

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

March 7, 2017

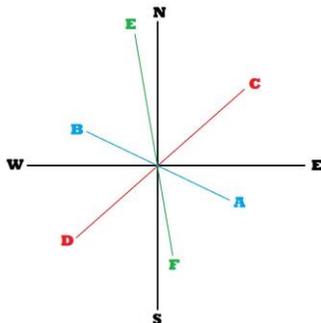
While I recognize that some of you who receive this weekly missive don't read it, don't read all of it, or read it occasionally—and that's fine—I appreciate whatever thought you are able to give to these musings. If you do read this column, though, some of the recent editions have been lengthy, and I'm going to be briefer this week.

Last Sunday, Ben Davis gave a plug for geocaching in his short presentation ramping up to next Sunday's auction in support of **our 8th well** in Ghana. Ben mentioned geocaching because a "geocaching adventure" is what I offer every year in the auction; and, while geocaching is a year-round activity, the approach of spring is a wonderful time to be thinking about it. So this week I'm going to write about geocaching

You are no doubt aware that the United States has a network of geopositioning satellites that surround the planet. We know them as GPS satellites, and the Russians have a similar system, known as GLONASS.

And you may know that the primary purpose of these satellites is military. In the beginning, they were for our ballistic missile submarines, since you can't hit anything with a missile unless you know the location from which you're launching it.¹

GPS satellites provide position information by a process known as "triangulation." The GPS receiver on a submarine takes bearings to as many satellites as possible, and where those lines of bearing intersect is the location of the receiver. The more lines of bearing, the more precise the location.



While the GPS signals are amazingly accurate, their full capability is classified, and "ordinary mortals" don't have access to it. BUT, on May 2, 2000, the U.S. Government declassified the signal sufficiently that it became useful for non-military uses. The very next day, a fellow named Dave Ulmer planted what would become the very first "geocache" near Portland, Oregon, and by the end of the month, a new sport had been born.

In the beginning, geocaches were generally metal ammunition cans, and geocachers had to use specialized and expensive equipment in order to locate them (I paid almost \$800 once). Today, though, www.Geocaching.com has apps for every smartphone, and you can do most everything for FREE.

The sport was a great deal more technical in the beginning, but today, using a smartphone makes the whole thing relatively simple. While the signal has been declassified down to about six feet (making it useful for locating your phone or your car), that still leaves lots of room for searching, as you know if you've ever used "Find My iPhone."



¹ I don't know whether this is still true, or not, but it was true in the beginning.

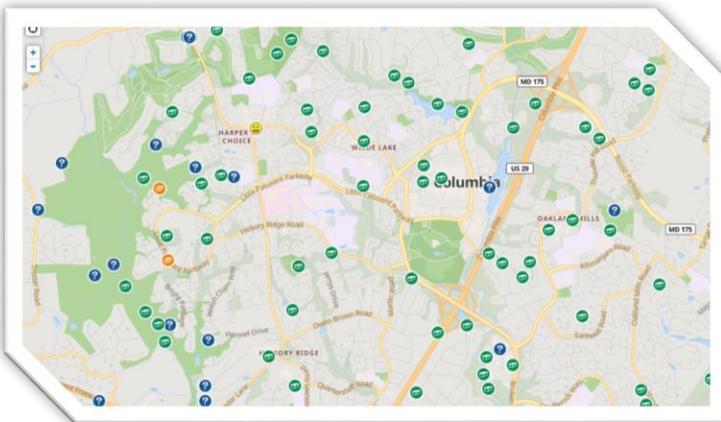
The truth of the matter is that geocaching is little more than high-tech hide-and-seek. Once you know the coordinates of the cache, you follow your GPS compass until you're within about a ten-foot radius of the cache. At that point, near the limit of the signal accuracy, you have to wander about, crawl about, and otherwise search for the cache. You know that the cache has to be hidden in such a way as to protect it from weather, animals, and Muggles (non-geocaching humans), so after a while you learn how and where to look.

Once you've found the cache, you can upload that information to the Great Computer in the Sky and move on to the next one. Larger caches have a logbook to be signed and trinkets to be traded, but I don't usually do that unless I'm with children.

One of the things I like best is to find "Travel Bugs." These are simply numbered "dog tags" that move from cache to cache, literally around the world. If you find one, you log that you've found it, place it within a week or two in another cache in some interesting location, and log where you put it. In that way, the Bug's owner can track its travels from wherever he or she lives.



There are currently more than 2,000,000 geocaches worldwide, and they are literally almost everywhere. The map shows geocaches within a short distance of my current location at The Meeting House. While the first caches were ammo cans, these days they are more commonly Tupperware boxes, plastic film canisters, and other small, waterproof containers.



Geocaching is a pleasant and interesting way to be outdoors, and if you win Sunday's Geocaching Adventure, I'll show you what I mean 😊.

Dave

