

MARKUS STITZ

GREAT BRITISH GRAVEL RIDES

CYCLING THE WILD
TRAILS OF ENGLAND,
SCOTLAND & WALES





Wick

Llŷdypol

Iste of Skye

Kyle of Lochalsh

Beauly

Inverness

Aberdeen

Fort William

03

02

Pitlochry

Perth

Dundee

Oban

04

06

07

05

Edinburgh

Dunbar

Jura

26

Glasgow

08

SCOTLAND

Dumfries

10

Carlisle

11

Newcastle upon Tyne

Sunderland

Penrith

12

13

Hamrogate

14

Hebden Bridge

15

Sheffield

Liverpool

Manchester

ENGLAND

Shrewsbury

Aberystwyth

WALES

25

24

King's Lynn

Norwich

Peterborough

16

Cambridge

Birmingham

Milton Keynes

Oxford

17

Swansea

Cardiff

Bristol

18

19

London

Dover

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Southampton

Bournemouth

Chichester

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Brighton

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Exeter

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Plymouth

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRELAND

FRANCE

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Great British Gravel
Rides GPX files from
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SCOTLAND



EXPERT



SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

01 COAST-TO-COAST GRAVEL ADVENTURE

99KM JENNY GRAHAM

This coast-to-coast expedition through one of Scotland's most scenic glens offers a long day in the saddle or the perfect opportunity for a weekend adventure, with local beer, a bothy and one of Scotland's most photographed castles along the way.



ABOUT JENNY

**Gravel riding for Jenny in three words
all-round journey**

'I was born and bred in the Highlands of Scotland – being out on our bikes and exploring on foot is in our DNA up here.'

Riding a bike has been part of Jenny Graham's life since she was a kid, either for travelling to various places or playing around the Scottish city of Inverness. It was when her son Lachlan started school that Jenny used her spare time to take up cycling as a sport, mountain biking in particular. Back then, a three-hour ride was a pretty big deal for her, but Jenny was drawn to the wild places the bike took her. As her son got older and more independent, they spent a lot of time cycling together. She gained a number of national qualifications, started guiding young people from the Highlands and created bespoke trips for people to show them around the Highlands.

'It was never about getting fit enough to go around the world, it was always this curiosity of how far I could travel on my bike.'

When her son became a teenager, Jenny could spend even more time on gathering experience and being out on the bike. What first started as a hobby, became a career. While getting the miles in, she found herself questioning how many miles a day she could do. Things had fallen into place in her life and, at the age of 38, she was confident that she would be capable of breaking the women's round-the-world record.

'There was no one at home sorting things for me. Keeping on top of my timings became more and more difficult when I was out there. It's difficult to



