



# GRAVEL RIDES CAIRNGORMS & PERTHSHIRE



15 gravel bike adventures in the heart of Scotland



MARKUS STITZ

# GRAVEL RIDES CAIRNGORMS & PERTHSHIRE



**15 gravel bike adventures  
in the heart of Scotland**

**MARKUS STITZ**



Vertebrate Publishing, Sheffield  
[www.adventurebooks.com](http://www.adventurebooks.com)

# GRAVEL RIDES CAIRNGORMS & PERTSHIRE

---

15 gravel bike adventures in the heart of Scotland

First published in 2025 by Vertebrate Publishing.



Vertebrate Publishing  
Omega Court, 352 Cemetery Road, Sheffield S11 8FT, United Kingdom.  
[www.adventurebooks.com](http://www.adventurebooks.com)

Copyright © 2025 Markus Stitz and Vertebrate Publishing Ltd.

Markus Stitz has asserted his rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as author of this work.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-83981-261-3 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-83981-262-0 (Ebook)

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or mechanised, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems – without the written permission of the publisher.

**Front cover** *On the approach to the Burma Road from Carrbridge (route 06).*

**Back cover** *Speyside Way near Kingussie (route 01).*

**Opposite** *Old Invercauld Bridge over the River Dee (route 12).*

Photography by **Markus Stitz** unless otherwise credited.



All maps reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright. AC0000809882.

Printed and bound in Latvia by United Press.

Vertebrate Publishing is committed to printing on paper from sustainable sources.

Every effort has been made to achieve accuracy of the information in this guidebook. The authors, publishers and copyright owners can take no responsibility for: loss or injury (including fatal) to persons; loss or damage to property or equipment; trespass, irresponsible behaviour or any other mishap that may be suffered as a result of following the route descriptions or advice offered in this guidebook. The inclusion of a track or path as part of a route, or otherwise recommended, in this guidebook does not guarantee that the track or path will remain a right of way. If conflict with land-owners arises we advise that you act politely and leave by the shortest route available. If the matter needs to be taken further then please take it up with the relevant authority.

PLEASE GIVE WAY TO HORSES AND PEDESTRIANS.





Contains Ordnance Survey Data © Crown Copyright and Database Right.

# CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Acknowledgements	x
How to use this book	x
Responsible access & legalities	xii
The bike	xiv
General safety	xvii
In the event of an accident	xviii
Beasties	xix
Be responsible	xx
Beyond the bike	xx
Planning your ride	xxi
Maps & symbols	xxi

## SECTION 1 – EASY ROUTES

01 ■ Uath Lochans – 26.9km	3
02 ■ Cambus o'May & the Deeside Way – 22.8km	9
03 ■ Kindrogan Forest – 14.7km	15
04 ■ Scone Palace & the Tay – 26.3km	21

## SECTION 2 – STRAIGHTFORWARD ROUTES

05 ■ Wolf's Lair & the Dava Way – 32.8km	29
06 ■ The Burma Road – 43.5km	35
07 ■ Ryvoan Bothy – 40.7km	43
08 ■ Blair Atholl & Glen Tilt – 26.7km	49
09 ■ Black Wood of Rannoch – 32.9km	55
10 ■ Aberfeldy Draft & Flow – 24.2km	61
11 ■ Blairgowrie Forests – 21.7km	67

## SECTION 3 – CHALLENGING ROUTES

12 ■ Grand Tour o' Ballater – 77.3km	75
13 ■ Glen Prosen & the Southern Cairngorms – 72.6km	87
14 ■ Dunkeld Moorlands & Big Tree Country – 75km	99
15 ■ Little Glen Shee – 50.9km	111

Appendix	118
----------	-----



Download the Gravel Rides  
Cairngorms & Perthshire  
GPX files from  
[www.adventurebooks.com/GRCP-GPX](http://www.adventurebooks.com/GRCP-GPX)

### Route grades

- Easy
- Straightforward
- Challenging



## Introduction

This is my second solo book on gravel riding. Over the last three years, since I wrote *Great British Gravel Rides*, a lot has changed. But while gravel bikes have evolved significantly, with wider tyres, suspension and new transmission systems, my opinion has not changed – the best gravel bike is the bike you already have.

I have always seen cycling as a source of enjoyment, a great way to meet new people and the best form of travel to discover new places. Since publishing my first book I have noticed more people out on bikes, which is encouraging. With further progress still needed, I have also seen improvements in infrastructure and services across Scotland.

