

HIGHLAND TOUR in TWO PARTS

1929

Kate MacKenzie and Daisy Browne

Efforts are continually being made to define what a holiday really should be – whether a hectic whirl of pleasure, a quiet rest, or a vast investigation of interesting places. I am afraid the North of Scotland offers little to those who desire the hectic whirl, but I would imagine it to be ideal for those who have ‘an eye to see and an ear to hear’.

We had long desired to spend a cycle-touring holiday in the North and this year saw the fulfilment of our desire. We arranged to have a good start by breakfasting at the Lomond Hotel Glenfarg at 9.30 am, but 10am saw only one of us partaking of the good fare provided. However, by 10.15am the errant one rolled in, all smiles, excusing her lateness by some tall tale of making strawberry jam until one o'clock in the morning! In spite of that, we managed to arrive at Perth railway station just in time for the 11.50am train to Inverness. We had not taken the train to escape riding through the Grampians – far from it, for the road winding up through the mountains was most alluring – but we wished to spend the time saved at Castletown near John O'Groats.

As the train climbed slowly north, we enjoyed the panoramic views which unfolded themselves, but nevertheless we were pleased to reach Inverness about four o'clock and feel that we were starting our tour proper now. We elected to cross the Black Isle, as being a more direct route, and this involved taking the ferry across from Inverness. We were studying the map while crossing, discussing whether to take the Cromarty Ferry farther north, when an old Highland wife decided it for us by saying it was a stormy crossing and we had better keep to the road, adding “if anything happens, then you will be on the road”!

The Black Isle is wrongly named. At least, on that day it might have been called the Golden Isle, for such a wealth of golden broom we had never seen anywhere previously on our travels. At Dingwall, we seemed to be a great source of interest and amusement to the natives whilst we bought our provisions, but we heeded not, being in that blissful state of abandon one enjoys on the first day of a tour, with a whole fortnight stretching in front of us.

We were soon speeding eastwards along the north shore of the Cromarty Firth towards Invergordon, a most pleasant village, with its gardens full of lupins of all shades, and reached Tain in good time for the night. This, the first night of our holiday, was our first experience of a Highland Hotel, and the one we chose looked most attractive from the outside. Alas and alack, however, one disillusionment followed another when we got inside. The landlady said her price included hot baths, but on hearing we would indulge in same, said “I'd advise you not to have one, for the water's stone cold”! The same applied to the electric light – we might have had a nice bright room if there had been a bulb in the lamp-holder! The catering service was very poor, and we were quite ready to quit this place bright and early after an almost untouched breakfast.

By nine o'clock we were spinning merrily along, our spirits rising as the rain poured down and as it grew blacker and blacker across the Dornoch Firth. We chose to cross the dark and stormy water by ferry, thus saving a twenty-mile detour, and we had grave doubts about its being a pleasure trip. A rough footpath down a long neck of land led us to the ferry station, but there was no sign of life there, the ferryman living on the other side. Our next puzzle was, how was he to see us, as it took us to see his house? On reconnoitering, we found a stick with a flour bag attached to it, (this advertising ‘London Pride’ flour), so we hopefully hoisted this in the little cairn of stones and repaired to a ruin for shelter. Nothing happened for a long time, but thanks to the good eyesight of the ferryman our wait was not in vain, for we eventually saw a black speck appearing off the opposite shore. This was our ferryman rowing out to his motor boat, and thankful were we, when bobbing up and down in the middle of the Firth, that it was not the rowing boat of bygone days that was taking us over. We were surprised to learn that only four persons had crossed before us this season so far.

As a change from this desolation, we now ran through the policies of Skibo Castle. Fortunately, we had left the storm behind us at the Dornoch Firth. Whilst having a drink at the fountain in the little village of

Clashmore, we were astonished to hear someone enquire, "Well! Have you come all the way from Fife this morning?". This turned out to be the reporter who has frequently photographed the Fife DA on special occasions and he was much interested to hear whether we were bound.

