

Nature Conservation on OTA is managed through the ILMP. A great deal of time and resource is being spent to protect and enhance habitats and species across OTA and, where possible, access is being improved to allow the general public to appreciate the wildlife of this beautiful area of Northumberland.

ENVIRONMENT - WOODLANDS

OTA has around 1,687 hectares of woodland comprising some 6% of the training area. They are a valuable resource, integrating tactical environments for military training with high levels of biodiverse natural habitats. The woodland resource is managed sensitively, taking into consideration landscape and conservation, there is also a commitment towards increasing the woodland cover at Otterburn, particularly native broadleaf species.

Otterburn has 23 ancient, semi-natural woodlands covering approximately 100 hectares. Three of these woods are SSSIs and provide a valuable source of local native tree seed.

Stewartshields plantation is the largest area of woodland on the training estate. Purchased from the forestry Commission in 1986, the 485 hectare woodland has been restructured to provide 18 individual woods separated by open areas. This has created a diverse tactical training area and also provides Otterburn with a woodland rich in conservation value.

Since 1987 there has been 650 hectares of new native woodland planted on the estate and over 5,000 metres of new hedgerows. All woodlands at Otterburn are managed in accordance with the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme, reinforcing the DTE's commitment towards national and regional woodland policy and targets.

PUBLIC ACCESS

There is a presumption in favour of safe public access to the DTE. This is balanced against the over-riding requirement for safe military training, the environment and local farming businesses. Recreational activities such as walking, riding and cycling are encouraged on the public rights of way across the OTA in addition to managed events on other non-public areas.

Public access on the majority of OTA is managed using Military Byelaws. These are essential in allowing troops to train effectively and prevent the general public from encountering any potential danger. Access users are notified by the use of red flags and/or lamps and road barriers when Byelaws are in operation. Failure to adhere to them, is a criminal offence.

Land to the north of the River Coquet is not covered by byelaws. The area is used by OTA for "dry-training" (no live rounds) and the public may come across troops training in this area. This area has been designated as "Open Access" in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW).

This part of OTA offers an unrivalled outdoor experience for those wanting to explore the Cheviot Foothills and Border Country.

Access users must adhere to the Countryside Code:

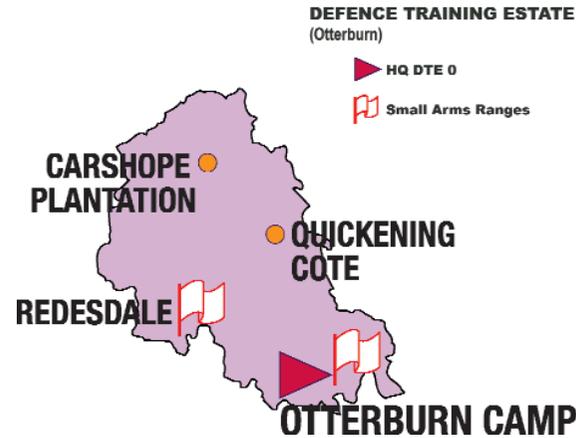
- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



Photos courtesy of DTE O

Public rights of way are safe routes on which to travel, but like all DTEs the land these routes cross is potentially dangerous. The general public must comply with the following safety rules when entering OTA:

- Do not approach, touch, or handle any unidentified objects
- Keep to public rights of way and do not deviate
- The use of metal detectors is prohibited
- Keep away from all buildings, bunkers and military installations, except where it is clearly shown that public access is permitted
- No camping or fires
- Crags and rocky out-crops are dangerous



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In addition to this Public Information Leaflet for DTE O, further information relating the DTE can be obtained from the addresses below. Finally, Defence Estates publication "Sanctuary" contains articles about how we are managing and integrating military training with the environment, conservation and public access, across all DTEs nation-wide.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

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PUBLIC INFORMATION LEAFLET



DTE Otterburn

WHY THE ARMY NEEDS TO TRAIN

The British Army is held in the highest regard around the world. This respect has been hard-won over recent years in Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands, the Gulf, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq – and countless peacekeeping operations throughout the world. But such professionalism does not happen by chance. It is attained by constant, thorough and tough training, in realistic conditions. The Defence Training Estate (DTE) provides the principal facilities to achieve this, and DTE Otterburn (DTE O) plays a very important part in this process, particularly for training on major artillery systems.



ORGANISATION & MANAGEMENT

The DTE in the UK is controlled by Headquarters DTE, based at the Land Warfare Centre in Warminster, Wiltshire (see address at end of this leaflet). The Estate is sub-divided into 10 regionally-based areas, each with its own Headquarters and staff. DTE O offers live firing and other facilities for Army units of many types, both Regular and Territorial. The range is one of only two places in the UK where the Army can train properly on its modern artillery systems. DTE O, along with the rest of the DTE organisation, has made significant progress over recent years in improving management practices to ensure that training is appropriate in terms of the area, nature of ground, and seasonal factors. For example, these take into account farming practice and the increased possibility of damage to softer ground. DTE O also includes Ponteland and Whitburn Ranges, but this brochure covers the principal training area which is Otterburn Training Area (OTA).

TRAINING IN DTE O

OTA was first established in 1911 as an artillery range, and today training takes place 7 days a week and for virtually the whole year, except for a 4-week period during the height of the lambing season (15 April to 15 May), plus at least one non-firing week-end each month, and a 2-week break over Christmas.



