Interactive Historical Geography
A Non-Linear Spatiotemporal Exploration Of Multi-Contextual Markings Through Geocaching

Introduction

Historical geographies are a universal presence across time and space. Communication of the past is generally presented in textual accounts or through the experience of visiting historical sites. Typically, it is a linear, one-directional exchange between the creator of the historical account and the recipient.

Objectives

This primary objective of this research is to develop an alternative, non-linear approach to standard, field-based historical site interaction. It is based on a conceptual perspective and methodological framework called Interactive Historical Geography (IHG). IHG combines textual account, visual observation and field experience to allow those seeking historical knowledge to do so in an interactive, exploratory manner across a wide-range of historical and contextual possibilities. The underpinning vehicle for this interaction is the use of GPS technology in the form of a relatively recent, world-wide hobby-phenomena commonly titled “geocaching.”

What is Geocaching?

In its basic form, geocaching involves the placement of a container or “cache” in a hidden location. Participants in the activity can then obtain coordinates for the location of the cache and attempt to locate it using a GPS. The main interface for accessing geocaching information is the geocaching.com website. The cache is the most basic element of geocaching. An equally important content of a geocache is a logbook which allows visitors to sign their names, and if they are so inclined, report their experiences during the “hunt.” Furthermore, participants can also log their “finds” on the geocaching.com website.

Geocache Types

- Traditional
- Multi
- Virtual
- Locationless
- Webcam
- Puzzle
- Event
- Letterbox
- Earth

What is Interactive Historical Geography (IHG)?

- Supports understanding that typical historical approaches generally cannot
  - Natural format to engage non-linear, interconnected systems
  - Reflects common modes of unstructured, free-form thinking, ideas and thoughts
  - Sites and their geographical contexts are ignored or unknown to local people
  - Allows discovery and learning about locations, geographies and histories
  - Public information outlets often only sites of well-known events or people
  - Wide span of historical events, artifacts, and individuals (obscure to famous)
  - Geocaching - intrinsically connected with geographical field experience
  - Allows users to create their own interpretations of site history
  - Provides a sense of ownership of the past- user chooses what to explore

IHG was implemented as a geocache titled “Choose Your Own Adventure-Historic Livingston Co.”

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual approach starts with the notion of an ambiguity. The idea of an ambiguity implies that for any given site, there is a potential for multi-sense interaction with numerous contexts, formal histories, and geographies.

Context

Interactive Historical Geography are related in a many-many relationship with the historical contexts of a given site. Each is relative to how the effort each is interpreted, while each has the potential to supplement and reshape the other in perspective and inquiry decision.

The Historical Time Cube

Puting IHG into Practice

Upon arriving at the site, the user learns about the history of the site and what activities occurred there.

Study Area

Conclusions

New technologies and modes of spatiotemporal thinking are allowing the past to be re-imagined and experienced in non-traditional ways. By combining the field-intensive hobby of geocaching with a non-linear guidebook, and a conceptual approach that seeks to understand and interact with the interconnections between time, space, scale, and context, inquiry and exploration into historical geography can take on a new, engaging meaning that can educate and inform.