Our route now lay through Golspie and just beyond the village one comes to the beautiful avenue leading to Dunrobin Castle. By dint of talking sweetly to the gatekeeper, we were permitted to go right down to the Castle and see its grandeur at close quarters. This magnificent edifice stands high about the sea and the view from the terrace, down to the beautiful gardens, far below, is one that will be long remembered. It was very tempting to linger there, but we must be up and doing, as we still had the Ord of Caithness to tackle before reaching Dunbeath, our objective for the night. At Brora we had a most enjoyable tea at the Sutherland Arms, and set off in high spirits, our road away up the coast appearing most alluring. Just beyond this point, we passed a stone indicating where the last wolf in Sutherlandshire had been trapped.

Proceeding to Helmsdale, we were nearly run into the ditch by a very large motor car laden with luggage, the driver apparently in a tremendous hurry to get somewhere, but of this more anon. Up to this point, we had not had much climbing to do, but having left Helmsdale behind we were now tackling the famous Ord, a five mile climb to 800 feet over a very barren countryside. The road zig-zags out and in, and from certain points the cliff scenery is very fine. From the summit one gets a wonderful view of the Mountains of Sutherlandshire, with Ben Loyal standing out clearly. We were now on the well known Berridale Brae, where we were fortunate enough to see six beautiful stags close by the roadside. Unfortunately, one does not spin down Berridale Brae after having climbed up five miles to the top of it – prudence says 'walk', and the road, after dipping down to sea-level in a mile, proceeds to climb another 420 feet in the next mile; so progress was not altogether rapid. However, we arrived at Dunbeath Hotel about ten pm and secured the last bed available. A quaint old-fashioned little village Dunbeath is, but this hotel gave us the best accommodation, and the cheapest, of the entire tour. Whilst we were having supper, a voice from the armchair by the fire remarked, "I think we passed you ladies today already". This was the owner of the large car which had treated us none too well earlier in the day. We thereupon aired our grievance, and to make amends the motorists insisted on taking us in the car to visit some friends of ours who lived up on the moors behind the village, next morning.

Leaving Dunbeath at mid-day, we took three hours to cover the fifteen miles to Wick, the wind now blowing an absolute gale straight from the North. A dreich cauld place Wick was this summer evening, and the two things of note about it were its smell of herring and the warm welcome we got at our friend's house! There remained now to finish the day another fifteen miles' journey across a bleak, desolate, shelterless road, right in the teeth of the gale to Castletown; but what of that when one knows of the welcome that is ready at the destination!

We spent three days very pleasantly at Castletown, visiting places of interest, including naturally a run to John O'Groats close by. We signed our names in the Visitors' Book at John O'Groats House and just above ours was the name of Tom Hughes, who had arrived that morning at five o'clock by tricycle from Land's End, having broken the record which had stood for a great many years. The wind had been blowing for the past day or two, a veritable gale straight from the North Pole – one imagined it was December instead of midsummer – and we marvelled at Tom Hughes' ride into the teeth of it, comparing it with our own slow progress under similar conditions.

Friday morning saw us start off again on the resumption of our tour – one fidgets to be getting along again after spending more than two days in one place when touring – is this a good or a bad sign? However, much rested and refreshed, we were ready for the road and were soon spinning along through Thurso towards the west. At Old Reay Inn, we stopped for lunch. This was a delightful little place and we were only sorry that it was not far enough on for us to stay the night there. The road now became hillier and more lonely, with great stretches of moorland everywhere and an occasional glimpse of a beautiful sandy beach with the sea rolling beyond. One seems to keep on climbing to the region of 500 feet and then descending again to sea-level; the road is certainly not monotonous, but it would not do to be pushed for time here, as the going is slow. Past the quaint townships of Melvick and Strathy, up climbs the road again to pop down at Armadale, and now it was tea-time, so we struck off on a little side road leading to the village of Armadale. One has to open a field gate to reach the village, perched high above the sea. We were most frankly received at the cottage where we enquired for tea, the good lady saying she was only

