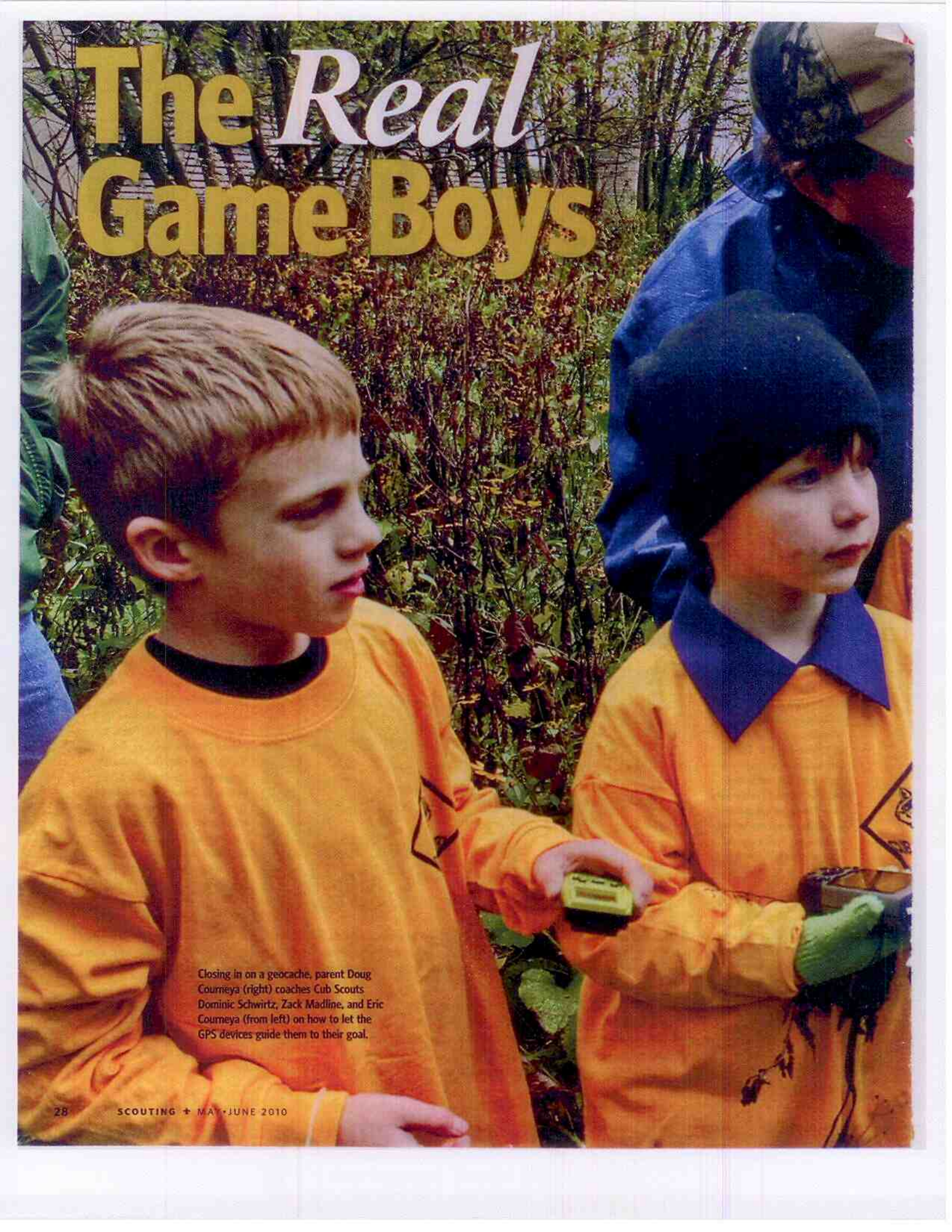
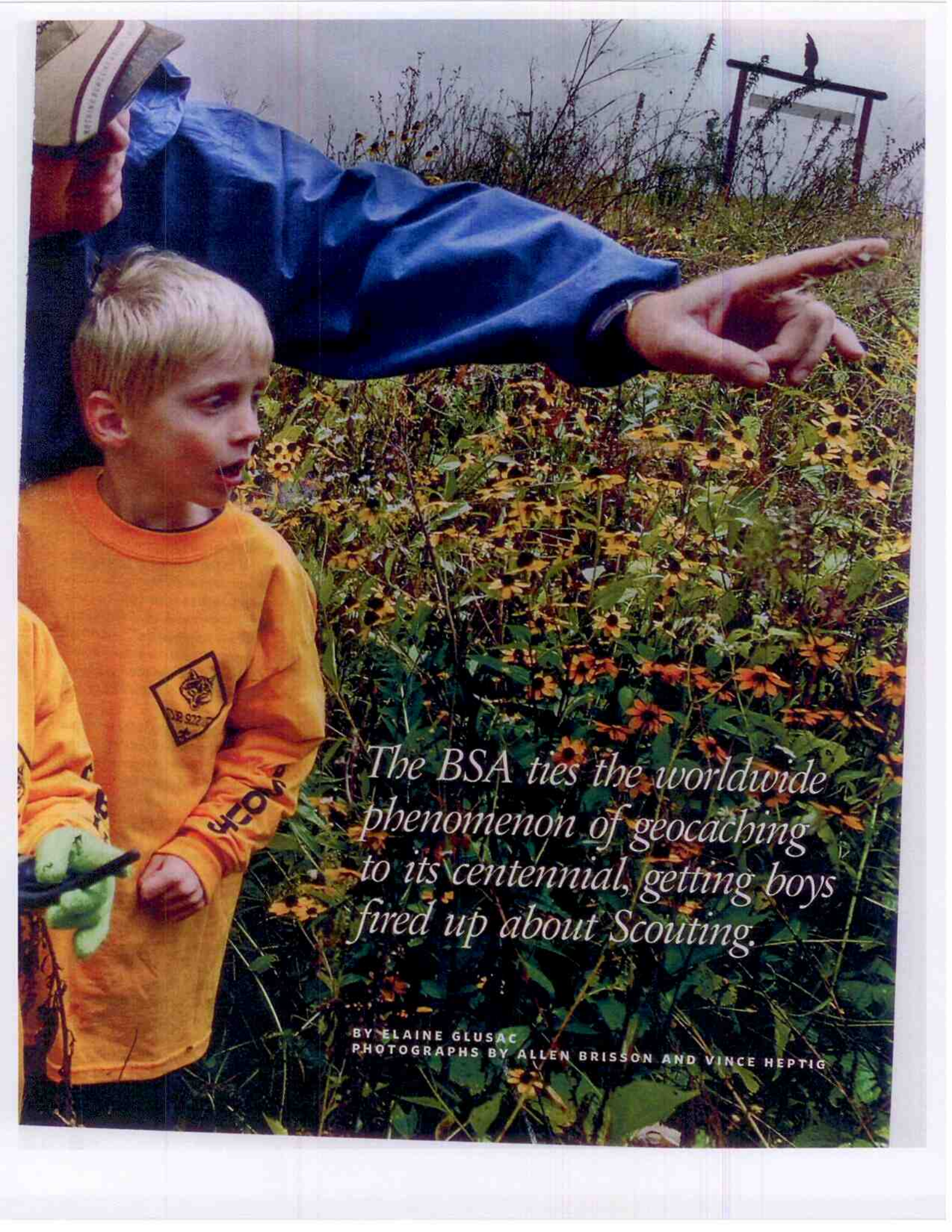


