

TREASURE HUNTING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Pirates and hidden treasure stories do not fall out of fashion. Today, information technology teams up with the classical adventure to create an exciting incentive activity: Geocaching. Through a GPS, hunters have to find the hidden treasure in a remote nature site in Spain. At the same time, team building and improvisation abilities are reinforced.

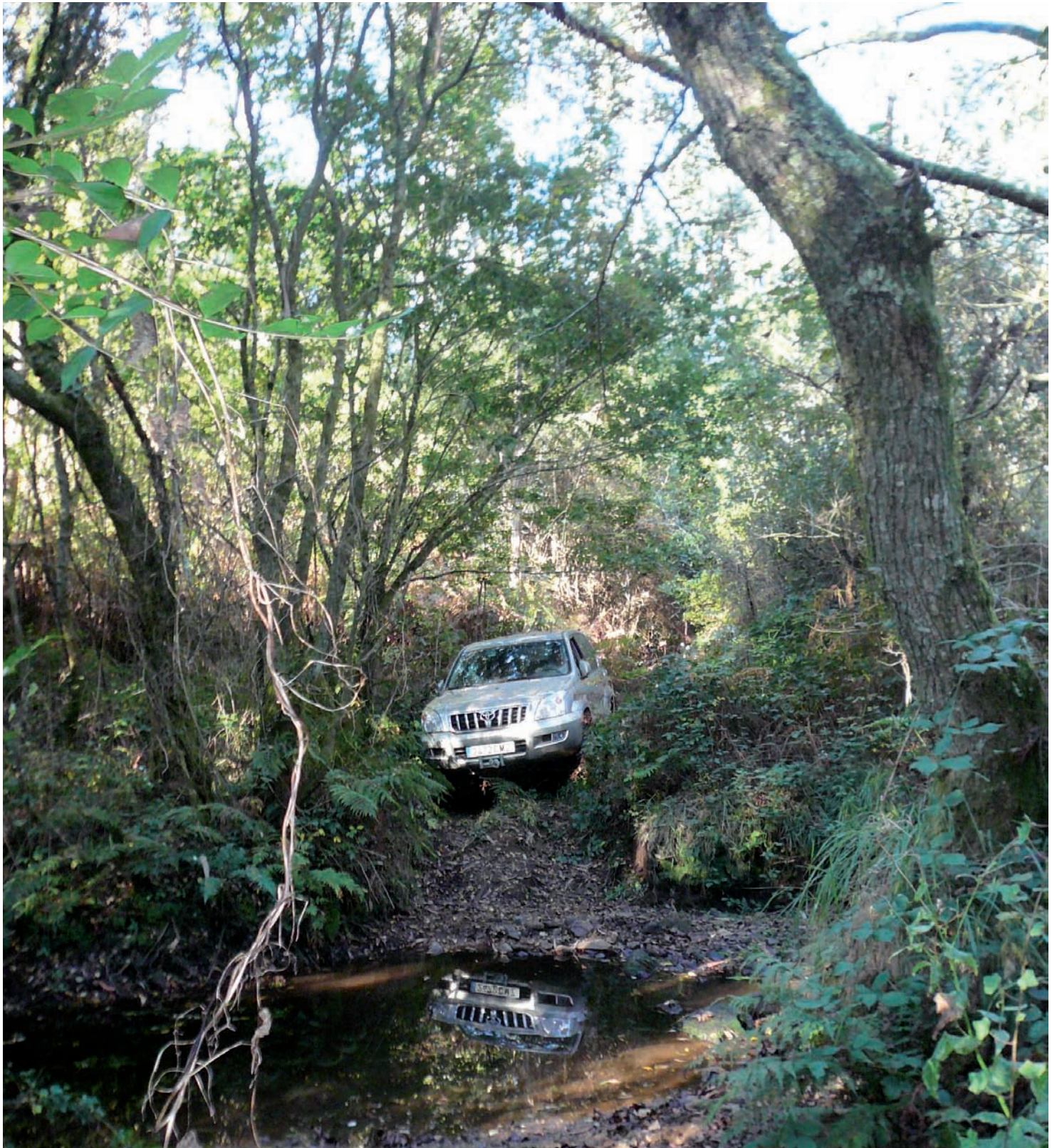
By **MARTA MARTÍNEZ** photos of **AGENCIES**

Maps drawn on paper have now become part of history, but treasure hunting is still alive. What better than the new information technologies to facilitate the process? This is precisely the base of Geocaching: looking for hidden treasures with the help of a GPS terminal. This electronic device allows the localization of latitude and altitude coordinates of the objective and so the adventure begins. Some incentive agencies have introduced GPS as a searching tool for their activities creating novel and original trials that favour team building. The treasure hunt is usually organised in two teams, each armed with a global positioning system, an electronic device with the coordinates or waypoints of the search, thanks to which the adventurers will obtain clues to find the final treasure. In the process, the team members will have to agree on decisions, collaborate, define strategies, adapt to the characteristics of the group and improvise to achieve their objectives successfully.

