

TRIP NOTES: CAIRNGORM GOLD BIG MOUNTAIN CLASSICS

Cairngorm Gold Big Mountain Classics Weekend

4 days of gritty granite singletrack and sublime big mountain scenery including an ascent and descent of the UK's 2nd highest peak.

- Big days out in big mountains including the UK's second highest peak.
- Monster climbs and monumental alpine style descents
- Mile after mile of tight, twisty singletrack hewn into steep granite hillsides
- Link with the London to Aviemore Sleeper Train for minimum time off work
- Super-comfy bike-friendly hotel accommodation!

INTRODUCTION

The Cairngorm mountain range contains more ground above 1000m than any other massif in Britain. It's highest peak, Ben Macdui, at 1,309m, is not just the UK's second highest mountain but it's also by far the highest you can sensibly ride and an ascent and descent is an absolute must-do. But there's more to this amazing area than just high mountains. The soaring granite peaks are skirted on all sides by ancient caledonian pine forests, and these conceal a real mixture of awesome trails. The scenery is nothing short of breathtaking and the riding's even better.

SAMPLE ITINERARY

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

Day 1: Rothiemurchus/Inshriac/Lairig Ghru

Distance: Various options

Ascent: Various options

We'll have a reasonably easy outing on day 1, starting directly from the railway station, or our hotel, and cruising through town into the lovely Rothiemurchus Forest. We'll enjoy some great, easy-flowing singletrack to start with as well as some incredible scenery. We can then up the ante a little and head west towards Inshriac Forest for some more technical singletrack, and then back east again to round it all off with the bottom section of the amazing Lairig Ghru path - one of the best short trails we've ever ridden.

First night in Aviemore. Dinner in La Taverna Italian restaurant.

Day 2: 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 estate tracks that almost fly by, although there are a few really good fun techie sections too :) And after an afternoon swim under the Falls of Tarf (is anyone really brave enough?), the last 20km are gently downhill. There's a bit of a bonus too - we can use the minibus to drop us at the trail head cutting out around 200m of tarmac climbing!

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

Day 3: Ben Macdui

Distance: Around 30km

Ascent: 1000m-1200m

A few choices of route here but the favourite would be to get dropped off at the ski station on Cairngorm which, at 630m, saves a lot of climbing, and then make the short, very steep pull up onto the plateau, where we cross the 1000m contour line for the first time. We then skirt around the edges of the amazing granite corries before enjoying flowing singletrack down into a high col, 200m short of the summit. It's a mixed push/ride from here. The descent follows incredibly sandy singletrack for over 10km, dropping close on 1000m in a single hit. We finish a long way from where we started so we then need to hop on the minibus for the drive back to Aviemore.

Third night in Aviemore. Dinner in the Cairngorm Hotel.

Day 4: Sgor Gaoith and Glen Feshie

Distance: 20km

Ascent: 900m

This is a shorter day that really consists of a one-up, one-down assault on one of the finest viewpoints anywhere in the UK. It's steep in places, and most will push at least some of it. But once up, there's some easy fun riding along the ridgetop to the summit. And a chance to eat lunch at 1118, while gazing out over the rest of the massif. The descent is a corker; sinuous singletrack weaves a sweet line through the heather, crosses a succession of streams and then drops back into Glen Feshie, with barely a water bar in sight - one of the best. It may be possible to squeeze a few more miles in, depending on legs and travel arrangements, but we usually leave time for a celebratory pint before heading our separate ways.

INCLUDED IN THE TRIP PRICE

- All accommodation – 3 nights in a comfortable, family-ran hotel (on a 2 people sharing basis)
- Cooked breakfasts and packed lunches prepared by the local deli
- All travel in Scotland – 16-seat luxury minibus with a dedicated professional driver and bike trailer
- All guiding with a 4-1 client to guide ratio

NOT INCLUDED IN THE TRIP PRICE

- Getting to and from Aviemore

- Travel insurance and personal equipment
- Evening meals
- Incidental personal expenditure, such as drinks, snacks 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. 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

Technical: Typical trail centre Blacks are unlikely to phase you and you're happy on even tougher natural terrain. You're happy on smaller drops that can't quite be rolled.

Fitness: You're comfortable out all day at a good pace, and will even manage a few real epics if you pace yourself. 50km+ and 1500m of climbing won't phase you too much.

There'll be some big ups (including a fair bit of hike-a-bike), some long days, and some technical downs - a sense of humour may be required at times. It will also involve riding 4 days back to back (but voluntary rest days are possible if needed).

We travel with 2 guides to help us manage different speeds and different ability levels. But the plan is always to ride as a team and to pull together as much as possible. A strong team will achieve way more than a bunch of fit individuals. We usually find that everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses, and that during the trip most people will have good days and off days.

