The One That Got Away

I began my geo-caching adventure on a sunny afternoon. The cache I was after is entitled “Carol Ann’s Mother’s Day Cache” (code GCFA12). The coordinates I was given were:
N 40d 19.373 W 074d 39.636
In order to make life easier for myself, before I left my room I plotted these coordinates as a waypoint on Google Earth. This was the picture I got:

It seemed like a straightforward position; all I had to do was walk down Alexander Road, then follow the canal for a ways. I even zoomed in so I could get a sense of landmarks that might help me:
In this picture I noticed the two circular structures in the upper right hand corner. What I
did not notice was the thin black line running parallel to the canal, which turned out to doom my
trip. For having come to those circular structures, I found myself on the northern edge of a river,
which I incorrectly assumed to be the canal. I followed the water for a ways, the whole time
being told by my GPS that I was closing in on the cache. However, when I got close, within 100
ft, my GPS started having problems. It started pointing across the river, which I figured could not
be correct. Since I was walking under a considerable amount of tree canopy, I assumed that my
GPS was simply having problems determining my position, so I walked around in a series of
increasingly frustrated circles, as shown here:
As you can see, my GPS did have some issues telling exactly where I was. At one point it even thought I had crossed the river, which I never did. At last, I realized that I must be walking along the wrong river. I knew I was close to my target, at some points less than 30 feet away, but I was separated by a body of water, and I was not wearing swim trunks. I made my way back to the landmark, and walked northeast along the river for a bit, hoping that there might be a place for me to cross. This wandering is represented by the blue path below:
When I found no places to cross, I decided to call it a day and turned my GPS off. This is what my complete trek in that area looked like:
As you can see, I left Alexander Road too early. I was deceived by the first river I came to, and thought *that* one was the canal. My GPS did not have landmarks or a map built in, so I didn’t know I was erring until it was far too late. To my credit, the zoomed in picture of the coordinate waypoint is extremely ambiguous as to which side of which river the cache actually is:

In this picture, it appears that the cache is in the water, and so it very well could’ve been on the northern edge of the smaller river rather than the southern edge.

Two important observations from this geocaching mission: One, be very wary of a GPS’s accuracy when under heavy tree branch coverage. Two, if you are going to use Google Maps to help you prepare, make sure you pay very close attention to the region and note any significant topographical obstacles (i.e. bodies of water!) that might be in your way. For now, the cache still remains hidden, perhaps for another sunny afternoon sometime.