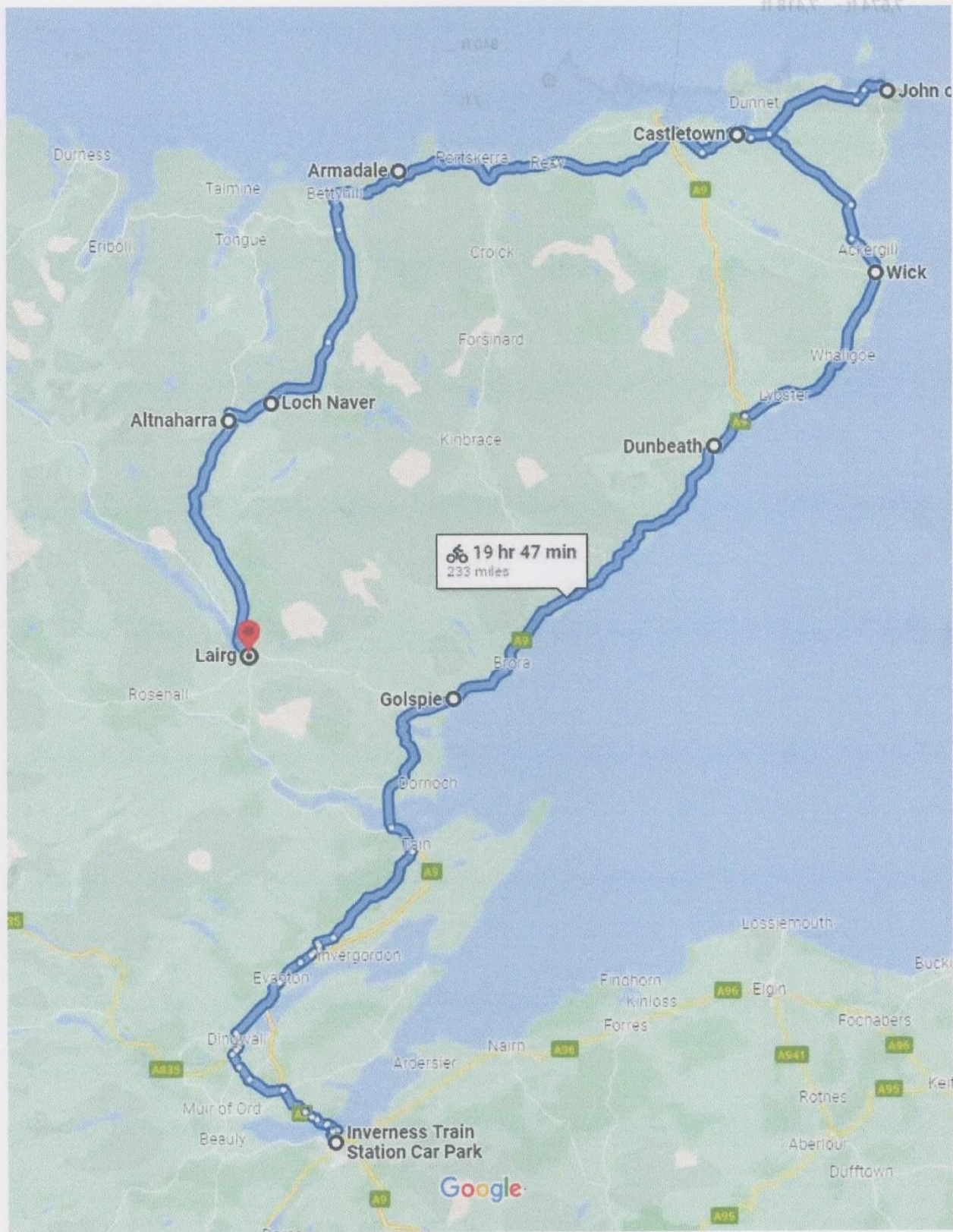
sorry the butter was not quite ready. We said we would make the butter while she got the tea ready, so we churned away in turn, finding it a great deal harder work than cycling, but just think of the huge pat of really fresh butter that adorned the table amidst pile of other good things!

It was our intention to stay overnight at Bettyhill, but not at the one-and-only hotel there, which is a very swanky place and charges a guinea per night per person for bed and breakfast, so we were told. We had therefore to cast around among the crofting places for a lodging and managed to get shelter for the night, but we had to admit it was not the best we had had, by any manner of means. We were therefore very pleased to be out in the open again next morning, and to leave behind us Bettyhill, with its great stretches of shimmering white sands, and turn south down Bonnie Strath Naver.