It's never a race and we will never leave anybody behind on either the ups or the downs

Training

Just get out and ride. 30km at a steady pace will definitely be more useful than 15km at racing speed. So if your local trails are short, try to slow it down and do 2 laps. If you haven't ridden 50km in a day before, we recommend doing so at least once before the trip – to increase your confidence if nothing else!

BIKES

Your bike needs to be ready for the rigours of the mountains – steep and rocky climbs and descents.

It would be well worth having it fully serviced (or doing it yourself). If there are parts you're in any doubt about, change them. This trip WILL be hard on bikes.

As a minimum make sure your chain, chainset and cassette are all in decent nick and your brake pads are new or nearly new (you can always carry the old ones as spares and slot them back in later).

A lightweight x-country bike won't be strong enough for the descents and a downhill rig will be too heavy for the climbs. There's no perfect bike but make sure you can climb and descend on it reasonably well.

Fat bikes are not suitable!

We prefer to run tubeless to reduce pinch flats – a real problem on rocky terrain. Always carry at least one tube though.

Tyres are important. Lightweight racing tyres won't be strong enough. We recommend good trail or all-mountain tyres such as Maxxis High Rollers.

Note: There are excellent bike shops in the area.

BIKE CLEANING, MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY

The hotel has a hose so we can wash the bikes each evening.

We travel with a bike stand and a good selection of tools. If you need specific tools for your bike, please bring them.

We try not to leave the bikes unattended on the trailer, but we've got a selection of cables and locks so we can lock them if needed. If you've got a lock, please bring it. The hostel provides secure storage.

MAPS

Yup, we're guiding so you don't need them. But if you're interested in following routes on your own maps, speak to us before you buy them in case plans change and you end up with the wrong ones. If you just want printouts of where we've been when we get home, let me know and I can do this (on a non-commercial basis ☺)

ETHICS ON THE HILL

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

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

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

We'll certainly meet walkers and we want any interactions to be as positive as possible. It's important to give mountain bikers a good name.

WEATHER

We could get everything from hot sunny days to full on winter blizzards – we've had snow in June! We generally have good, clear weather at this time of year but please pack winter and summer riding kit. See the kit list to find out what to bring.

INSURANCE

Medical insurance isn't necessary in Scotland, but we strongly recommend travel insurance to cover you should you get injured or fall ill before the trip or during it.

ACCOMMODATION

Ravenscraig Guest House

www.aviemoreonline.com

This is a small and really comfortable family-run hotel. It's close to the centre of Aviemore and is very bike-friendly, with a handy hose, bike storage and a drying room. The breakfasts are also superb.

KIT LIST

The weather can be very varied in Scotland so we need to be prepared. We'll have a briefing every evening to give you an up to date weather forecast and plan the next day. We can share some of the kit to keep packs as light as possible, although on very remote days we need to cover all eventualities.

Riding kit

Some items can be shared between the group. If you haven't got all the kit please let us know at the first night's briefing.

- Hydration pack big enough to carry everything in the list below – suggested size 15L to 20L
- Water and snacks – gels, energy bars, flapjacks, jelly babies
- Lunch (we supply it but you need to carry it!)
- Dry bag to keep everything dry inside your pack
- Mini pump for your valve type
- 2 inner tubes plus spare ones in the minibus (even if you use tubeless) – Scotland is very rocky!
- Tube patches (preferably self-adhesive)
- Tubeless repair kit (if you use tubeless)
- Tyre boot or patch
- Tyre levers
- 2 spare spokes that fit your wheels
- Multi-tool
- 1 set of spare brake pads
- Rear gear hanger for your bike - essential
- Cable ties
- Duct tape (we suggest wrapping 1m around your pump)
- Power link for your chain type and speed
- Mobile phone - in a waterproof case or plastic bag

- Small personal first aid kit
- Insect repellent (we recommend Smidge)
- Sun screen
- Any medication you need

Recommended clothing

- Helmet – not full face
- Knee and elbow pads
- Cycling shorts and/or waterproof shorts (or trousers)
- Wicking base layers or cycling jerseys
- Mid layer (fleece or soft shell)
- Windproof jacket
- Waterproof jacket
- Insulated jacket or warm emergency layer
- Woolly hat or buff
- Riding glasses
- Gloves (worth having a spare pair if it's wet)
- Waterproof socks
- Cycling shoes (you must be able to walk in them!)

For the minibus

- Small 'hand luggage' bag for post-ride clothes
- Plastic bags for wet and dirty kit
- Chamois cream if you use it

Your guides will carry

- Pliers
- Chain splitter
- Emergency spokes
- Spoke key
- Adjustable spanner
- Cassette tool and chain wrench
- Shock pump
- Puncture and tubeless repair kits
- Small bottle of chain lube
- Spare chain links/joining pins
- Assorted nuts and bolts
- Emergency shelter
- Emergency blanket
- Warm insulated jacket
- First aid kit
- Maps
- Compass
- GPS
- Mobile phones
- VHF radio