

The Micro Manifesto - 2007

Part 1

The state of Micro caches has reached the point where the subject must be addressed. GONIL members and leadership are just the group to bring awareness to this subject and affect change. If we truly love geocaching and wish to preserve and protect the game for all who play and insure its availability for those who wish to play the game in the future, the time to act is now.

This writing is in no way an attempt to position myself as the cache police, nor do I propose that GONIL assume any such role. The reality is that we, as a group, representative leadership, must raise awareness of issues, set standards and encourage all that which is in the best interest of geocaching and GONIL.

Bad micro caches are killing the sport of geocaching. There I said it. I have been bold enough to say what many think and believe. I am not afraid to put it out there. Now let's explore this remark.

I am not in any way anti-micro. I am all for micro caches. A good micro cache exemplifies all that is and can be great about geocaching. Today so many micro caches are just not good. The now archived Lincolnshire micro series in my area was a prime example of good micro geocaching. All the caches were well thought out placements. They carried out a consistent theme.

They were all well crafted. They were well maintained and the owner took an active role in supporting them. DNFs were addressed properly and with promptness and when its time was up the series was archived and the caches removed.

First, let's have a look at the description "bad caches". There are many bad caches out there. Some are far worse than others. There are folks among us who will declare "there are NO bad caches". This is an attempt at politically correct garbage. This is meant to pacify the uncreative, forgive the shortsighted, apologize for the inept and generally let off the hook those not willing to make the effort to achieve some basic standard of acceptance. I am likely sealing my fate so as never to be considered for a position as a volunteer cache approver/reviewer. I am not aware of the process by which these hard working and under appreciated helpers are recruited and trained, however, even they are culpable for allowing the proliferation of crap.

The following are just a few of the qualifiers I will put out there as factors to classify a cache as a bad cache:

- **A cache hidden on private property (with or without permission) is a BAD cache.** The WalMart parking lot is private property. The front porch at the Cracker Barrel Restaurant is private property. â€˜Nuf said.
- **A cache in an inappropriate container is a bad cache.** That

word inappropriate, boy, cuts a pretty wide swath, doesn't it? Yes it does. There are way too many containers in use out there that are just BAD choices. All but the best high-end food storage containers become leaky and nasty very quickly in our part of the world.

Poor choice in containers makes for fast geotrash. If a land manager found a crappy, leaky, smelly, wet and moldy cache would you be surprised to learn that restrictions on geocaching were imposed in his jurisdiction? Our part of the world places higher demands on cache containers than some others. In some ways our area is easy as we can count on high levels of moisture, hearty chewing, four legged forest folk, and strong freeze and thaw cycles. I would guess that more even climates have even more challenges as the extremes of weather are less frequent and predictable. A cache could remain dry for a long time in a desert environment, only to be swamped in a flash flood once in a decade.

- **A poorly maintained cache is a BAD cache.** A log sheet that is full should be replaced promptly. When you see three log entries in a row over a three week period in which all three finders mention the need for a fresh log this is now a bad cache. It is in need of attention by the owner. If you cannot get out to one of your caches over a three week period you likely own too many caches. This is a hobby. If you are invested in it to a greater extent than your free time and other obligations will allow it is time to scale back a bit. Please choose to archive or

adopt out a few of your hides in the interest of preserving the enjoyment of the game for others who play.

- **A cache larger than a micro with no swag inside is a BAD cache.** Many geocachers do not swag swap. Many minicachers live for the treasures in that box. Imagine you are 5 years old and have just hiked even .20 miles into the woodsiness, up and down, looked high and low and were rewarded with an empty, smelly Tupperware box with scraps of wet paper in a moldy ziploc. How many more of these hunts will you be enthusiastic about joining dad on a journey to go find? And, by the way, cache-raiders are BAD geocachers. If all who cache truly swag swap and respect the adage "trade up or trade even", there would be NO empty caches (unless a cache owner hid an empty one in the first place). It is not the minicachers who are absconding with all that swag. What the heck are you all doing with this junk anyway? Do you really need more happy meal toys? How many key chains do you really need?

- **A cache that is repeatedly mugged, at a rate beyond that which is to be reasonably expected is a bad cache.** Bad choice of location? Bad choice of container? Bad situation which results in normal searching drawing a greater than ideal level of suspicion and attention? Bad cache.

- **If the S.O.G.A. (Signs Of Geocaching Activity), or geotrail is so clear from an open area straight to the hidey spot and so obvious that a 7 year old with a normal level of curiosity**

could walk right up and earn a smiley for a fast find without the use of a GPS or even any knowledge of the game! This is a BAD cache too. It might have started out pretty well, but lacked the forethought as to the environmental impact that a popular cache can create doomed this cache to badness. Any cache that adversely effects the environment or the perception of and opinion of geocaching and/or geocachers as a result of this impact on the environment has truly earned the title BAD geocache.

