

Bealach na Ba

Tour Manager: Martin Jamieson

Wednesday 21st May to Wednesday 04th June 2025

This is a circular tour in the superb west coast of Scotland, starting in late May with stunning view to the Inner Hebrides. Starting from Oban we will visit Skye, and Applecross, returning via the Great Glen and Loch Ness. The tour includes 3 challenging days which may be graded as a 7.

Itinerary

Wednesday 21st May 2025 Arrive in Oban - Gateway to the Isles.

Ideally we all arrive in Oban in the late afternoon and meet up with the group for dinner. There are several trains each day with capacity for 9 bikes.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Thursday 22nd May 2025 Lismore, Ardnamurchan and Fort William

Starting with the morning ferry to the Isle of Lismore we have fabulous views back to the natural harbour of Oban and, northwest into the Sound of Mull. Cycling north on Lismore we take the ferry to Port Appin then ride north to take the ferry to Ardnamurchan. We cycle along Loch Linnhe to Camusnagaul and get the little ferry to Fort William. The ferries allow us to travel northward on very quiet roads with beautiful scenery. I visited Lismore in 2024 and could not resist including again. It is worth it for the cake alone.

- Route distance: 62.0km
- Route altitude gain: 909m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 23rd May 2025 Fort William day trip to Loch Arkaig

The shorter version of today's cycle goes along the canal towards Loch Lochy (what imaginative nomenclature) to the start of Loch Arkaig and back, a total of 47km with 378m

of ascent and no hills over 61m. Those seeking a longer cycle have the option to also ride the length of pretty Loch Arkaig where the single track road follows the shore. Then return, at total of 93km and 947m of ascent.

- Route distance: 47.0km
- Route altitude gain: 378m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 24th May 2025 Fort William to Lochailort

We cross over to Camusnagual on the passenger ferry again and cycle on the quiet south side of Loch Eil, to Glenfinnan Viaduct (of Harry Potter fame). Sometimes there is a steam train on this route to Mallaig. There is the option to visit the museum at the Glenfinnan station. We finish at Lochailort. This is a short day with little climbing, so more time to be a tourist.

- Route distance: 40.0km
- Route altitude gain: 447m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Sunday 25th May 2025 Lochailort day trip to Castle Tirnam

The cycle ride to the castle is on a spur road towards the coast with no through traffic. The castle itself is perched right on the shore. This day can be shortened to an almost flat 25km ride to Glenuig where there is an inn, and optional short detour (on foot) to the ruined hamlet of Smirisary.

- Route distance: 66.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1494m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Monday 26th May 2025 Isle of Skye and on to Kyle of Lochalsh

We start on the main road and soon leave to meander down to the hamlet of Arisaig on the coast. On a sunny day it is the most beautiful place with silver sands and turquoise seas. From Mallaig we take the ferry to Armadale on Skye. Then cross Skye back over The Bridge and on to Kyle of Lochalsh which has lovely views back to Skye.

- Route distance: 68.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1241m
- Accommodation: Hotel

- Meals: (B)

Tuesday 27th May 2025 Kyle of Lochalsh day trip to Eilean Donan Castle

This is a short day of cycling so we include a ride up Loch Long and back to visit the iconic Eilean Donan Castle which is well worth the visit. Then returning to the hotel at Kyle of Lochalsh.

- Route distance: 43.0km
- Route altitude gain: 603m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Wednesday 28th May 2025 Bealach na Ba

We have a long warm up cycling around Loch Carron before starting the ascent to the Bealach na Ba (pass of the cattle). This is a steep climb on single track roads with hairpin bends was originally built in 1822. We will have a short rest before we start, and do pause to take a photograph on your way up. You might have to get off and push on the steepest parts. This is the hardest hill climb in Britain with an average of 7% and steepest section 20%. The main section is 627m over a distance of 9km. Hopefully we will get a clear day with good views. After that it is downhill to Applecross where we are staying.

- Route distance: 68.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1761m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Thursday 29th May 2025 Rest Day

Do nothing, or take a very short cycle south along the coast to Culduie and maybe a swim in the sea. Possibly visiting Applecross Heritage centre, as well as Applecross House and gardens. There are longer hilly walking routes to consider. I rarely plan a rest day but want to encourage people to enjoy the slower pace of life, before the most challenging day of the tour when we cycle to Gairloch.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Friday 30th May 2025 Applecross to Gairloch

The coastal road to Sheildaig proves that there is no easy road to Applecross. There are no major hills but lots of minor steep ones. This makes it the hardest day of cycling on the tour. After half way we have less steep ascents and a long easy section beside Loch Maree and on to Gairloch.

