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Geocache Placement FUNdamentals

November 21, 2013

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Topics we'll cover:

- Cache Site Selection
- Permits and Permissions
- Container Selection
- Camouflage
- Obtaining Accurate Coordinates
- Cache Hiding Process and Tips
- Working with your Reviewer

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Cache Site Selection

- **Location, Location, LOCATION!**
- **Ask: Why should there be a cache here?**
  - **Scenery**
  - **History**
  - **Education**
  - **Challenging hide**

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Cache Site Selection

- **Why <u>shouldn't</u> there be a cache be here?**
  - **I don't have permission**
  - **There's a good chance it might get discovered and removed/stolen**
  - **"Hey! There's no cache here in this parking lot yet!"**

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Cache Site Selection

- **Consider the impact the cache could cause**

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Cache Site Selection

- **Consider the impact the cache could cause. Ask:**
  - **What will the land owner/manager think of this cache?**
  - **Are non-geocachers (muggles) going to find it?**
  - **Are muggles going to see cachers seeking and get suspicious?**

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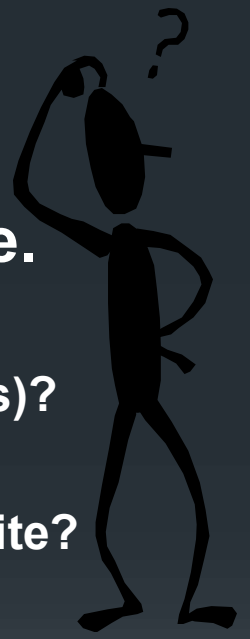
Cache Site Selection



- **Consider the impact the cache could cause. Ask:**
  - **Will this placement create new "social" trails (geotrails)?**
  - **How will rain/snow/ice affect the cache and site?**
  - **What kinds of hazards will cachers face to get to the site?**
  - **Is this a place I'd choose to hunt for a cache myself?**
  - **Can I easily come back to this site for my *required maintenance duties* as cache owner?**

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Cache Site Selection

- **Review the Geocache Placement Guidelines**

  - Geocache placements do not deface or destroy pubic or private property.
  - Geocaches are placed so that the surrounding environment is safe from both intentional and unintentional harm.
  - Keep both natural and man-made objects safe.
  - No object or property may be altered to provide a hiding place, clue, or means of logging a find

    http://www.geocaching.com/about/guidelines.aspx

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Permits and Permissions

- You **MUST** have permission from the property owner or land manager
- Failure to obtain permission has caused geocaching to be banned in some areas
- Some public lands allow geocaching by permit and/or fees
- The presence of a cache in an area **DOES NOT** mean it is an allowable place to hide another

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Permits and Permissions

- These areas are **NOT OPEN TO GEOCACHING:**
  - Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson
  - National Parks*
  - US Fish and Wildlife Refuge and Wildlife Management Area lands*

*(Exceptions can be made)

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Permits and Permissions

- **GeocacheAlaska! Inc.** has negotiated geocaching permits in some areas
  - **Visit www.geocachealaska.og/landmanagers.htm**
  - **Some areas include:**
    - **Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge**
    - **Chugach State Park**
    - **USFS Chugach National Forest**

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Container Selection

What in the world do I use?!

- Containers should **always** be chosen to hold up to Alaskan weather and critters!
  - Some permits *require* bear-proof containers
- Poor containers mean **more maintenance visits**

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Container Selection

What in the world do I use?!

- **Ammo Cans!**
  - Durable
  - Keep out moisture
  - That rewarding “cra-thunk” of opening one
  - Everybody loves a regular-sized cache!
  - Or…

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Container Selection

What in the world do I use?!

- **Durable containers!**
- As close to waterproof as you can find
- Ammo cans, lock-n-locks, decon containers, bison tubes

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Container Selection

Using a retired military container?

- Remove military and hazard markings!
- Label clearly as a geocache
- Make sure the logbook and container have contact information

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Container Selection

Try to <u>avoid</u>:

- Plastic butter/sour cream/peanut butter containers
  - Food containers aren't as watertight as you think
  - Food containers, no matter how clean you think you got it, can attract critters
- Metal cookie or mint tins

  - They rust
  - They must have a water-resistant logbook and unperforated ziplock bag to survive any rain and snow

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Container Selection

What should it look like?

- Should have permanent markings identifying it as a geocache
- Permit numbers should be clearly visible if required
- Put the coordinates and GC Code on the container and logbook

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Container Selection

What else should I know?

- Take steps to keep your logbook/logsheet signable in all weather
- Rite-in-the-Rain logbooks and printer paper are excellent for caches in Alaska!
- Ziplocks can help protect your log
  - Protip: Try not to put a pen/pencil in the baggie—it makes **holes!**

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Camouflage

Make it blend in!

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Camouflage

Find a way to make your cache "blend in"

- A pile of sticks and leaves is easy *and* common (Protip!)
- Use a natural "cubby", and cover the entrance with sticks, a rock, or other natural elements
- Cover the container with natural camo, or use camo tapes and painting techniques

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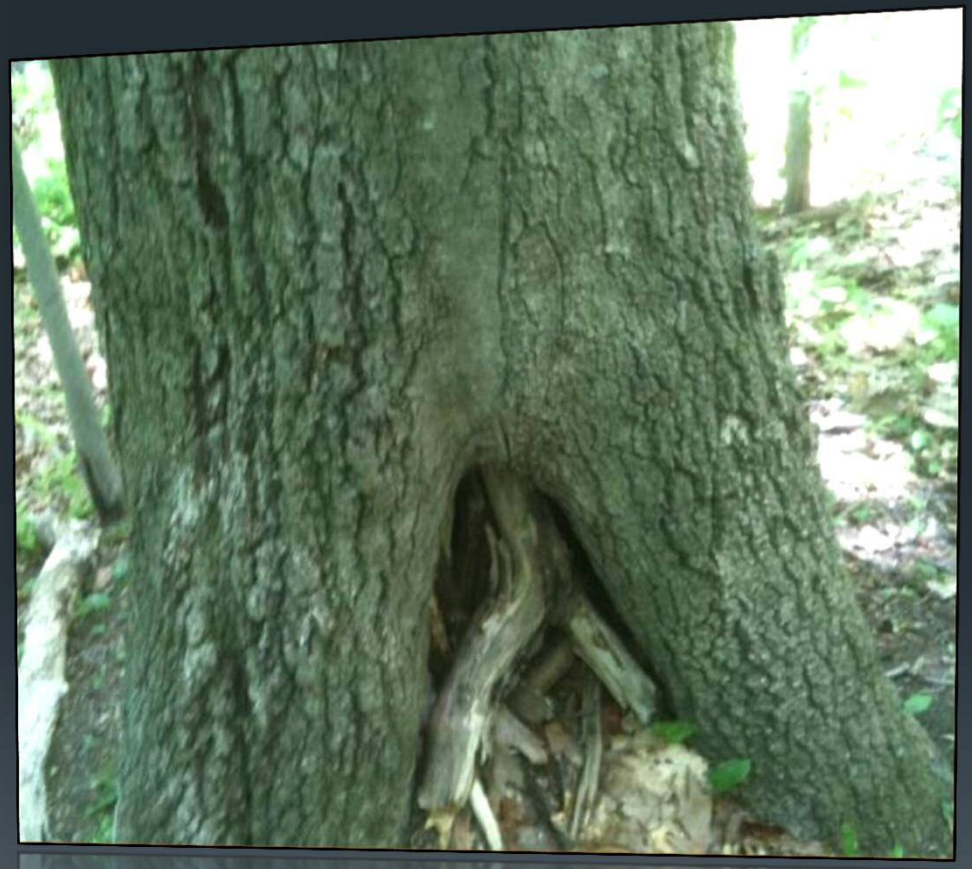
Can *you* spot what's out of place?

