



GRAVEL RIDES LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS

15 gravel bike adventures in & around
Scotland's first national park & Argyll



MARKUS STITZ

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Front cover Mark Baker climbing up the track at Troisgeach Bheag (route 08).

Back cover The author above Glen Finglas Reservoir (route 09).

Opposite Mark Baker and the author at the start of Glen Kinglas (route 15).

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PLEASE GIVE WAY TO HORSES AND PEDESTRIANS.





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Download the Gravel Rides
Loch Lomond & The Trossachs
GPX files from
www.adventurebooks.com/GRLTT-GPX

Route grades

■ Easy ■ Straightforward
■ Challenging



Introduction

Scotland's first national park has been at the very heart of my journey of exploration in the country, ever since I embarked on my first big cycling adventure here in 2006. With not much of a plan but with Yoda (his real name is Martin), a very good mate, in tow, I hauled a heavy backpack and a hardtail bike along the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond before the terms 'bikepacking' and 'gravel riding' were coined. It was the journey that made me fall in love with Scotland, and almost twenty years later, I am still here.

It was Argyll where I first set foot back in Scotland when I returned from cycling 34,000 kilometres around the world. In 2017, shortly after the trip, I was fortunate enough to meet Carron Tobin. Carron, who was working as project manager for Wild About Argyll, the destination marketing organisation for the area, put all her faith in me and allowed me to develop the Wild About Argyll Trail, Scotland's first long-distance gravel trail.

Much of my early work through Bikepacking Scotland was made possible with Carron's help. Together we developed a collection of gravel routes along the stations served by ScotRail's Highland Explorer train between Glasgow and Oban. This was followed by a joint project with Mark Beaumont and Jenny Graham exploring the boundary of Argyll and developing a route around the third-largest freshwater loch in Scotland, Loch Awe. Jointly, we made the Dunoon Dirt Dash happen in 2019, which has since put many smiles on people's faces and connected like-minded bikepackers from across the world.

In 2024, I was invited back by Jim Riach. Jim, back then in charge of all things active travel for Trust in the Park, asked me to portray the people of the national park and explore their connection with cycling in my film *Gateways*. This was the final spark to write this book.

I hope my fourth solo guidebook will be a great inspiration for you to explore and connect with the people that call this part of Scotland home. My advice: travel slow and stop often – there is much to see here.

Enjoy the ride!

Markus Stitz

Edinburgh, August 2025

OPPOSITE THE AUTHOR ON ONE OF HIS FAVOURITE RIDES ON THE WEST COAST – CLIMBING OUT OF GLEN MASSAN (ROUTE 12).



NEAR THIRD FARM ON THE APPROACH TO THE A811.

04 JOHN MUIR WAY TASTER

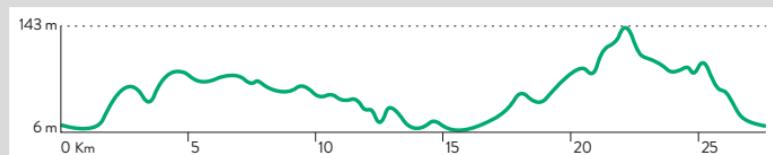
27.6km/17.1 miles

Introduction

It can be tricky to enjoy a view of Scotland's most beautiful loch from its southern shores all by yourself. Balloch is the closest entry point to the national park from Scotland's biggest city, Glasgow, and with this proximity and the ease of getting there by public transport come the crowds that frequent this part of Scotland from early spring onwards.

If you would like to enjoy the views and add some more tranquillity to the

occasion, this loop is a great choice. You'll be rewarded with two outstanding opportunities to admire the bonnie banks – and both approaches that lead to them are very enjoyable gravel paths and likely to be empty. On your way, you'll get a taste of the John Muir Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails, which connects Helensburgh on Scotland's west coast with Dunbar on the east coast.



