



Lost and Found

A quaint memory, a technological blunder, and a refreshing hike made for an entertaining afternoon at Rice Lake Conservation Area

My grandfather, a native of Port Hope, will sometimes dig down into his memory and share stories from his childhood with me. One day as we were driving along, he felt inspired to tell me about his first time riding in a car. The car was a neighbour's new Ford, the destination was Rice Lake. There my grandfather remembers scooping rice out of the aptly named lake, which his mother later prepared for dinner. "Really?" I asked, "Is there actually rice growing in the lake?"

It turns out that the most extensive stands of wild rice were swept away when the water level of the Rice Lake was raised in order to connect it to the Trent-Severn Waterway, but still my curiosity was piqued. I decided to head out to Rice Lake Conservation Area, which is owned by the Ganaraska Conservation Authority and located on the west end of the large lake, just east of Bewdley.

My goal for the day wasn't to sing for my supper while searching for rice, but rather to find my first geocache. I'd heard about this concept of a high tech scavenger hunt, where seekers use a Global Positioning System (GPS) device to track down hidden "caches" containing simple trinkets and treasures, but, being a self-confessed technological neophyte, had never tried geocaching myself.

The night before, my dad ran me through the functions on the fancy GPS he was rather nervously lending me for the day, and I dutifully downloaded the coordinates for the cache from the geocaching.com website into the GPS. I had convinced a friend to come along as another pair of cache-seeking eyes. She, being about as technology savvy as myself, greeted the idea with lukewarm enthusiasm as first, but started to get excited as well once I expertly (or so I thought) used the GPS to pick out the correct trail and direction that would lead us to the cache. As set off on our hike, we were struck by our lovely surroundings in this environmentally significant area. We had left a meadow of long, tall grasses and entered the lush forest of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Vibrantly green ferns quivered under the light rain, a canopy of tall trees bordered either side of the trail, and frogs hopped in and out of the puddles that had collected in the earlier downpour.

Nearly forgetting to look down at the GPS to track our position, I was surprised to see that we were almost standing on top of the cache.

Or so it seemed.

We searched. And searched. And searched.

And eventually I shrugged my shoulders and suggested we head down to check out the lake. Being quite large and hard to miss, we had a much easier time finding Rice Lake. Its 32 kilometers seemed to stretch in an endless blanket of blue, punctuated by a few boats bobbing in the distance. We stopped for a while and quietly listened as the waves softly lapped the shore.

Standing on the shore, however, I didn't see any rice, nor did the geocache present itself during the second quick search we made for it on our way back.

I guess some things you find, some stubbornly stay lost.

As I returned the GPS to my dad that night, I said I thought there must have been a mistake with the coordinates I had put in the GPS. "Oh?" he frowned, turning the GPS on and pressing a few buttons.

"Well of course you didn't find it! You were still 30 meters off. See?" My dad pointed as he zoomed in on the coordinates I had entered for the cache and compared them to the path the GPS had followed.

The zoom! I smacked my hand against my forehead. Of course it would look like we were standing right on top of the cache from the bird's eye view distance I had forgotten to change on the display screen of the GPS.

"Gee, you did have a good long look for it, didn't you?" he smiled, as he scanned through the exact pattern of my steps that the GPS had recorded. I had to laugh along with him when I saw the persistent, aimless zigzagging of my frustrated steps, always at least 30 meters from where they should have been directed.

In the end, I smiled as I reflected back on my experience that day. After all, I went for a great hike, tried something new, was determined to try it again until I did it right, and finally, had a good laugh at myself. All of these things, I think, are the essentials of life if I too want to have good stories to share with my grandchildren some day.

Rice Lake Conservation Area is only one of many Conservation Areas in Ontario that offer great hiking opportunities. To find other Conservation Areas that include hiking trails, go to www.ontarioconservationareas.ca.

Melissa Rodgers is a student at Carleton University and works for Conservation Ontario during the summer. Her passions include history, cooking, reading, and the great outdoors.