Could a muggle?



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Camouflage

How about urban caches?

- Try making the cache look like it belongs!

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Camouflage

Do you want it to be found?

- Hiding from muggles?
  - Give it camo to make it easy to overlook. **BUT,**
  - Be sure to be clear in the description and difficulty rating about what a cacher should look for
- Hiding from cachers? (An “evil” hide?)
  - Make sure the difficulty reflects how hard it is to find

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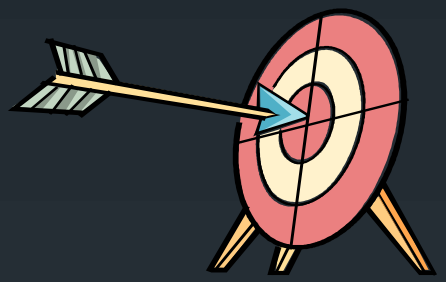
Camouflage

Do you want it to be found?

- You *could* put an olive drab nano or micro in the woods…
  - It won't likely get muggled, but…
  - It likely won't be found by cachers either!



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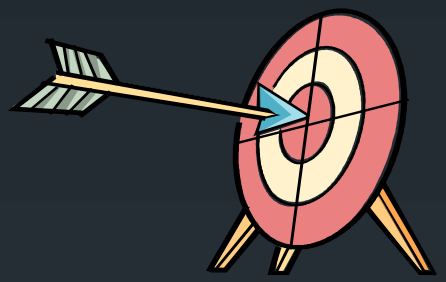
Obtaining Your Coordinates

Do you want it to be found?

- Good coordinates are what this game is all about!
  - Geocaching started when someone wanted to prove how good the accuracy had become after selective availability was turned off!



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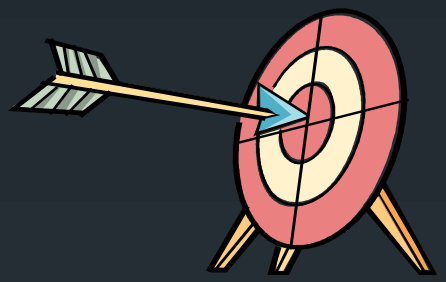
Obtaining Your Coordinates

A dedicated GPS unit does it best!

- Many smartphones and their apps do not record accurate waypoints
- Under heavy canopies, learn to use the “Average” function to capture coordinates
- Get coordinates, then walk 500’ away and hunt your own cache. Did it take you where you should be?



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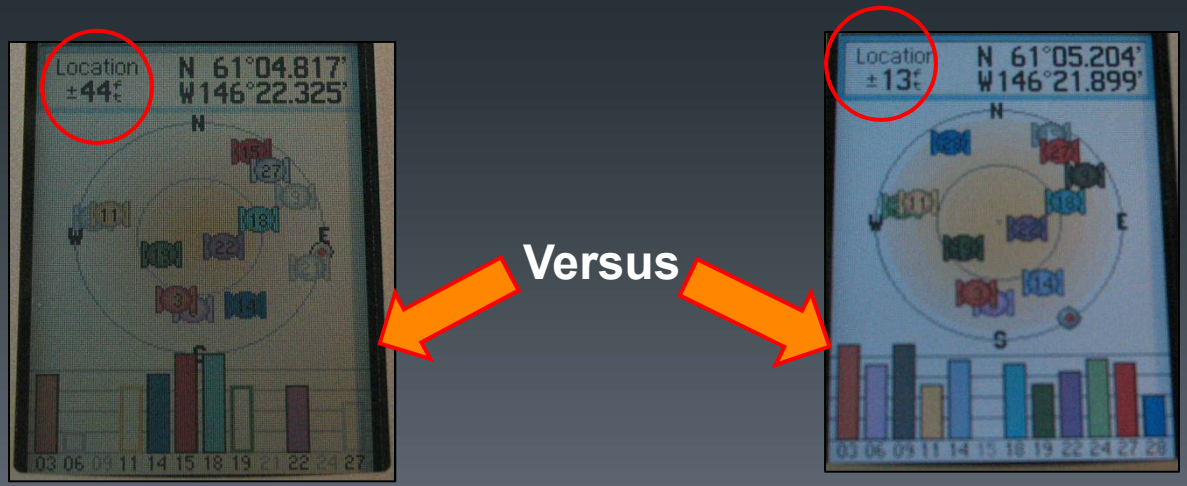
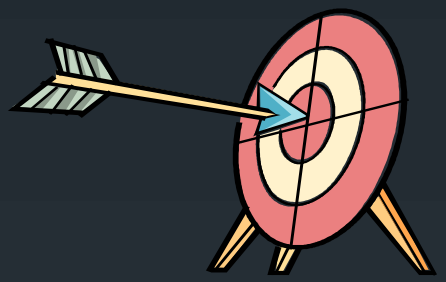
Obtaining Your Coordinates

Run your GPSr with a clear sky view for about 10 minutes to allow it to get a good satellite lock

- Simply turning on and grabbing coordinates generally yields poor accuracy





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Obtaining Your Coordinates

"Averaging" waypoints produces the best results

- Let your GPS "settle" for a few minutes at your cache's location
- Start the averaging process and let the unit sit for a few minutes to collect multiple samples
- Save the point without moving the GPS! (Protip!)
- Shoot for the lowest EPE you can get (10' is pretty good)
- You can also take multiple points and manually calcultate them

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Cache Hiding Processes and Tips

It is ***highly*** recommended that new geocachers find a few dozen caches before making their first hide!

- Learn the guidelines
- Get to know your Reviewer
- Ask other local cachers for answers and help at events or online!

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Cache Hiding Processes and Tips

Hiding good caches is helped by finding a bunch of them yourself!

- Hide caches that you would want to find
- Search the internet and caching forums for fun, creative, and unique ideas
- Have a great location to share? Take us there!

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Cache Hiding Processes and Tips

You hid it. You maintain it.

- Have a maintenance plan.
  - Can you easily address issues at this site should they arise?
- Caches are placed to last
  - Will yours last through weather, muggles, and perhaps only occasional visits from other cachers?

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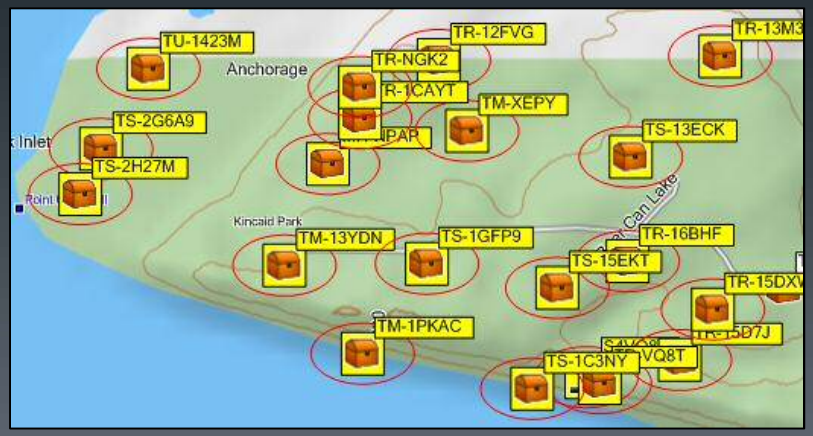
Cache Hiding Processes and Tips

Let's talk about getting too close

- Geocaches must be at least 528' (0.10mi) away from each other
- Some land policies require more than 528'. Be aware!