DISTANCE 27.6km/17.1 miles **ASCENT 280m/919ft** **HIGHEST POINT 143m/469ft** **% OFF-ROAD 27%** **START/FINISH Balloch railway station**
START/FINISH GRID REF NS 390818 **SATNAV G83 8SN** **GPS 56.0023, -4.5834** **GRADE** **TERRAIN** Gravel paths and roads **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**
At the start/finish **PARKING** Balloch Castle car park (alternative start) **MAP**
OS Landrangers 56, Loch Lomond & Inveraray, and 57, Stirling & The Trossachs (1:50,000)



1 ONE OF THE BEST GRAVEL TRACKS WITH A VIEW – AT KNOCKOUR HILL.

2 ON THE GARTOCHARN NATURE RESERVE. 3 LOCH LOMOND FROM KNOCKOUR HILL.



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Directions

① The route starts at Balloch railway station, with trains to Glasgow Central station. Car parking is available nearby for free at Balloch Castle, which is an alternative start. Exit the station at Tullichewan Road and then turn **R** on to Balloch Road. Shortly afterwards bear **L** on to the cycle path and cross the bridge over the River Leven. At the end of the bridge turn **L** on to the signed John Muir Way and follow this along the bank of the River Leven. In summer this part of the route will be very busy, so please take extra care here. Continue on the John Muir Way for 1.2km and then turn **R**, following the signposts. A short climb takes you to Balloch Castle, which is sadly in a poor state. The car park here is a great alternative start if you arrive by car, as the route also passes by on the return leg. Continue to follow the John Muir Way out of the car park, now also following National Cycle Network Route 7. Continue **SA** until you reach the entrance gate to Balloch Castle Country Park: bear **R** on to the lane and then keep **L** (effectively **SA**).

② After 800m turn **L** on to the A811 and then immediately **R** to continue on the signed NCN7 on small country roads for 6km. Upon reaching a T-junction, leave the NCN7 and turn **L** on to Duncryne Road, signed *Gartocharn*. Soon turn **R** on to Old School Road. Descend gently on this road until you reach the A811 main road. Turn **R**, and then immediately **L** on to a small road into Wards Estate.

③ Follow this road for 700m and then turn **R** into the RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond reserve. The beautiful reserve occupies a site of woodlands and wetlands on the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond. Its diverse habitats provide a fantastic opportunity to spot a variety of wildlife. While the car park can only be accessed at certain times, the reserve is open 24 hours a day and is a prime site where Greenland white-fronted geese come to overwinter. When you enter the reserve, continue **SA** until you reach the 'Skein of geese' art installation. This artwork by Hannah Imlach features a visual image of skeins of geese flying in the sky, combined with a sundial showing the times when the geese arrive and leave. Return on the same path for 100m and then turn **R** on to a woodland trail. At the next fork keep **L** and continue through the woodland. After 1.5km you will reach a gate.

④ Turn **R** here to follow the shore path, which was constructed in 2022, for about 700m until you reach a lookout point on the shores of Loch Lomond. This is one of the best views of Scotland's most beautiful loch. Return the same way and keep **R** to follow the shore path to Gartochrangan and then continue on a small road. Keep **R** at the next fork and continue **SA** at the junction. Follow this road until you again reach the A811: turn **R**. If the busy road is not your thing, you can cycle on the path on the right-hand side parallel to the road.



4



5

4 A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF LOCH LOMOND.
5 'SKEIN OF GEESE' ART INSTALLATION AT RSPB LOCH LOMOND.

Coffee and food

Green Rose Coffee Shop, Balloch

Bike shops

Halfords, Dumbarton (detour)

- 5 After 2km the A811 swings left at a cottage. Turn **R** here to follow a side road. A slightly steeper climb takes you past the water treatment works first, and then into a forest at Knockour Hill, where the tarmac turns into gravel. Shortly after you pass a transmission mast you will get the next amazing view over Loch Lomond as the track continues around the hill. Follow the track past Boturich Castle, and just before Over Balloch you will be back on tarmac. When you reach the John Muir Way/NCN7, turn **R** back into Balloch Castle Country Park and continue to the car park. If you are using the car park, this is the finish of your ride.
- 6 Turn **L** to follow NCN7 and continue on the cycle route though the park. After about 400m, instead of following the signposted route, continue **SA** until you reach a gate. Turn **R** on to Balloch Road, and after 500m turn **L** on to Tullichewan Road back to the railway station.



RIDING BACK FOR THE PICTURE IN GLEN KENDRUM.

