

NORTH BRUNSWICK NBM MAGAZINE

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Nation's Next Top Model Home Films at COMPASS POINTE

The 2009 Cast of
Nation's Next Top Model Home.

Farms as Attractions
Agritourism in Brunswick County

Roger Bacon Academy
Celebrates 10 Years

Painting on the Honor System
John Stanley



Meet your neighbors:
-Clif & Laura Bridgers
-Kathryn Norman
-Cape Fear Memorial's
Bridge Tenders

Complimentary

fall 2009

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A full-page photograph of a person standing in a red canoe on a calm body of water. The person is wearing a blue tank top and khaki shorts, and is holding binoculars to their eyes. They are surrounded by dense, lush green foliage and trees, creating a sense of being deep in a forest. The lighting is soft, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

Not All Who Wander are Lost

The Art of Geocaching

STORY BY BILLY JASON FRYE

It's hot. I've been dodging the same fire-ant nest now for half an hour. Scanning the forest floor in this remote piece of Brunswick County somewhere between Winnabow, Green Swamp Gameland and Redwater Bay, I am growing more frustrated by the minute. I can't find what I'm looking for even though I know it is right here. I'm sweat soaked. I forgot my hat in the car and my neck and ears are paying the price. So, I do the only sensible thing: stop, sit down on a hummock far from the biggest fire-ant nest I've ever seen, drink some water and regroup.

I'm not lost, far from it. I have my GPS (Global Positioning System) and North Carolina Gazetteer, and I'm still on the trail I used to get here. My problem is I can't find an ammunition can hidden out here by someone calling himself Voodoo dancer. I've looked under every tree, shrub and log in a 40-foot radius and I just can't find it, and the clouds blowing in look thundery and ready to rain. I'm calling off my search for Voodoo dancer's Geocache, Hidden Tower, but I'll be back to resume my search soon.

Geocaching is a worldwide treasure-hunting game that started around 2000 with the introduction of consumer model GPS units. By using a set of coordinates entered into your GPS you search for hidden containers — geocaches — outdoors, sign the logbook and swap for some of the “treasure” inside, if there is any.

Geocaches are commonly hidden in locations of importance or interest to the hider, some may require puzzle solving or detective work and others require special skills or equipment to access. Ranging in size from the equivalent of a 35mm film canister up to a five-gallon bucket, geocaches can be hidden remarkably well in public places and remote spots alike.

I geocache in the greater Southport area and I have found several “micro” caches (35mm film can sized), as well as a couple of larger caches (shoebox sized) that were hidden in public places: parking lots, parks, near historical markers. I have not found any larger caches like Voodoodancer’s ammunition can at Hidden Tower or the one he calls Stomach Lake. Both Hidden Tower and Stomach Lake require some work to access. Hidden Tower takes some off-road driving, although nothing too tough if the weather is right, but Stomach Lake, so named because the pond that is its hiding place looks like a stomach, requires a kayak.

Mystery or puzzle caches require you to search for clues to the final geocache site. The Rovin’ Reporter, in Southport, has you examine historic photos in the Southport Visitors’ Center to obtain the final coordinates.

Getting Started

Even though Stomach Lake is a bit difficult for the average

Geo-What?

GEOCACHE: A container hidden outdoors containing a logbook and, optionally, treasures or trinkets for the finder(s) to swap. Sometimes shortened to cache.

GEOCACHING: The act of hiding or seeking a geocache.

GEOCACHER: One participating in geocaching.



person to get to, geocaching is quite accessible and it is a fun, family-friendly way to exercise the body and the mind and enjoy the outdoors at the pace you select.

Getting started is simple. At www.geocaching.com, sign up for a free membership to access their worldwide catalog of geocaches and coordinates.

A simple search by zip code reveals pages of geocaches, the difficulty rating of the terrain and challenge of finding the geocache, the name of the geocache and other bits of information. Click the name of the geocache to expand the description, see the name of the geocacher who hid it, get a hint useful for finding the geocache, and upload the coordinates onto your GPS.

Advanced search options allow you to search for geocaches with Google Maps. I

like to use a combination of the zip code and Google Maps searches. This method allows me to find geocaches along the route I’m driving or in areas I’d like to explore more. I always check Google Maps against my gazetteer to get a larger view of the area where the cache is hidden, giving me an idea of the terrain and what I may need to bring along to stay safe and still have fun.

The Equipment

You do need a GPS and a map or gazetteer, along with a few other things, to start geocaching safely, but keep in mind you control what caches you seek and you can limit your search areas to parks and urban areas or more wild places if you choose. Cost can become an issue, but keeping geocaching within your budget, interest level and skill level should be no problem.

Basic GPS devices start at around \$70 and will point you in a

straight line to the selected geocache; top-end models can be as much as \$600, but they come preloaded with sophisticated topographic mapping software and expanded functions. Many newer automotive GPS devices, such as the Garmin Nuvi, can be used for geocaching, but check the specifics for your device for geocaching capabilities. You'll also need a map or gazetteer to use as a backup to your GPS, a water bottle in case you get thirsty, sunscreen and bug spray and a spirit of adventure.

George Bland, assistant manager at Wilmington's Great Outdoor Provision Company, knows a little about geocaching and a lot about the outdoors and some ways you can make both safer and more enjoyable.

"First you'll need a GPS," George says. "We carry the Garmin eTrex Vista and DeLorme Earthmate and can order anything you'd like, but many people have the new Garmin Nuvis from Best Buy and they can support geocaching to a point.

You'll also want, no, need some sort of map as a backup."

We move through the store, looking at some of his geocaching recommendations. A book: *The Essential Guide to Geocaching*. A gazetteer because, as George says, "paper maps don't have a battery." Wide-brimmed hats. ExOfficio's insect repellent clothing. Shirts from Patagonia and Columbia that dry quickly and have built in UVA/UVB protection. Water bottles. Ultralight first aid kits. Carabineers and whistles perfect for use as geocache treasure

"Not all of this is essential to enjoy geocaching. There are 30 or 40 geocaches in Downtown Wilmington, more in the parks and beaches all over New Hanover, Brunswick and Pender counties, most requiring little more than a GPS, map and suitable shoes," George says.

George is right. With a GPS, map, some water and my first aid kit (containing my epi pen for bee

stings), I've had a lot of fun exploring Brunswick and New Hanover counties while geocaching. There are more than 350 geocaches in a 20-mile radius of Southport; finding them has taken me from Bald Head to Brunswick Town to the boonies, and I've barely scratched the surface. So, grab your GPS and find a geocache and maybe we'll cross paths sometime. ■



Below: With a GPS, a map, outdoor skills and an inquisitive nature, geocaching is a great way to explore the great outdoors in Brunswick County.