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Cache Listing Processes and Tips

How to publish your cache listing

- How to Create a Cache Listing
- Entering Coordinates
- Difficulty and Terrain Ratings
- Saving, Editing, and Submitting
- Attributes and Additional Waypoints

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Ask this before you start:

- **Is this an appropriate location?**
- **Do I have proper permission obtained?**
- **Do I have good coordinates?**
- **Did I pick a good container for the site?**
- **Let's do this!**

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Cache Listing Processes and Tips

- **Get signed in on the website!**

www.geocaching.com

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- Protip: You can prepare the text for your cache offline and cut & paste it when you're ready to publish!

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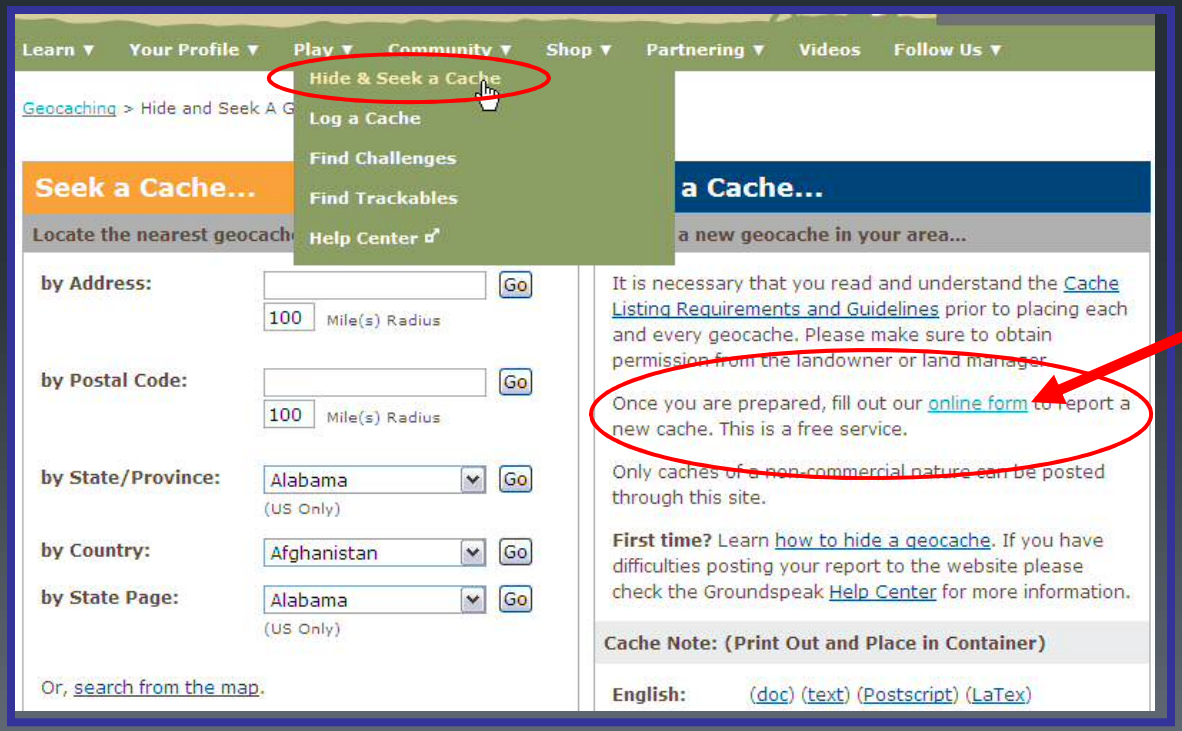
Cache Listing Processes and Tips

- Click on “Play” → “Hide & Seek a Cache”



Then, “online form”

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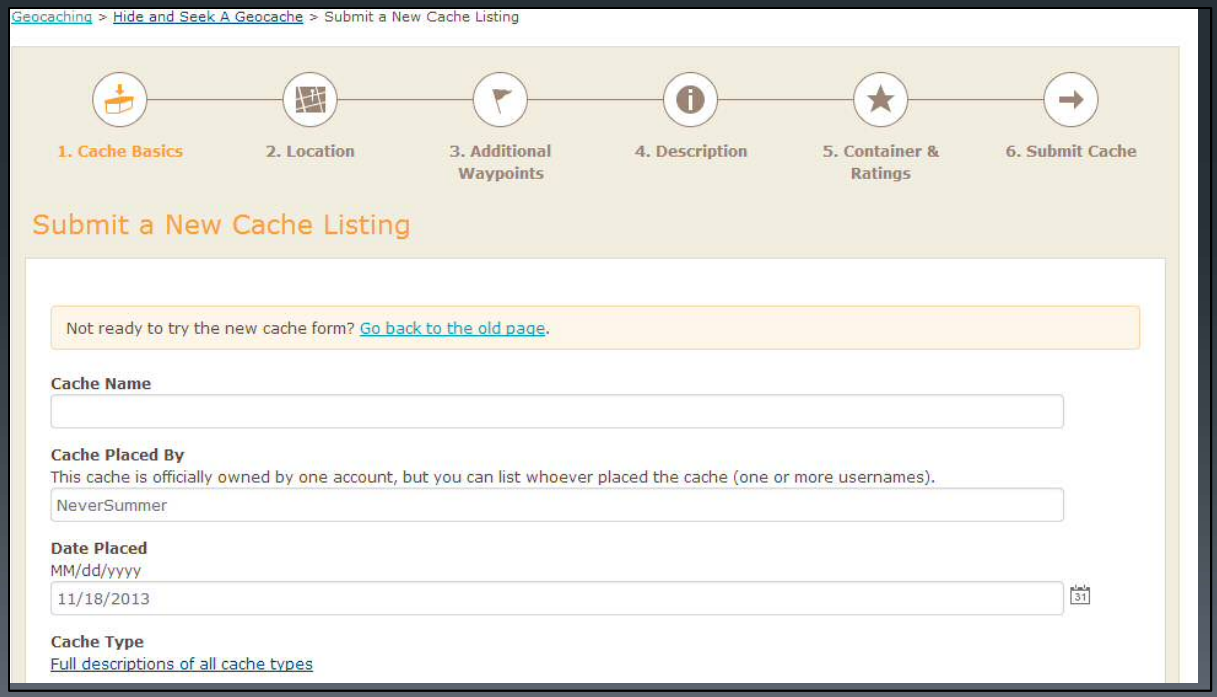
Cache Listing Processes and Tips

- Follow the prompts from step to step



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Cache Listing Processes and Tips

Choosing the cache type:

- So many different types!

