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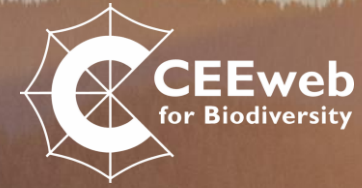
Experience design and nature conservation via Visitor Monitoring and Management in protected areas

25-26 April 2023

CEEweb for Biodiversity

Geocaching as a Tool for Visitor Monitoring and Engagement

- Visegrad Fund



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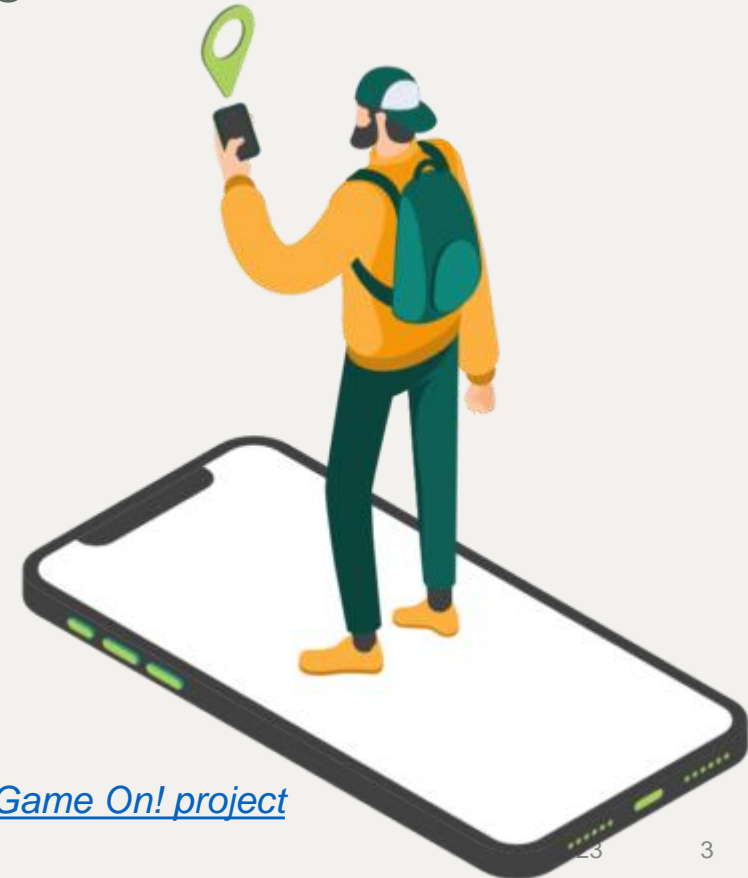
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What is Geocaching? (I)



- World largest treasure hunt game
- The goal → to find a cache (i.e. the hidden treasure) using GPS
- A cache is a container of various sizes that contains:
 - A log-book
 - Pen or pencil or stamp
 - SWAGs (“stuff we all get”) → the “treasure”
 - Small items for exchange (left by geocachers)
- A cache has its own unique geocaching code



What is Geocaching? (II)



- Travel bugs or geocoins
 - Special items sometimes located in caches
 - They have a unique code that travels around the world from cache to cache
 - Serves to track travels of a specific geocoin or travel bug



Source: [Dr. Vota](#)

Types of caches (I)



- Traditional cache
 - most common & simplest type
 - located directly at the listed coordinates
- Letterbox
 - To find the letterbox, you must complete tasks described in the listing of the cache.
 - Often, the listing takes the form of a story that leads you to decipher the coordinates where the cache is hidden.
- Multi-Cache
 - consists of one or more stages, each of which containing the coordinates for the next one



Source: [QuentinUK](#)

Types of caches (II)



- **Virtual caches**

- coordinates for a rather interesting or unique location
- usually with a described object (e.g. art sculpture, a scenic lookout)
- Validation for finding a virtual cache generally requires one to email the cache hider with information such as a date or a name on a plaque, or to post a picture of oneself at the site with a GPS receiver in hand

- **Event caches**

- Act for a gathering that is organised by geocachers
- Have to be longer than 30 minutes; typically, 1-2 hours
- •To be published minimum 14 days before the event
- Visegrad Fund
- •



Source: A Geocacher finding a Virtual Cache at McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

How to geocache?