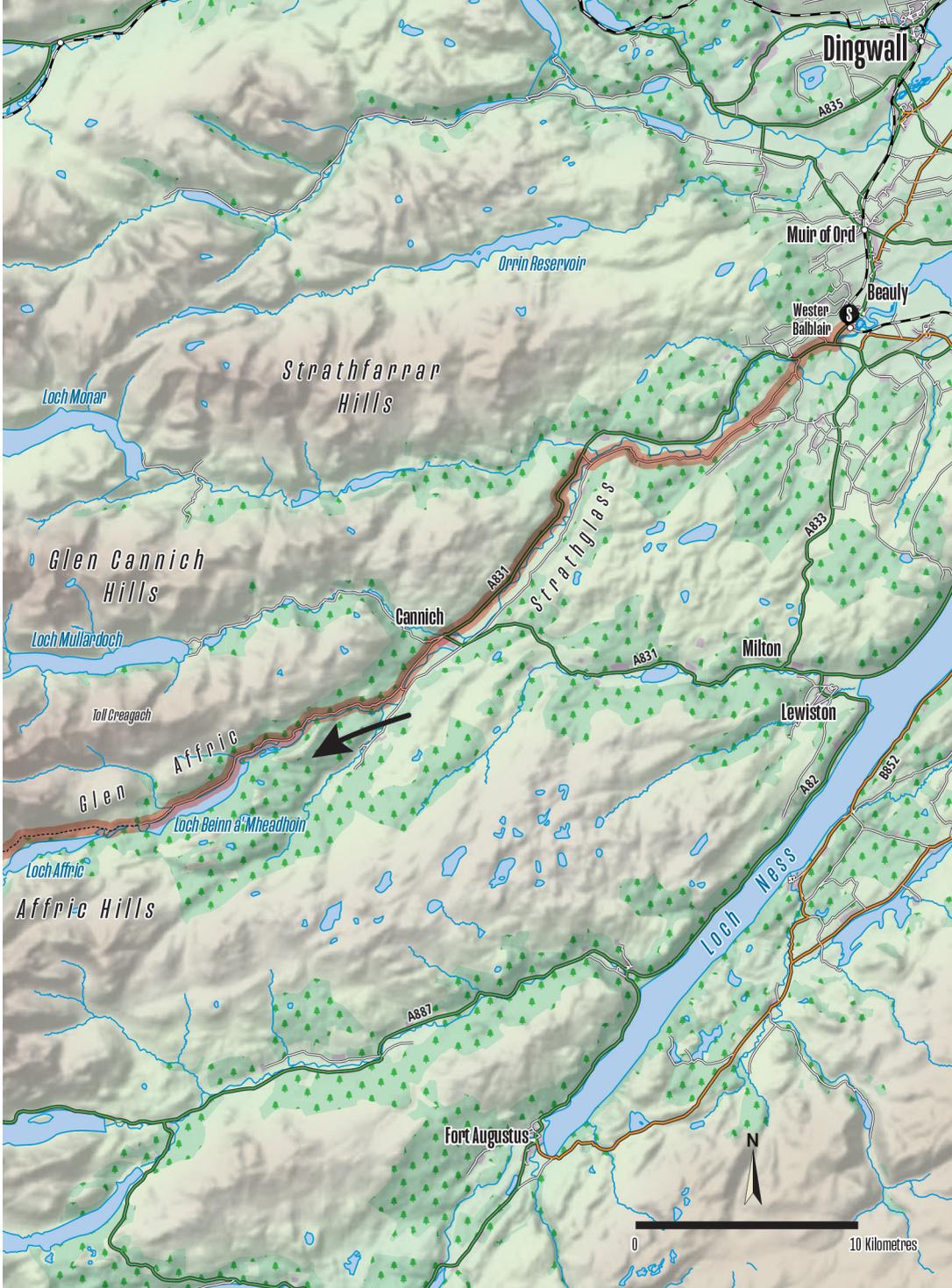
keep that at the forefront of your mind, because you're so busy looking after yourself and making sure that your basic needs are being met.'

When Jenny arrived at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on 18 October 2018, she had completed her unsupported circumnavigation of the globe by bicycle in 124 days, 10 hours and 50 minutes, setting a new world record. Although she missed the target of averaging 290 kilometres per day she had set herself, mainly due to fatigue and weather conditions in Australia and New Zealand, she averaged an impressive 254 kilometres per day. And her last leg involved an all-nighter. Cycling for 30 hours straight and covering over 482 kilometres, Jenny made it to the finish in Berlin to complete her cycling mission.

'Getting to the start line of that trip was probably the hardest thing that I've ever done.'

PREVIOUS PAGE THE MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS OF KINTAIL (ROUTE 01). OPPOSITE CAMBAN BOTHY IN THE KINTAIL MOUNTAINS.







THE AFFRIC KINTAIL WAY IN GLEANN LICHD.

While Jenny's experience at the finish was a mixture of exhaustion and shock, the real accomplishment for her was getting the start line. When she was greeted by friends and family in Berlin it was hard to process what had just happened, but looking back she is incredibly proud of making the decision to set off and putting so much effort into making the trip a reality. After months and months of talking about the trip, and the battles she came across to make it happen, she felt a huge euphoria and a whoosh of emotions when she was finally on her way.

'We need to see that there's a place for everyone in this world. Having a variety of faces, colours, shapes and voices out there is hugely important. I think it can only inspire more and can create content for everyone, and make the world a little bit fairer.'

At the beginning Jenny doubted whether she was educated enough or had enough money to be an adventurer. She couldn't see anyone like her doing those things; adventuring seemed to be the domain of the wealthy. For Jenny, representation of minority groups, so people can picture themselves doing it, is key to get a more diverse group of people into cycling. As is hearing those stories of people that come into cycling and adventuring through another field.

'We could get on these bikes and travel fairly fast. It was really good fun, just coming on and off roads into wild places, then cycling down glens. That bit captured me – the journey aspect is what makes me reach for the gravel bike each time.'