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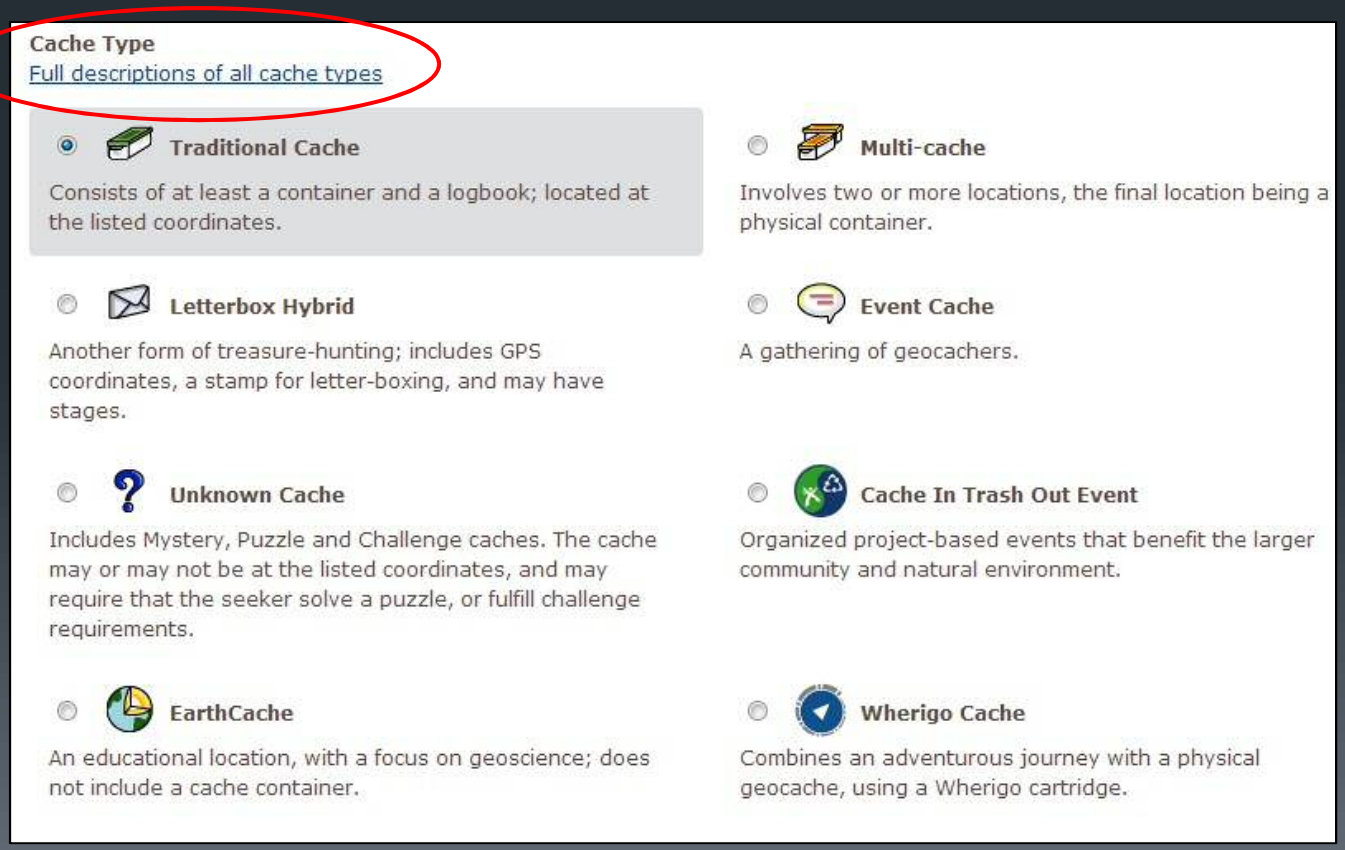
Cache Listing Processes and Tips



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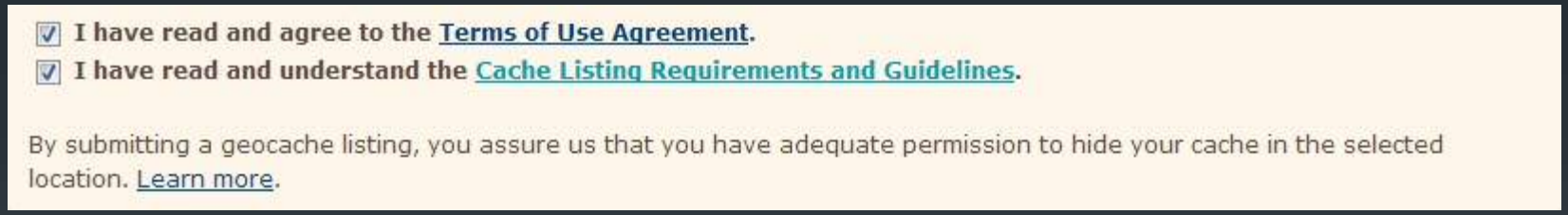
Cache Listing Processes and Tips

- A Very Important Step:



Only check those boxes if the statements are TRUE!

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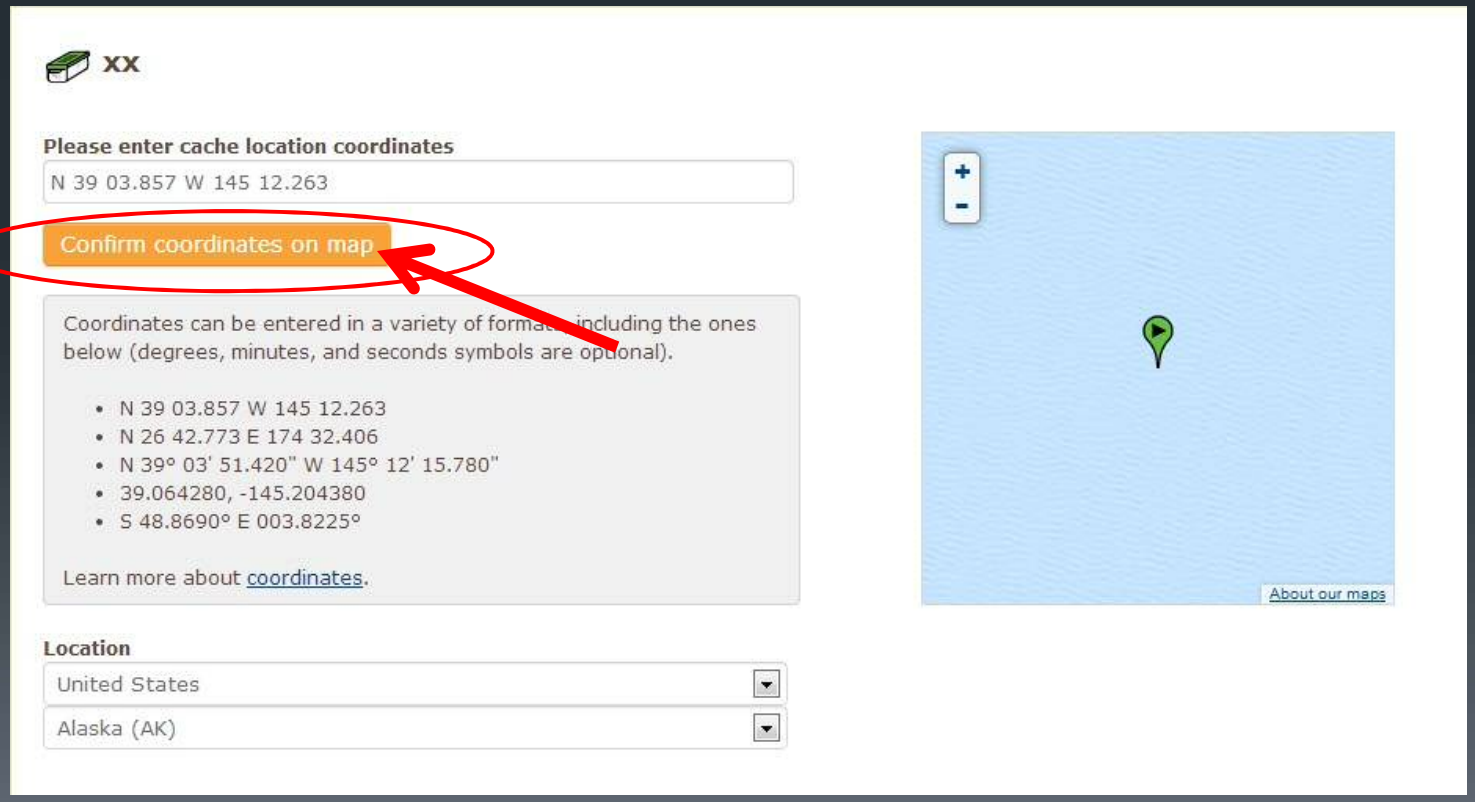
Enter Your Good Coordinates