07 GLEN OGLE LOOP

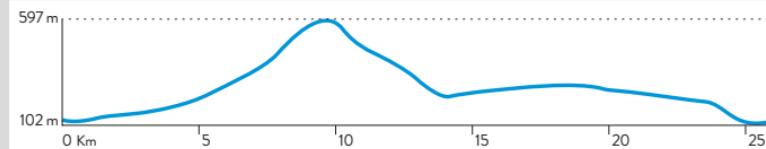
25.8km/16 miles

Introduction

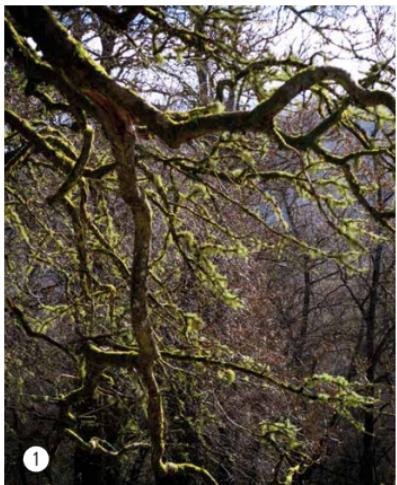
This is an adapted version of the Three Glens Loop originally published by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, which incorporates the new Ember electric bus service stop in Locearnhead, allowing you to access this wonderfully wild loop by public transport.

While not too challenging in terms of distance, this route feels properly wild and takes you into very remote territory, with no services along the route. For an even longer adventure and to allow for a coffee or lunch stop, you can combine this route with route 1 to add a visit to Killin.

For gravel riders and mountain bikers alike, this is an awesome loop with an adventurous mountain crossing, featuring three beautiful glens and a big climb into the upper reaches of Glen Kendrum, followed by a sweeping descent of Gleann Dubh into Glen Dochart, before a return through Glen Ogle. While the route could be cycled in both counterclockwise and clockwise directions, the direction described here avoids a technical climb.



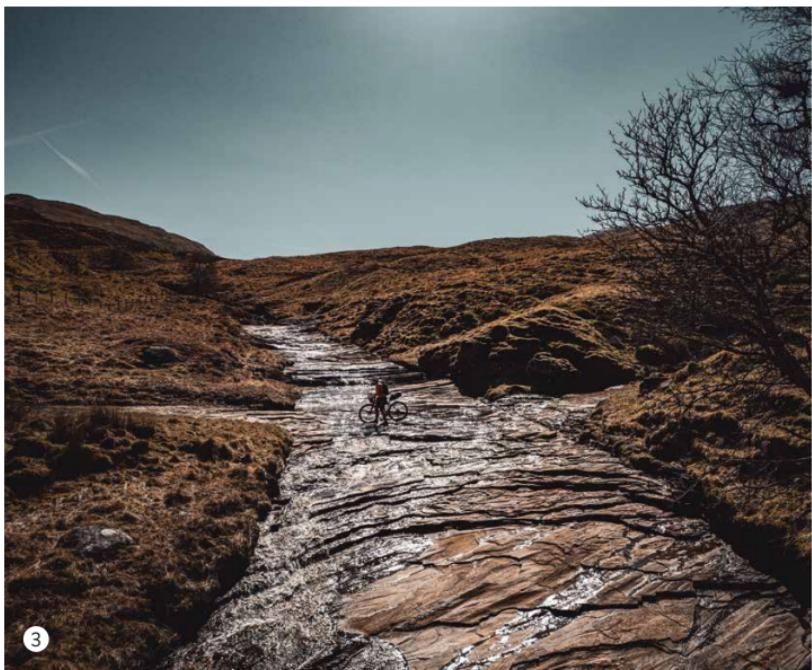
DISTANCE 25.8km/16 miles — **ASCENT 570m/1,870ft** — **HIGHEST POINT 597m/1,959ft** — **% OFF-ROAD 92%** — **START/FINISH Locearnhead** — **START/FINISH GRID REF NN 588238** — **SATNAV FK19 8PR** — **GPS 56.3860, -4.2877**
— **GRADE** ■ — **TERRAIN** Gravel paths, roads and cycle paths — **PUBLIC TRANSPORT** At the start/finish — **PARKING** Car park (600m) — **MAP OS Landranger 51, Loch Tay & Glen Dochart (1:50,000)**



1



2



3

1 IMAGINE THE RAIN IT TAKES TO FORM MOSS ON TREES – GLEN KENDRUM. 2 AT THE TOP OF GLEN KENDRUM. 3 CROSSING THE RIVER AT THE BOTTOM OF GLEANN DUBH.