1. Create a user profile on www.geocaching.com
2. Download a geocaching app (e.g. [C:Geo](#) or [Locus](#))
3. Download offline vector maps and caches for chosen locations



———— Geocaching in Visegrad + Serbia?



- With the exception of Serbia, which has its active number of caches in hundreds (281), the remaining four have thousands of active caches, with Czech Republic ranking highest among them (Groundspeak Inc. 2013).
- Slovakia: geocaching has been recognised as a marketing tool to promote many tourist-related locations (Szabóová 2015)
- Poland: a lot of attention since 2009 → high use of smartphones by citizenry (Józefowicz 2018)
- There are rules and guidelines that govern the activity, especially land use (Groundspeak Inc. 2016).
 - Countries can have some specific rules as well. The rules are available to help prevent or resolve any related conflicts.

Geocaching for Protected Areas



- Geocaching, as an outdoor activity, has been concluded to have positive correlations with natural areas (Mendes *et al.* 2013)
- Protected Areas (PAs) are of special interest in geocaching (Mendes *et al.* 2004)
 - Opens PA to new/larger audience
 - Improves visitor experience
- **Challenges:** deterioration of the vegetation through trampling has been regarded by most researchers as a major challenge. (Leung & Marion 2000)

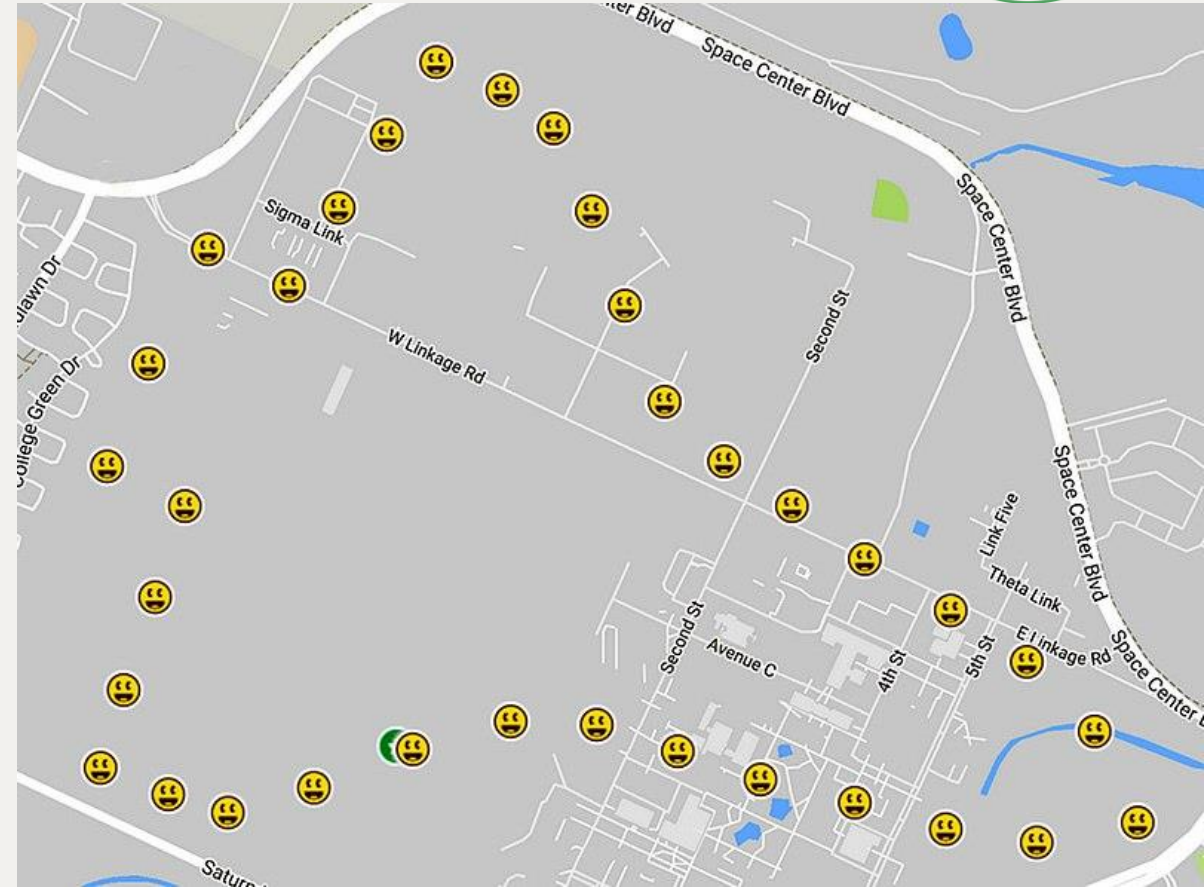


Source: [Fihu](#)

Pros



- Used in the management of nature protected areas to monitor visitors and visits
- Has the ability to promote conservation at protected areas
 - natural parks
 - forest reserves
 - wildlife sanctuaries
- Can serve to educate people or participants about the natural features of the protected area (Mendes *et al.* 2014; Zecha 2012).



