

Life

**Confluence hunters going the distance --- Man unwittingly kicks off new global travel pastime**

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Alex Jarrett has made a hobby of seeing invisible lines and taking pictures of them. Now his hobby has sucked in hundreds of people around the world.

It all started in 1996 when Jarrett, armed with a Global Positioning System (GPS) device, went hunting for a spot in the New Hampshire woods where latitude and longitude lines intersect.

Jarrett found the location, snapped a photo, and posted it on a Web site he had created.

"I had no idea it would go this far," says Jarrett, a 27-year-old computer programmer.

Since Jarrett posted that first picture, thousands of people have visited his Web site, [www.confluence.org](http://www.confluence.org), combing through nearly 15,800 photographs of intersections of latitude and longitude lines in 103 countries.

As interest grew, updating the Web site became like a full-time job. Eventually, Jarrett recruited a team of volunteers and the site now operates on proceeds from sales of T-shirts, coffee mugs and picture calendars sporting its scenic images.

Any location on Earth can be described by giving its position along the invisible latitude and longitude lines that circle the globe, providing reference points to anyone using a map.

Toronto's position is at latitude 43 degrees and 39 minutes north and longitude 79 degrees and 23 minutes west.

Jarrett and his fellow enthusiasts focus on the degrees rather than the minutes. Their goal is to hunt down all the degree intersections, or confluences, that are on land.

Jarrett says there are 64,442 latitude and longitude degree confluences in the world. After eliminating many near the North and South Poles, where they are far closer to one another, and the ones over water, there are roughly 12,000 on land. Of those, about 1,900 have been documented and posted on Jarrett's Web site, accompanied by pictures and a narrative about the expedition.

According to the site, 200 of the 1,776 confluences in Canada have been visited, including 26 in Ontario.

Around the globe, desert dunes, wind-swept prairies, mountain vistas, even people's backyards are at confluence points. Surprisingly, few are in urban locations.

Both the availability of cheaper GPS units - which receive signals from the satellite system used for navigation - and the Internet have made the exercise of hunting down confluences easier and allowed it to become a teaching tool as well as a way to meet people around the world.

It has also created opportunities for adventure. Some confluences in the Alps make for long skiing trips, and other confluence hunters have turned their attempts into multi-day

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backpacking trips.

At one confluence in California, two groups looking for the same spot ran into each other and wound up sharing the discovery. At another, a teacher took his students to a confluence in the woods to teach them about geography.

There are 64,442 latitude and longitude intersections. As long as the location is within sight of land and hunters can get within 100 metres, it qualifies as a "visit" on the Web site. One hunter, who calls himself Captain Peter, has visited about 50 confluences by slightly adjusting the routes of his cargo ship.

On these treks, hunters often will do what they affectionately call "the GPS dance," stepping back and forth with a GPS unit in their hand until the minutes reach zero and they are left with a nice, round degree.

Some confluences are hard to reach. One hunter in South Carolina refuses to quit in his attempt to document a confluence on a military base. Another sought-after confluence is on a nuclear test site in Nevada.

Germany has become a hotbed of confluence hunting. Many spots have benches and other markers, such a monument or a plaque, to identify confluences for passersby. People also revisit confluences to see how a location has changed over time.

A GPS unit is not necessary to find the sites, provided the seeker has a detailed map, a compass and a good sense of distance. In fact, Jarrett urges hunters to bring along a map and compass anyway, lest they suffer the same fate as a group in Brazil whose GPS device failed.

The confluence hunters wound up lost in the jungle.

**CP PHOTO HIGH-TECH HELP:** A Global Positioning System device can be used, but it is not necessary.

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