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

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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 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 geoaching.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 "find" on the geocaching.com website.

Geocache Types

Traditional | Multi | Virtual | Locationless | WebCam | Puzzle | Event | Letterbox | Earth
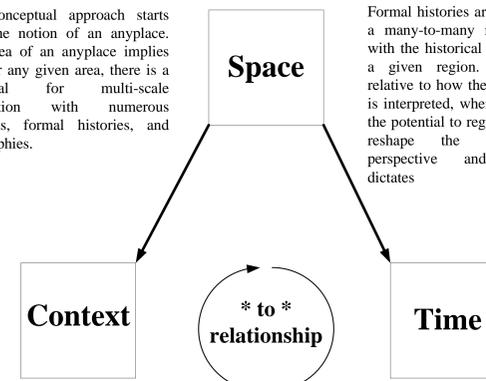
What is Interactive Historical Geography (IHG)?

- 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

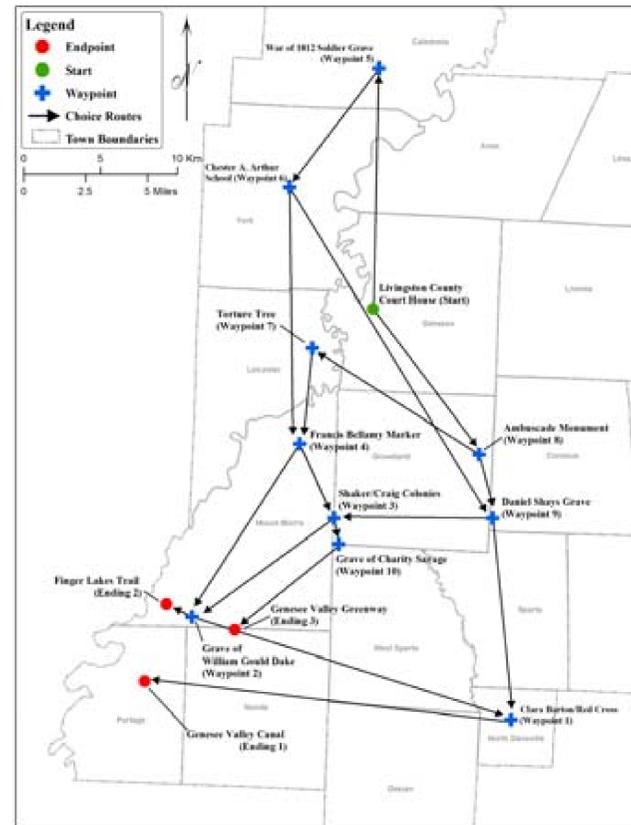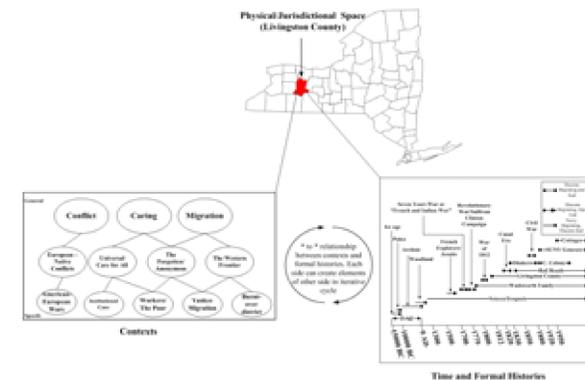**IHG was implemented as a geocache titled "Choose Your Own Adventure-Historic Livingston Co."**

Conceptual Framework

The geocache uses a total of fourteen locations that include a starting point, ten waypoints, and three ending points. Each point location was carefully field-checked, and recorded using a GPS device.

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

Formal histories are related in a many-to-many relationship with the historical contexts of a given region. Each are relative to how the other each is interpreted, where each has the potential to regenerate and reshape the other as perspective and inquiry dictates

