

GEOCACHE ALASKA! Inc.

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MARCH 2011 NEWSLETTER

HAPPENING NOW:

Days are lengthening and the snow cover is getting thinner – must be Springtime in Alaska! Twilight isn't until after 8pm so those unfound night caches are going to become after-midnight caches if you don't get them done soon. Spring brings ramped-up opportunities for personal CITO activity as the snow reveals all sorts of 'treasures' to be found – pack them out and keep our parks looking pristine. And – there's no time like now to visit your 'owned' caches to spiff them up with a little new swag, check the container's watertightness, and replace the logbook if necessary.

RENEWAL TIME!

Visit geocachealaska.org today and sign up for an annual subscription Premium Membership. Help underwrite our land use advocacy outreach efforts and the annual website hosting costs. Each member makes a difference!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

Mar 20 – **Another Mat-Su Cachers Unite Flash Mob - GC2PN9J** - organizing the Cachers of the Mat-Su in their own GeocacheAlaska! Chapter.

June 4 – **WWFM 8 - Anchorage AK - Town Square Flash Mob 2 – GC2PNYM**
Be a part of the world-wide caching sensation - World-Wide Flash Mob No. 8, bringing cachers together all across the globe on a summer day to celebrate the social side of geocaching fun!

EDUCATE YOURSELF:

The GeocacheAlaska! Inc. website's EDUCATION page has PDF presentations from our entire Eduvent Series. To date, we've seen Geocaching basics, SWAG, Earthcaching, Benchmarking, Cache Placements, Cache Submittals and the role of the Groundspeak Reviewer covered. The most recent Eduvent presented GSAK (Geocaching Swiss Army Knife) macro usage. Download them online from the [EDUCATION](#) page on our website and power-up your geocaching skills! (<http://geocachealaska.org/education.htm>)

CITO: ADOPT A HIGHWAY!

GeocacheAlaska! has adopted the Seward Highway for the first few miles 'northbound' from Girdwood. Three CITO events are held during the non-snow months, and you'll be seeing the first event of 2011 listed soon...



GEAR GUIDE – ALASKA STYLE:

Visit the TOTT thread on the GeocacheAlaska! forum to report on your indispensable TOTT (Tool Of The Trade). What do you consider the absolute bare minimum necessities to hunt caches in Alaska? Of course, there's a real difference between urban vs backcountry caching gear – and there might be seasonal differences too. A peek into NorthWes' cache bag reveals a GPS snuggled away, a spare set of batteries, a good-sized compass set to the correct declination, some swag, a Bison cache ready to place, a few replacement logsheets, at least one small garbage bag, a water bottle and a camera. To see more check out the TOTT thread – and share what makes your caching adventures a success in the Great Land!

LAND ACCESS HIGHLIGHTS:

Advocacy Committee members are working to secure a Geocaching permit for the Mat-Su State Parks. This year's Chugach State Park (CSP) Geocaching Permit Number is **11-007**. It must appear on your CSP cache container and on your cache listing page. See GeocacheAlaska! Inc's **Land Access info** at the [Land Managers](#) link on our geocachealaska.org website.

EVER WONDERED WHAT THOSE ATTRIBUTE SYMBOLS MEAN? TIME TO FIND OUT:

Please, put Attributes on your Geocache Listings

By Scott Aleckson (SSO JOAT)

Disclaimer: The views expressed by this often opinionated cacher do not necessarily reflect the views of GeocacheAlaska!, the Board of Directors, or any other member of the GeocacheAlaska! organization, nor is there any affiliation with GroundSpeak.

As I continue to make my way around the countless cache listings available at geocaching.com, I have come to find that there are still many caches out there that have this much dreaded warning in the top right section of the page...



No attributes available

Why? It baffles the mind. Why go to all the trouble of finding the location, recording the coordinates, planting a cache container with logbook and swag, writing up your detailed cache listing, and then submitting it for reviewer approval while skipping the easy step of picking up to 10 attributes for your cache listing? I have to think that the reason is that people don't know what they are, how to select them, or what they all mean. So, let's fix that, right here, right now!