I hope this guidebook will be a great inspiration for you to explore not only the natural beauty of the Cairngorm mountains, Perthshire and the mighty River Tay, but also connect you to the people that call this corner of Scotland, with its rich history, home.

I have spent many hours cycling here, as the small town of Alyth has been the base of Bikepacking Scotland since August 2023. I worked on three projects developing routes for gravel bikes in the area: in 2020, the Highland Perthshire Gravel Trails; in 2021, the Travel for All Our Tomorrows project in the Cateran Ecomuseum; and in 2022 by developing gravel routes for Cairngorms Connect.

The fact that there are now several titles for gravel riding shows the popularity of this segment. For me the rise in prominence of gravel cycling was also an encouragement to write a book with routes which are more accessible and appeal to a much wider variety of people than my previous books.

And whether it may be foraging, enjoying a good coffee, visiting a museum or simply taking a break at a beautiful spot, for me there is so much more to a good cycling adventure than just the distance covered or the metres climbed.

I hope this book encourages you to get out and explore.  
Enjoy the ride!

**Markus Stitz**

Edinburgh/Ås, December 2024





ON THE DEESIDE WAY FROM BALLATER TO CAMBUS O'MAY.

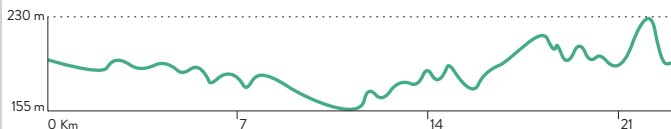
# 02 **CAMBUS O'MAY & THE DEESIDE WAY**

22.8km/14.2 miles

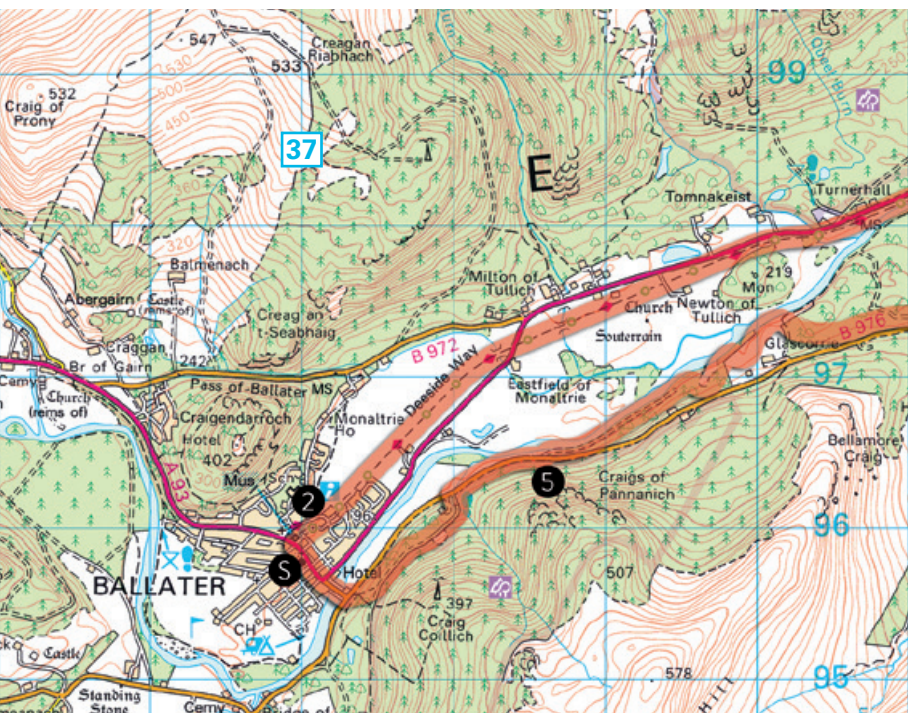
## Introduction

If I had to choose, this would be my favourite early morning ride before breakfast in autumn. With the sun rising as you cycle east out of Ballater, this loop never ventures high or climbs steeply but still gives you a great sense of why Royal Deeside has become one of the best cycling destinations in Scotland. This route is family friendly with just a few concessions: if you don't mind crossing the A93, cycling a section on a quiet road and passing a few gates.