The *Real* Game Boys



Closing in on a geocache, parent Doug Courneya (right) coaches Cub Scouts Dominic Schwartz, Zack Madline, and Eric Courneya (from left) on how to let the GPS devices guide them to their goal.



The BSA ties the worldwide phenomenon of geocaching to its centennial, getting boys fired up about Scouting.

BY ELAINE GLUSAC
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLEN BRISSON AND VINCE HEPTIG



ON AN UNSEASONABLE 40-degree day in early October, not even a constant drizzle could dampen 7-year-old Cub Scout Jack Parry's enthusiasm for treasure hunting. Attending Cub Scout Adventure Day at Gamehaven Scout Reservation, a 266-acre camp just outside of Rochester, Minn., he made a beeline past the tomahawk toss, BB gun targets, and archery range directly to the lodge marked "Geocaching."

New to most of the 100 Gamehaven Council Cub Scouts and their parents at the event, geocaching uses Global Positioning System handhelds to find pre-established waypoints where others have left a "cache," or hidden container full of prizes, for them to take. Unlike most fellow Cub Scouts, Jack of Stewartville's Pack 156 brought his own GPS unit.

"When we started, we called it 'treasure hunting,'" said Jack's father, Jim Parry, who began geocaching with his

family more than two years ago as a way to explore Minnesota parks.

"Arr," broke in Jack, smiling through gritted teeth, "and I'm a pirate!"

