

Explore the State Parks with Your GPS



Minnesota State Parks have rolled out a new geocaching adventure, after introducing a geocaching program that was a big hit with park visitors. Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunt, where participants use hand-held GPS devices to track down a stash hidden in a weatherproof, camouflaged box at a location designated by latitude and longitude.

Since this activity has grown so popular, Minnesota State Parks decided to add geocaching to the many outdoor recreation activities available in the parks. The park geocache program is designed especially to appeal to kids and their families.

Almost 20,000 geocache finds were recorded in state parks during the 2008 Geocaching Challenge. In 2009, the program had a wildlife theme. For the Geocaching Wildlife Safari, the "critter caches" in all the parks feature collectible cards, each with information on a mammal, insect, fish, reptile or amphibian that lives in the park or did in the past. A cache may occasionally include a "wild card," offering the finder a special reward.

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All state parks are part of the Geocaching Wildlife Safari, but 24 of them across the state are demonstration parks, where GPS units are available to be checked out free of charge. These parks also offer some "Geocaching 101" how-to programs to get people started in this activity.

Many of the parks have multi-caches, where participants find multiple boxes, the first ones offering quick quizzes or puzzles and the coordinates for the next cache on the route. All of the routes are fairly easy hikes, and are designed to lead people to interesting places in the parks.



The Origins of Geocaching

Geocaching, first coined by Matt Stum on the “GPS Stash Hunt” mailing list on May 30, 2000, was the joining of two familiar words. The prefix geo, for Earth, was used to describe the global nature of the activity, but also for its use in familiar topics in GPS such as geography. Caching, from the word cache, has two different meanings. A French word invented in 1797, the original definition referred to a hiding place someone would use to temporarily store items. The second use of cache has more recently been used in technology. Memory cache is computer storage that is used to quickly retrieve frequently used information. The combination of Earth, hiding, and technology made geocaching an excellent term for the activity.

Geocaching.com

By **Explore Minnesota Tourism**

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