You can discover the classic Deeside scenery of pine, heather and blaeberry on the smooth surface of the trail that follows the former track bed of the railway line that connected Aberdeen with Ballater via Dinnet. Break up the ride with a nice scenic section on the South Deeside Road, before a stretch on gravel tracks and grassy singletracks takes you back into the village of Ballater, which, for its small size, has a great selection of nice eateries and two well-stocked local bike shops.



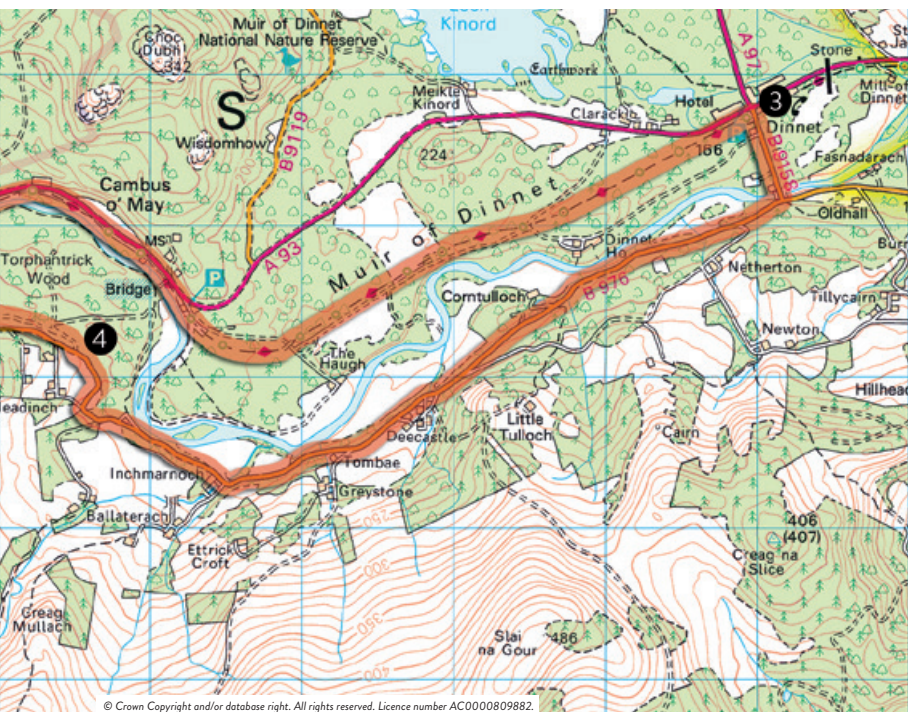
DISTANCE **22.8km/14.2 miles** — ASCENT **170m/558ft** — HIGHEST POINT **230m/755ft** — % OFF-ROAD **66%** — START/FINISH **Ballater** — START/FINISH GRID REF **NO 369957** — SATNAV **AB35 5NE** — GPS **57.0485, -3.0406** — GRADE **■** — TERRAIN **Gravel paths, roads and some singletrack** — PUBLIC TRANSPORT **Stonehaven railway station (60.5km)** — PARKING **Church Square car park with charging points at start** — MAP **OS Landranger 44, Ballater & Glen Clova (1:50,000)**





2

1 ACROSS THE MUIR OF DINNET. 2 CAMBUS O'MAY BRIDGE CROSSING THE RIVER DEE.



© Crown Copyright and/or database right. All rights reserved. Licence number AC0000809882.

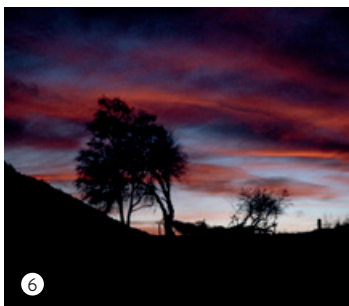


## Directions

- S** The route starts at Church Square car park in Ballater. If you need additional route advice or any help with your bike, your best choice is Cycle Highlands, situated right next to the car park. Follow Church Square north, turn **R** on to Golf Road, then turn **L** on to Bridge Street. For coffee and food, you'll pass the excellent The Bothy on your left, before turning **R** on to Station Square where you will find another good bike shop, Bike Station Ballater. The former terminus of the Aberdeen to Ballater line and the nearest railway station to Balmoral Castle closed in 1966 as part of the Beeching cuts and hosts the royal waiting room and carriage, as well as a tearoom. Take the path on the **R** side of the building and then follow the wheelchair ramp on to the former railway track, now the start of the Deeside Way, which mainly follows the former Old Royal Deeside Railway all the way to Aberdeen.
- 2** Follow the Deeside Way through a residential area out of Ballater, crossing the busy A93 after around 2km. **Care is needed** when crossing, as the trail dips on to the road and climbs sharply up on the other side for a few metres. Continue on the smooth gravel track for another 2km until you reach a gate, and shortly afterwards the Cambus o' May Cheese Co., home of fine cheeses and a nice cafe. Follow the Deeside Way for another 2km and you will see a fine suspension bridge on your right. Although the bridge was renovated after major storm damage in 2015, Aberdeenshire Council sadly kept the turnstiles, which make it impossible to