Directions

① The ride starts at the bus stop in Locearnhead, which is well-connected by the Ember service from Edinburgh to Fort William. Head south on the A84 for around 700m and then turn **R** following the signs for National Cycle Network Route 7. Be prepared for a stiff uphill from here onwards. After a few houses the route turns **L** to follow NCN7. Continue south on NCN7 for about 2km, and then turn **R** and continue on a gravel track towards Glen Kendrum. There are no services on this route, but the Golden Larches Cafe is only a short detour from here.

② Follow the route of the dismantled Callander and Oban railway on a gravel track to the foot of Glen Kendrum. After crossing the Kendrum Burn over a bridge, take the next track to the **L** to climb into Glen Kendrum. While at first gradual, the track gets steeper as it progresses, and the upper section demands good bike-handling skills and climbing legs on a gravel bike. The scenery is outstanding, with amazing views down the valley and on to the rugged cliffs of Creag Mac Rànaich at the summit of the climb. The reward for the long climb to the highest point at 597m is an amazing downhill for more than 4km through Gleann Dubh, with a river crossing just before the end.



4 ON THE FORMER RAILWAY LINE. 5 THE PICTURESQUE GLEN OGLE VIADUCT.

Coffee and food

The Golden Larches Cafe (detour)

Bike shops

Killin Outdoor Centre, Killin (detour by using route 1)

③ Shortly after you see the viaduct, turn **R** and cross the burn. (If you combine this ride with route 1 from this book, instead take the track on the left.) Continue on the former railway line, passing the site of Killin Junction station. (If you are extending the route, you will rejoin at the next fork, so there is very little overlap between the two routes.) Keep **R** to continue gradually uphill towards the top of Glen Ogle, where you will find reminders of the old railway. After passing Glenogle Cottages, rejoin NCN7 south at Lochan Lairig Cheile.

④ Follow NCN7 south on a very smooth gravel track. After a short woodland section you can enjoy the magnificent views from Glen Ogle Viaduct, built in the 1860s by John Mackay. This route, which overlaps with the Rob Roy Way, is compared in Queen Victoria's journal from 1842 to the famous Khyber Pass. Certainly not nearly as steep (and dangerous), cycling through the steep-sided Glen Ogle is one of the highlights of this loop. The next one soon follows when you descend NCN7 on sweeping switchbacks towards Lochearnhead. Because of the tight corners, be especially mindful of other path users here. After an underpass, take the path on the **L** to retrace your tracks back to the start in Lochearnhead.



GRAVEL PATH AT THE BEGINNING OF GLEN CRERAN, WITH LOCH CRERAN IN THE BACKGROUND.

13 OYSTER LOOP

79.9km/49.6 miles

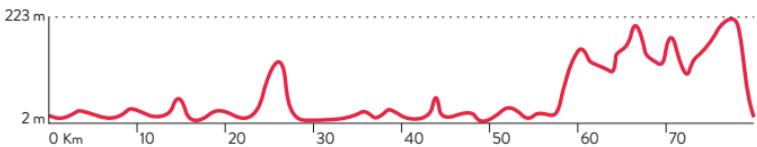
Introduction

This ride is not only a feast for your eyes, but also for your belly! By stopping at the Pierhouse Hotel in Port Appin you can either break the route up into two days, or start early and enjoy an excellent lunch at one of Scotland's best seafood restaurants. There are good vegetarian and vegan dishes too, and the head chef is a keen cyclist!