To quickly answer the question that has popped into the minds of several folks reading this, "What do attributes do for my cache listing?", I'll sum it up as simply as I can... it attracts the right cachers to the right caches. Many cachers travel to distant areas for caching. As there are over a million cache listings on this planet, there must be a way to quickly sort through them for the ones you want to seek. Thus, a lot of cachers will filter the caches for an area based on attributes in addition to things like cache type, D/T ratings, container sizes, find activity, etc. If a handicapped cacher wants to know what they can get to, they'll filter by the handicap attribute. During the winter, people filter by winter access attributes. People on a driving road trip who don't want to hike a great distance may filter by the Park-N-Grab attribute. If you haven't selected appropriate attributes for your cache, these people are not even seeing your cache listings when they run their filters. And it can be even worse to pick the wrong attributes.

How do I select Attributes for my cache listing?

It's really easy. As the Cache Owner (CO), when you first save or submit your cache listing, you will get a page at geocaching.com that says your cache has been saved/submitted and then it prompts you to select Attributes your cache. So you have to click on a link to get to the Attributes page.

The CO can add or edit the Attributes for any of their owned caches at any time right from the cache page. The menu at the upper right corner of the page where you select "Log cache" will have an entry about halfway down the list that states, "edit attributes" (see the doggie?). Pick that item and will take you to the Attributes editing page.

Navigation

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The Attributes page is nothing more than a table of the Attribute images, a single phrase description of each, and two or three "radio buttons" for you to select the state of each Attribute. Some Attributes are either turned "on" or "off". Others can be set to "yes", "no", or "off". When in the "no" state, the

image changes to have a red border with the standard red slash through it. When an Attribute is turned “off”, the image is grayed out and will not appear on your listing at all.

You may pick up to 10 Attributes for your cache listing. There are currently 56 possible Attributes to select from and new ones are periodically added to the geocaching site. Since you only get 10, you have to be very picky about which ones have the most meaning to this particular cache. And if there are less than 10 Attributes that apply, well it should go without saying that you should only pick the ones that actually apply. Do NOT pick Attributes just to fill up the quota of 10. If only 3 apply, then just pick those 3 and be done with it.

You might notice that while you get to pick 10, there are actually 12 attributes boxes on your cache listing page. Two of them are reserved for other uses. GroundSpeak can assign custom attributes as they develop them. One such custom attribute that must be assigned by GroundSpeak is the Lost & Found Tour.







 If someone posts a Needs Maintenance log to your cache, it will trigger the “first aid” attribute to be displayed. To clear this attribute, the owner needs to visit the cache and correct whatever problem was reported, and then post an Owner Maintenance Log to the cache, after which the Needs Maintenance attribute will be cleared.



One last general point about Attributes; when you do your regular cache checks (at least once per year) please review the Attributes that you have selected for the cache listing. Things change over time. Trails wash out or get improved. New rules may pop up for the area prohibiting activities that may have been OK when the cache was placed. So, please make it a point to check your caches, check your listings, and check your chosen Attributes. Fix or update all of them as needed. Cache ownership is NOT a drop it and forget it activity. Keep your caches current and thereby the visiting cachers happy. Happy cachers write better logs!



For the remainder of this article, I will list out all the currently available attributes with some tips on what they mean and where you should or shouldn't use them.

Permissions:

  Dogs are either specifically allowed or not allowed in the area of, and leading up to the cache. If it is a place where dogs might be allowed, but you probably wouldn't want to take your dog there (e.g. a muddy swamp or a technical climb), just leave it turned off.

  Bicycles are either specifically allowed or prohibited from the area of, and leading up to the cache. Again, if there is no bicycle rule, but the area wouldn't be a good place for riding a bicycle (like that muddy swamp), then just leave this attribute turned off.

  Motorcycles, and we are talking about OFF-ROAD “dirt bikes”, are either specifically allowed or specifically prohibited from the area leading up to the cache. Street motorcycles get the same consideration as other highway vehicles and this attribute should not be used in the sense of highway vehicles.

  Quads, or as we refer to them in Alaska, “Four-Wheelers”, are either specifically allowed or specifically prohibited from the cache area, just like dirt bikes.



Off Road vehicles, such as Jeeps and dune buggies, are either specifically allowed or specifically prohibited from an area. Many park areas in Alaska have specifically prohibited all forms of motorized off-road vehicles (snowmachines are often treated separately).



In the winter months, there are certain areas that specifically allow or prohibit snowmachines in the cache area. For instance, if a winter area is a skiing-only area, you should indicate that snowmobiles are not allowed. And for those areas where snowmachines are allowed only after the land manager clears it (e.g. national forests), state that in your listing.