5



6

4 ON THE DEESIDE WAY. 5 PARKED UP AT THE CAMBUS O'MAY CHEESE FACTORY. 6 SUNSET AT TORPHANTRICK WOOD.

### Coffee and food

The Bothy, Ballater  
 Cambus o'May Cheese  
 & Milk Hoose Cafe,  
 Cambus o'May

### Bike shops

Cycle Highlands,  
 Ballater  
 Bike Station Ballater

### Accommodation

Balmoral Arms, Ballater

cross the Dee here with a bike. Instead, the route continues on the Deeside Way through a nice woodland area to Dinnit.

- 3 Turn **R** where the Deeside Way reaches Firmouth Road, crossing the River Dee, and then turn **R** on to the South Deeside Road, B976. The road follows the river on its southern bank.
- 4 After 5.8km, turn **R** at the *Upper Headinch Water* sign to continue through a gate on to a gravel track. Follow this track through the woodland until it eventually becomes a narrower track. This trail is part of the Cambus o'May path network. For easy navigation, follow the signs to Ballater. Continue over a field with two gates on either side. If you can spot cows with calves, it is advisable to follow the alternative track along the field edge. Continue on the track until you reach the South Deeside Road again.
- 5 Turn **R** to follow the road. Shortly afterwards take a **L** turn to continue the Ballater/Cambus o'May loop on a path. This is a short but steep hill; the alternative is to follow the road. Continue on the path, then cross the road and follow Ballater Bridge over the Dee. Continue on Bridge Street and take the road on the **L**, Victoria Road, immediately before the church, and turn **R** at the next opportunity to finish the ride back at the car park.



DESCENDING THE BURMA ROAD.

# 06 THE BURMA ROAD

43.5km/27 miles

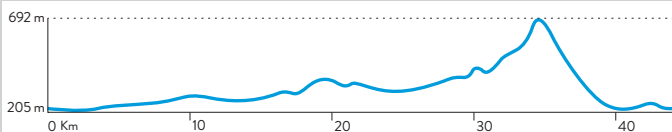
## Introduction

Supposedly built by prisoners of war in the 1940s and now a very popular mountain bike route, the Burma Road offers one of the best views you can get as you ride the routes in this book. While most people ride the route from Lynwilg, near Aviemore, over the Monadhliath into the valley of the Dulnain and on to the village of Carrbridge, this itinerary tackles the climb from the opposite side. This route is less steep and offers you a nicer vista on the downhill.

On a calm day this will be one of the best gravel rides in Scotland. On a bad day