Source: Geoart, by [Jim Evans](#).

Case Study: Geocaching in Austrian National Parks

Used in National Parks of Hohe Tauern, Kalkalpen, Gesäuse, Donau-Auen, Neusiedler See-Seewinkel and Thayatal.

Has the ability to greatly influence protected areas positively. (Hödl and Pröbstl-Haider 2017)

Measures to regulate the activity effectively are needed to balance benefit for participants (visitors) and the area (Mendes et al. 2014).

Environmental impacts measured by:

- number of caches
- frequency of visits
- types of the hiding place (Brost *et al.* 2011; Patubo 2010)



Case Study: Considerations (I)

Parks recorded a higher possibility/likelihood for a high rate of impacts and disturbances from geocaching.

So, factors to consider:

- Hide caches not more than 2 m from trails.
 - 3 parks had their caches hidden not far (short distances) from the trails. This helps gain interest because they are able participate easily and get more finds.
- Don't hide caches at natural places (e.g., trees, deadwoods) → avoid trampling, soil erosion, etc.
- Hide around or at facilities or places that don't lead to environmental disturbances (e.g. buildings, signposts, boards, fences, viewing points)



Geocaching at Die Kalkalpen for the Earthcache.
Source: geocaching.com.

Case Study: Considerations (II)

- Give preliminary information on where caches can be found → indicate to only use trails.
- Set caches in areas where network/internet is available.
- Visitors can be given preliminary education on do's and don't's.

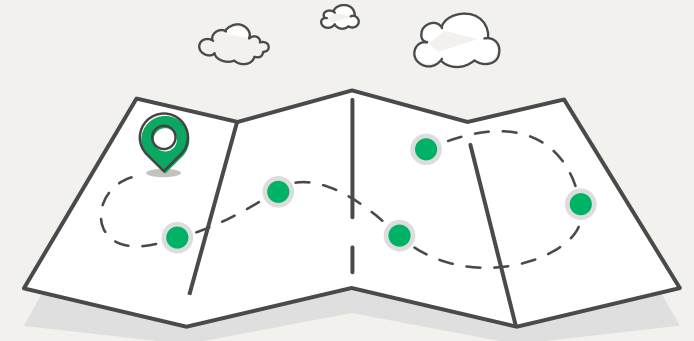


Geocaching at Thayatal. The "Thayarunde" is a path for bicycles, skater and runners.. Source: [GuentherZ](#).