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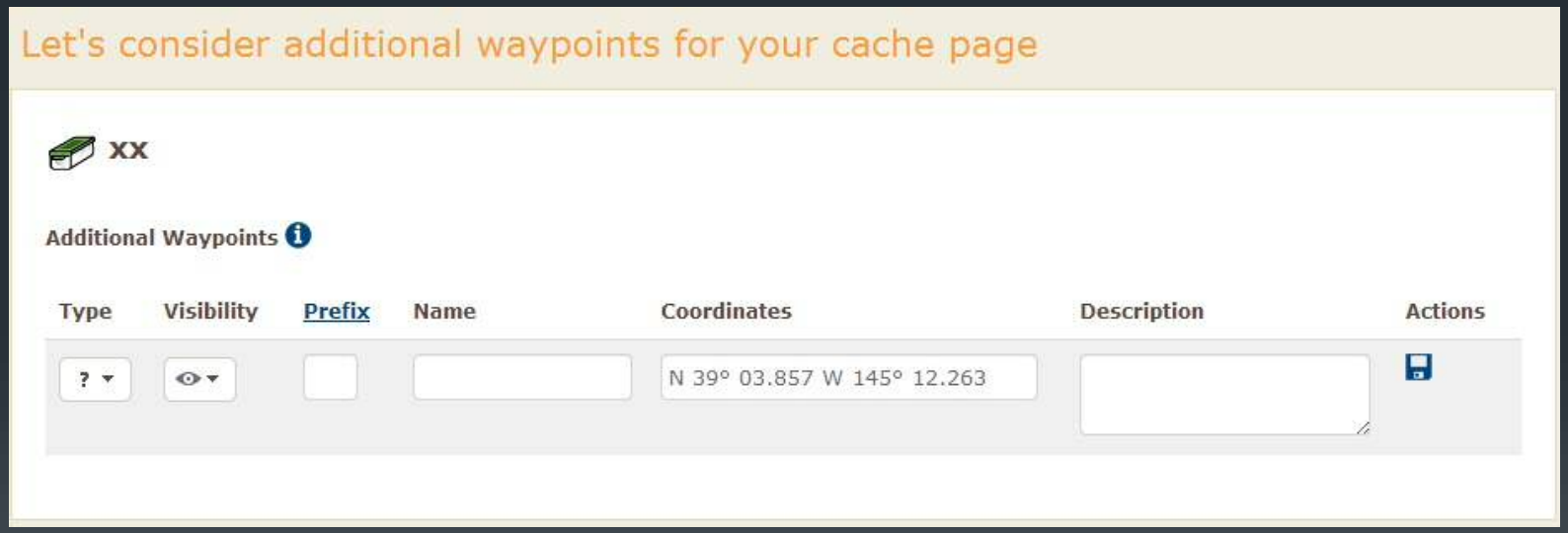
Enter Any Additional Coordinates



- Use this section to list parking coordinates, points for your multicache, the final for your unknown, or other related coordinates for your cache

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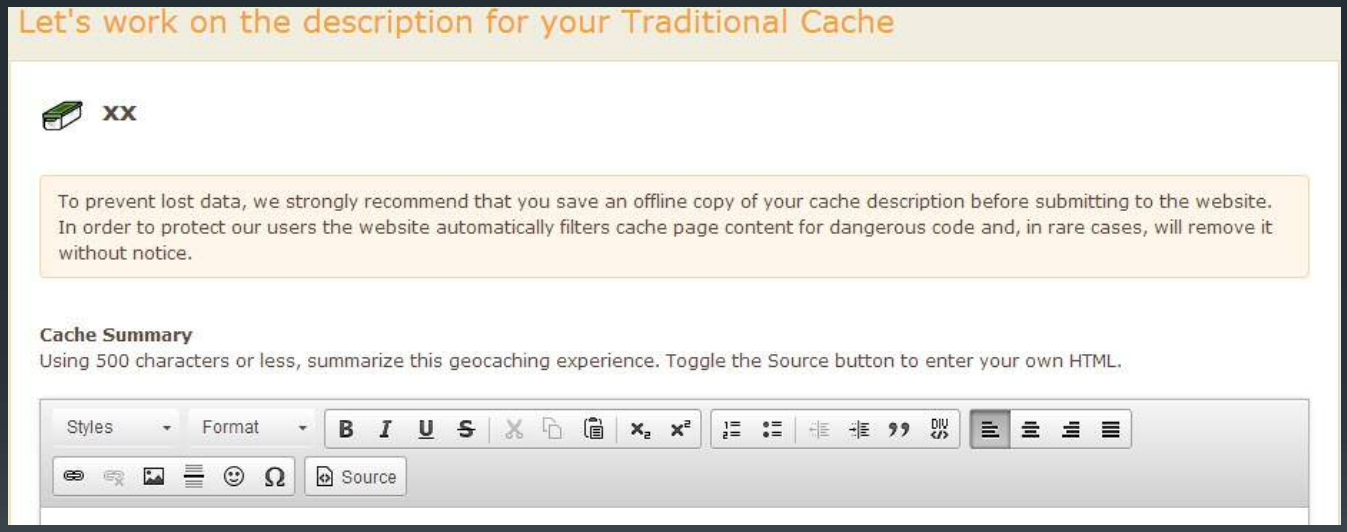
Enter the Cache Summary



- Use this section to give a quick introduction to your cache.
- This is sometimes the only section people can read on their paperless devices, so be clear and helpful!

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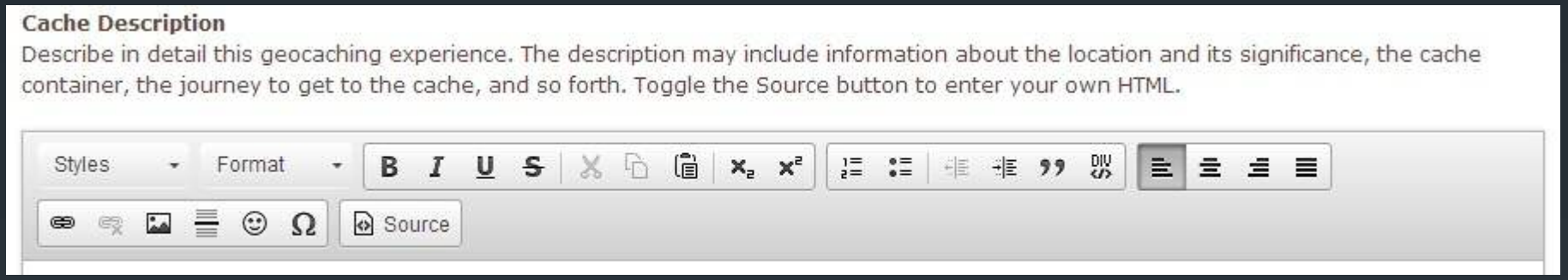
Enter the Cache Description



- Use this section to give a more detailed description of your cache, and information about the hunt.
- **Protip:** Both fields can be cut and pasted from your word processor, or coded in html