It was a beautiful morning and we had all the countryside to ourselves as we sped along this peaceful glen. Earlier on, we had taken a wrong turning and found we were on the wrong side of the river. On enquiring at a cottage, we were informed that we could cross by the swing bridge further down, which we did. We agreed we did not enjoy crossing this swing bridge with our bicycles as the way it swung most, when we were over the deepest part of the river, made one a bit squiffy! However, it was safe enough, and we were soon on the main road south. For many miles there was no sign of life, and one might well wonder why all this arable land by the riverside lies barren. It was not always so. This was all cultivated land a century ago, and Strath Naver was full of crofting townships. However, the Duke of Sutherland of that period must have a Deer Forest, and the crofters were told to go. Where were they to go? One might well ask. They resolved to sit tight, but the Duke merely sent his henchmen round and burned down every house in the valley. One of those burnt out in this fashion was a MacKenzie (great-grandfather of Miss MacKenzie) and, knowing all this, our journey through Strath Naver held more than an ordinary interest for us. We eventually came upon one house beside the road, and on enquiring, were told that the crofters had returned there and re-built their home twenty-seven years ago. A few others had done the same. At a farm where we stopped for lunch, the people told us the same story. On hearing that one of us was a descendant of an evicted householder, they could not do enough to show us hospitality. The narrow road winds down the Strath in a most fascinating fashion and we were loth to pass on and leave it behind us. We now saw the Sutherlandshire mountains towering ahead of us and were eager to see what type of scenery would unfold itself when we left the glen.

The road turned westwards along the north shore of Loch Naver and we had a fine view of Ben Klibreck (3154 ft) rising sheer on the other side of the Loch. Peacefulness was the dominating feature here too; scarcely a soul to be seen, and the impression of having all that magnificent panorama to gaze on gave one a feeling of awe. We stopped by another Pict's House beside Loch Naver and went wading in the loch for a change, not being in the least hurry to leave this delectable countryside. At Altnaharra, we joined the main road south from Tongue and started the ascent of Strath Bagastie, which crosses the shoulder of Ben Klibreck at 700 feet. What a splendid view we had looking southwards from the summit, one mountain range rising behind another as far as the eye could see, and on this fine summer's evening the peaks stood out clearly in the sunlight. Ben More Assynt (3274 ft) over to the west was perhaps the closest of the very high peaks, and how thankful were we that for once the weather was on its best behaviour. What a loss would have been ours had we missed that grand view!

Some little way down on the descent we stopped at Crask Inn for tea, then followed a delightful spin for miles upon miles into Lairg where we had a very important person to meet – the man with the primus stove and the money!



PART TWO

Walter L Browne joins the trip

I followed the same plan as my predecessors, omitting breakfast at Glenfarg and arrived uneventfully at Inverness about four o'clock, seeking tea at Neish's Temperance Hotel before doing anything else. Whilst waiting for tea there, I copied several addresses from their Hotel Guide for future use. I took the main road via Beaully and was in no hurry as I was a day in advance of my programme and was not due in Lairg until Saturday night. Consequently it was only 8pm when I docked in Evanton, the first house in the village being the Temperance Hotel I was looking for. It was also a farmhouse, which is a happy combination. The following morning I pushed on, still leisurely, in bright sunshine, via the high road past Aultnamain. On the descent to Bonar Bridge there are fine views over the Dornoch Firth, which I appreciated, though I don't suppose Rossiter did, later on in the year!

It was still only mid-day, with eight miles to go to Lairg; I had plenty of time, so I took the very pretty road closely following the Shin Valley, reached Lairg and scanned the faces of the natives for traces of the consternation which ought to have taken place following the arrival of two rationally clad females! Lairg is very prettily situated at the southern end of Loch Shin and I followed the road northwards for some two miles without meeting any cyclists. I dozed in the sun for a couple of hours till the usual call that comes to one about five o'clock became insistent, which I satisfied at the Temperance Hotel. My companion at the table proved to be one of the Lovat Scouts who had passed with his regiment through Grimsby in September 1914 while I was billeted in, of all places, a Mormon Meeting Hall there. On my mentioning this to the landlady, she remarked, looking at my shorts and bare knees, "You would be a gey wee laddie then!". On my returning up the road once more, I picked up my companions and we docked for the night in a Boarding House which was good and as a result of our recommendation now appears in the Handbook.