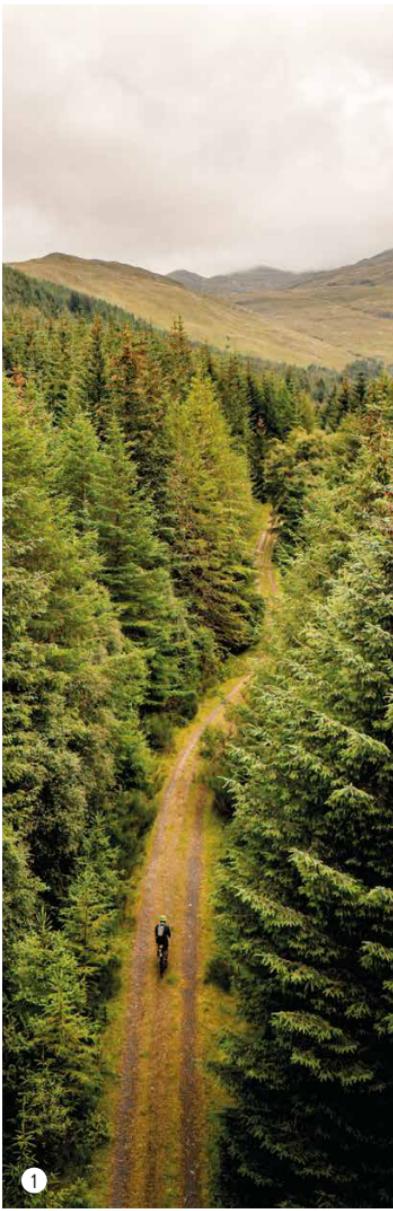
While the route is one of the few outside the national park, the scenery you encounter on the three loops that make

up this route is world-class. Loop one takes you into the dense forests that surround Loch Creran. Loop two includes fabulous coastal roads and a stop in Port Appin, with views on to the mighty mountains of the Morvern peninsula. And the third loop takes you around Beinn Lora, with a cracking descent back to Benderloch.

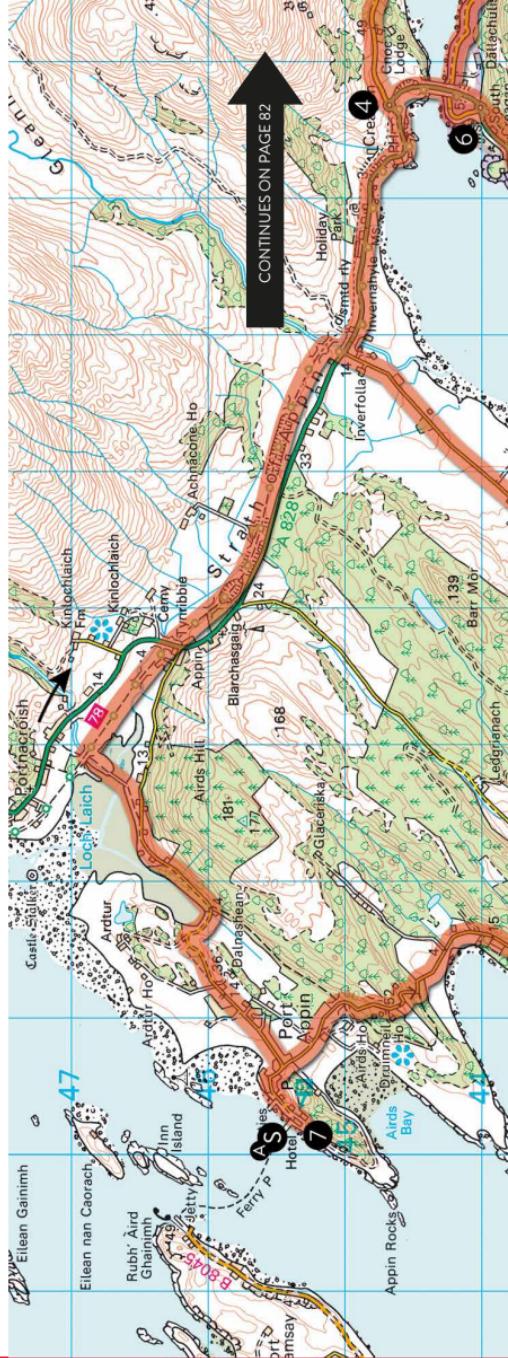
If you are looking to pack in all the features of Scotland's west coast into one long day, this is the perfect opportunity to do so.