Jenny's journey into gravel riding was slow to start with. She wasn't a fan at the beginning, as the gravel bike didn't go on the road as fast as she wanted, and it also didn't do what was expected of a mountain bike.

It was a joint trip with Lee Craigie from the Adventure Syndicate, crossing Scotland from north to south, that finally changed her mind. The variety of terrain that gravel bikes could cover was what triggered Jenny to rethink, and since then a gravel bike has become a stable companion on her adventures.

ABOUT JENNY'S ROUTE

This is one of only two point-to-point routes in this book. Often logistics make it difficult to complete a coast-to-coast journey but, as Jenny's favourite route starts and finishes at a train station, it is possible to ride this route in one day without the need for a car. However, taking you through one of Scotland's most beautiful glens, past a pretty unique hostel and a bothy, which provide valuable shelter from the elements and midges, this route

would also make a great multi-day trip.

Tapping into the wealth of other routes that Jenny's itinerary passes, this journey can easily be extended and provide the backbone to a longer adventure. For Jenny, this is the gravel riding she can easily find when she leaves her house in Inverness. This route gets her to the other side of Scotland, travelling through the most incredible places. It reminds her how lucky she is to call the Highlands her home.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

People have been living in the area around Beauly from around 2000 BC, but the origins of the town trace back to the founding of the priory in the early thirteenth century. Local legend says that Mary, Queen of Scots stayed overnight in Beauly in 1564 and that the town's name is credited to her reaction: '*C'est un beau lieu*' (what a beautiful place). While Mary's reaction might have given the town its name, it more likely that it originates from the French monks who founded the priory at Beauly. The monks were of the Valliscaulian order from Val-des-Choux.

This coast-to-coast gravel adventure starts at Beauly railway station, which is connected to Inverness by the Far North Line, with around ten services per day. Only the abbey church remains of Beauly Priory, but the town has a good variety of places to eat and stay and is located on the popular North Coast 500 route, an 800-kilometre scenic route around the coast of Northern Scotland. From the station the route follows the A862, part of the North Coast 500. The route meets the A831 east of Wester Balblair and follows this road for a short while. Near Kilmorack the route joins a quieter road on the left and crosses the River Beauly. The bridge crossing the river is one of three bridges spanning this 25-kilometre-long river. The route continues on a road to the south of the River Beauly towards its source near Struy.

The first climb of the route takes you to Fanellan, from where the road undulates through the valley to Struy. The village of Struy is the gateway to Glen Strathfarrar and the surrounding Munros; it lies near the confluence of the River Farrar and the River Glass, where the rivers join to become the River Beauly.



LOCH BEINN A' MHEADHOIN.

A visit to Struy Church is worthwhile, and the nearby Eagle Brae Log Cabins offer mountain bike hire for those travelling without their own bike. The route continues on the road following the River Glass to Cannich through a mixture of beautiful, lush woodlands and more open stretches. This part of the route follows the Great North Trail and An Turas Mor, two long-distance bikepacking routes which ultimately lead to Cape Wrath in the far north-west of Scotland.

The route crosses the River Glass at Comar Bridge and continues on the A831 into Cannich. This small village is sandwiched between the River Cannich in the north and the River Glass in the south, and is surrounded by beautiful woodlands. Comar Bridge is where the route meets the Affric Kintail Way, a long-distance walking and mountain bike route connecting Drumnadrochit, on the shores of Loch Ness, to Morvich in Kintail. Once you reach the village, the route leaves the Affric Kintail Way again. For those wanting to add more climbing and gravel to the itinerary, you can continue to follow the signposted Affric Kintail Way; it meets our route again near Dog Falls.

Cannich is the last stop for food and supplies for the next 50 kilometres. If you want to taste



HEADING TOWARDS THE HIGHEST POINT OF THE ROUTE AT BEALACH ALLT GRANNDÀ.

the craft beers of the Glen Affric Brewery, a stop at the Slaters Arms is recommended. Be prepared to be turned away when it's busy. If this is the case, the well-stocked Cannich Stores and Post Office provide takeaway food as well.

Cannich also marks the eastern end of Glen Affric, which is often described as the most beautiful glen in Scotland. The glen, which is surrounded by moorland and mountains, contains two large lochs and the third-largest area of ancient Caledonian pinewood in Scotland. The area was first colonised by Scots pine trees around 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, after the last ice age. However, even the older trees in the glen which have survived tree felling are not that old, as for many years tree growth was hampered by the high populations of deer and sheep. These older trees have a gnarled appearance and are known as 'granny trees'. After many decades of careful management to encourage the native forest, biodiversity has improved and the glen now supports a wide variety of birds including capercaillie, black grouse, crested tits

and Scottish crossbills, along with golden eagles and ospreys. Scottish wildcats and otters also reside in the glen.

