CACHE AND CARRY

By Sedona Callahan   Art by David Meikle

THE COMPLETE GUIDE [HARDLY!] TO GEOCACHING

Call Carol Potter a geek, nerd, techie. She doesn't care—as long as you let her try to hook you on her current passion—geocaching.

Potter first read about geocaching, an adventure activity growing in popularity around the world, while living in Michigan. She was intrigued with the

idea, but too busy at the time to pursue it. Fast forward to Leadership Park City's Class XII "ropes course" that included a geocaching component,

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and Potter, a class member, was both excited and frustrated. "We were in groups of six people with one GPS! I barely got to touch it! I went out that very night and bought one! That was the spring board."

Global Positioning System [GPS] is a worldwide radio-navigation system with applications ranging from its original military uses to navigating your car in an unknown city or finding your lost pet. Geocaching is the spin-off game that keeps players fiddling with their beloved GPS units long after their practical applications are completed. Cachers take advantage of GPS units' features and capabilities by setting up "caches" (a hiding place for concealing and preserving provisions) and sharing their locations on Internet geocaching sites. Players then use location coordinates to find the caches.

"Geocaching—The Official Global GPS Cache Hunt Site," found at www.geocaching.com, lists about 250 cache sites in and around Park City.

Potter, director of Mountain Trails Foundation, knows there are 335 miles of trails in Summit County, but she wasn't able to locate them all before buying her GPS unit. "Now I intend to walk every mile of them, hiking the trails and looking for caches."

Potter learned to use her GPS in a Park City Community Education class last fall. The instructors, "Tumbleweed" and "Cactus"—in real life, Tom Kelly and Carol Duh—taught students how to use their GPS units, and then took them on a field trip to locate caches.

"The class inspired me to look into ways to enhance our trail map with GPS coordinates, way points and tracking. This truly combines my two favorite things—hiking and technology! There are a lot of caches on our local trails."

Another class member was motivated to take the geocaching class because of an experience she had hiking in the Uintas. Mary McPheter explained, "We were hiking a trail off the Mirror Lake Highway. Among us we had two GPS units and four hiking books." Yet, even so heavily loaded with trail locator information, the group became, well, not exactly lost. "Let's just say it took a while to locate ourselves. We wondered, if we had to, could we actually use the units to orient the group?"

McPheter and her friends could have used the expertise of Jim Snyder, Park City police officer and former member of Summit County Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team. Snyder said, "I didn't know how GPS worked at first, but the Search and Rescue guys all use these units. On a search, the GPS creates track marks that you transfer to a computer so you can see where you've been. The guys in Search and Rescue are experts in using their GPS units, and they've included geocaching as a way to keep practicing."

Snyder and his family have added geocaching as a primary component of family vacations. "Wherever we go—Moab, Cedar City, St. George—we always stop and look for caches." Some caches, such as ammo boxes buried in the ground, contain prizes for the find-

er. Snyder, who has established a couple of caches in Summit County, (one near Beaver Creek above Kamas), says he places survival items (a compass, a sting kit, or other things that people can place in their backpacks) in his caches. When a cacher takes a prize from a cache, courtesy calls for a replacement item.

Snyder says there are games within games, as well. "Sometimes there's a 'travel bug'—a tagged and registered item, hidden in the cache. The owner has a specific agenda for the bug, such as going to a Colorado Rockies baseball game and returning to Utah." The finder of a travel bug moves the item along to a cache closer to the objective target, until someone who is able carries it to its final destination. "Travel bugs have been moved from Utah caches to some in Alaska and Hawaii," added Snyder.

Snyder and Potter agree that geocaching creates opportunities to explore areas that are off the beaten path, sometimes way off. "My family and I went up to the Rowe Mine cache, up along the south fork of the Weber River. We ended up hiking all day, exploring for hours. We found the cache near the old mine shaft," said Snyder.

Potter added, "People come here from all over. Geocaching draws them into a beautiful place and gives them the opportunity to find a cache as well." ❧

Sedona Callahan still points a wet finger upward to feel the wind direction and orient herself in the wilderness. She has never been lost for very long.

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