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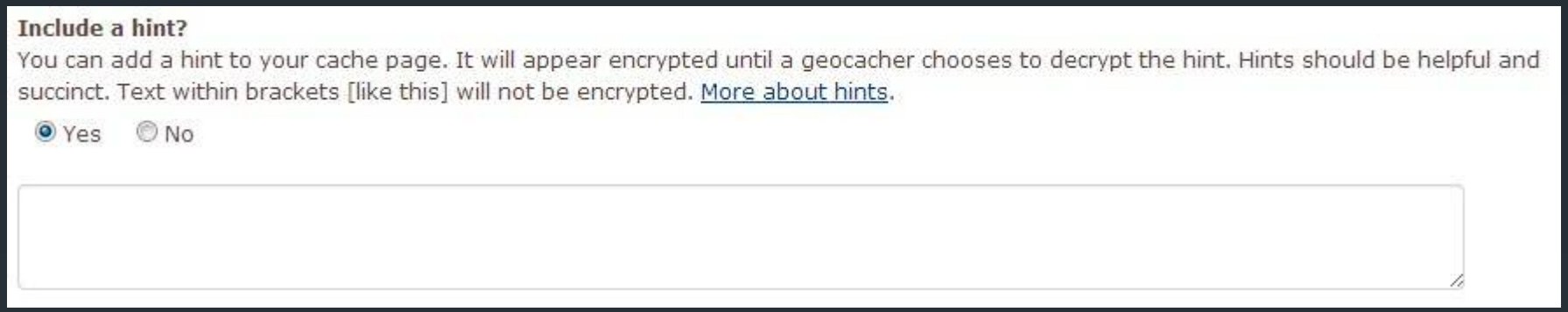
Enter a Hint



- Use this section to give a subtle hint to help others find your cache, or overcome a hurdle in your puzzles.
- **Protip:** hints such as “none” or “yeah right” aren’t helpful.
  - No hint is better than a snarky unhelpful hint

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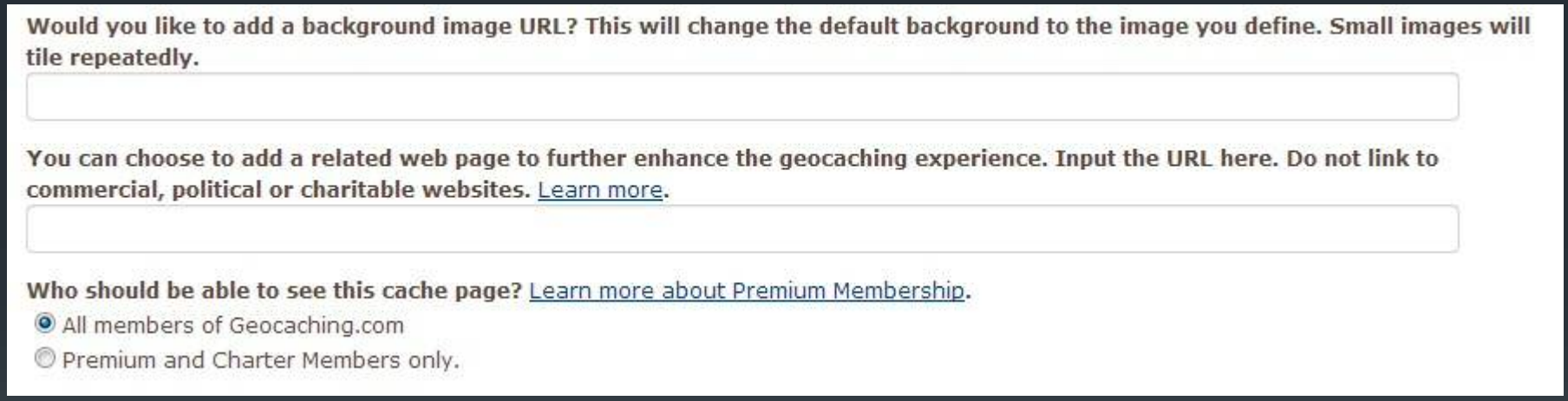
Finish up the Description



- Follow these directions and use them as needed
- Selecting “Premium and Charter Members only” will only allow your caches to be found by Premium and Charter members

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Cache Sizes

- **Micro:** Anything less than a “small”. Bison tubes, 35mm film containers, waterproof match containers

- **Small:** A container at least the size of your closed fist, but smaller than “regular” size

- **Regular:** A container that you can fit your foot into. An ammo can or coffee can.

- **Large:** A container that you can fit your head into, or more. 5-gallon buckets, 55-gallon drums…

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Cache Sizes

- **Other:** Could be unique, could be tiny, could be unimaginably huge!

- **Not Chosen:** Choose this option for events, CITOs, and when you will provide details about the cache itself in the description.

- **Protip:** Remember that people want to be able to search by cache size, so choose appropriately!

- Choosing “Other” or “Not Chosen” can also work for an “evil” hide, but be sure your Difficulty rating reflects that fact!

Difficulty Ratings

- From 1-5 (1 is easiest, 5 is most difficult):
- 1: In plain sight, or can be found in a few minutes of searching
- 2: The average seeker would be able to find this in less than 30 minutes of searching
- 3: An experienced cacher will find this challenging, and might take up a good portion of an afternoon
- 4: A real challenge for the experienced cacher. May require special skills or knowledge, or in-depth preparation. May require multiple days or trips to complete
- 5: A serious mental or physical challenge. Will require special skills or knowledge to find or open the cache.

Terrain Ratings

- 1: Handicapped accessible. Terrain is likely to be paved, is relatively flat, and requires less than a ½ mile hike
- 2: Suitable for small children. Terrain is along marked gravel or dirt trails, and there are no steep elevation changes or heavy undergrowth. Less than a 2 mile hike required.
- 3: Not suitable for small children. Terrain is likely off trail, and one could encounter heavy undergrowth, some steep elevation changes, and is more than a 2 mile hike.
- 4: Terrain is probably off trail. Will have very heavy overgrowth, and/or very steep elevation changes (requiring use of hands), and/or is more than a 10-mile hike. For experienced outdoor enthusiasts only.
- 5: Extremely challenging terrain. Requires specialized equipment to complete, or is otherwise difficult. (4wd, SCUBA, rock climbing, etc.)

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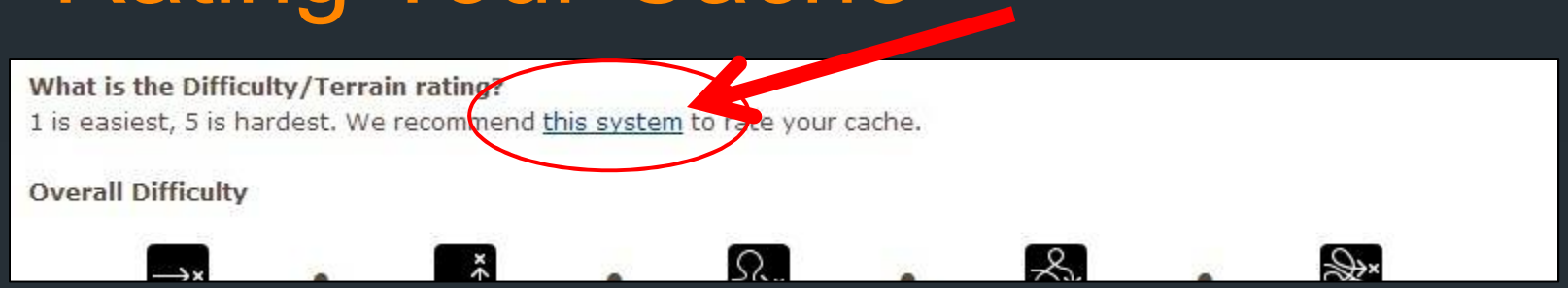
Rating Your Cache



Protip: Not sure how to rate your cache?

- Use the “ClayJar” system!
  - Click the “this system” link and answer the questions!