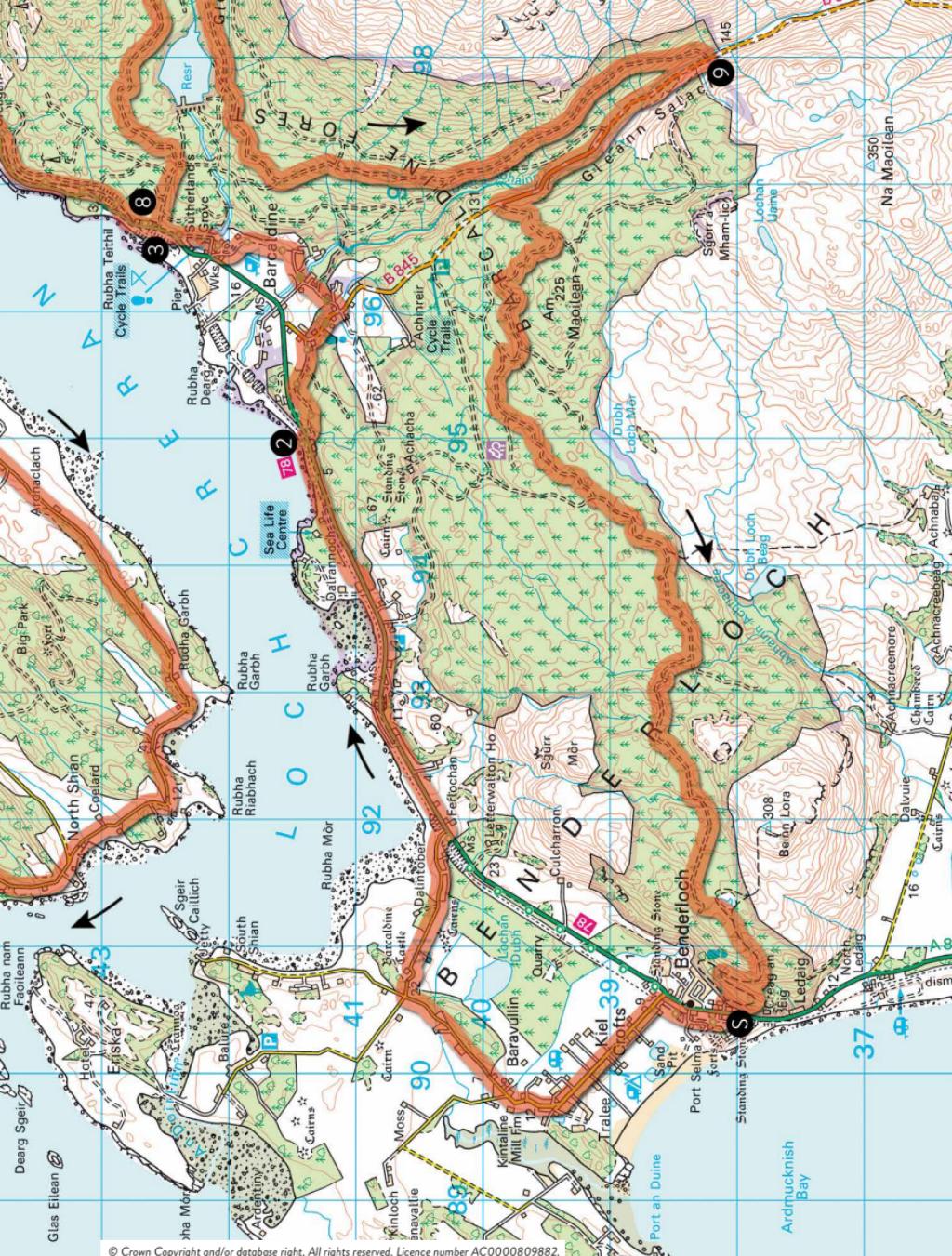


DISTANCE 79.9km/49.6 miles **ASCENT** 990m/3,248ft **HIGHEST POINT**
223m/732ft **% OFF-ROAD** 33% **START/FINISH** Benderloch **START/**
FINISH GRID REF NM 904381 **SATNAV** PA37 1QW **GPS** 56.4887, -5.4048
GRADE **TERRAIN** Gravel paths, roads, cycle paths and singletrack **PUBLIC**
TRANSPORT North Connell (4km) **PARKING** Car park at start **MAP**
OS Landrangers 49, Oban & East Mull, and 50, Glen Orchy & Loch Etive (1:50,000)



