

University academic lifts lid on iPhone tracking

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Both iPhones and iPads store the tracking information.

A University of Exeter researcher has revealed how he discovered [Apple iPhones and iPads are tracking every movement](#) of their owners and storing it in a file on the device.

Dr. Alasdair Allan, a Senior Research Fellow in the Astrophysics department, came across the find while looking at programmes on the [iPhone](#) with security expert, Pete Warden.

He found a file which contains coordinates coupled with time stamps which show where the phone has been. This information goes back for almost one year – which appears to start from the point it was switched to the latest operating system for the device, iOS 4.

The information in the file is automatically transferred to the owner's

computer when the two are synchronised, although there is no obvious reason for the data to be collected.

Dr. Allan said: “Our best guess is that the location is determined by cell-tower triangulation, and the timing of the recording is erratic, with a widely varying frequency of updates that may be triggered by traveling between cells or activity on the phone itself.”

Data from the files can be visualised to show where and when the device has been over a long period of time.

News of the find has shocked some and has made international headline news. Some privacy campaigners have expressed concern about the discovery, but Dr. Allan said there was no need to panic.

Dr. Allan added: “There's no immediate harm that would seem to come from the availability of this data. Nor is there evidence to suggest this data is leaving your custody.

But why this data is stored and how Apple intends to use it — or not — are important questions that need to be explored.”

[Apple](#) has said that the data collection is included in its terms and conditions.

Provided by University of Exeter

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