Taking you into this scenic haven, the route follows the GB Divide trail for a short while, although it goes in the opposite direction from the standard one for the GB Divide. From Cannich the environment becomes increasingly remote; the upper reaches of Glen Affric being among the most isolated in the Highlands. The route follows the Glen Affric Road to Dog Falls,



a series of waterfalls on the River Affric within the Glen Affric National Nature Reserve. There are several waymarked paths to the falls, which are just a short detour off the route from a car park on the left. This is also the point where the route meets the Affric Kintail Way again. At this point, for those wanting to add more gravel to the itinerary, you can follow the Affric Kintail Way on the southern shores of the River Affric and Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin – this is also the route of the Highland Trail 550.

Our route follows the tarmac a bit longer, climbing steadily uphill. Soon Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin is reached. The loch looks very much at home in the glen, but it is not quite as natural as it looks. In the 1950s an ambitious hydroelectric project was undertaken in the area: water runs in

pipes from Glen Cannich, just to the north, into Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin, which is dammed to raise the water level. From there, the water flows on to a power station at Fasnakyle, near Cannich. The route travels on the road along the lochside, with great views on to some of the islands and peninsulas. A small car park on the left provides a good opportunity for a stroll through the Scots pine and birch woodland or a picnic on the shores. There is another good spot right at the end of the public road, where short waymarked trails provide for stunning views of Loch Affric and the surrounding mountains.

The end of the public road marks the start of a great gravel track to Affric Lodge. This route keeps mostly well above the loch and passes through both fine pinewoods and moorland scenery, with views of the mountains high above. Now used as private accommodation, the four walls of the drawing room within the lodge were painted with sporting scenes by Sir Edwin Landseer, whose painting *The Monarch of the Glen*, which is now exhibited in the National Gallery of Scotland, is one of the most popular paintings of the nineteenth century.

Affric Lodge marks the point in the route where scenic tarmac roads give way to off-road trails. A wide gravel track continues on the northern side of Loch Affric, climbing first and then descending to Cnoc Fada, where the Affric Kintail Way is joined once again. A few fords need to be negotiated on this section, which can become dangerous after prolonged spells of rain. The River Affric is followed westwards on a wide gravel track, which undulates on the northern side of the river. The scenery here is some of the finest that Scotland has to offer. Glen Affric Youth Hostel, housed in a former stalking hut on the Affric Estate, is a good stop for those doing the route over 2 days. You'll get a warm welcome at this friendly eco-hostel; there is also a small hostel shop which sells basic food and soft drinks, if your supplies need topping up. Please be aware that the hostel is only open from April to September (double check opening times with the hostel before you set off).

From the hostel, the riding continues on a grassy track with a few fords to reach Camban Bothy. A very basic unlocked shelter, maintained by volunteers from the Mountain Bothies Association, Camban is

nestled in the beautiful surroundings. A few ruins around the bothy provide signs that there might have been a settlement here once. Please help by carrying out any rubbish you find here, and always follow the Bothy Code when visiting www.mountainbothies.org.uk/bothies/bothy-code From the bothy the riding becomes much more technical – be prepared to push on this section and allow plenty of time for this part of the route. The next 8 kilometres will feel like a proper expedition.

Bealach Allt Grannda is the highest point of the route at 348 metres; a small cairn marks this point on the watershed of Scotland between the headwaters of the Allt Grannda and the Allt Cam-bàn. From here, a well-maintained but very technical path leads downhill, first gradually, and then very steeply. The steep section continues for around 2 kilometres – you'll be pushing or carrying your bike. While the terrain is exceptionally tough, this part of the route is really dramatic as the path contours round the slopes high above a deep basin. This is one of the toughest sections of the Highland Trail 550; at least you'll get to descend instead of pushing uphill, while waterfalls tumble down into the depths. Once you have reached the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club hut at Glenlicht, you'll be back in the saddle.