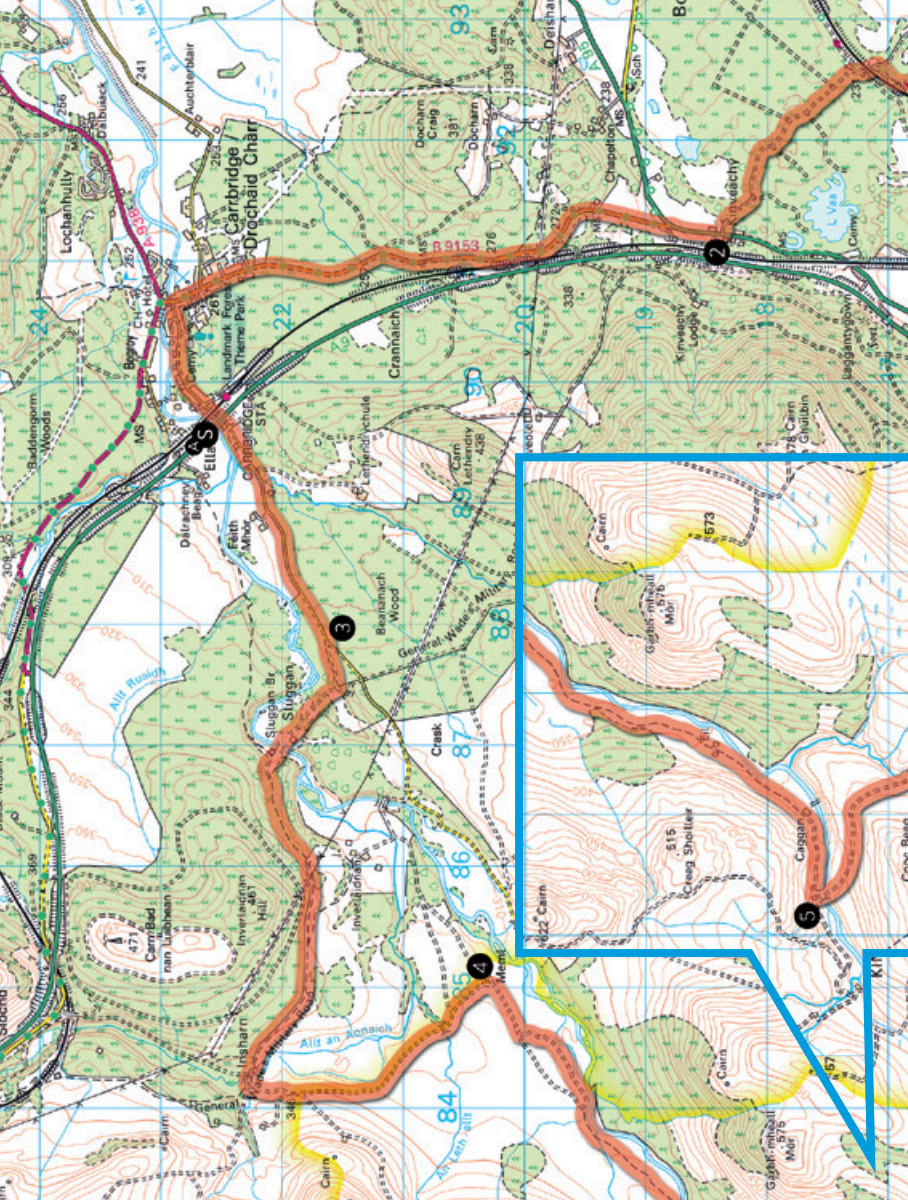
this route, although only 43 kilometres long, can be a full-on adventure. Attempting the route in this direction will give you a bail-out option at Carrbridge station, with frequent trains back to Aviemore.

But this route is not just about the grand views across the Cairngorm mountains. Your ride also takes you past two stunning bridges, the Old Packhorse Bridge and Sluggan Bridge, as well as through some of the nicest stretches of Caledonian pine woods in the national park.



DISTANCE 43.5km/27 miles — ASCENT 660m/2,165ft — HIGHEST POINT 692m/2,270ft — % OFF-ROAD 71% — START/FINISH Aviemore — START/FINISH GRID REF NH 895125 — SATNAV PH22 1RH — GPS 57.1909, -3.8287 — GRADE ■ — TERRAIN Gravel paths, roads and some singletrack — PUBLIC TRANSPORT Aviemore railway station (300m) — PARKING Car park at start with charging facilities for electric cars — MAP OS Landrangers 36, Grantown & Aviemore, and 35, Kingussie & Monadhliath Mountains (1:50,000)









**1** SLUGGAN BRIDGE. **2** OLD PACKHORSE BRIDGE IN CARRBRIDGE. **3** THE APPROACH TOWARDS THE BURMA ROAD ALONG THE RIVER DULNAIN. **4** CLIMBING TOWARDS THE TOP OF THE BURMA ROAD.