After breakfast next morning, maps came out and we began to consider our route in more details than the skeleton plan which I had prepared. We carried a primus stove and so were free agents until tea-time, which is a very moveable feast, so we proceeded down the Shin once more, stopping to look at the Falls of Shin and turning to Inveran westwards up Strath Oykeell. After twelve miles or so, the road becomes rather desolate, crossing wild and barren moorland, broken occasionally by a swiftly flowing stream. Just beyond Oykeell Bridge, the two ladies being well in front, I was accosted by one of a tough-looking trio lying in the heather, with the customary conversational opening, "Can you gie me a match?". I gave him two and overwhelmed by my generosity, he enquired, "Are you interested in pearls?". I replied, "Yes, I'd like to see them". The upshot was, I bought one, small but very nicely coloured. Mounted in a ring, this pearl now forms a permanent memento of our tour. Pearls are found in the fresh-water mussels which occur in many of the Scottish rivers. This one came out of the Oykeell, but I have also seen one which came out of the Tay and men make a regular business of fishing up the mussels from the river-bed and opening them – just occasionally, they are rewarded with a pearl and sometimes a very fine one.

Aultnacealgach House gave us tea, which was welcome after the cold wind and rain of the last two hours. Just beyond here, the road turns southwards to Ullapool, but we were not going there just yet; we took the northward fork to Inchnadamph. Unfortunately, just glimpses of the mountains could be seen as a heavy mist had come down and it was still raining as we rode along the side of Loch Assynt, of which we could just see sufficient to realise that it was extraordinarily beautiful. However, as we reached the western end, the rain stopped and we descended to Lochinver at nine o'clock. We had four addresses here and thought we should have no difficulty in getting rooms. At the first house, nobody appeared; the second one gave us the chilly mit, the third one the geological survey or stony stare and we finally quested to a house away up on the top of a hill – why is it that houses that are sure to take you in, are always up on top of long hills? – but still nothing doing. Everybody is named MacKenzie here, but by this time our opinion of this famous clan was rather a poor one. However, all's well that ends well! In spite of the folly of arriving at Lochinver late on a Sunday night (in fact, it is most unwise to arrive in Lochinver at any time on Sunday) we docked at a very charming cottage, the house of a Customs Officer who hailed from Kent. It was by now eleven pm, but that did not prevent them from making us supper and doing all possible to make us comfortable; so much so, in fact, that the MacKenzie of the company ejaculated "Gie me the English after this – I'm done wie the MacKenzie's!".

Next morning dawned bright and clear and we were in a great hurry to set off on the famous coast road to Ullapool. Anyone with unusual powers of description might do justice to this glorious road. It starts off as a narrow lane by the side of a rushing torrent, uphill, descending equally rapidly and roughly to the shores of Loch Culag, where, on a small eye of land jutting out was built the village school, just the width of a small road connecting this with the mainland. To the left Canisp (2779 ft) stood out clearly, while to the right the weird sugar loaf of Suilven (2399 ft) rose clear above the foothills. The road continues winding in and out, up and down, ever and anon giving one views of the sea and groups of islands. We enquired the name of one group from an auld man by the roadside and having told us, he followed with the usual enquiry, "Could you gie me a match?". There should be a great fortune in this neighbourhood for a slot machine delivering matches without the trouble of putting pennies in! Just beyond Inverkirkaig the road gets even rougher, though perfectly rideable for cyclists and apparently also for the one motor car we met, which decently gave us the right of way. We had now turned inland for a matter of two miles and there was a glorious panorama of mountain peaks from Suilven – now the back view – to Cul Mor and An Stac, with Loch Skinkaskink in the foreground. We descended to Inverpolly only to ascend again for a mile followed by a similar descent to the shores of Loch Badnagyle. There was a CTC Danger board on top of this hill, but not very dilapidated. The ten miles from Lochinver had taken us four hours, but I really think it was the most delightful ten miles of road I had ever covered in 64,000 miles spread over twenty-eight years of riding.