Team Building

It is not the prize what really counts but how the group bonds and learns how to work together for a common objective. The treasure has often got to do with the company and its values: find pieces of a jig-saw puzzle which forms the logo of the company, objects with a valuable meaning for the firm, etc. Using a GPS has an added advantage: apart from an exciting adventure in action, users can familiarise with this new information technology device, whose use can be useful prospectively in daily life. The direct relation of Geocaching and new information technologies favour that companies of this sector are now the ones who are most interested in this type of activities. Oscar Freire, project director of the incentive agency and team building Oxígeno, assures that companies dedicated to telecommunication and computer development are most interested in Geocaching. Oxígeno in-

corporated GPS devices two years ago and they have noticed a growing demand. "At the beginning all this GPS technology sounded complicated, but this activity is more and more in demand because they can see a practical use in daily life", comments Freire. Oxígeno's headquarters are in A Coruña but organises activities in most of the Autonomous Region of Galicia. The search is about two hours long and takes place in forests and prairies: Forgoselos mountain range, San Zurzo pine forest, Capelada mountains or Segade Mountain. "We try to find areas without paths or marked routes, so that the hunters can feel freer and the adventure is more exciting", Óscar Freire says. The great demand of technology companies is something that also Álex Diego, partner of Unomasuno Team, has noticed. Amongst its clients there are Vodafone, Orange, Royal Post or Telecom, huge companies who are often interested in Geocaching or Treasure Hunting, as Unomasuno Team prefer to call it.



GEOCACHING, AN INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON

Geocaching craze is spreading around the world at great speed. Adventure lovers decided to use the GPS device in a recreational and different way and this is how Geocaching started. Through given altitude and latitude coordinates, anyone with a positioning electronic device can go in search of the hidden treasure. The Geocaching phenomenon develops through the Internet, where you can check the waypoints nearer to the place where you live.

What types of treasures are there spread around the world? You can find from diaries with information about the founder of the treasure and signatures of all the hunters who have found it, to CDs, books, videotapes, tools, antiques or even money and jewels. But every time you take a treasure you need to leave another one for the next geocatcher to find.

Some places can be of not difficult access such as a forest, a prairie or inside a building in the city, but there are others which imply real risk and adventure: the bottom of the sea, cliffs, etc. 21st century pirates will have real enjoyment for a while!



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Like real pirates

At this incentive and events agency they take pirate stories literally and this is why one of the most demanded Geocaching activities takes place in Menorca, with boat adventures included. The participants must sail from reef to reef in search of the clues which will take them to the treasure, the old typical trunk hiding thousands of surprises. Along the way they will come across historical characters who will tell them oddities and traditions of the island, a different and amusing way of getting to know Menorca. But these people are not always nice and caring, sometimes these characters will demand trails and team building activities in exchange of new clues that will allow the team to go ahead in their adventure.

Unomasuno Team has great experience in dealing with customers from all countries, this is the reason why there is the possibility of doing the treasure hunt in English, in French or in Spanish, of course. This agency organises searches in other parts of Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Granada) and Europe (London, Paris, Prague) or even the northern area of Morocco for the most adventurous.

An amusing variant within Geocaching adventures is the one Extravaganza suggests. The treasure is in this case gold, the adventure implies looking for gold nuggets in a grabbing night reviving the experience of mid- XIXth century gold searchers in California. Although they have the advantage of possessing a GPS, searchers will have to find the objects and other surprises which are placed in dark caves and holes. The adventurers have only a light pattern each and their target is “Golden River”, where they will start the search of the precious gold nuggets. Extravaganza revives “The Gold Rush” usually in the Spanish Nature Reserves, although they have also organised it in other nature spots in the world like the Scottish Highlands, the Swiss Alps and in the United States where this phenomenon originated.

Easy to use

In Andalusia the incentive and active tourism company Alúa uses also GPS technology for their gymkhanas or treasure huntings. According to its manager, Ignacio Alonso, the use of GPS is

not complicated at all, either for the users or organisers of the activity. Much on the contrary, it saves costs and time.

The positioning electronic devices are handed out as another tool for the development of the adventure. But, careful! In case orientation was an easy task, Alúa often combines Geocaching routes with small trials which add difficulty and excitement to the adventure, like ambushes and paintball attacks, quad biking routes or visualizations of the area in a hot air balloon.

The activities often take place in Sierra Morena, in the area which is nearest to Córdoba. Alúa’s priority is organising searches in mountain or countryside areas, always in nature, but at the same time near the main Andalusian cities for their customer’s commodity. Participants usually have to travel fifteen minutes by car from Seville or Córdoba to take part in the activities.

By four-wheel vehicle

The events and incentive company Sankara is an expert in what they have renamed Geoplaying. Located in the capital city of the country, Sankara organises treasure hunting in any part of Spain, but especially in forests of the mountain range in Madrid and in the historical groves in Aranjuez. Adventurers are given the Treasure Hunter Kit, containing a metal detector, the GPS device, tools for digging up and the treasure map. For three or four hours the participants have to find different archaeological pieces like the Holy Grail, the Longinos Spear, the Dead Sea Rolls, etc. Depending on the level of difficulty and the physical effort that the participants want, the hunting can be made on foot or by four-wheel vehicle. Geoplaying is attracting more and more curious adventurers. According to Pedro Diezma, manager of Sankara, “the use of technology in combination with outdoor activities is very much enjoyed”.

Estefanía Fernández shares the same opinion. She is the manager of services and tourist activities agency Meigalicia. According to Fernández, Geocaching “is one of the most demanded activities”. Meigalicia normally uses 4x4 vehicles for the hunting and to make it more exciting they even organise it at night around the Galician Costa da Morte lasting eight to ten hours. “People are looking for alternative activities which are out of the normal”, says Estefanía.



Reinventing a classical

Geocaching is a modern and original way of reinventing the great classic: treasure hunting. GPS in hand, the adventure becomes a unique experience shared with the members of the team who learn to collaborate and adapt to the unexpected difficulties, as well as making each participant familiar with a technology which is spreading and becoming useful in our daily lives.





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