Bikexplore

The Moray Firth

Tour Organiser: Helen and Harvey Bell

Saturday 29th May to Sunday 06th June 2027

A moving-on tour of the lesser visited North East corner of Scotland, staying for eight nights in hotels and self-catering accommodation, including breakfasts, carrying your own bags on five days.

Itinerary

Saturday 29th May 2027 Aberdeen

Meet in the hotel bar early evening for a tour briefing

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: Self-Catering

Sunday 30th May 2027 Banff

We leave the Granite City to join NCN1 and ride through Old Aberdeen to Dyce, past the airport and the helicopters waiting to take oil workers offshore. We leave NCN1 to follow the river Don to our coffee stop at Inverurie. The Don Valley was famous for its illegal whisky distilleries and smugglers. We carry on north through rich farmland to Turriff where we re-join NCN1 and have lunch, before following the River Deveron to Banff Bay, where across the river is the elegant Georgian, Duff House. Some of us will be staying in Banff and some in neighbouring Macduff.

- Route distance: 81.0km
- Route altitude gain: 815m
- Accommodation: Self-catering cottages
- Meals: (B)

Monday 31st May 2027 Fraserburgh Circuit

From Macduff we ride east to attractive Gardenstown and then onto the tiny fishing hamlet of Penan where Local Hero was filmed in 1982. We carry on east to Fraserburgh the home of The Scottish Lighthouses Museum to a cafe. After refreshments we ride south and inland

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through Stricken to Maud where there is also a cafe option and then return through rural Aberdeenshire to Macduff and Banff.

- Route distance: 100.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1300m
- Accommodation: Self-catering cottages
- Meals: (B)

Tuesday 01st June 2027 Elgin

We ride west on NCN1 along The Moray Firth to Cullen, the home of the famous fish soup Cullen Skink, made from milk, potatoes and smoked haddock. It's strikingly situated beneath arched viaducts which were built because the Earl and Countess of Seafield refused to allow the railway to pass through the grounds of Cullen House. There are cafes here and at Buckie further west. Beyond Buckie at Portgordon you can often see seals resting on the seashore. To cross the River Tay we now have to ride south as the cycle route bridge has been washed away in storms, just off the route at Spey Bay you might see dolphins, otters and the rare Osprey. We turn inland towards Elgin and our hotel. Nearby is the remains of Elgin Cathedral, once considered Scotland's most beautiful cathedral.

- Route distance: 68.0km
- Route altitude gain: 600m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Wednesday 02nd June 2027 Speyside Circuit

From Elgin we ride south to Rothes and then to Craigellachie to admire the old Telford Bridge before riding west to Cardhu Distillery for refreshments. We are in the famous Whisky Triangle with fifty Speyside distilleries south and east of us. For our return we ride north to Dallas over undulating forested terrain before heading west along the River Lossie back to our hotel in Elgin.

- Route distance: 85.0km
- Route altitude gain: 900m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Thursday 03rd June 2027 The Moray Firth

From Elgin we join NCN1 and ride south of Burghead Bay past Kinloss RAF base and Findhorn Bay. At the mouth of the bay is the home of the Findhorn Foundation, set up in 1962 as a centre for alternative and ecological living. We leave NCN1 here for a cafe stop in Forres before continuing past Brodie Castle and the sandy beaches of Nain to then head inland towards lunch in the college cafe in Croy. We now pass through Culloden, site of the last battle on British soil where the Jacobite rebellion was quashed, and skirt Inverness to

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cross the Kessock Bridge onto the Black Isle, so named for its dark rich soil. The last stretch takes us to Avoch overlooking the Moray Firth and our final destination.

- Route distance: 104.0km
- Route altitude gain: 915m
- Accommodation: Self-catering cottage
- Meals: (B)

Friday 04th June 2027 Dornoch Firth

We ride to Fortrose where we can divert off route to Chanonry Point and if the time is right, see the bottlenose dolphins that feed here. It's then along NCN1 to attractive Cromarty for a café stop before crossing Cromarty Firth on the ferry. From Nigg Ferry we continue North to Portmahomack. a beautiful location for another refreshment stop, it's one of the only west facing villages in this corner of Scotland so can display stunning sunsets. After lunch we head west on easy undulating roads through Tain before crossing the Dornoch Firth Bridge to our hotel in Dornoch, the small town known for its championship golf course and surrounded by sand dunes which also has a cathedral and History Links Museum.

- Route distance: 73.0km
- Route altitude gain: 580m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Saturday 05th June 2027 Cromarty Firth

From Dornoch we retrace our route over Dornoch Firth to Tain but then ride south along NCN1 to Alness for a coffee stop. Then along Cromarty Firth towards Dingwall where you might smell the barley roasting from the distillery nearby, before crossing the Black Isle to ride into North Kessock where the ferry used to cross the Beauly Firth before Kessock Bridge was built, and into Inverness, our final destination.

