



By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

Colette Jessen of Grant has been feeling the thrill of geocaching for about four years. What is she doing?

Geocaching (pronounced geo-cashing) is a worldwide game of hiding and seeking treasure. A geocacher can place a geocache in the world, pinpoint its location using GPS technology and then share the geocache's existence and location online.

Anyone with a GPS unit can then try to locate the geocache. A GPS unit is an electronic device that can determine your approximate location on the planet. Coordinates are normally given in latitude and longitude.

The word Geocaching refers to GEO for geography and to CACHING, the process of hiding a cache.

Jessen and her sister, Brenda Ledall of Imperial, plus Callin Ledall, Ledall's son, have had fun together hunting down geocaches. They've found them around Ogallala, Grant, Chase County, and Jessen has also located geocaches in California, Oklahoma, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Mexico and more.

As a matter of fact, she found one in a pub in downtown Oslo, Norway while on vacation.

Some people plan their vacations around the hunt. Jessen doesn't, as a person has to go online ahead of time to get the geocache's coordinates.

To become a serious geocacher, a person creates an account at www.geocaching.com, gets the coordinates (longitude and latitude), enters them in a GPS unit, finds the geocache, then goes back online and registers the find.

Each geocache has an assigned number, so the serious geocacher can check that cache off the list.

Jessen said some people have found thousands of geocaches.

She became involved with the hobby because "I like the thought of the old days and people burying money in jars, like a treasure hunt.

"There's the thrill of walking by it and no one knows it's there," she said.

The geocache may be as big as a military ammunition box, and as small as a lipstick holder. It can be disguised as many items.

Some contain a "treasure." Jessen and the Ledalls found one at Little Grand Canyon between Imperial and Wauneta that contained a \$5 Cabela's gift card. If a "treasure" is found, another one of similar or greater value must be left.

Some don't contain anything. But, the treasure isn't important, the hunters explained. It's the thrill of the hunt.

Callin said, "It's fun to find something in the middle of nowhere. It's the fun of finding it, too. It feels so good when you've searched forever."

He recalled a hunt for a geocache near Big Springs, where the container was camouflaged as a pine branch on an actual pine tree. That one was hard to see.

Then there's the three-step geocache, where you find the first one and it gives you the coordinates for the second one, which leads you to the final geocache.

The geocachers have even developed their own "lingo," Jessen said. "Mugglers" mean people who steal or damage a geocache.

TNLN means "took nothing, left nothing." TFTC means "thanks for the cache."

One of the most unique geocaches Jessen has found was a bird feeder that looked as if it was full of seed.

Jessen looked and looked for the geocache. She finally decided that the bird feeder must be it. Turned out, it was hollow, and the person who placed it had glued bird seed to the window to make it look as if it was full.

Another fun one was a metal outlet cover that was magnetized and attached to a light pole. It looked functional, but was really a hollow box—a geocache.

Jessen said that in Phoenix in the winter she can walk her dog and find 10 geocaches within a mile of her home.

In Grant, she said one man has found and placed many geocaches. The Boy Scouts have also placed one there.

Brenda Ledall said geocaching would be a good tourist attraction in Chase County. She envisions a walking geocache search, or one involving a family bike ride.

Jessen agreed, adding that it's a good way to get the kids off the couch and away from the television. It would also be a good way to get tourists to stop for an hour or so to stretch their legs while hunting a geocache.

Ledall noted that most hunting involves walking, so it's good exercise, too.

There are a number of geocaches in the area. Many are located at tourist attractions in Ogallala. There's one between Imperial and Benkelman.

And, there's one at The Balcony House Bed and Breakfast in Imperial.

That's where the trio ended up Monday. They found one, the TNLN type, as it was a "sign-in only" geocache.

But, we won't tell you where it is. Get a GPS unit and find it yourself. And, find the thrill of the hunt, too.

It could be a fun, new recreational opportunity in the New Year.