

Land owners reassured over new craze

We give you all the information you need to know as geocaching takes hold

A new craze has been met with uncertainty from some farmers and landowners across the country.

Geocaching involves a small plastic container being placed somewhere in the countryside.

The co-ordinates of the placement are then uploaded to a website and participants download those co-ordinates to a GPS device, and go off in search of the geocache, or cache, as they are generally known.

Each container holds a small logbook in which the finder records their visit, which is then later logged on the parent website.

In recent months a few landowners who have been concerned about this practice have contacted the Scottish Farming Leader and NFU Scotland's regional managers.

Dr Terry Marsh, author of *Geocaching in the UK* puts those fears at bay. He said: "Since 2000 geocaching has developed into a popular, worthwhile and motivational activity adopted by many agencies and the public alike.

"Its very essence appeals to individuals, families and those of advancing years who still feel the benefits of a walk in the countryside, as well as organisations and educational institutes.

"Geocaching is also being seen as a means of developing tourism, especially in some remote areas, bringing aid to local economies. But current experience does not indicate a massive surge in visitor numbers as a consequence of geocaching – rather a tendency among those tourists who are also geocachers (a minority) to extend their stay while they continue their search for caches.

"This has certainly been the case on Skye, for

example. Geocaching, however, is too young an activity for there to be definitive data on these aspects, although the prospect of recording data currently exists on the Isle of Mull.

"Inevitably, by its very nature, some geocaching takes place on active farmland, and this can raise mixed feelings among those who earn their living from the land. But, managed and pursued in a proper manner, there is nothing of concern beyond the existing issues that arise from the public use of the countryside in general.

"Geocaching neither adds to nor detracts from the rights of land use that currently apply across the whole of Britain."

One of the requirements devolving on those who place geocaches is that they should obtain the consent of the landowner to do so.

The Geocaching Association of Great Britain (GAGB) maintains a Land Agreement Database, which lists many associations, such as the Forestry Commission, the Woodlands Trust, the John Muir Trust, etc, and many individual and estate landowners, who have happily given consent for geocaches to be placed on their land.

Significantly, that consent has come about because of the tight guidelines that geocachers follow, which influence the placement of caches. Anyone with concerns about geocaches on their land should contact the association in the first instance.

Dr Marsh continued: "The key feature is that geocaches are simply 'concealed'. They are not buried, not placed in drystone walls, in active or ruined buildings, or in places that are manifestly dangerous. And while they might be permitted in

'protected' areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Development Areas, sites of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, such placements will not be published without a clear statement of consent from the landowner."

The process of geocaches becoming 'live' involves a review by a team of experienced volunteers, who make a wide range of checks to ensure that the cache can be published. Only then does it become visible to the geocaching community.

Part of this self-regulatory process involves the removal of geocaches that are not in appropriate places, and it is within the power of the reviewers, as well as the person who placed the caches, to disable or archive them in order to prevent anyone from looking for them.

It is also a requirement that no-one is allowed to place a new cache more than 50 miles from their home; this is to ensure their ability to maintain the caches in good condition.

Dr Marsh concluded: "Anyone seeking a geocache, whether on access land does so entirely at their own risk and subject to the normal regulation imposed by the various countryside codes of conduct."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

or to speak to someone further about a geocache on your land contact the Geocaching Association of Great Britain.
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