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**Ref. GAGB / MOD Landowner
Discussions**

By e-mail: 19th August 2013

Dear <GAGB Member>,

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you following our meeting on the 24th July 2013. As promised, I am writing to confirm the position of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in respect of Geocaching and the placing of geocaches on our property.

As discussed at the meeting, the MOD are unable to give permission for any physical geocache to be placed anywhere on the MOD freehold/leasehold estate (referred to here after as the owned estate). Whilst the MOD does operate a presumption in favour of public access on its estate, when compatible with military operations and training, we do not consider physical geocaches to be acceptable. Our main areas of concern centre on:

- a. National Security – It is not appropriate to encourage people to leave or conceal marked or unmarked packages on any part of the MOD owned estate as it contradicts all security procedures and could lead to false security alerts.
- b. Public Risk and MOD's Duty of Care to all Users of the estate – The majority of the MOD training estate is a risk area where blank fire, pyrotechnics and smoke may be used even outside of the 'live fire' danger areas. The Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) danger is self evident in live ranges but also exists in dry training areas where individuals could inadvertently disturb, or harm themselves, on military debris whilst searching for or hiding geocaches.

The MOD estate is extensive. It is fundamental that a consistent approach is applied across the owned estate to ensure there is no confusion amongst staff and military users in how sites are operated and to ensure overall clarity in how the public can safely use the military estate. Resources do not allow a site specific approach to geocaching and, more importantly, this would not support an over arching level of consistency.

As you are aware the MOD often has to implement changes in levels of security associated with different sites and that each site must remain flexible in how it is used for training purposes. Such variations will ultimately affect the extent to which a site is publicly accessible. Clearly these changes may happen over night so further preclude a consistent approach to the management of geocaching.

Turning to a legacy issue, despite the Geocaching Association of Great Britain's (GAGB) guidance about ensuring landowners permission is granted prior to the locating of geocaches, we are aware that there are numerous examples located across our estate that have not received permission or that may have received mis-guided local permission. As discussed at our meeting the MOD has found, and disposed of, geocaches located in highly unsuitable locations such as against security fences on bases and within live-fire Impact Areas where public access is permanently denied.

Whilst the MOD does acknowledge these may have been placed by geocachers associated with other listing sites, such as Terra Caching or Open Caching, it is unfortunate that the views expressed by some on GAGB (and other) online forums in relation to geo-caching on the MOD estate did little to build confidence that members would act in a responsible manner in the gaining of permission and/or placing of geo-caches.

The MOD will be contacting other geocaching websites to ensure a consistent message is made apparent to all geocachers.

It is for these reasons that physical caches on the MOD owned estate are not permitted.

There are a small number of training areas that the MOD do not own or hold under leasehold arrangements. These are areas where the MOD is licensed to train but are not the primary occupier. In these circumstances the MOD has no control over geocaching or many other recreational activities and thus it still remains the landowner's decision to allow the placing of geo-caches e.g. Dartmoor Training Area with the exception of Willsworthy Range which is owned by the MOD.

You requested that we provide a dataset of our owned estate in order for your Reviewers to ensure that further caches are not approved on the MOD estate. I am still pursuing agreement to release this information to your organisation but in the meantime I would be grateful if you could publish a request on your website/forum for owners of geo-caches known to be on the MOD owned estate to remove them.

In order for me to progress your mapping info request could you please let me know in what format the data would be acceptable.

An internal protocol is now being drafted to ensure that it is understood that geocaches are not permissible on the estate. Should a geocache be found they will be removed. I am also continuing to ask MOD land managers to inform my office of any known geocaches that have received local permission with a similar view to removing them.

As we agreed at our meeting the MOD has no objection to "virtual" caches on the estate as this would be no different from any other recreational user taking access. I would be very grateful though if you could remind your members that any such point should be in an area accessible by the public and that appropriate safety messages are published with any within live fire areas. These areas will be very obvious to those setting the cache. Please contact the Access Team via DioStratPol-Access@mod.uk with any enquiries in this instance.

Yours sincerely