
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Geo-caching

Prepared by: Peter Ord, Factor - Balmoral Estate

Purpose

Peter Ord, a Forum member, has submitted a paper (attached) on the activity of geo-caching prepared by him in conjunction with the Balmoral Estate Ranger. He has requested the thoughts of the Forum on this issue at the January meeting.

Recommendation

That the Forum discuss the paper and feed back its views to the Park Authority and Peter Ord.

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Re: Geocaching

Geocaching is an orienteering-style of sport for GPS users which originated in America in 2000. The basic idea is that individuals set up caches all over the world and share the locations over the internet. GPS users download the coordinates and then try to find the geocache. The geocache usually consists of a small lunchbox, which contains a visitor book, plus a reward. As GPS units become cheaper and easier to use it is likely that the number of people participating in this sport will increase and that land managers will receive more requests for permission to locate geocaches on their estates. Most Geocaching web-sites suggest to participants that they should ask landowners permission before locating a geocache, however, it is evident that this does not always happen.

At the beginning of the 2006 summer Balmoral Estate received a request to place a geo-cache somewhere near Loch Muick. We met with Linda Kennedy and agreed a suitable location for the cache. We have become aware that we have at least a further two geocaches; one somewhere on Bachnagairn and one in a cairn on the track up Broad Cairn. Both of these have been placed without our knowledge or permission. This month we received another formal request to place a geocache, this time in the middle of open ground in Glen Gelder. We have asked the geocacher to locate their cache close to a path or track. However, being able to locate a geo-cache in an isolated location, off the beaten track, is part of the appeal of this sport. The original geocache that we helped install near Loch Muick has been visited about twelve times over the 2006 summer.

I am concerned at this organised but unregulated sport interfering with legitimate land management operations. I am very uncomfortable that unknown organisers are encouraging unknown participants to enter land owned and managed by others, at best without having the good manners to seek permission or at worst without any warning invading someone else's privacy. To leave litter behind for someone else to find without any obligation to remove it at some predetermined future date also contravenes best practice.

There is no control over the siting of these which may possibly be in sensitive areas such as SAC's, SPA's, SSI's. In the past no-one had any incentive to visit these areas and these sensitive sites were left undisturbed thus contributing greatly to their natural heritage interest.

In most cases geocaches seem to be sheltered in newly-built cairns of stones and, as you know, many hill-walkers and land managers are trying to discourage the construction of cairns to the extent that some are even being removed from the Scottish hills.

As this is becoming a recognised sport possibly involving numerous organisers and participants I feel that permission to site a new geocache should always be obtained and the views of land managers should be acknowledged before anything is left in the countryside. Presumably land managers can just remove any geocache located without permission?

What guidance can the national access forum give to land managers and to those organising this new sport? Does the Access Code provide any mechanism to protect vulnerable areas of the countryside?