1 BARCALDINE FOREST.



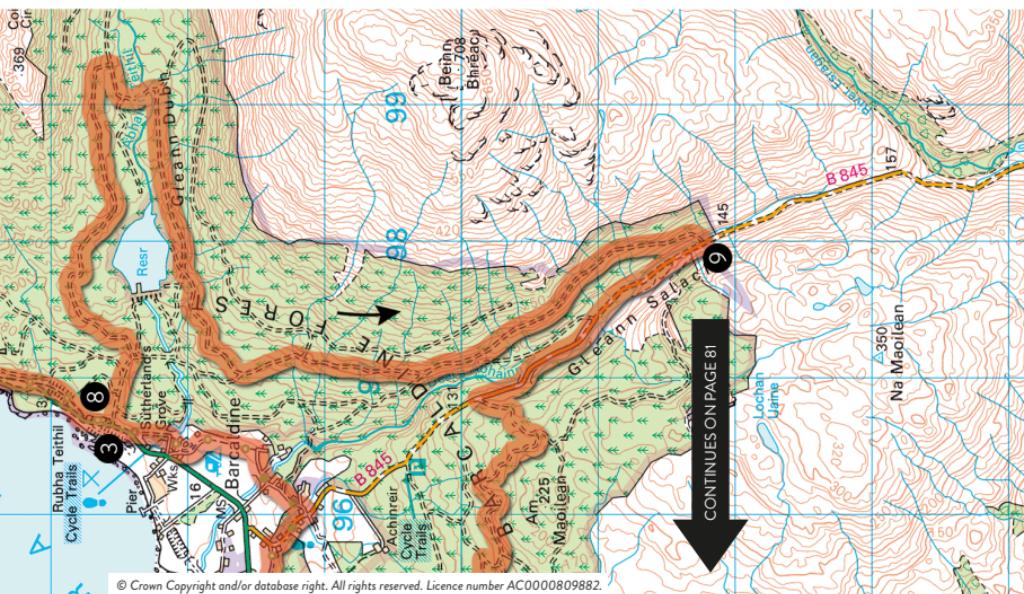






2

2 NEAR SUTHERLAND'S GROVE.



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3 ROAD ALONG LOCH CERAN. **4** GRAVEL PATH AT THE BEGINNING OF GLEN CERAN.
5 FOREST AT THE BEGINNING OF GLEN CERAN. **6** NEAR DRUIMAVUIC HOUSE.

Directions

The start of this route can be adjusted. Benderloch is the closest start if you are accessing it via public transport; but, for combining it with an overnight stay, the Pierhouse Hotel in Port Appin is an excellent choice as a start location. Port Appin can also be accessed by taking the ferry from Oban to Achnacroish on Lismore, cycling along the island, and then taking another ferry from The Point to Port Appin. This route can also be easily split up into three independent loops. At the start of each individual loop, you will find opportunities to park.

- ① Start from the car park opposite the 'Pink Shop' (Benderloch Supermarket) in Benderloch and turn **R** on to the Caledonia Way. Initially follow the cycle route (National Cycle Network Route 78) and then bear **L** off NCN78 just before a bridge on to the road to Tralee. Keep following the road until you reach a four-way junction: turn **R** here. You'll pass Barcaldine Castle on your left, a 17th-century tower house and now a B&B, also called the Black Castle. Continue until you reach the main road (A828) and turn **L** to rejoin the Caledonia Way (NCN78). Continue on the cycle route along the shores of Loch Creran. This is where the route gets its name from, as the Caledonian Oyster Co grows Pacific oysters in the crystal-clear waters of the loch (you can sample them at the Pierhouse Hotel for lunch).
- ② The route crosses the A828 and leaves the shore at Barcaldine to continue into the beautiful Barcaldine Forest. Continue on the signposted NCN78 past a walled garden to Sutherland's Grove. (This is the first time you can shorten the route by turning **R** here and continuing the route at point ⑧.)
- ③ Continue north on the Caledonia Way along the shore of Loch Creran and cross the road immediately after a roundabout. Follow the cycle route over the bridge and cross the road again before the next roundabout. (This is the second opportunity to shorten the route: instead of crossing the road, continue on NCN78 for the loop to Port Appin.)
- ④ The route now continues east on the road at the northern edge of the loch. This is the most technically advanced of the loops in the route, with some sections that require good bike-handling skills. Follow the road for 7km along the shores of Loch Creran at first, and then the River Creran into the glen. Shortly after the loch you will pass Glasdrum Wood, a remnant of ancient Western Atlantic oakwoods, and worth exploring by foot. The route continues through Invercreran and past Loch Baile Mhic Chailein, which contains a crannog. Shortly after Coilleveneach, turn **R** on to a gravel track. Follow this track along the banks of the River Creran. Turn **R** on to a small road and cross the river and continue into Glenure. Turn **L** first and then **R** at the second opportunity on a gravel track that continues along the edge of the property.