An electronics-driven treasure hunt, geocaching combines sleuthing and hiking. From "geo" for geography and "caching" for hiding goods, geocaching has gained a worldwide following since it began in 2000. It started when the U.S. Defense Department, which controls the global satellite navigation system, stopped scrambling satellite position signals. This allowed GPS users far more accurate data than they had ever had in the past to mark such sights as hot fishing holes.

To test the devices' navigational possibilities, some began leaving goods in the woods and posting the coordinates on the Internet for others to find. Such computer-directed trekking instantly took off. Today there are nearly a million caches worldwide in more than 200 countries—from Argentina to Zimbabwe—tracked at geocaching.com, the game's Internet center.

Now geocaching is the centerpiece of the Boy Scouts of America's new Get in the Game! program. Part of the Scouts' 100th Anniversary Celebration, Get in the Game! uses geocaching to spread the word about Scouting by creating geocaches that highlight Scouts' contributions to the community. It also aims to engage with thousands of geocachers across the country and get youth—both existing Scouts and potential new recruits—enthused about Scouting.

"No young person joins Scouting to have their character developed," said Bob Mersereau, director of the Scouts' 100th Anniversary Celebration Project. "They join because it's fun, and geocaching is just that."



THE NEWFANGLED activity swaps the old-fashioned magnetically controlled navigator for a GPS unit programmed with destination coordinates. But as a tool, GPS represents an upgrade with screen appeal.

“Geocaching captures the technology aspect of what kids live with these days but puts them outside and gives them exposure to nature,” said Frank Reigelman, BSA’s director of outdoor programs. “For a hundred years nature has been Scouting’s classroom, where boys gain leadership experience and learn all the skills that translate to character development.”

The popular game fosters teamwork, problem solving, navigation,



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

It’s easy to make containers to hide geocache goodies. Here’s what you need:

- 1 Roll of nonglossy duct tape in brown, tan, or camouflage.
- 2 Small, reusable plastic food container with lid. Four-ounce size works well.
- 3 Wrap container with duct tape and place at GPS coordinates.



and environmental stewardship through technology. And increasingly that technology is easier to access. Basic GPS units cost well under \$100. Many smartphones already owned by Scout leaders and parents are equipped with GPS, and others, such as the iPhone, offer inexpensive applications to add geocaching functions.

At the Gamehaven event, geocaching neighbored a strong competitor: the BB range. But Troop 98 Scoutmaster Tony Mueller knew he had an edge. “It’s the Nintendo, cell phone, tech appeal,” said Mueller, walking a wooded path two hours prior to the event to plant caches along the trail. “You give a GPS to the

Training goes before tracking as Scoutmaster Tony Mueller teaches the boys how to read their coordinates (above), and then Jack Parry and Aaron Munson head off in search of “treasure.” Later, Dominic Schwirtz (opposite, front) and his friends think they’ve found something.

kids, and they know what to do.”

About six much warmer weeks earlier, Mueller had spent an afternoon devising four different hiking routes for the Cub Scouts where he planned to hide three caches each for this event. He used his GPS unit to record coordinates for hidden cache containers: plastic food storage boxes, recycled peanut butter jars, and tennis ball tubes, stripped of labels, cleaned, and covered with camouflage-patterned duct tape for disguise. Treasures within consisted of small toys and trinkets—tops, rulers, plastic insects—that Mueller had purchased for the entire event from a novelty store for about \$60. A pencil and logbook or piece

Teamwork unites Jack Parry, Jimmy Fritzjunker, Dominic Schwartz, and Aaron Munson (below, from left) in the task of learning how to read the GPS device. At the end of the trail, Jim Parry helps his son Jack grab an elevated cache (opposite right).

of paper, which players sign and date when they've reached it, accompanied each cache.

“Caches can cost as little as you want them to,” said geocaching expert Mary Stevens, volunteer coordinator for Get in the Game! “You can do it for next to nothing. You can use plastic containers from home. Prizes can be leftover patches or trinkets that are crowding your council—or child’s—closet.” Anything but breakable items or food, which may attract unwanted animal visitors, are fair game for the caches.

Back in the field, Mueller’s coordinates coincided with log piles, trees with low Y-shaped trunks, and trail signs—landmarks where he could place the cache containers with a hint of mystery. While public geocaches can be maddeningly hidden, “We have to make it a little easier for Cub Scouts,” said Mueller, strewing

leaves over a tape-covered Tupperware container placed behind a tree stump. “You want them to find it.”

BUT FIRST, THE BOYS—other than Jack—needed background on the magic of GPS guidance. Using a blow-up globe, Mueller explained to a group of five Cub Scouts that a series of 24 satellites arranged like a constellation in the sky use the grid system of latitude and longitude to tell us where we are in the world.

