

Ultimate Scotland road trip 2017

Introduction

Big mountains, awesome trails and stunning scenery make the mountain biking in the Scottish Highlands among the best in the world. This a real trip of a lifetime: we sample a little of everything on offer as we journey east to west across the Highlands, riding different trails every day.

The scenery is amazingly diverse: from the Caledonian pines of Rothiemurchus to the slabby, bare slopes of Torridon. The riding is equally as varied. During the week we'll enjoy a little of everything - from remote 4x4 tracks, miles from the nearest road, to long, rocky mountain paths and sinuous peaty singletrack that sneaks through heather-covered glens.

What to expect

Getting ready for a week-long trip anywhere is complicated. Getting ready for 6 days of mountain biking in fairly full-on, remote locations is a pretty major task. With as many as 8 guests, all with different levels of fitness and experience, there's plenty of room for misunderstanding.

These notes will help you find out what to expect during the trip and what to bring. If there's anything else you need to know, or want to check, please don't hesitate to ask.

Sample itinerary

Please note that this is totally dependent upon the weather and trail conditions and could alter considerably.

Day 1

Meet at the Holiday Inn, Woolston Grange Ave, Warrington WA1 4PX at 10am – this is just off the M6 at Junction 21. We'll load the bike trailer, hop on the minibus and settle down for the long trek north. Please arrive early if you want coffee or breakfast here before we leave.

First night in Aviemore. Dinner and trip briefing in the Winking Owl pub, Aviemore.

Day 2

Rothiemurchus/Lairig Ghru

Distance: Various options

Ascent: Various options

We'll have an easy ride on day 1, riding from the door of our accommodation into the lovely Rothiemurchus Forest. We'll enjoy some great, reasonably easy singletrack as well as some incredible scenery. We'll round off the morning with the bottom section of the Lairig Ghru, one of the best short trails we've ever ridden, and then meet the minibus for a late-ish lunch.

Anybody wanting to save themselves for day 2 (a biggie) can spend the afternoon relaxing. Those with energy left will ride west into Glen Feshie and the Inshriach Forest, where the singletrack gets a little steeper. This section can all be done as a linear route so we can meet the bus in the Inshriach Forest and head back to Aviemore from there.

Second night in Aviemore. Dinner in La Taverna Italian restaurant, Aviemore.

Day 3

Glen Tilt

Distance: 55km

Ascent: 1,000m

The classic Glen Tilt circuit is about 55km with 1,000m of ascent. It sounds huge, but it's actually nothing like as tough as it sounds. The big attraction of this route is the scenery and the remoteness of it all. A lot of the miles are on good 4x4 tracks that literally fly by, and after an afternoon swim under the Falls of Tarf (anyone brave enough?), the last 20km are gently downhill. It may be possible, for those that want it, for the bus to drop some of us at the trail head cutting out around 200m of tarmac climbing!

Third night in Aviemore. Dinner in the Winking Owl pub, Aviemore.

Day 4

Glen Affric

Distance: 20km (short route)

Ascent: 400m (short route)

After a big day yesterday, there's an option for this to be a much shorter day with some easy forest road climbing and some great, mainly non-technical singletrack. All among some of the Highland's best scenery. But there's also an option of another epic – including some of the best technical singletrack we've ever ridden (29km/500m of ascent) –we can make a final decision the evening before.

Fourth night in the Torridon Hostel. Dinner in the wonderful Torridon Inn.

Day 5

Torridon

Distance options from 25km to 46km

Ascent: 600m to 1,200m

There are a few options for this day depending upon weather, what we did the day before and how everyone's feeling. The biggest of the classic loops is around 46km with 1,200m of ascent and is a real monster – probably best done in good weather only. Opt-outs are available if anyone's really feeling it (this is a holiday after all!). Whatever happens, we'll have an epic day in one of our favourite places to ride.

Fifth night in the Torridon Youth Hostel. Dinner in the amazing loch-side Gille Brighde restaurant in Diabaig.

Day 6

Torridon

Distance: 17km (or 34km for an out and back)

Ascent: 300m (600m for out and back)

A shorter day that sees us cross the Applecross Peninsula on some sumptuous singletrack that delivers us to a great pub or tea shop. It would be rude not to grab lunch here. The trail is fantastic to ride in the other direction too, if anyone's got the energy to ride back!

Sixth night in the Torridon Youth Hostel. Dinner in the Torridon Inn.

Day 7

Sligachan, Skye

Distance: 18km

Ascent: 270m

We'll have a lot of travelling today as we head to Skye to ride, then south for our final night in Spean Bridge. The Sligachan Glen trail is awesome – we follow sandy and rocky singletrack the length of the glen, passing beneath the jagged peaks of the Cuillin Ridge (of Danny Macaskill fame). The trail visits a stunning remote beach, where toe-dipping (or more) is optional.