The route continues along the southern side of Gleann Lichd. Bounded in the north by Beinn Fhada and in the south by the Five Sisters of Kintail, the route continues on a well-graded gravel track through this wild and dramatic treeless glen, with the beautiful River Croe meandering between the steep mountainsides. The legend of the Five Sisters of Kintail actually involves seven sisters: the youngest two sisters of the seven fell in love with two Irish princes, who had been washed ashore during a storm. However, the sisters' father would only allow the two youngest sisters to marry once the older sisters were married. The princes and the father came to an agreement that, if they could marry the two sisters and return to Ireland, they would send their other five brothers to marry the remaining five sisters. The five sisters waited, but the five princes failed to appear – they eventually turned into mountains to wait into eternity.

There is usually a herd of Highland cattle grazing in Gleann Lichd, so ensure that you leave all gates as you find them. The gravel track continues to the Kintail Outdoor Centre, from where a tarmac road leads to Morvich, which marks the end of the Affric Kintail Way.

From Morvich the route continues on a smaller road and then joins



the A87 along the shores of Loch Duich. Please take care on this part of the route (especially in summer, when traffic can be an issue), as the A87 is the main road from Fort William to the Kyle of Lochalsh. Along with the neighbouring sea lochs of Loch Long and Loch Alsh, Loch Duich forms a Marine Protected Area to conserve the lochs' burrowed mud and their flame shell beds. A small petrol station on the left provides the first resupply point after the long and remote section. If you have plenty of time, the smaller road on the right shortly after Inverinate is a great alternative, but be prepared for more climbing in exchange for great views over the loch.

One of Scotland's most visited and iconic visitor destinations is next. Eilean Donan is a small tidal island situated at the

DISTANCE 99km/62 miles › ASCENT 979m/3,212 ft › GRADE Expert › START Beaulay railway station › FINISH Kyle of Lochalsh railway station › START GRID REF: NH 520458 › FINISH GRID REF: NG 762272 › BIKE-FRIENDLY PUBLIC TRANSPORT At the start and finish › HIGHEST POINT 348m/1,142 ft › TERRAIN Very remote on alpine terrain which requires a long hike-a-bike. The second most difficult route in this book › RECOMMENDED TYRES Schwalbe G-One Bite

BEST TIME TO RIDE

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

SINGLETACK 10%

PATH 20%

ROAD 70%



LOCH BEINN A' MHEADHOIN WITH THE MOUNTAINS OF KINTAIL IN THE BACKGROUND.

confluence of three sea lochs about 1 kilometre from the village of Dornie. The island and its picturesque castle are connected to the mainland by a footbridge. There has been a castle on the island since the thirteenth century; it was rebuilt in the early twentieth century by John MacRae-Gilstrap. Probably the most photographed castle in the whole of Scotland, it has featured in movies such as *The World is Not Enough* and *Highlander*. Eilean Donan Castle is open to the public from March to December.

The route passes the village of Dornie and crosses Loch Long, then a smaller road with a pizza place and a cafe on the left provides a shortcut before the A87 is joined again. The route continues on the main road arriving in Kyle of Lochalsh, finishing at the railway station, from where services leave around four times a day to Inverness.

If you have travelled from the south of Scotland to get to Beaully and bike spaces on the train for the way home are booked during peak times, you can extend the trip to Armadale on the Isle of Skye, about 35 kilometres away, and take the ferry to Mallaig, which has frequent train connections to Fort William and on to Glasgow or Edinburgh.

OTHER ROUTES NEARBY

- > Affric Kintail Way
- > An Turas Mor
- > GB Divide
- > Great North Trail
- > Highland Trail 550
- > North Coast 500

WHERE TO EAT

- > Corner on the Square, Beaully
- > Cannich Stores and Post Office
- > Slaters Arms, Cannich
- > Glen Affric Youth Hostel
- > All The Goodness Coffee & Bakeshop, Ardelve
- > The Lighthouse Coffee, Kyle of Lochalsh

BIKE SHOPS

- > OrangeFox Bikes (servicing and sales), Muir of Ord (T 01463 870 346)
- > Eagle Brae Log Cabins (mountain bike hire), Struy
- > Ticket To Ride (mountain and hybrid bike hire), Inverness

WHERE TO STOP

- > Beaully Priory, NH 528465
- > Dog Falls, NH 287283
- > Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin, NH 244262
- > Loch Affric, NH 199233
- > Glen Affric Youth Hostel, NH 080202
- > Camban Bothy, NH 053183
- > Bealach Allt Grannnda, NH 045176
- > Eilean Donan Castle, NG 882259

