



ENVIRONMENT

Getting Dirty Outside©

by Valentine Rinner

A well known brand of laundry detergent had a big campaign last March about how little time kids spend outside - and how little they get dirty. The ad started off in a prison. Prisoners actually get to spend on average two hours a day outside. In interviews they say how vital this time outside is to them. It allows them to relax, to flush out frustrations, to keep their minds right and their bodies strong. When asked how they would feel if that time was reduced to only one hour, the reactions were - sadness, anger, torture...

According to the brand's worldwide 12,000-participant survey, one hour is the average time per day that children spend outside. *One single hour.* Even more worrying than that, a UK survey found that one in three children spent less than 30 minutes per day outside while one in five did not play outside at all on an average day. And it's about the same for the rest of us...

Everyone knows the physical and mental health benefits of being outside, of playing outside. The wholesome stimulation you get from playing outdoors cannot be replaced by board games or by virtual games. However with more and more space and time constraints, and higher availability of Smartphones and tablets, getting kids (and grownups) outside is a huge challenge.

Some people agree that the tremendous success of the Pokemon Go App does have the advantage of getting people moving outdoors. Players keep their eyes down on their Smartphones but at least they're doing that outside and getting some fresh air and exercise. However, long before Pokemon Go there was Geocaching. The official definition of geocaching is a real-world, outdoor treasure hunting game, using GPS-enabled devices. Participants navigate using a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the container (called a geocache) hidden at that location.

It started in 2000 with one guy hiding a bucket in a wood. According to Groundspeak, the group that runs Geocaching.com, there are now more than 3 million geocachers around the planet, looking for one of the few million caches hidden all around the world. Pokemon Go is actually a simpler more virtual version of Geocaching.

The advantage of Geocaching is that it is collaborative. Anyone can hide geocaches, they are everywhere. Whereas Pokemon Go is mostly urban, even the most remote locations are very likely to have a geocache not too far away. It's also more challenging as you get riddles and puzzles to solve along the way. And when you get to your final location it's actually just the beginning. Instead of waiting for virtual monsters to show up there's a real treasure to look for. You get to put your Smartphone down and climb up a tree, dig into the soil... get dirty...

So now that Pokemon Go has popularized location-based gaming, it's the opportunity to try out different and more complex outdoor location-based games. Your Smartphone might actually take you from the virtual to the real world for a change and help you, your friends or your kids to get more fresh air and exercise.

As a long-time avid geocacher myself I've noticed that my friends are now way more receptive to the idea of heading out to random outdoor places and looking for stuff. It's a great excuse for a weekend outing. Geocaching is just one of those games but it's also the most developed and straightforward. So thank you Pokemon Go for making it a trend to head outside!