- Route distance: 99.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1882m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 31st May 2025 Gairloch day trip to Pool Ewe and Badachro

There are also self-led alternatives for today:- Rest- cycle out to Rua Reidh Lighthouse engineered by David Stevenson. - visit one of the beautiful beaches -perhaps Big Sand- spend longer at Pool Ewe gardens and skip Badachro

- Route distance: 41.0km
- Route altitude gain: 789m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 01st June 2025 Beaully Firth to Inverness

A long undulating ride (max 239m) finishing along the lovely cycle route on the shore of the Beaully Firth (possible dolphin sightings) and over the Kessock bridge into Inverness.

- Route distance: 113.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1396m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Monday 02nd June 2025 The Great Glen

Starting on the southern side of Loch Ness we ride on minor roads to Fort Augustus, then a mix of canal paths, main road and cycle paths (some of which are rough) south to Fort William. The picture was taken from near Fort Augustus looking up Loch Ness. It is hard to imagine but the loch holds more fresh water than all of the English and Welsh lakes put together. Before you ask we have swum in it but not the length of it.

- Route distance: 110.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1336m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 03rd June 2025 Fort William to Port Appin

Reversing the route from the second day of the tour, we take the ferry and cycle down the west side of Loch Linnhe, then another ferry at Corran and south to Port Appin

- Route distance: 53.0km
- Route altitude gain: 751m

- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 04th June 2025 Port Appin to Oban then home

Lovely quiet cycle route to finish off our tour back in Oban for lunch-time

- Route distance: 41.0km
- Route altitude gain: 613m
- Accommodation: none
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £2350

Payment Schedule

Deposit on booking £400

Final Balance due by 12th February 2025

Price includes:

- Hotel accomodation
- Breakfast
- Dinner on seven nights
- Luggage transfer up to 10kg
- Ferry tickets

Price does not include:

- Lunch
- Drinks

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
before 12.02.2025	£400
after 12.02.2025	£2,350

The price of £2350 is based on a minimum number of 10 people taking part in the holiday. If there are insufficient bookings by Wednesday 12th February 2025, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Area

It is a moving on tour on the west coast of Scotland, starting and finishing in Oban. There are two-night stays in five locations to allow time to see the places we visit.

The tour includes the Bealach na Ba which is the highest hill climb in Britain, as well as flat sections beside canals, and everything in between. The average daily ascent is 1,046m. This Holiday is classed as “Energetic” because it averages 66km on cycling days, but has two days of over 100km.

For many the highlight of the tour may be the challenge of cycling over the Bealach na Ba, which rises 626 meters from sea level and commands spectacular views. There is a rest day planned for the next day!

The route is mainly on very quiet roads, often single track with passing places. There are five different ferries which helps us avoid riding on main roads. We use cycle paths and avoid main roads where possible. There is one section on the Great Glen where the cycle path has been closed and we will ride part of the way on the main road.

Travel

The tour starts and finishes in Oban which has trains from Glasgow with additional space for bikes.

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. Thus, it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Organiser nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point.

Potentially a tour may be cancelled (e.g. if it does not attract the minimum numbers) so please do not commit to any travel arrangements until you have received confirmation that the tour will go ahead. In the event of cancellation Bikexplore will only be responsible for refunding you the cost of the tour itself.

Accommodation

The maximum number of participants will be 20 including the tour Organisers. We will stay in a variety of standards of hotels depending on the availability in each location

All rooms have en-suite facilities. Prices are based on two people sharing a room. When booking with a partner to share please request twin or double beds. Unfortunately there are no single occupancy rooms available.

Meals and Health

Breakfast each day is included and in addition dinner is included on seven evenings. We will pay for our own lunches, café stops and beverages. Most of the tour is in sparsely populated

areas so there may be few options for procuring lunch and these could be closed on the day we need them. Please carry sufficient food and water to last you all day if necessary. Most places are happy to accept credit cards but please carry some cash just in case.

Please advise the tour organizer of any dietary requests in your Booking application, and do remember to pack any medications that you need. Can you also remind the tour organizer of any dietary requests and health issues at the start of the tour.