Part 2

The proliferation of BAD micro caches, if not curtailed, has the potential to destroy caching from the inside. The founders of geocaching would likely never speak out on this subject. They have a vested interest in seeing more and more people geocaching. Hey, let's promote those premium memberships. Some of this lies at the core of the micro problem. Geocaching was NEVER intended to be a game or sport to be played at lunch hour in polished Florsheim shoes. Geocaching is not for everyone. Geocaching should not be twisted from its original intentions just so all can play. Not all are supposed to be geocachers. This is a sport not a democracy or a charity. But, hey, I do realize it IS a business for some.

I realize many of us do not want to cache only on a weekend when we have a half day to invest in the activity, however, driving a \$28,000 sport utility vehicle to the back corner of a parking lot in a strip mall is not a sport, it is not a game. It

certainly is NOT geocaching.

Just as virtual caches were shelved and the concept was moved on to become Waymarking, the time is now to move junk micros out of geocaching and on to another site, by another name and another culture. I propose that until a flashier name can be developed and a site is built as a home for this other activity we refer to the pursuit of these finds as "CrapTracking". Actually, that seems like a perfectly fine name for it. Call it what you like, but please do not call it geocaching. Don't introduce it to your friends as geocaching and don't kid yourself. There are precious few rules for our game, and I am not advocating more rules. I am just trying to create awareness of a problem, initiate some valuable dialog and grow our game in a healthy direction.

If a new geocacher hunts a WalMart, lamp post skirt micro cache they think this is what geocaching is supposed to be. We have set a very bad example. If 10 of their first 20 finds are these types of silly pursuits, just how seriously are they to think the sport is? If the most interesting place that geocaching brings them is to a guard rail along side a highly trafficked secondary road in a suburb how fun was that? How far do you think they will go and how much effort are they likely to invest in placing their first cache for you to hunt and find? A 35mm film container velcroed to the underside of a bench at a strip mall shopping center in front of a radio Shack is no ones idea of an adventure. A magnetic key holder in a hotel parking lot placed there just so a traveling salesman with a GPS can get his cache fix is not a

sport, an adventure or even a challenge. When was the last time you had to think twice about interpreting the information on your GPS screen in the middle of an empty parking lot at 11:30 at night? Was the tree canopy messing with your signals? What canopy? What tree? I have to believe the founders of geocaching are horrified at the thought of a geocacher who has never gotten dirt on their shoes. Did you need to consult your compass or look at the map on the cache listing? Didn't think so. Did you choose to decode the hint? What hint? The first ever lamp post skirt micro was a stroke of pure genius. Every other one after that was just copycat crap.

We still need micro caches. We just need to uphold the standards that I believe any and all rational geocachers would agree were and still can be the factors upon which the decision to hide a micro cache should be based. Following are some smart criteria I offer up to reflect this spirit and intent:

Only hide a micro geocache if:

- **The location will not support the hiding of something larger.** You should be hiding the largest container a location will allow. Can the hide hold a reasonable log sheet? One in which a finder can put down more than just initials? Is the log sheet large enough to last a reasonable time before it needs to be replaced? This is also an issue to aid the cache owner. A log sheet should be big enough to last a minimum of six months without replacement. This is also for the fun of the finder.

Looking through a log sheet and seeing the names of fellow cachers who have been there before you is a lot of fun. Why deny this to others? I have seen Chicagoland geocacher names in hides all over the country and across the Atlantic. How cool is that, To know that a fellow cacher has traveled thousands of miles only to wind up in the same unique spot as you? A cache should be large enough to accommodate travel bugs if possible. Way too many Travel bugs stay in the possession of cachers for way too long simply because the cacher has not crossed paths with a hide big enough that they can put the bug into. And, hey, that reminds me, stop attaching travel bug tags to things that are larger than makes reasonable sense. If the bug hitchhiker is to large for all but the largest 1% of hides out there€! do not expect it to move much, often or well. And, while I am at it, **NO MORE STUFFED TOYS!** I will not take or move TBs with stuffed toys. Too big. Too damp. They are all smelly, moldy and icky. Just geotrash. Bad decision. Bad choice. Bad idea. Just geojunk. A cache should be large enough to accommodate a few simple swag items, especially signature items. Most sig items are, by practical intention and design, very small. My above remarks regarding log sheets and cacher "footprints" bears this out as well. It is fun to see common and identifiable sig items in caches you find.

- **Hide a micro cache when the final destination is more important than the cache itself.** Sometimes the journey is not the treasure, but the destination is the prize. A simple trail, heck, even a drive-up that culminates in a geocacher being exposed to

something of value is a great reason to hide a micro. A memorial, a sculpture, an amazing feature of nature, even the playground you enjoyed as a tyke is worth sharing with our community. A geocache is a great way to do this. Again, mention it in the description, or even surprise me when I get there, but make it worth my trip even if the trip is short. And while you are at it... think creatively, put in the effort, and find a way to safely and securely hide something bigger. Hiding a micro stage and a larger final is a great way to offer more; so it becomes a multi, so much the better. This is also a great way to create a modern virtual cache. Use a simple multi or an offset cache to work around the lack of the virtual option. Use a date on the memorial, the address on the building or some such other information available at the site as components of the final coords or clues to the puzzle to get the final coords. Any location of value can be leveraged into a geocache, and one of a size larger than a micro if you are willing to be a bit creative. Look for ways not to take the easy way out.

