Engaging youth in geoscience with Earthcaching

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Abstract

Earthcaching is a unique tool for presenting geoscience to the public in a fun and rewarding way. The program began in 2004 as a collaboration between the Geoscience of Society and America and Geocaching.com. While the game of geocaching involves finding a hidden container using GPS coordinates, Earthcaching requires players to gather information about a location of geological interest. In order to log the Earthcache as "found" on geocaching.com, the player must answer a few questions based on their visit. Over 11,000 Earthcaches have been created in 131 countries and territories. The Earthcaches were developed by over 3000 users and have been visited 1.3 million times. Earthcaches have grown to be an integral part of the geocaching community, yet Earthcache descriptions often contain long introductions full of scientific jargon that discourage non-scientists. The goal should be to maximize their appeal, especially to children who may soon begin a career in science.

Geocaching has reached wide popularity in part because of the excitement of finding a hidden object. The challenge with an Earthcache is maintaining the same level of excitement without the thrill of physically signing a cache logbook. A rewarding view or unusual formation can often serve as the "wow" factor, but something that impresses a trained geologist won't necessarily resonate with the public. Perhaps the best method for appealing to younger age groups is by including a thrill of physically signing a cache logbook. A rewarding view or unusual formation can often serve as "found" on geocaching.com, the player must answer a few questions based on their visit. Over 11,000 Earthcaches have been created in 131 countries and territories. The Earthcaches were developed by over 3000 users and have been visited 1.3 million times. Earthcaches have grown to be an integral part of the geocaching community, yet Earthcache descriptions often contain long introductions full of scientific jargon that discourage non-scientists. The goal should be to maximize their appeal, especially to children who may soon begin a career in science.

Figure 1: Map of current Earthcache locations in the lower 48 States and surrounding areas.