Setting your Geocaching Game (I)

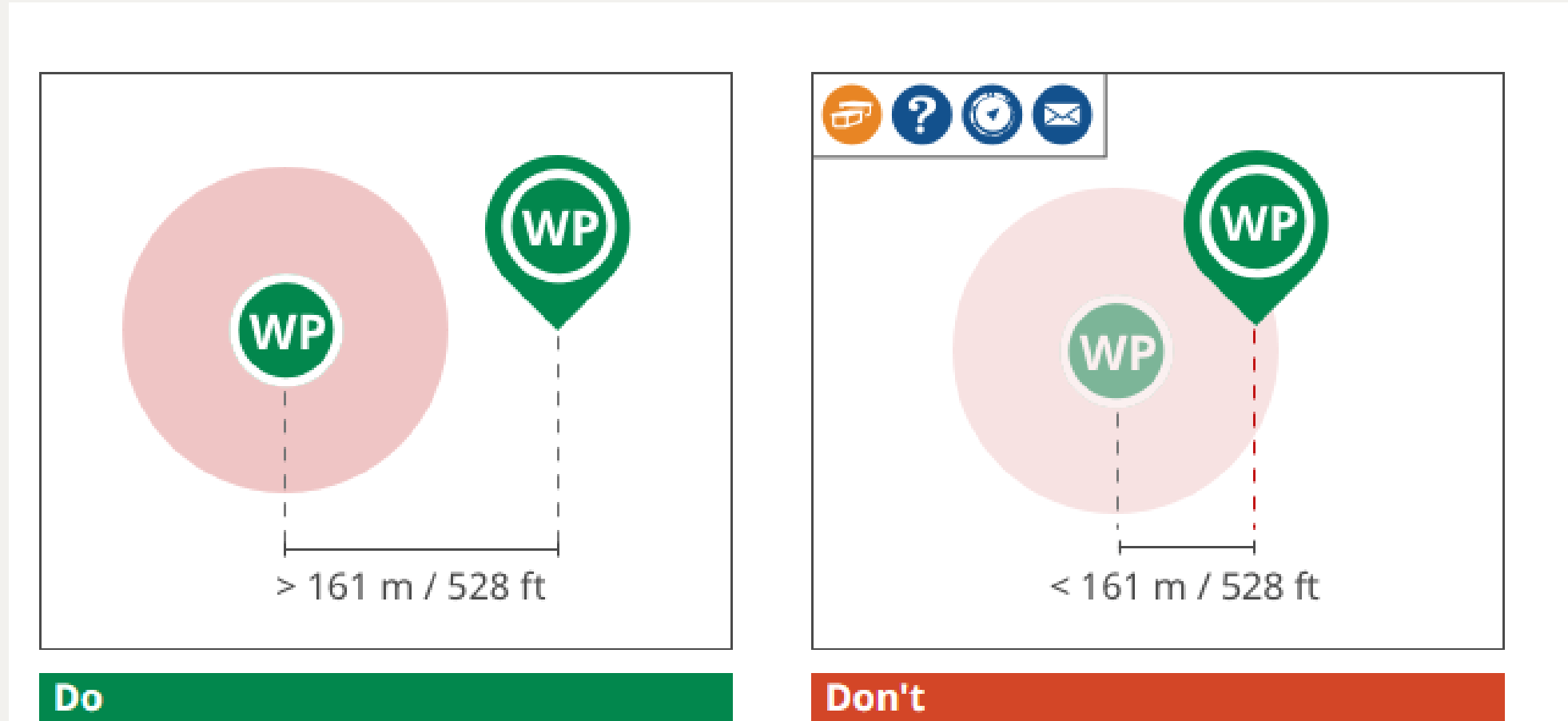
“When you go to hide a geocache, think of the reason you are bringing people to that spot. If the only reason is for the geocache, then find a better spot.” (briansnat, Geocaching.com Charter Member)

- Registers → You can do so at [geocaching.com](https://www.geocaching.com).
- Check for their guidelines and any applicable Regional Geocaching Policies.
- Submit your cache for review → reviewers are geocachers themselves (i.e. volunteers)



