



Geocaching in the Mat-Su Valley

Geocaching was born on May 3rd, 2000; the day after the GPS system was made available for public use. A guy named Dave Ulmer hid a bucket in the woods south of Portland, Oregon filled with odds and ends, including a can of beans. He posted the coordinates on a usenet group and challenged people to go find his “stash” and sign the log book.

Ten years later Geocaching has spread around the globe with over one million caches with an estimated three to four million “cachers.” The MatSu Valley is home to over 400 active caches, with more being hidden all the time.

From that first 5 gallon bucket, today caches come in all sizes. A “nano” cache can be as small as the tip of your pinky finger, a “micro” might be the size of a chapstick container, a small might be the size of a pill bottle. An empty ammo can or a Tupperware container makes a great “regular” size cache. A “large” cache could be just about anything that can be hidden effectively.

Getting started has two very simple components. First, go to www.Geocaching.com and register. A basic membership is free and the premium membership is just \$30 a year. I recommend starting out with the free basic membership at first, and upgrading to the premium features later.

Your second step is getting a GPS if you don’t already have one. For geocaching, you want a hand held type unit, not the kind you’d use in a car for driving directions. Garmin and Magellan are the two most popular options. Your iPhone or other GPS enabled smart phone will work too. You can spend as little as a \$100 on a good unit. Or if you like a few more bells and whistles, you can spend \$200 to \$400.

Now you are ready to go geocaching. You can search for nearby caches on the Geocaching.com website and view the cache coordinates, cache description, hints, and the logs of previous finders. Input the coordinates into your GPS, make note of the cache details and head out!

Some caches can be directly driven up to and can even be found by someone who might be mobility impaired. Other caches might require a significant hike. And that’s the beauty of geocaching. There’s something for everyone.

So, why would you go looking for a cache? Some caches are filled with “swag.” That’s what cachers call the trinkets, toys, souvenirs, and other odds and ends you’ll find in a cache. But for most the real goal is not what is in the cache, it’s the thrill of finding something that is hidden to most people. The journey in finding a Geocache is often the greatest reward.

Caching in the MatSu Valley will let you explore areas that may not have know existed. It lets you get out and enjoy this great land we live in. From the Butte to the trail system around the Crevasse Moraine and Long Lake to the Iditarod Headquarters, there’s caches out there to be found.

Geocaching can be done solo but is also a great group and family activity. Are you worried your kids spending too much time in front of the TV? Load up some cache coordinates and head out. We’ve taken out kids as young as three and four years old and they love finding “hidden treasure.”

So, get out and enjoy the Valley! Cache on!

*More information may be found at www.Geocaching.com and www.GeocacheAlaska.org.
You can find Todd Stafford on the hunt, caching as AKStafford.*