- Route distance: 74.0km
- Route altitude gain: 615m
- Accommodation: Youth Hostel
- Meals: (B)

Sunday 06th June 2027 Inverness

Tour ends after breakfast

- No cycling
- Accommodation: None
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

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Cost

- Land only price: £610

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £150 per person is required as soon as possible once the Tour Organiser has confirmed your booking, with the final balance to be paid by 20-March 2027

Price includes:

- 4 nights hotel accommodation, 3 nights self-catering accommodation & 1 night youth hostel
- 8 breakfasts
- Nigg Ferry

Price does not include:

- Any other meals

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
20/03/2027	150
After 20/03/2027	Full price of tour

The price of £610 (land only) is based on a minimum number of 8 people taking part in the holiday. If there are insufficient bookings by Saturday 20th March 2027, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Grade and area covered by the holiday

This holiday is classed as energetic (6) as one day is 104km long with about 1000m of ascent and we are carrying luggage, the other days are probably a grade below (5) as they are shorter and there's less climbing, one day is energetic but optional.

We are cycling in North East Scotland from Aberdeen to Inverness mainly along or close to the Moray Firth, the furthest point north is Dornoch. There are also two optional days when we cycle inland in Aberdeenshire and Speyside.

Travel and communication

The Tour starts in Aberdeen and ends in Inverness where there are main line railway stations.

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. 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. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements, you should ensure that the tour is definitely going ahead.

Should there be insufficient bookings or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, we reserve the right to cancel the tour at any time. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have been told the tour will go ahead. In the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred outside what you pay us.

We will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.

If you are unable to join the WhatsApp group we can only communicate with you in an emergency.

Accommodation

The maximum number of participants will be 10 excluding the tour organisers.

We'll stay for 4 nights in hotels, 3 in Premier Inn's and 1 in an independent hotel. 3 nights will be in self-catering properties and 1 in a Youth Hostel.

There are no single rooms and in the independent hotel 3 people will have to share a room for one night, otherwise it's twin rooms.

Meals, health and diet

There are be 5 hotel/hostel breakfasts included and 3 provided by us in the self-catering properties.

We will organise where possible group evening meals and there is the option of self-catering on 4 nights

We will stop at cafes for lunches and coffee where possible but you should always carry spare food in case these aren't available.

Check that you have informed the Tour Organiser of any dietary requirements in your Booking Form.

Please remember to pack any medications that you need to take regularly.

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Cycles and equipment

• Ideally a touring, road, hybrid bike or electric . We suggest medium weight tyres (i.e. NOT heavily treaded mountain bike tyres). We would take a minimum of 25mm wide tyres.

• We recommend at least two spare innertubes and pump. We will carry basic general tools and a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you also bring a small first aid kit and any tools that are specific to your bike. Two water bottles should be ample as we are stopping at cafes.

• You should ensure your bike is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low (easy) bottom gear is useful on the hills.

• Mudguards are optional, but if it is wet then it's not so much fun cycling behind someone without them.

• A lightweight lock is advisable for when we stop at cafes.

• A bell/horn is essential for the cycle paths.

• Emergency rations e.g. energy bars are good to have, and we suggest a map, or some means of navigation.

Rides and rest days

• A moving on trip where we stay for two nights at the same accommodation on two occasions and one night at the rest.

• We'll be riding on well surfaced roads or cycle paths.

• Most of each day will be spent cycling. People will be able to ride with the led group at around 19-23 km/h (on level sections) or by themselves, usually meeting up at cafes for lunch and refreshment breaks, the co-leader will ride at the back of the led group.

• It is expected that you may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore some local object and this is okay. You are on holiday.

• Some of the route is hilly and there is no back-up vehicle, so you do need to be fit to get the most out of this tour. It is essential to get out on your bike and do at least 50-to-80 kilometre rides before the tour starts. There are some steep descents too, so you should be able to negotiate these safely. 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, you will need to be aware of the route each day. This information will be given to you before, or at the beginning of the holiday, and again at daily briefings.

Weather, clothing and culture

• Daytime temperatures-historical average range of 10-15degC

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• Hopefully sunny but could be cool and damp. We suggest cycling layered tops and leggings and a lightweight wind/waterproof. Lip balm and sunglasses.

Maps and guides

• No route sheets will be provided as such, just print the maps as you see fit.

• GPX files will be provided before the start.

• Ordnance Survey Landranger maps: 21, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 36. 37 & 38

Travel insurance and vaccinations

Travel insurance is not compulsory for UK nationals traveling in the UK.

You should be up to date with vaccinations and boosters as recommended for the UK. There are no additional medical recommendations, but please do bring any medications that you need to use. Please also make the tour organiser aware of any health issues.

Passport, visas and monies

Holders of non-UK passports are advised to check whether they require a visa.

Tour organisers contact details

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