A delightful little sandy bay on the shore of Loch Badnagyle decided us that it was time to put an end to the wanderings of a faithful tin of beans which had accompanied the expedition from Burntisland to far John O'Groats, down Strath Naver and so here! We buried the empty tin in a rabbit hole. Of course, that wasn't all our dinner! Thus refreshed, we proceeded on our way, having to reach Ullapool for the night. The prominent cone of An Stac was visible for many miles whenever we chanced to look back. One might mention the fly-catching plant, the sundew, which was very common all along the roadside, but it did not do its duty as efficiently as it might have done! We passed but one house until we reached the main road again at Drumrunie Lodge ten miles further on. Our recollection of the latter part of this day's travel was the ascent of innumerable hills and the corresponding fast descents, ending with a two mile shoot into Ullapool itself. Just outside the village, we met two CTC cycle campers and exchanged the usual greetings. We laid in provisions for the next day's journey and having disposed of tea, set about finding accommodation for the night. Our choice fell on the Ferry Inn, but unfortunately, it was on the other side of the Loch (Loch Broom). We did not realise this until the proprietor who had been pointed out to us just as he left the same shop, was on his way across home. We therefore made shift with another CTC appointment. Our hostess told us that Ullapool now consisted of Old Age Pensioners and young folks on the dole. It suited us well enough to pass the night in; it stands on the threshold of beautiful scenery, rather than having any particular beauty of its own. We told our landlady our destination for the morrow and asked about possible ferries across Loch Broom. She thereupon hailed an ancient mariner (aged about 110) and there followed an excited conversation in Gaelic, which we afterwards translated into, "See and tak' plenty of money off them, for I'm going to!". For his part, he charged us the exorbitant price of half-a-crown apiece for putting us and our bicycles across half-a-mile of water. When we saw the Ferry Inn now we wished we had been able to get across on the previous evening.

The road rises 750 feet in the first mile and a half, very rough and stony and of course quite unrideable in either direction. From the summit, there is a fine descent of about four miles into Dundonnell at the head of Little Loch Broom. The road hugs the south side of the Loch closely and is one of several roads in this neighbourhood which were constructed about 1850 to provide relief work for the crofters following several years of potato famine. Just before Badcaul the road proceeds to climb and here by the roadside we noticed the familiar sign of the Winged Wheel in black and gold. Looking over to the north shore of the Loch, we could discern the little crofting townships, small isolated communities, their hayfields and cornfields making a fringe of green and yellow tartan above the sea. From the summit of the road, we could pick up to the north-east the Sutherland mountains we had been amongst the previous day, while away to the west we could distinguish the dim blue outline of the Outer Hebrides. The whole circle of Gruinard Bay lay before us with the Isle of Gruinard but a mile from the shore, the Priest Island five miles further out and all of the Summer Isles beyond. From Little Gruinard we climbed steadily up the steep Gruinard Hill, rising some 300 feet with a gradient of 1 in 7. Leaning over the retaining wall at the top of this precipitous road, one looks right down into the waters of Gruinard Bay, iridescent with blues and greens and purples shimmering in the sun.

Aultbea for tea was our next objective, and we found the hotel nicely situated on the shore of Loch Ewe, with its Isle of Ewe in the foreground. The road climb high above the water here, again giving us good views and we soon descended upon Poolewe. Close by is Inverewe House built in 1865 by Mr Osgood MacKenzie and here he laid out a garden full of semi-tropical plants which flourish in the warm moist climate. The road to Gairloch crosses the bridge over the River Ewe, goes up the riverside and over the moors to Loch Tollaidh. On this Loch there is a small island or crannog fashioned by human hands years ago to serve as a burial island. On the left hand side of the road nearer Gair Loch there is a large boulder called Clach Nam Brog, which means the Shoe Stone, for here the women who had walked thus far over the hills to church bare-footed, usually sat down to put on their stockings and shoes. From the Auchtercairn Brae there is a glorious prospect to the west, across the Bay of Gair Loch to the heavenly hills of Skye, looking right into the sunset.

A CTC appointment here gave us very good accommodation and the following morning we climbed the long wooded valley of Kerrysdale, reaching the summit at 427 feet. Before us lay Loch Maree with its wooded islands – a glorious view with mountains rising on all sides. We descended a mile to the lochside and thereafter continued by the shores of the loch for many a mile in the brilliant sunshine, which had taken the place of the earlier dullness, to Kinlochewe, where once again we laid in supplies, intending to picnic at the first available farm on the Torridon road. A likely looking spot soon presented itself at the farm of Cromasaig. I unpacked the cooking utensils while the ladies of the party went off in search of milk and eggs. (They could speak the language better than I could!). Milk was fairly easy to come by, but eggs was another matter, because the farmer kept only one hen and it is unreasonable to expect one hen to lay six eggs at once! We speculated as to why only one hen – without reaching any satisfactory conclusion.