Cycles and Equipment

TYPE OF BIKE

Many types of bikes could be used for most of this holiday, but a touring or gravel bike would be most suitable. On the day that we cycle the Great Glen part of the cycle route is unpaved and would be uncomfortable on any bike with narrow tyres. The alternative is a busy main road.

MAINTENANCE

You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes.

A low bottom gear (eg. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended.

Mudguards are optional but demonstrate respect to those who are following you in wet weather.

Lights are recommended in the very unlikely event of arriving back late and useful if walking outdoors at night.

A bell is advised.

Water bottles are required to ensure you are hydrated at all times.

Emergency rations sufficient to last you all day should places be closed.

You must carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs, including two inner tubes, spare gear and brake cable, split link and spare brake pads. There are almost no bike shops on route and they are never where you need them. You are advised to use 28mm tyres, or larger, to suit the variable terrain.

Luggage will be carried in normal circumstances, but if something goes wrong you need to be able to carry all your own luggage. The luggage weight is limited to 10kg per person, which is usually sufficient for any holiday, washing spare clothes each night.

Please bring a bike lock suitable to your attitude towards the risk of theft.

Rides, Rest Days and Fitness

This is a cycling holiday for 15 days with just one rest day. At five locations we stay for 2 nights and could treat the day trip from that location as a potential rest day. Alternatively, it can be just a shorter cycle. The other locations are just for one night.

Please note it may not always be possible to follow the itinerary exactly due to road works or weather etc, as things do not always go as planned. In these circumstances, you will be advised of alternative arrangements. The tour organiser will not always be at the front of the group but may be anywhere within it, as circumstances require, so you will need to be independent and aware of the route and likely stopping places.

Most of the cycling is on minor roads, but we also use cycle paths and there are some sections on main roads. People tend to cycle in small groups, and meet up with the rest of the group at view points and cafes. The tour should be manageable for someone who cycles regularly and has reasonable fitness. There are some longer days and some days with a lot of ascent, as well as shorter and easier days. Please train for the tour so you can enjoy it when you come. Try to ride some 100km day trips in preparation.

People may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore some local attraction and this is encouraged. We want you to make the most of your holiday. If you wish to go further from the group and do your own thing then please do advise the tour organizer.

Weather Clothing and Culture

The weather in the UK can be very variable so please carry waterproof clothing and sun screen. You might end up using them on the same day. Please do bring layers as temperatures may be lower than you are used to. The average maximum temperature in Oban at the end of May is 15 degrees C, while the average rainfall for the whole month is 70mm. In comparison figures for London are 18 degrees and 50mm.

Diane and I like open water swimming, and there will be some opportunities to swim or just paddle if you would like to join us. Please only do what you are safe and comfortable with. A swimming costume, goggles and microlight towel would not add much weight to carry.

Helmets are optional, but are recommended.

Maps and Guides

The tour organizer will email a link to Plotaroute with all of the planned rides for the tour. These can be downloaded to your Garmin, or other cycle computer, or phone. If you do not use such technology please do bring the relevant pages from a road atlas and highlight the planned routes. Maybe bring the road atlas pages as well as a Garmin.

We are not following all of a recognized route (like the NC500) but there will be some overlap. Perhaps bring a map and footwear for Applecross in case you decide to go walking.

Travel Insurance and Vaccinations

Holiday costs in the UK have risen so we strongly recommend purchasing travel insurance in case you have to cancel for any reason.

There are no additional medical requirements for UK residents holidaying in Scotland, but please do bring any medications that you need to use. Please also make the tour organizer aware of any health issues.

Passport, Visa and Monies

Scotland voted to stay in the EU and stay in Britain, so there is no requirement for Passports or Visas. The currency is pounds Sterling.

Joking aside, since covid most cafes now take credit cards (but please do bring some cash as well). You will need access to sufficient funds for evening meals (seven are included in the tour price) and all lunches and café stops.

Ferries

The tour includes 5 ferries. The Calmac ones to Lismore and Armadale require people to arrive a minimum of 30 minutes early. Sometimes they load cyclists before cars, so it is important to arrive early.

The other ferries are small and two of them do not take cars. These smaller ones will run a shuttle service as they can't take all of our group at one time. I suggest that we allow any slower cyclists to go first, to allow a more leisurely ride on the other side.

Communication

Prior to the start of the tour communication will be by email, but during the tour communication will be in person or by WhatsApp. We will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route as well as sharing photos. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.

Tour Organiser Contact Details

Martin Jamieson - mdjamieson@hotmail.co.uk