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Geocaching in the Humboldt area

By Maggie Anderson

Television. The Internet. Video games. Since its advent, electronic entertainment has quickly become an expensive staple in family life. PlayStation games, at around \$45 for each new release, can eat up both money and family time. For families who enjoy technology, but are looking to get out of the house, however, there is a new option - Geocaching.

Geocaching is the most common name for an updated, high-tech version of an old classic, the scavenger hunt. Using a handheld Global Positioning System unit, or GPS, Geocachers hide and hunt for secret treasures all around the world. The game is coordinated from a website, www.geocaching.com. Here, caches are listed by longitude and latitude coordinates that allow players to use their GPS units to navigate from one location to the next.

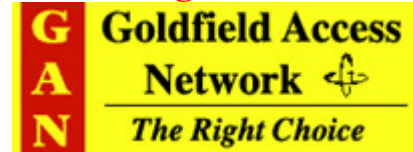
According to the website, the first ever Geocache was hidden on May 3, 2000, outside of Portland, OR. At this time, there are 185,644 active caches in 216 countries around the world.

Users can search for caches by area on the website. There are 32 active caches within a 25-mile radius of Humboldt. Nine of these caches are operated by "SoyGuy," also known as Luke Longlet, a Humboldt resident.

Longlet said he takes pleasure in Geocaching as an outdoor family adventure. "Families can enjoy doing it together and it can get the kids away from the TV," Longlet said. Also, Geocaching is inexpensive. A GPS unit can be purchased for about \$90. The rest of the Geocaching process is free online.

According to Longlet, the caches range in size from the microcache, which is the size of a film canister, to a five gallon bucket. In each cache there is typically a logbook for

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the finder to record the date and the find. There may also be a small “treasure” hidden in the cache for the finder to take. The only rule is that if you take something from the cache, you must leave something behind.

For Longlet, the treasure is not a concern. “The adventure is in finding the cache,” he said. Caches range from simple to extremely complex. Each cache is rated in level of difficulty on the website and has a description from the owner of the cache. An encrypted clue may also be provided, and users who have previously found the cache can post messages on the site.

Caches can be hidden anywhere, from a secluded spot in the forest to a busy street corner. Other caches have clues at different locations leading people to the final prize. One cache's formula involved counting the lights in a Hy-Vee parking lot to get the numbers for the cache coordinates, according to Longlet.

The Longlets ultimately found the cache in a huge hollow tree.

Longlet believes the sport is growing in popularity in this area, as more people become aware of its existence. In fact, a new organization for Iowa Geocachers was created this past year.

The Iowa Geocachers Organization stemmed from the Eastern Iowa Geocaching Association, but was expanded to the entire state in March of this year, according to Board Member Chad Chapman of Clarion.

The Iowa Geocachers website, www.iowageocachers.org, includes forums where members can chat about caches, sell or buy GPS units, and even ask for advice on technical problems. “It's people helping people,” Chapman said. The site also includes lists of favorite caches in Iowa and upcoming events, such as the Geocoffee event scheduled for Aug. 13 in West Point (Iowa).

According to Chapman, one goal of the organization is to increase membership and awareness of the sport through community involvement. “There are a lot of people who don't even know what Geocaching is,” Chapman said. The organization's efforts seem to be working, as membership has increased from 40 to 200 since March of this year.

As knowledge of the sport continues to grow, Chapman hopes that many more people will enjoy Geocaching. “It's a great family activity,” he said.