Similar to all the above, these are used to indicate areas that either specifically allow or prohibit horses. Take horse access to the area into consideration and just like dogs or bicycles, leave this attribute turned off if it isn't a good riding area.



Campfires are either allowed or prohibited from the cache area. If there is a campground with fire rings available, then indicating that campfires are OK would be warranted. As would it be beneficial to denote specific geographic fire bans that are in place.



The truck drivers and RVs icon has as much to do with accessibility as anything else. If the cache is located in a place where a retired couple from Texas in a 40-foot motorhome should not try to drive into, then turn on the No-RV attribute. If the cache is at or near a good RV campground or dump station, then turn the Yes-RV attribute on.

Equipment:



If it will cost money to access the area of the cache, turn this attribute on.



If you'll need climbing gear (ropes, harnesses, etc.), then turn this attribute on.



If the only way to get to the cache is by using a boat, then turn this attribute on.



Use this one if the cache is underwater and requires scuba gear to access.



Usually used with a night cache, use this one if you must have a flashlight.



A form of night caching puzzle, used to indicate that a UV Light is required.



For winter caches, this indicates that you'll need snowshoes to get to the cache.



Also for winter caches, this indicates that you'll need cross-country skis to get to the cache site. That generally means the trail to the cache is designated for skiing only.



This attribute gives warning that some kind of special tool is needed to access the cache. This could be anything from a simple screwdriver to a special wrench or magnetic retrieval tool. Chances are that the cacher will have to make more than one trip to the site to gain access.



A Wireless Beacon is part of the cache. If the cache has a Garmin Chirp device, this attribute needs to be used. It is not limited to the Chirp and any other type of cache, usually a multi or puzzle, that uses a radio transmitter should have this attribute selected.

Conditions:



This cache area is either good or bad for bringing along small children.



For those who are in a hurry, use the Yes icon if the time needed to get from your car to the cache and back will always be less than one-hour for the average person. Use the No icon if it is impossible to complete this in less than an hour. If the answer is, "it depends, but maybe", then it's probably best to leave this one turned off and describe things in your listing.



Scenic view should be used if there really is something majestic or very interesting to see near the cache site; in other words, most people would want to take a picture of it. If the cache site is definitely not scenic (i.e. a Wal-Mart parking lot), then you can choose to display the Not scenic version. Otherwise, leave it turned off.



Significant Hike means that you need to be in decent physical shape and equipped for a long or difficult hiking trail. You can turn on the No hike version of this if the cacher will have short and easy access to the cache close to the parking area.



Difficult Climbing indicates a physically demanding or more technical climb is involved along the access to the cache. The No version can be used to indicate that the terrain changes leading to the cache are easily walk-able.



May require Wading is only available as a Yes icon. If the cacher must wade through water (during the summer) to get to the cache, then turn this one on.



May require Swimming is similar to the wading icon, but this one means that waders will not be enough to get you there while remaining dry as swimming is necessary (in summer).



If the cache is truly available at any time of the day or night, then you can turn on the Yes attribute to indicate such. If the area is shut down or closed during any portion of the day, then you should turn on the No attribute for this one.



A night cache or any cache which might be more pleasant or interesting to do during the night can be indicated with the Recommended at Night attribute. If the cache should NOT be visited in the dark, then use the No icon to warn people not to try it.



If the cache is absolutely, positively available (without heavy equipment) during the entire winter regardless of snow and ice, then turn this attribute to Yes. If there is no way to get to your cache during the winter months, then turn this one to No. An important one for Alaska.



Stealth Required is generally used for urban caches. If your cache would usually have people (muggles) around who would see the cacher searching, then you should indicate Yes. If the cache is placed such that the cacher will have plenty of privacy despite being in a public area, then you can turn on the No version. Wilderness caches generally leave this off.



Watch for Livestock is an either on or off icon. The meaning can change based on your geographical region. It means one thing in farmland, but could be used in areas of Alaska to indicate a high local population of Moose or Caribou that you should watch for.



A recent addition to the attribute lineup is the Field Puzzle icon. These are available only for Multi and Mystery cache types. If your puzzle cache will have to be solved partially or entirely “in the field”, then you should turn this attribute to Yes. If your puzzle is solved entirely at home with no field component, switch this one to the No version. If your Multi or Mystery cache is not a puzzle at all, then leave this one turned off.