Rain fell soon after resuming our travels and Glen Torridon presented a gloomy aspect – the narrow road bounded by the almost sheet mountainside. Just before reaching Fasaig Village, Torridon, we swung off to the left, intent upon following the footpath to Shildaig. ~The first mile is good road and thereafter it becomes a narrow, boulder-strewn footpath meandering through the woods high above the Loch. These few miles of walking and climbing came as a pleasant change from the usual road and we much enjoyed our leisurely progress here, in spite of millions of flies. The footpath proper stops at Balgy and from there the two miles into Shildaig are rideable again. Just as we emerged at Shildaig we met two members of the North Lancs DA to whom we gave instructions to help them follow the route we had just traversed.

Shildaig is just one street of whitewashed houses, but very fortunately one of these is a place where tea may be obtained – not, perhaps, patronised by Royalty, but at least by Kuklos and Klossie in 1926 and numerous other CTC-ites. We left our names to swell the crowd and they were detected later on by a honeymoon couple of our acquaintance. A long gentle climb of about five miles brought us to the head of Glen Shildaig and we descended to Tornapress, with the dark mountains to our right through which the famous road climbs over to Applecross. From Kishorn, the views of Skye to the west were very distinct and here also was Courthill House, noted for the palms and other tropical plants growing in the open. A little further on, one of the party espied lettuces growing in profusion and on expressing approval of them to the old man working amongst them, was rewarded with a large bundle. Although only four miles now separated us from Lochcarron, the road here climbed to 400 feet, dropping the same distance in about half-a-mile; and so on to Lochcarron for the night, where the hotel did us uncommonly well.

Next morning we discovered our first puncture, but managed by pumping to keep going until we reached Strome Ferry, which we crossed without any delay, doing our repair on the other side. The road rises to 282 feet and descends to Strath Askaig all in the first mile, but it climbs up to 685 feet again in another three miles. Our rims were quite hot when we reached the bottom of the corresponding three-mile descent into Lochalsh. Here we met another two CTC tourists, this time from London. Dornie Ferry was the next point and we reached it to find no sign of the ferryman, so we unshipped our packs, thinking to have lunch while we were waiting. Just then we spotted a boat coming over from Totaig making for our pier and we promptly got aboard with our bicycles. Half-way across to Totaig, however, we discovered that our packs were still reposing at the ferryman's shelter and what was more serious, the grub too! The ferryman, however, was most obliging and put back for us. We passed close under the Castle of Eileann Donan, which is an island at high tide.

We landed at Totaig, choosing the south side of Loch Duich to avoid the hill of Keppoch (506 ft) on the north side and this brought us to the foot of Glen Shiel. Glen Shiel is a deep and narrow defile, with

strangely sharp-peaked mountains on either side. The River Shiel tumbles down this sinister pass and the Five Sisters of Kintail – Scour Ouran, 3505 feet dominating the other four – make a grand precipitous rampart on the northern side of the Glen.

Glen Shiel and Eilann Donan Castle, previously mentioned, both figured in the futile Jacobite rising which took place in 1719 – a three-hour fight decided the fortunes of the Jacobites. The road itself is one of General Wade's, built to connect Bernera Barracks on the coast with Fort Augustus and as such is excellently graded to the summit at 889 feet, from where there is a slight descent to Cluanie Bridge Inn, which we were right glad to reach, as it was then close on seven o'clock. At first, our hopes of getting tea were dashed, as they were busy with dinner for their resident guests. However, the maid managed to cope with the extra three and we had tea in the manager's private office, with the added comfort of a peat fire burning in the hearth. We were just sorry that the huge dumpling boiling in the enormous pot over the fire was not for us!