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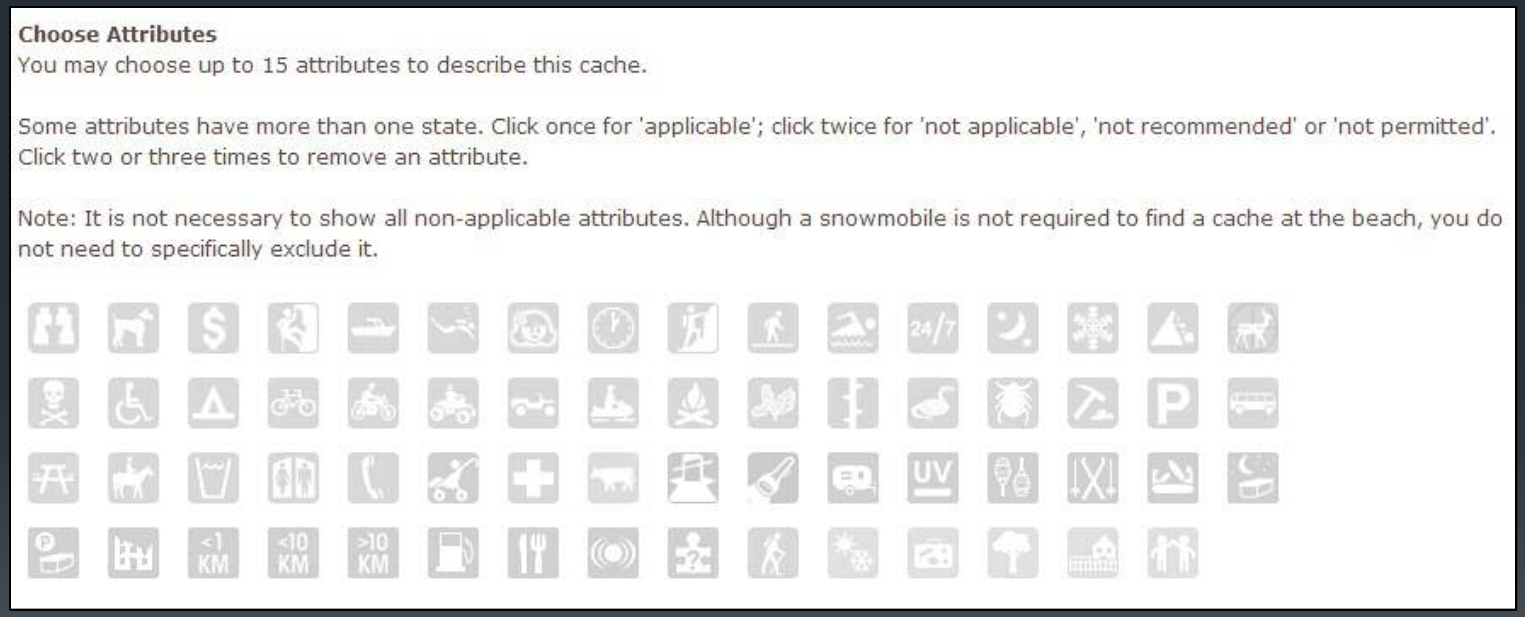
Attributes



- Attributes are another helpful and searchable feature.
- Select those that most apply

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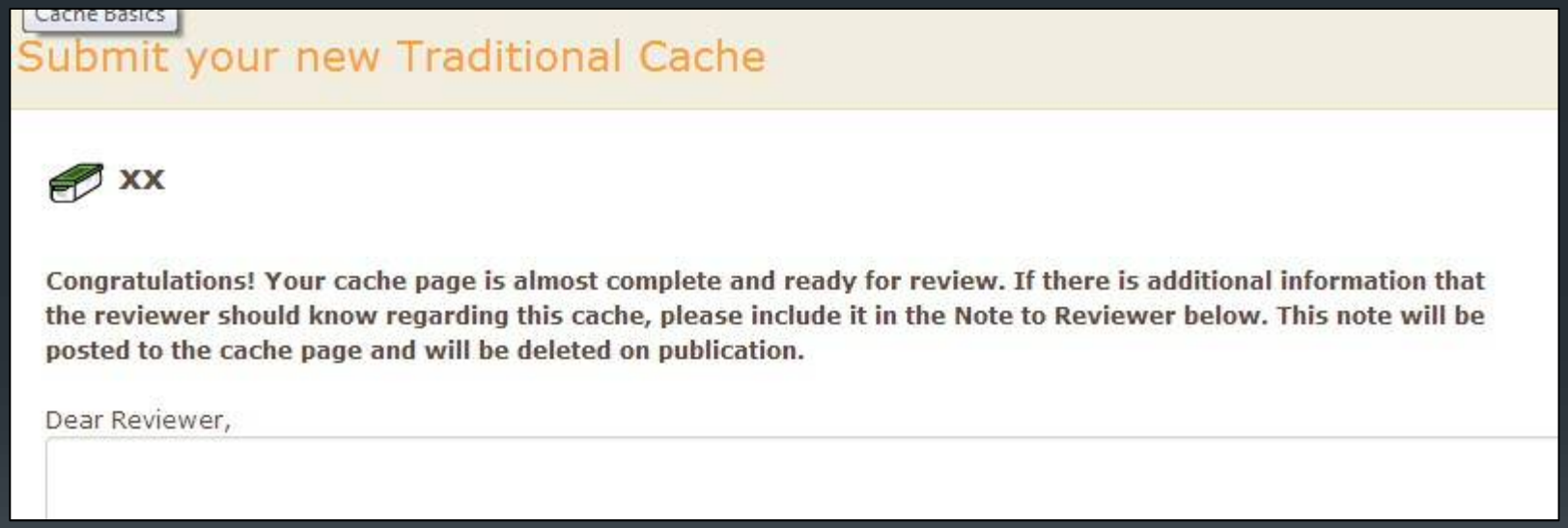
Almost there!



- Leave important information about your cache in this log to the Reviewer
- Permissions, helpful location information, etc. should go here, and will not be published on the cache page when it goes live

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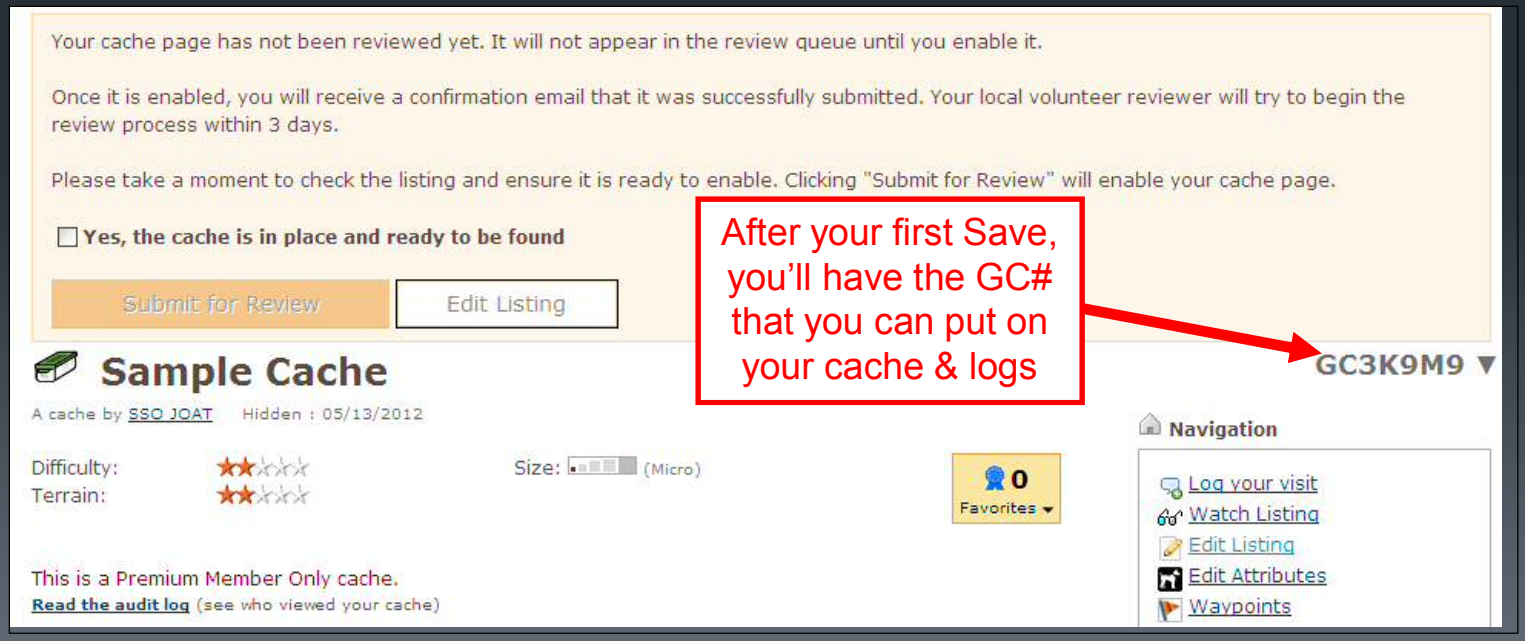
Review Your Cache Page

You can return to Edit Listing, or, if it is ready, check the box, and Submit for Review!



