Geocaching > User Profile

Profile for User: Sample State Parks

Profile Geocaches Trackables Souvenirs Gallery Lists Statistics

🇺🇸 Sample State Parks

Member Since: Monday, 14 December 2009

Last Visit: Thursday, 10 March 2011

Status: Premium Member
[\(Give a Gift Membership\)](#)

E-Mail Address: [Send Message](#)

Home Page: [Visit Homepage](#)

Occupation: Conservations and Education Agent

Location: mostly outdoors

Forum Title: Conservations and Education Agent
[See the Forum Posts for This User](#)

Pennsylvania Conservation Agent

Profile Information:

[Note: This is a **sample** profile page for parks departments.]

The Sample State Parks Department welcomes geocachers to its parks. A full list of the state parks in Sample can be found at [www.YourWebsiteHere.com](#). All caches placed in our parks must adhere to the [Geocaching.com requirements and guidelines](#). We have developed our own specific process for obtaining permission to place a new cache in our parks. You can find the process outlined in detail at [www.YourWebsiteHere.com/geocaching](#). Check out our Bookmark Lists for some of the great caches available in our parks. See the Lists tab at the top of this page.

The sample geocaching policy below has been taken largely from **Pennsylvania's State Parks/Forestry Geocaching Guidelines**:

The [Geocache Identification Form](#) (Word doc download) is an application for registration and placement of a geocache on lands administered by the DCNR - Bureau of State Parks and Bureau of Forestry. You must present the form in person to the State Park or State Forest office where you'd like to place the geocache. The geocache site location is subject to review by the Park Manager/District Forester or designee.

The following guidelines apply to all geocaches on State Park and State Forest lands:

- Placement of geocaches on lands administered by the DCNR - Bureau of State Parks / Bureau of Forestry requires authorization of the Park Manager / District Forester or designee. This authorization will be considered through a review process, including a Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory search (PNDI) that insures its location is compatible with other park and forest activities.
- A geocache contact person responsible for necessary upkeep of the site must be identified prior to approval by the Park Manager / District Forester or designee.
- There should be no earth disturbance or vegetative impact to any approved site.
- The cache should not be readily discernible by the general public.
- All cache seekers and cache owners must abide by park/forestry hours and all other park/forestry rules and

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Appendix B: Sample Profile Page for Law Enforcement

<http://bit.ly/6O0x4L>

GEOCACHING

Hello, **POMaster** (Sign Out)
 🗿 1
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[Geocaching](#) > User Profile

Profile for User: Sample Police Dept 827

Profile
Geocaches
Trackables
Souvenirs
Gallery
Lists
Statistics

📍 Sample Police Dept 827

Member Since: Monday, 14 December 2009

Last Visit: Wednesday, 16 December 2009

Status: Member
[\(Give a Gift Membership\)](#)

E-Mail Address: [Send Message](#)

Home Page: [Visit Homepage](#)

Occupation: Police Department

Location: South Precinct

Forum Title: [See the Forum Posts for This User](#)

Sample Badge

Profile Information:
 [Note: This is a **sample** profile page for law enforcement.]

Hello Geocachers,

Police Department 827 welcomes responsible geocaching. We understand that geocaching is becoming an increasingly popular hobby. Along with Groundspeak, we would like to remind geocachers that they should not place caches in areas that might cause unnecessary concern. We do not have permission forms or give approvals for cache placements, but if you have any other questions, you can reach us at ###-###-####.

Police Department 827 covers the entire southern half of Sample County, from the lake shore on the west and to the county line in the east. This area is further subdivided into smaller regions designated as O, R and S on this sample map. When there is a question, it helps to let the police officers know where your geocache is located.

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