

COMMUNITY

Searching for a treasure

Geocaching an adventurer's hobby

By Ryan Bolton
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

They can be found under rocks, beneath the sprawling branches of a maple tree and even under bridges. People traverse across the globe to search for them using only their global positioning systems (GPS) and the co-ordinates of the listed treasure. They sift, hike and explore until they find their coveted booty: a geocache.

It's a hobby that has recently enamoured Milton resident Peter Near and his family, and many more like him in Halton.

"You find a lot of new things that you didn't know existed," he said. "In Milton, for example, there are all kinds of trails out there that aren't a part of the Bruce Trail, necessarily, just trails put out there by Conservation Halton that I didn't even know existed before."

Geocaching is the adventurer's hobby of choice as a giant outdoor treasure hunt. Across 100 countries and all seven continents, enthusiasts hide geocaches — usually consisting of a waterproof box with a pencil and log book and sometimes dollar store trinkets, like stickers — and post its co-ordinates on websites like geocaching.com for other enthusiasts to discover using a GPS.

With more than 691,000 active geocaches around the world, about 1,500 can be found in Halton. Using his BlackBerry's built-in GPS unit, Near started small by finding a couple of neighbourhood caches in Milton. He was hooked. He then decided to take his two daughters, Jaimee, 3, and Katlyn, 5, to go what they like to call "treasure hunting."

"They got a real kick out of it and then started asking me on the weekends, 'Can we go treasure hunting again?'" said Near.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ONTARIO GEOCACHING ASSOCIATION

OUT AND ABOUT: Local geocache enthusiasts, from left, Paul Bruch, Joshua Becker and Morgan Becker enjoy a successful search near Hwy. 7 and Trafalgar Road.

"Geocaching gives you an opportunity to get out of the house and do something with your kids, and it's amazing just how much of this is going on around you for years and you don't even know about it."

For Anne Hogan, information officer for the Ontario Geocaching Association, geocaching is about the adventure. Starting in 2003, Hogan has traveled by car down to Florida twice stopping at every state to hunt for a geocache.

Ever since the GPS became available to the public in 2000, the new pastime of finding hidden treasure exploded around the world. It has been only recently, in the last couple of years, however, that geocaching has grown exponentially, said Hogan.

Another local geocache enthusiast, Paul

Bruch enjoys exploring the outdoors, especially when he's not in the area. By using the GPS units, Bruch has also picked up some handy traveling skills. "The GPS skills I've learned through using it in the field have given me a confidence so that when using my GPS to travel on non-geocaching trips, I am able to confidently use it to navigate to my destination," he said.

As work calls for some traveling, Near enjoys hunting for caches in far off places like Germany. He even has a program on his BlackBerry called Geocache Navigator, which shows him the closest 10 caches relative to his location. "There is usually something within a kilometre that you can go and find," he said of traveling overseas. "It's an interesting way to go out and discover some

of the areas you are traveling in for work, and it beats going from office to hotel."

Near found a travel bug in Milton — a toy with a pin code on a dog tag, which are hidden in some geocaches — and took it with him to Munich, Germany where he hid it. Because it has a pin code, the travel bug can be tracked on-line. Since then, Near has watched it travel to Cologne, Paris and even jump continents to Darwin, Australia.

It's advised by the Ontario Geocaching Association not to use objects that look like bombs for the caches and to refrain from putting alcohol, food or illegal substances within one. Geocache aficionados should also make sure that a hidden geocache doesn't negatively impact the environment, or is placed on private property without consent.

Discover Country Heritage Park

ALL COLOUR ANTIQUE TRACTOR & TOY SHOW
GATHERING OF THE ORANGE SHOW & INTERNATIONAL COCKSHUTT CLUB SHOW



July 17th
12pm-9pm
& July 18th
& 19th from
10am-5pm

FRIDAY PROGRAM
• Lawn Tractor Pulls
7:00pm-8:30pm
• Tractor Displays
• Club Souvenirs
• Park Exhibits 12-5pm

SATURDAY & SUNDAY PROGRAM
• Antique Lawn & Tractor Pulls
• Tractor Parade
• Lawn Tractor Races (Sat)
• Toy Show & Sale
• Vintage Cars/Trucks
• Swap Shop
• Machinery Demo
• Kid's Pedal Tractor Pull
• All Colour ICON
• Parks Exhibits Open
• Country Canteen Open
• Miniature Horses
• Features Massey Exhibits
• Kids Scavenger Hunt & Prizes

HERITAGE DISCOVERY DAYS • JULY 25-26 12-5PM



• 1830 Cassin Farmstead
• 1870 Lucas Farmstead
• 1910 School House

• Blacksmith Shop
• Apple Industry Building
• Milk on the Mooove Building
• Massey, John Deere, Case IH, Cockshutt, Ford, Allis-Chalmers tractors & equipment
• Carriage Works Shop
• 1928 Women's Institute Building
• McDuffe John Deere Dealership
• Ford Garage
• Kids Scavenger Hunt & Prizes

PIRATE FESTIVAL • AUGUST 1, 2, & 3 • 10-5



Arrrgh me hearties!! Board your pirate ships and set sail to the second annual Pirate Festival. Make port at Country Heritage Park, Aug. 1st, 2nd and 3rd 2009 to enjoy the show. Pirate stages, merchants and food abound.

New this year is "Captains Keg"
an adult night of frivolous fun

Check out our website for all program updates.
www.countryheritagepark.com

8560 Tremaine Road, Milton

905-878-8151 or 1-888-307-3276

Daily admission: Adults \$7, Seniors \$6, Children \$4, Family Package: \$20 (some events differ). Programs subject to change.

Country Heritage Park is open all year for school daytrips, youth programs, corporate events, weddings, group tours & facility rentals. Call for details or email info@countryheritagepark.com.