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Edit Your Cache Page

- Your Profile Page will display unpublished caches.
- View and Edit them as much as you need before publication
- Work with your Reviewer to address any issues and edit as necessary

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Waiting for Publication

- Geocache review takes anywhere from moments to a handful of days
- Communication with your Reviewer and getting your ducks in a row ahead of time are key!

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Working with your Reviewer

- **So, who is that Reviewer, anyway?**
  - Greatland Reviewer/GeoawareUSA4
  - Some others might help if our Reviewer is on vacation, swamped with cache submissions, or he retires
  - **Protip:** Get to know LadyBugKids

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Working with your Reviewer

Here's what we'll cover:

- An Introduciton
- What's the Difference Between GeocacheAlaska! And Groundspeak?
- What Does a Reviewer Do, Anyway?
- Helping Your Local Reviewer

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GeocacheAlaska! vs. Groundspeak

What Hats Do They Wear?

- GeocacheAlaska! Inc. Board of Directors
  - Committed to geocacher education and land manager advocacy
  - Works to assure access to local, state, and federal public lands for local geocachers
  - Establish local policies with Land Managers via GeocacheAlaska! Advocacy Committee
  - Follows the mission to Educate, Advocate, and Recreate

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GeocacheAlaska! vs. Groundspeak

Groundspeak Volunteer Reviewer?

- Reviews submitted caches
- Performs administrative cache maintenance
- Assures published caches meet the guidelines
  - Local, State, Federal policies
  - Groundspeak/Geocaching.com Guidelines

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Reviewer Roles

Groundspeak Volunteer Reviewer

- May be asked to intercede on a noncompliant cache on behalf of
  - Land Managers
  - Land Owners
  - Individuals in the caching community

Groundspeak is only a listing service. Ultimately, the cache owner and local caching community are accountable for compliance with local land manager policies

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Reviewer Roles

Groundspeak Volunteer Reviewer

Conformation to Groundspeak Guidelines:

- Proximity
- Non-commercial
- Adequate permission/proper permits
- Distance from home coordinates
- “No agenda”
- “Light and Fun”

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Reviewer Roles

Groundspeak Volunteer Reviewer

New ideas may be tested by:

- Coordinating with and asking other Reviewers
- Using the Groundspeak Appeals process (appeals@groundspeak.com)

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Reviewer Roles

Groundspeak Volunteer Earthcache Reviewer Roles

- Conformation to Groundspeak and Geologocal Society of America (GSA) Guidelines
  - Geology/Earth Science lessons
    - Not Botany, Archaeology, Oceanography, etc.
  - “Solid” logging task(s) relating to the geology lesson

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Reviewer Roles

Groundspeak Volunteer Earthcache Reviewer Roles

- Answer(s) to logging task(s) in a Reviewer Note
- Land Manager permission and contact information, or explicit reason why not in Reviewer Note
- Cache page content source attributions (footnotes, bibliography)
- Written at a Junior high school reading level
  - Not a cut-and-paste from an academic journal article

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Reviewer Roles

Respond to Cache Concerns

- Direct contact from cachers, land managers or property owners
- “Needs Archived” logs
  - Must be appropriate for the situation
    - Multiple DNFs and no response from cache owner
    - Long-time “temporarily” disabled caches with no updates from cache owner
    - Cache is in disrepair or verified missing, and cache owner has not logged in for an extended period of time

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Reviewer Roles

Respond to Cache Concerns

Please note:

- If one caches exclusively by smartphone app, the geocaching.com website does not update your account to reflect the dates one has been active. Be sure to log into the website regularly to avoid any issues

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Reviewer Roles

Administrative Maintenance

- Periodically runs a Pocket Query for the entire state of Alaska looking for:
  - Caches that have been “temporarily disabled” for more than 30 days with no updates from the owner
  - Caches that have four or more DNFs following a consistent string of finds
- Posts a Reviewer Note requesting response within 30 days

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Reviewer Roles

Administrative Maintenance

- Archives the cache during the next review cycle
  - If cache is not replaced, repaired, or updated
  - If owner has not provided a maintenance plan
- Cache owners may request unarchival
  - If maintenance has been performed
  - The cache is reviewed again against the current guidelines

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Reviewer Roles

Administrative Maintenance

- Communication is ***KEY!***

A cache will not be archived if the cache owner maintains communication with the greater caching community and the Reviewer with notes and updates to the cache page

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Reviewer Roles

Administrative Maintenance

- A cacher may appeal a Reviewer's decisions about publication and archival at

www.support.groundspeak.com/index.php?pg=request

- A Reviewer may refer an issue to Groundspeak employees if the issue extends beyond the scope of their volunteer responsibilities.

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Reviewer Roles

Administrative Maintenance

Greatland Reviewer *will* filter on caches with the "Needs Maintenance" attribute and place a note on the cache page

- Request for posting of an "Owner Maintenance" log to remove the attribute and address the maintenance performed
- No further Admin action will be taken unless other problems crop up

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Reviewer Roles

Helping your local Reviewer

Want to “reserve” or check on a location?

- Coordinate Checks:
  - Please create a cache page and submit it with coordinates of interest.
  - This is the only way for the Reviewer to check for proximity issues

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Helpful Resources

- GeocacheAlaska! Forums: http://geocachealaska.proboards.com/board/56/alaska-reviewers-corner
- Geocaching.com Resources: http://www.geocaching.com/resources/default.aspx
- Geocaching Glossary of Terms: http://www.geocaching.com/about/glossary.aspx
- Geocaching Knowledge Books: http://support.groundspeak.com/index.php?pg=kb.book&id=1
- Geocaching.com Forums http://forums.groundspeak.com/GC/
- Geocaching.com Help Center: http://support.groundspeak.com/index.php?pg=request
- GeocacheAlaska! Related Links: http://www.geocachealaska.org/relatedlinks.htm

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Join GeocacheAlaska!

- Your representative Alaska organization
- Volunteer members make EduVents across the state possible
- Work with local, state, and federal systems to promote, permit, and participate in the game

Membership is Vital

- Get involved! (GeocacheAlaska.org)
  - GeocacheAlaska! brings the community together to secure permits with land managers
  - Backed by an involved, knowledgeable membership, the united group better negotiates for permit terms and awareness initiatives

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What does Geocache Alaska do?

- Sponsors and organizes statewide and regional events
- Secured an adopt-a-highway section of the Seward Highway for regular CITO events
- Designs, produces, and offers Alaska geocoins and travelers
- Makes available licensed geocaching merchandise for members
- Maintains EduVent resources in one place to help you learn more about the game in a clear, concise manner
- Gives Alaskan geocachers a forum to discuss geocaching, and our great state!

Enjoy Playing the Game!

- Questions?