- **Hide a micro as a stage in a multi cache.** Micros are a great way to provide coords or other info on the way to a larger, more satisfying and proper final hide. Multis get far less traffic than other hides. All the reasons for this underscore the current trend towards laziness and the departure from caching at its intention and at its best. You only get one smiley for hunting multiple locations. Cut the crap. Quit sniveling. It is not and was never supposed to be about the numbers. Although we call this a sport or a game, it is and was never intended to be one in which score

was kept between players. There is absolutely ZERO relationship between the number of caches one has found and the relative skills, abilities and level of contribution to the game one has made. A geocacher might have a lot of finds to their credit but very little respect for nature. Respect for property rules and boundaries or respect for his fellow players. Would his higher find count make him a "better geocacher"? I would argue, NO. Certainly not a better person or one who is setting an example for others. Clearly, no one that any one would openly profess to look up to, admire or celebrate. A geocacher with 300 finds of drive up lamp post skirt micros who has never attempted to solve a puzzle cache, track a multi or bushwhack their way to an ammo can is not much of a geocacher by any sane standard. But, hey, they sure are a mighty impressive CrapTracker.

- **Hide a micro as a final for a puzzle cache.** This is again a situation where the journey (puzzle) and the solution is the real treasure. No one minds a micro final in this situation. Puzzle caches are less often hunted by minicachers so the swag is less of an issue. Travelers and out-of-towners are less likely to hunt complicated puzzles as well. They see far fewer travel bugs as a result. Many travel bug owners prefer NOT to see their bugs wind up in puzzle caches. The lower traffic tends to strand them for too long.

- **Hide a micro cache when it is a part of some bigger and better idea and intention.** U.S. highway 270 is a ring road that circles Columbus, OH. I am not sure of its total length. From the

outer edge the highway is about 10 miles from the city center, approx a 20 mile diameter. A local cacher has hidden a series that is a circle tour of Columbus. The individual caches are hidden at nearly all of the exits. Caches are all about 1¼ mile from the exit. It is a perfect way for a visitor or a newcomer to get a really neat tour of the city and surrounding suburbs. I did the tour at night when in town for business. The caches are all findable. The neighborhoods are all safe. In spite of the fact that these are all micros, and some of them would qualify easily as "crap-trash" micros individually, as a series they are truly something special. I came across another example of creative micro caching in the Austin, TX area. A geocacher hid a series of micros between his home and the home of his ex wife. The cache series is themed around his frequent journeys to grab up his daughter for visits. Again, individually, basically crap, but together, fun and interesting. Both of these series offer up the element of a timed run as an option. Follow the speed limit. Hunt quickly and get back in the car. This could make for an interesting road trip for a carload of cachers. In our own area the Bob series was a great example of micro caches as a creative event and journey. It was a bit extreme, and surely a maintenance nightmare, likely the biggest reason why it is gone, but it was a lot of fun for many who hunted it. It introduced cachers to areas, neighborhoods and homes they would likely have never seen without the series. Remember, though, many cachers do not hunt an entire series as a series. If they only hunt a few of a series of junk micros, and likely miss out on the intended "series factor", then they are just "Craptracking",

hunting junk.

I am as guilty as the next geocacher of hunting and logging crap micros just for the numbers. I am moving away from this by actively ignoring these listings and I am encouraging all geocachers who truly care about the sport to do the same. Do not hunt the crap. Do not be the Craptracker. Set an example by not hiding them either. I have archived two of my junk micros. I have one or two other hides that will be either upgraded to larger containers where possible or archived as well. I am choosing to lead by example. Are you with me?

Thank you for reading. Please offer up your thoughts on the issues presented here, and then go out and find an ammo can. Better yet, go hide one for me to find.

Part 3

In the very near future I am to create my first two bookmark lists. One will be a listing of what I believe to be truly standout caches. Many and most bookmark lists of favorite caches are strictly based on opinion. Mine will be a bit different. I will publish the criteria I use in qualifying a cache for inclusion. The working list of qualifications is as follows:

- Must be a cache that I have hunted and found
- Must be larger than a micro
- Must not have developed adverse environmental impact
- Must NOT be located on private property

- Must be well maintained (at the time of my finding)
- Must possess some intrinsic element which results in a smile on my face and a feeling of "WOW"

I welcome any other criteria you all might offer up to be added to this early working list.

I will also be building a bookmark list that I am currently using the working title "worthy micro caches". This list would reflect micro caches that are in keeping with the criteria, spirit and intent of this document. I see no value in outing and/or calling attention to the junk out there. You now who you are and you all know which micro caches are crap (at least you have a much clearer picture now). My list will be a focus on the positive. I will accept submissions for consideration from GONIL membership for the inclusion of caches on this list. There is to be great motivation here. Hide a worthy micro cache, submit it to me for a place on the worthy micro bookmark list. You just might earn the admiration of your peers and a position of status and glory within our great GONIL community. Me, I am just looking for quality geocaches to hunt and brag about to my friends, both geocachers and muggles alike.