The training area consists of approximately 58,000 acres (24,300 hectares), of which some 29,000 acres (11,750 hectares) is set aside for so-called 'dry' (i.e. non-firing) training. It is intersected by public and military roads. Additional areas of Forest Enterprise woodland in the Kidland and Kielder forests are available for limited training. The training area is at an altitude of between 200m and 610m above sea level and can suffer rapid and severe changes in weather, especially in the winter months. Hatted camps accommodate around 1,300 visiting troops, who may spend several weeks at Otterburn.

There are 2 main live firing range areas, at Otterburn and Redesdale, for artillery, demolitions, all infantry weapons and restricted armoured vehicle firing. Fighter aircraft and attack helicopters also practise ground attack firing, and there are parachute dropping zones. A wide selection of live firing ranges provide facilities for weapons from 5.56mm calibre small arms to



artillery and 30mm guns on armoured reconnaissance vehicles. The soft nature of the ground precludes the use of heavy armoured vehicles such as Main Battle Tanks.

THE AS90/MLRS DEVELOPMENT

The training area has recently been developed to enable the Army to train sustainably with the 155mm Artillery System (AS90) and the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). The development arises from the need to provide a minimum of infrastructure to allow the current generation of artillery equipment to train at Otterburn.



Following the submission of a Notice of Proposed Development and two sittings of a Public Inquiry, the decision for the development to go ahead was finally announced in October 2001.



The construction of the infrastructure required to support artillery training, improvements to roads on the training area, and the provision of related facilities, is summarised in more detail below:

- The provision of 46 gun spurs and associated echelon areas, which may be grouped into the equivalent of 6 Gun Deployment Areas
- Three Technical and a Tactical Observation Post ridgeline
- A central maintenance facility with workshop, washdown and refuelling facilities
- A Regimental Replenishment Point
- Additional modular troop accommodation
- A network of single track roads (with passing places) and tracks linking these various facilities and permitting movement in all weathers, while protecting the sensitive environment
- A new 600m, 12 lane, Electric Target Range

The construction work was completed in mid 2005. Associated with the Inspector's decision letter were many conditions and undertakings that have helped mitigate the possible environmental impact of the development. This has resulted in several conservation schemes being implemented, improvements to public access to the training area and some restrictions on the frequency of future artillery firing at Otterburn. Nevertheless, the scale and layout of the proposed infrastructure reflects the need for AS90 and MLRS regiments to deliver their operational capabilities.



HISTORY OF THE TRAINING AREA

In 1911, 20,000 acres of land was purchased in Redesdale to provide an artillery range and tented camp for the newly formed Territorial Army. Further land was compulsorily purchased during the Second World War and other areas have been added in subsequent decades. OTA now covers 58,000 acres and has the largest single Impact Areas in the UK.

However, the history of OTA goes much further back than the early years of the twentieth century. The earliest sign of human occupation is the Bellsheil Long Cairn which was used for burials between 4000 and 6000 years ago. Other prehistoric earthworks include Bronze age Burial

Cairns and Iron Age Hillforts particularly in the Cheviot Dry Training Area. During the Roman occupation, troops were trained at Otterburn and signs of their presence include the Dere Street Roman Road, a range of marching camps and earthworks including the Chew Green complex which is of international importance.

There are remains of medieval villages abandoned during the Border wars between England and Scotland, as well as defensible farmhouses known as bastles. The bastles date from the turbulent times of the Border Reivers which ended with the Union of the Crowns in 1603.

Overall, there are 76 Scheduled Ancient Monuments across OTA, the most recent of which include the World War One Practice Trenches at Silloans and the 1960's target bunkers at Davysheil.

The archaeological resource of OTA is managed through the Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) and the Archaeology and Historic Environment Management Plan. The aim of these plans is to protect the sites from damage and where possible improve their condition and accessibility to the public.

MILITARY TRAINING IN NATIONAL PARKS

There is a long tradition of defence use within areas now designated as National Parks which, in Northumberland, pre-dates both the legislation under which they were created (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949), and the conferral of designation (1956). Since that time there has been a consistent thread of government policy accepting the presence of military training in the Parks. Nationwide military activity affects only 3% of the Parks' total land area, mainly in the Dartmoor and Northumberland National Parks, and live firing takes place on only 2% of the total area.



WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AT OTTERBURN TRAINING AREA

Conservation and environmental issues are extremely important parts of the management of OTA. The MOD has made a Declaration of Commitment to the National Parks and Natural England which means that military units are required to take environmental issues into account when planning and conducting training. OTA lies within Northumberland National Park which was designated in 1956. The area is predominantly upland moorland interspersed with woodlands and in-by farmland. OTA supports a wide range of habitat types and wildlife, many of which are of international importance.

There are 19 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI's) across OTA including extensive tracts of upland heather moorland, ancient woodlands, mires and species-rich hay meadows. Four of these have also been designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) which is the highest possible European designation.

These important habitats, at Otterburn support a range of animal and plant species which are of national and international importance. Seventy percent of Northumberland's Black Grouse live on OTA as well as a large proportion of England's population of Large Heath Butterfly.

Other species of note include Otter, Red Squirrel, Peregrine Falcon, Skylark, Bog Orchid and Jacobs Ladder, various Dragonflies and one species of moss found nowhere else in Northumberland.