Seventh night in Coire Glas in Spean Bridge. Last supper in the acclaimed Old Station.

Day 8

Return to England

Included in the original trip price:

- All accommodation: 7 nights of B&B or private hostel rooms
- Cooked breakfasts and packed lunches (evening meals are at your own expense)
- All travel in Scotland: 16-seat minibus with a professional driver and bike trailer
- All guiding: 2 qualified guides giving a 4-1 client to guide ratio

Not included in the original trip price

- Getting to and from the meeting place
- Travel insurance and personal equipment
- Evening meals
- Incidental expenditure such as alcohol, bike spares and laundry

A typical day

It's quite likely that no 2 days on this trip will be the same. But we can try...

We'll have breakfast together at a time agreed the previous evening, and then load the bikes onto the trailer and hop on the bus. Most days, it would be good if we were ready to ride at this stage so there's no major faffing when we're dropped off (where parking might be awkward for a bus and trailer). But this won't always be possible so we can discuss it in the briefing or on the day.

Remember to bring a small post-ride bag to leave in the bus with dry clothes and shoes to put on after the ride.

On days when we're moving to different accommodation, you'll obviously have to bring all your overnight stuff too.

In the evenings, it will be ideal if we can meet for a pre-dinner drink and have a chat about the plans for the next day. Armed with the latest weather forecast and a few maps we'll come up with something that will suit everybody.

Riding skills and fitness

Many people ask us about the riding and their skills and fitness. It's a hard one to answer as difficulty is so subjective and we'll have 10 different riders, all with different fitness levels and technical abilities.

Riding skills

Firstly, I don't think the riding is as tough as it sounds. I've chosen routes that give a real Scottish flavour but still make for an enjoyable holiday.

There will however, be some big ups (including a fair bit of pushing for sure), some long days (possibly 6-8 hours or more) and some technical downs (some of which probably everybody will walk a few metres). As long as you can keep smiling when you're tired and pushing your bike then you'll be fine.

In terms of riding ability, this trip won't suit anyone who isn't happy riding red grade trails in typical UK trail centres (please ask us if you would like more detail).

Fitness

It's much more about stamina than speed or strength. There are some long days and we won't be racing anywhere. On the bigger days, we'll ride at a relaxed pace that can be kept up all day. We'll also take more care than we would at a trail centre as a bad fall in a remote place is not good news.

The best training for this kind of trip is actually just getting out riding – preferably longer distances at a steady pace. 30km at a steady pace will be more useful than 15km at racing speed, so if your local trails are short, slow it down and do 2 laps!

We have 2 guides on the trip so we can try to cater for different speeds and ability levels. I'm sure everybody will have their own strengths and weaknesses and everybody will have good days and off days. If we pull together as much as possible a strong team will achieve lots more than a bunch of fit individuals.

Bike cleaning and maintenance

We'll have access to a hose for bike cleaning each night.

We'll also have a bike stand and some tools for fettling and repairs. Please bring any tools that are specific for your bike.

See the kit list for recommendations of what to bring.

Maps

Yup, we're guiding so you don't need them. But if you like following routes on your own maps, it's best to discuss that with us in Scotland in case plans change and you bring the wrong ones! If you just want printouts or GPX tracks of where we've been when we get home, let me know and I can do this (on a non-commercial basis 😊)

Laundry

It is possible to do laundry in some hostels. We can check before travelling if you feel this may be required.

Riding ethics

There's no getting around it, 10 mountain bikers on a trail will be pretty conspicuous, and we'll have some impact on both the landscape and other trail users.

As a company, MTB Guiding is 100% committed to minimising our impact in every way we can. We operate a strict 'pack it out' policy for all litter (including apple cores, banana skins and orange peel). We want to try to leave as little trace of our passing as possible.

While we'll enjoy some epic descents and trails during the week, please ride at a speed you can control and at a speed that reflects your line of sight and abilities.

We'll almost certainly meet walkers in places and I'd love any interaction to be as positive as possible. Let's give mountain bikers 'a good name'!

For more information check out [Do the Ride Thing](#) and also the websites listed at the end of these notes.

Weather

In the Scottish Highlands we could experience everything from hot sunny days, wet and windy days to full on winter blizzards. I've made many trips to Scotland at this time of year and I've generally had good, clear weather so we could hope for more of the same. When packing, please bring winter and summer clothing so we can make more informed decisions about what to wear and carry on the day or the night before.

Kit list

We'll send you a separate kit list.

Insurance

We don't need medical insurance in Scotland, but I strongly recommend travel insurance just to cover you should you get injured or fall ill before the trip or during it.

Useful websites

www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

www.wild-scotland.org.uk