While similar to another attribute, the Night Cache attribute is used to indicate a very specific type of multi-cache trail that must be completed in the dark. Why they chose to also have a No version of this icon is beyond me, but it would mean that this cache is not a night cache, which I would think is better served by just turning it off.



A Park-N-Grab cache means that you can park right next to the cache. There is no hiking or significant walking involved. The No version would indicate that you can't park next to the cache, which might be helpful if the Google map seems to indicate you can drive up to the cache, but you really can't.



The Abandoned Structure icon should be used if there are buildings near the cache, but you can say with certainty that no one lives in or uses these structures. The No version of this attribute would indicate that the old buildings you see near the cache actually are in use and people may be there.



This icon is used to indicate that the cache is less than 1 km (0.62 mile or 3,281 feet) from the parking location. Or the No version could indicate the cache is more than 1 km, but that is better handled with one of the next 2 icons.



This icon really means that the cache is greater than 1 km, but less than 10 km (6.2 miles) from the parking location. The No version would be a little confusing, but might mean the cache is more than 10 km, which is better handled with the next icon.



This icon means the cache is greater than 10 km (6.2 miles) from the parking location. The No version would seem to indicate the cache is less than 10 km, which would be better served by using one of the previous 2 icons instead.

Hazards:



This is the only hazard attribute that has both positive and negative icons. The Poison Plants icon used in Alaska would indicate the presence or absence of some of our very few contact irritant plants such as Cow Parsnip. In other geographic locations, it is commonly used for Poison Oak and Ivy warnings.



The Dangerous Animals attribute is used in Alaska to indicate the cache area is likely home to Bears. Naturally it has a bit of a different meaning way down south.



As there are no ticks in Alaska, I wouldn't expect to see this icon ever used up here.



We have lots of abandoned gold mines in Alaska, but this icon would be used if there are open mine shafts, caves, or similar mining hazards in the cache area.



This attribute is just what it says; the cache is located near or on a cliff. It may be at the top of a cliff with a cacher fall hazard or at the bottom with falling rock hazard.



Use this to indicate the cache area would be frequented by hunters during open seasons.



A very generic "Dangerous Area" attribute to cover a wide variety of hazards. If you use this icon, you should explain in your cache listing what specific hazards exist.



Thorns are generally referring to Devil's Club and similar thorny plants in the area.

Facilities:



If you can find and log the cache while sitting in a wheelchair, then you have a true Terrain rating of 1 and you can turn on this attribute. If you cannot get to the cache in a wheelchair, then the Terrain rating should be greater than 1 and you may turn on the No version. I'd suggest only using the No version on low Terrain rated caches that are close to HC access, but are not actually wheelchair accessible. Leave it off for high terrain wilderness.



If there is readily available parking near the cache or at the trailhead that takes you to the cache, then you can turn this one on. If your cache is near a road, but there is no parking available close to the cache, then you should turn on the No Parking version.



This one indicates that there is a mass public transit (bus, train, etc) access to the site.



Drinking water is either available or not available near the cache site.



Public Restrooms are either available or not available near the cache site.



A public telephone is available near the cache site. The No Phone icon may be used to further indicate that there is no cellular phone service at the cache site. This can be important for folks using GPS enabled "Smartphones" for geocaching.



Picnic tables are either available or not available near the cache site.



Camping is either permitted or prohibited near the cache site.



The terrain leading up to the cache will allow a baby stroller to be pushed along, or the trail is such that not even a baby stroller can be taken to the cache.



There is fuel (gasoline, diesel) available near the cache site, or not. This is best used on rural caches since any cache in the city is going to be somewhere "close" to fuel.



There is a restaurant available near the cache, or there isn't. Again this one is geared more towards the remote and rural caches, not the big city.

Congratulations! You are now an Attribute Expert! Thank you for keeping your cache listings current and easy to search, especially for those using GSAK!!!

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Opportunities are open to serve on GeocacheAlaska!’s Advocacy, Education, Events, and Fundraising committees. See more information on the member forums about each committee. Just an hour or so a month working with like-minded cachers helps build the game in Alaska!

Visit geocachealaska.org today and sign up for an annual subscription Premium Membership!