Space → *** to *** **relationship** → **Context**, **Time**

Example of the interaction between time, space, and context, relative to the study area
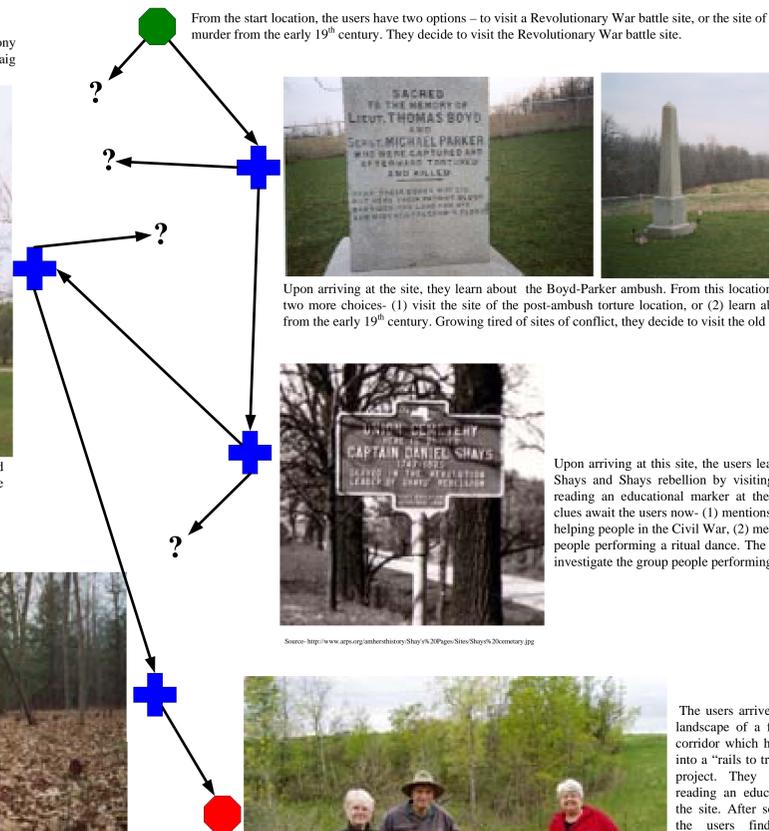
Putting IHG into Practice

Upon arriving at this site, they learn about the existence of Shaker colony in the area during the early 19th century that later become the Craig Colony for epileptics.

Once more, the users have two choices of where to go in time and space- (1) following a young man on a battlefield during the Revolutionary War, or (2) talking to a mysterious, ghostly girl.

From the start location, the users have two options – to visit a Revolutionary War battle site, or the site of a murder from the early 19th century. They decide to visit the Revolutionary War battle site.

Upon arriving at the site, they learn about the Boyd-Parker ambush. From this location, the users have two more choices- (1) visit the site of the post-ambush torture location, or (2) learn about an old man from the early 19th century. Growing tired of sites of conflict, they decide to visit the old man.

Upon arriving at this site, the users learn about Daniel Shays and Shays rebellion by visiting his grave and reading an educational marker at the site. Two new clues await the users now- (1) mentions about a woman helping people in the Civil War, (2) mentioning a group people performing a ritual dance. The users decides to investigate the group people performing a ritual dance.

Source- http://www.nps.gov/archive/history/Shay's%20Pages/Sites/Shays%20cemetary.jpg

Following the ghostly girl, the users arrive at an abandoned cemetery. Only the grave of Charity M. Savage is marked. Had this stone not been placed, she would have been one more of the over 200 anonymous graves around her marked only with numbered metal markers. The guidebook indicates that they have an option to find one of the three end points that contain a geocache container. The users decide to go search for the endpoint.

The users arrive at a historical landscape of a former railroad corridor which has been turned into a "rails to trails" recreation project. They learn this by reading an educational sign at the site. After some searching, the users find the hidden geocache container, and signs the logbook.

The users can now return back to waypoints previously visited in order to explore waypoints not visited. They can continue in this fashion until they have found all three endpoints.

The Historical Time Cube

Study Area

Livingston County, NY
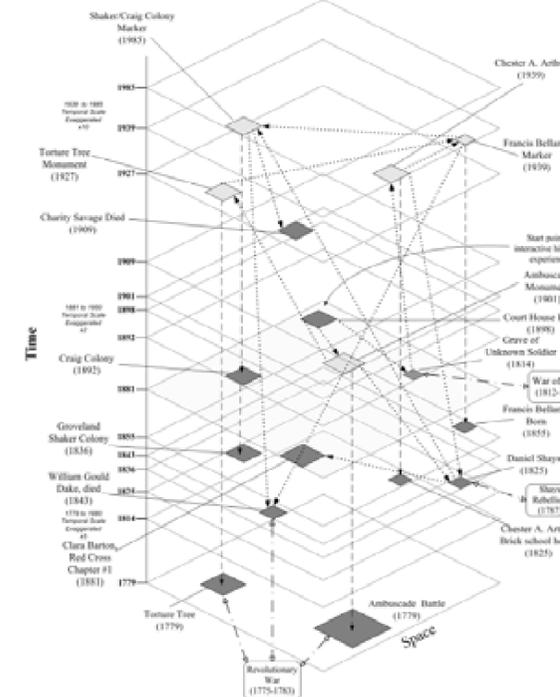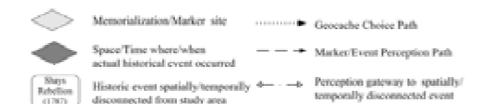
Conclusions

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 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.