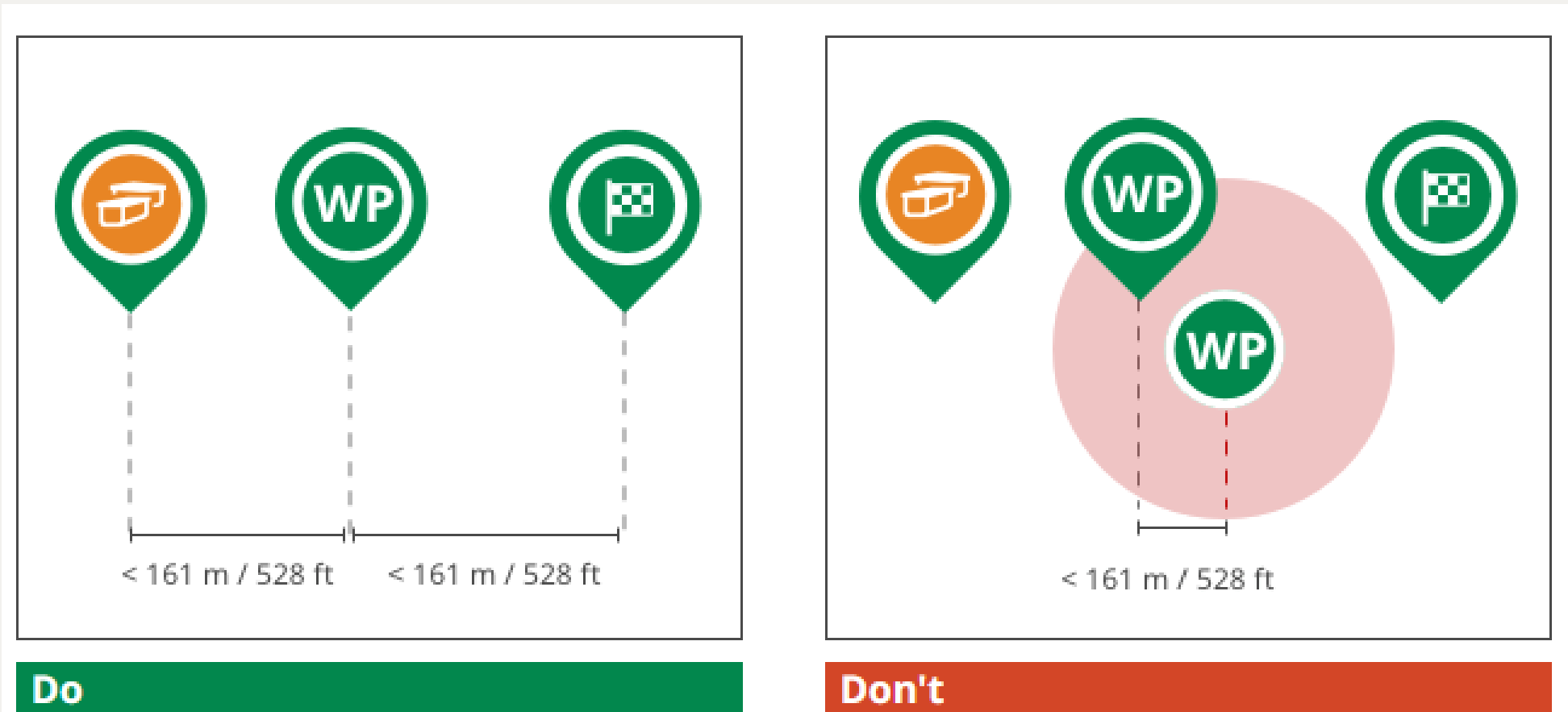
Source: [geocaching.com](https://www.geocaching.com)

Setting your Geocaching Game (II)



Source: geocaching.com

Setting your Geocaching Game (III)



Source: geocaching.com

Setting your Geocaching Game (III)

- Get accurate GPS coordinates
- Register it!
- The community volunteer reviewer may offer suggestions if there are additional concerns not fully documented in their guidelines.
- Communicate to your reviewer → describe your geocache location, container, and how it is hidden.
- Cache pages perceived to promote an agenda or highlight a cause will not be published.
- No commercial content.
- Maintain the cache page online → if not, they will archive it
- More info → <https://www.geocaching.com/play/guidelines>

Thank you!