## Directions

- S** Head past the public toilets at Aviemore car park to take a ramp and turn **L** to cross the railway line through an underpass – which is nicely lit up. Turn **L** on to Dalfaber Road and follow EuroVelo 1, or National Cycle Network Route 7, north. At the road end continue on the cycle path, and then on Dalnabay through a residential area. Take a **L** turn to continue on NCN 7, then a **R** turn on to Dalfaber Drive before turning **L** again on to Spey Avenue. Continue on the road until the signposted cycle route takes a path on the **L**, which leads you on to the Speyside Way. Starting at Buckie on the Moray coastline, the Speyside Way follows the course of the mighty River Spey all the way to Newtonmore. Your route follows a smooth gravel path through a nice woodland first, before you continue on a more open section, which provides stunning views towards some of the highest mountains in the Cairngorms range. Continue on the path until you cross the line of the Strathspey Railway through an underpass. Leave the Speyside Way here and carry on **SA** through a dense Caledonian pine woodland. There are several tracks on your right and your left; ignore them and carry on until you reach a gate and then a junction with the A95.
- 2** Turn **R** on to the A95. **Care is needed** once you join the road, as traffic can be dense at times. At the next intersection turn **L** on to the B9153 towards Carrbridge, rejoining EuroVelo 1 for a while. This road is quieter but still has a 60 mph limit, hence it is no longer classed as part of the National Cycle Network but is still signposted as the Lochs and Glens Way. Continue on the road into Carrbridge, until you can spot the old Carrbridge Packhorse Bridge, also known as Coffin Bridge, in front of you. Now a Category B-listed structure it has become a well-photographed site in the Highlands. It was built in 1717 to allow funeral processions to reach Duthil Church by crossing the River Dulnain. Turn **L** on to Station Road before the bridge and follow this for 3km until you see a path and gate on your **R**. You will pass Carrbridge railway station, which makes a good alternative start for this route.
- 3** Turn **R** and shortly after you join the gravel track turn **R** again on to General Wade's Military Road. This is a well-preserved section of the military roads that were built under the command of General Wade in the 1700s to allow government forces to deploy if there was a Jacobite uprising. This used to be an alternative off-road section of NCN 7 but sadly is no longer part of the network. Soon you'll reach Sluggan Bridge, which carries the (former) line of the military road from Dunkeld to Inverness across the River Dulnain. Please make sure to close the gates on the bridge. Continue on the gravel track until you reach a house at Insharn. Pass a gate and take the track on the **L** when you reach a three-way junction. This track takes you across the typical heather landscape of the Cairngorms, with a few Caledonian pine trees lining the path. Continue on this track until you reach a T-junction.



- 4 Turn **R** and continue parallel to the banks of the River Dulnain until you reach a fork. Your route follows the track on the **L**, which drops down towards the river. The other option, on the right, is much rougher. Both tracks merge, after which the route starts climbing gradually. The track, first very good to cycle, becomes much rougher before it reaches a small private house at Caggan. In good weather this is a good picnic spot. Carry on for about 700m until you reach a junction.
- 5 Turn **L** on to a wide gravel road across the river. From here you climb moderately for about 1km. After a short descent, the major climb of this route starts. Tackling the Burma Road from this side means a less steep ascent, but you will still have about 300m of climbing in less than 4km ahead of you. While the landscape on the ascent is rather desolate and barren, the views from the top of the climb at 692m are breathtaking. Apparently built by prisoners of war in the 1940s, the Burma Road is now part of BrewDog's Lost Forest, a controversial attempt by the Scottish brewing giant to plant the biggest ever forest in Scotland.



### Coffee and food

The Old Bridge Inn, Aviemore  
Ryvoan Cafe, Aviemore

### Bike shops

Aviemore Bikes, Aviemore  
Alpine Bikes, Aviemore  
BackCountry.Scot, Aviemore

### Accommodation

Ravenscraig Guest House, Aviemore



5 CALEDONIAN FOREST NEAR INVERLAIDNAN. 6 FORMER NCN 7 NEAR SLUGGAN. 7 AT THE TOP OF THE BURMA ROAD.

- 6 After you have soaked up the views from the highest point, you'll descend for 5km. On the lower parts of the Burma Road, you'll find some of the ancient woodlands that once carpeted the Highlands. Watch out for walkers – this is a popular hiking route. After the newly installed deer gate at Alltnacriche, you merge on to a small tarmac road, passing the Kinrara Distillery before turning **R** on to the A9. **Care is needed here**, but thankfully you will only ride 100m on this busy road, turning **L** almost straight away towards the B9152. Turn **R** and immediately **L** again and then join the Speyside Way on the **L**. This is a fun singletrack, but the gates along the route will slow you down. There is also a very steep but short switchback climb, which might require pushing your bike. Follow the signs of the Speyside Way to cross the railway line and the B9152 and continue on the small path parallel to the road until you reach a roundabout on the edge of Aviemore. (If you are pushed for time, you can ride on the B9152 into the small Highland town.) Turn **R** on to the B970 towards Rothiemurchus. Turn **L** at the next opportunity to merge on to Dalfaber Road and continue past Aviemore station and take the underpass on the **L** to return to the car park.