- 5 At the next fork keep **L**, cross the River Ure and then turn **R**. After a short descent you will begin climbing on gravel for the next 2.7km. Carry on **SA** and then take a **L** at the next fork, continuing to climb past a small, unnamed reservoir. This section of the route feels very remote and wild. The views from the highest point are superb, and are followed by a nice technical descent. When you come to a junction, keep **L** and follow the road, which eventually merges **L** on to the road along the southern shore of Loch Creran. Continue on this road for a while. Once you have passed under the A828 the road takes you back to a roundabout. Merge **L** back on to the cycle path immediately before the roundabout. (If you want to leave out the third loop, cross the road immediately after rejoining the cycle path and then turn **R** and return on the Caledonia Way, rejoining the route at point **8**.)
- 6 Continue over the bridge on the Caledonia Way to Invernahyle. Turn **L** to follow a quiet and scenic road to North Shian first, and then on to Port Appin. As with many coastal roads in Scotland, this is far from being flat. Once you reach Port Appin, turn **L** to the Pierhouse Hotel. This is an alternative start location – either by staying at the hotel, or if arriving on the ferry from Lismore. Regardless, this is Scotland's best restaurant for seafood and serves great lunch as well. You can also break up the route into two days and cycle the remaining 35km from here on day two.
- 7 Return on the road from the Pierhouse Hotel and keep **L** at the first junction. After around 3km take the track to the **L** at Taychreggan to cross the Jubilee Bridge. This is the best point from which to photograph Castle Stalker, which features as 'The Castle Aaaaarrrrrgggghhh' in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. After the bridge, turn **R** back on to the Caledonia Way and follow this for 3.6km back to the start of this loop at Invernahyle. From here, continue on the signposted NCN78 all the way back to Sutherland's Grove.



7 LANGoustines at the Pierhouse Hotel. 8 ON A GRAVEL TRACK NEAR GLASDRUM.

Coffee and food

Ben Lora Cafe & Bookshop,
Benderloch
The Pierhouse Hotel, Port Appin

Bike shops

Oban Cycles, Oban (not on route)

8 Take the next track on your **L** to leave the Caledonia Way and start climbing on the track deeper into the forest. This is where the gravel starts again. Keep **R** at the first fork, and then **L** at the next one, and continue on the gravel track above Glean Dubh Reservoir. Follow this track, ignoring the smaller paths to your left and right, until you come to a T-junction. Turn **R** and cross the Abhainn Teithil and then keep **R** at the next fork. Continue on the gravel track on the other side of the reservoir and keep **L** at the next opportunity. Descend on the track until you come to another junction: turn **L**. The track climbs gradually **SA**. Just before you reach the B845, you will start descending.

9 Turn **R** on to the road and descend on tarmac. When you see a stream to your right, the road will start to climb – shortly afterwards, turn **L** and continue to climb on a gravel track. Keep **R** at the next fork, and then **R** again. At the next opportunity turn **L**. Continue on the gravel track past Dubh Loch Mòr and keep **L** at the next fork. Shortly afterwards keep **R** and then **R** again, before you reach the highest point of the route at 223m. The views from here are stunning on a good day. The good news is that the downhill that follows is one of the best in this book! Keep **R** at the next fork and then take the path on your **L** and descend on the switchbacks into Benderloch. Make sure to watch your speed and stop at times to enjoy the views, and respect walkers and other path users. Keep **L** at all junctions, and soon you'll reach Benderloch. Turn **R** on to the A828 and immediately **L** to finish back at the car park.