“We’re doing a scavenger hunt in the woods, but with satellites providing the clues,” said Mueller, moving his pupils outdoors where the GPS unit could receive unobstructed signals. “This is radio reconnaissance. It’s like listening to the satellites.”

“That looks like a clock,” one second-grader remarked.

“A compass is like a clock,” said Mueller. “It tells you things. In this case, it tells you where to walk.”

The group broke up for the field hunt, two boys and their parents paired with a GPS unit pre-loaded with the course coordinates. Tracking their first waypoint in an open field, 8-year-old Omeed Feshami of Pack 93 in Spring Valley and his father, Mo Feshami, walked where the device pointed: west toward the lodge. When they approached the porch where the cache was hidden, they got confused and wandered off around the front of the building, before returning to the right spot several minutes later. GPS units are inaccurate within 20 feet of the coordinates, and geocachers must use old-fashioned detective skills





to find the treasure by looking for the telltale clue: something out of place.

"The first one was the hardest," said the elder Feshami. "We were looking at the distance, but it was within the margin of error."

"But it was really fun," said Omeed, brandishing a plastic digit, his prize, on his index finger.

On a separate mission, 6-year-olds Randy Gerard and Julio Roman of Packs 68 in Mabel and 186 in Rochester, respectively, bolted east past the park's defunct barn and turned south, loping downhill toward a campsite with a central log pile. Once the device told them they were within 25 feet, the boys circled the logs and fanned out to the adjacent tent platforms in search of the cache. But they finally returned to the wood stack where they flushed out a frightened field mouse before reaching in and finding the camouflaged jar full of plastic snakes.

"Snakes are cool!" shouted Randy.

"As long as they're fake," added his mom.

Parent Brian Smith, assisting Scoutmaster Mueller in the field, helped the boys learn the ropes. "Notice how the GPS got us close

but didn't show us where it is. After that you have to use your eyes; you use your senses to find out where it is," said Smith, as the boys signed the cache log. "Now put it back exactly where you found it so it's not easy for the next person."

Younger, less technically adept children sometimes appeared confused until they began walking where the GPS directed. "They only need help on the first one, and then they are fine," said Smith. "After they start finding stuff, they get enthused."

Mueller spent the day talking about latitude and longitude and satellite constellations to a series of audiences that ranged from those who could define the equator to those who couldn't identify the Big Dipper. Still, the GPS gadgets fascinated the children. Returning with false fingernails, plastic stencils, elastic bracelets, and rubber centipedes, they often asked for second and third geocaches to find.

"As soon as they figure out they can take stuff home," said Mueller, "they get in the game." ★

Chicago-based writer ELAINE GLUSAC has contributed to Condé Nast Traveler and National Geographic Adventurer.

GET IN THE GAME!

BSA's Get in the Game! program outlines several ways Scouts and Scouters can get involved.

- 1 ORGANIZE** a private unit, district, council, or camp event. These are great recruitment activities. Share your ideas on the geoscouting.com Web site.
- 2 COUNCILS ACROSS THE NATION** have released five trackable "travel bugs," or dogtag-size tokens, that represent the five "Pillars of Scouting": leadership, service, achievement, character, and the outdoors. Each contains a unique serial number. Geocachers who find these move them on to another cache, recording their movement on geocaching.com. Find out where your council Pillars tags have been.



- 3 VISIT** your council's public geocaches that highlight the work Eagle Scouts have done in the community. The project descriptions are publicly accessible on geocaching.com, so it's a great way to share Scouting's positive impact. Visit all 12 and earn the special patch.
- 4 CREATE** geocaches that highlight the "Treasures of Scouting" found in our programs. The "Treasures" cache series is themed to Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Venturers, volunteers, and alumni.
- 5** Each district can **RELEASE A PINWOOD DERBY CAR** with an attached travel bug tag that will move from cache to cache, trackable via geocaching.com. The goal is getting all the cars to the jamboree at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., in July. This "Race to 2010" began in March.

- 6 PARTICIPATE** in the national clean-up program "Cache in Trash Out" (CITO). The first national BSA CITO event will take place May 15, 2010, in partnership with geocaching.com. The events, organized by each local council, combine environmentally based service with geocaching fun.

When using the public geocaching.com Web site and the public Get in the Game! activities, follow all geocaching guidelines and safety rules. These can be found in the Get in the Game! toolkit and on geoscouting.com. For more information on the programs, log on to scouting.org/100years.