We set out again about eight o'clock on this rather cold, bleak evening, with 24 miles to go to reach Invermoriston, the first available place to stay the night. After some discussion, it was decided that I should push on ahead to fix up the accommodation. After sixteen miles of desolation, I came to a house at which I enquired and they referred me to one, Alan Cameron, at whose house I would be sure to get in. Two miles on, I reached Alan's abode, secured a bed for myself there and a room for the ladies with a Mrs Grant close by. Alan was 84. His was a bachelor establishment and very primitive, but he was most hospitable and did his best for me. In fact, he managed uncommonly well, even if his cooking left something to be desired, for the bacon the following morning was almost black; *verb.sap.* have eggs boiled instead of fried, when in doubt! The ladies were also most hospitably treated at Mrs Grant's and if things were a bit crude, the genuine kindness of the people more than made amends.

The following day, our run was to be a short one in any case. It was our intention to cycle to Spean Bridge and from there take the train over Rannoch Moor. As there are only two trains per day, we had to get the morning one to fit in with the rest of our itinerary. This proved to be our only really wet day, so our ride down the Great Glen didn't give us the views we expected. We docked early and in an uncommonly good place at Spean Bridge, spending the rest of the evening basking in front of the fire. The following morning was bright and clear, but the mountain tops were shrouded in mist, as the train carried us up by the River Spean until we branched off southwards along Loch Trieg and over the Moor of Rannoch. There is a footpath along the shore of Loch Trieg, continuing across Rannoch Moor, which is visible from the railway periodically and we formally registered our intention to cross it at some future date. Alighting at Rannoch Station, a few miles brought us to where the road branches off along the south shore of Loch Rannoch. It is now time to decide whether we should carry out the plan tentatively suggested at breakfast time, namely, to cross over to Glen Lyon by the hill path from Dall to Bridge of Balgie. We decided in favour of this, not knowing what we were letting ourselves in for and we reached Dall in time for a pleasant *al fresco* lunch, most of which we had bought from a grocer's van half a mile up the road.

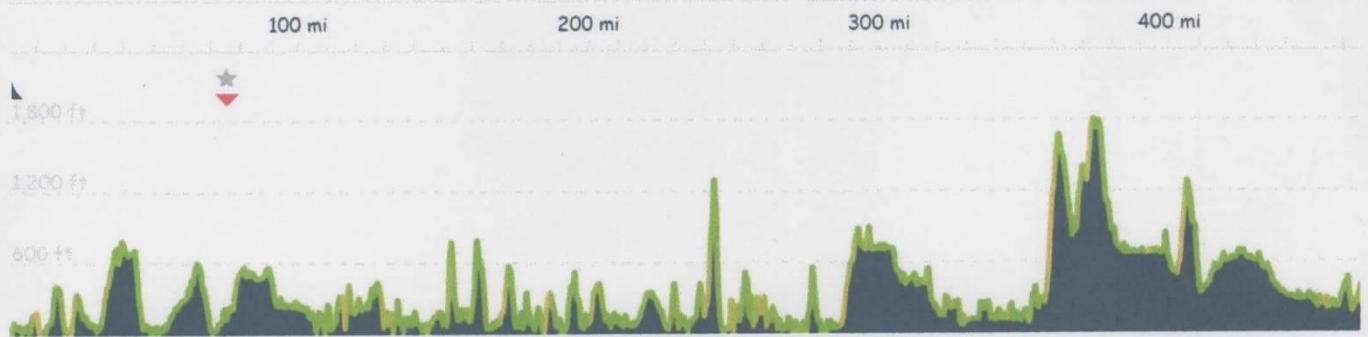
Dall farm is situated amongst the trees of the Black Wood of Rannoch and the path leads up just west of the house. The first four miles is good going and even partly rideable, as it was made by the proprietor to give access to the moors during shooting season. There are fine views to the north when one looks back and one enjoys the keen exhilarating air at the summit of 1570 feet. Just before reaching the summit, we met two walking tourists who held up their hands in holy horror when they learned that we intended continuing down to Glen Lyon with our bicycles. It simply could not be done and we should have to turn back again. Their statement was substantially incorrect. We must admit, however, in fairness to them, that it took us three hours longer than we intended, because the road speedily deteriorated firstly into a grassy track with peat bogs stretching across the middle of it, then it became a stream bottom, then it climbed high up the hillside and became a sheep track with boulders embedded in the heather, ready to snap off your pedal spindles; finally it began the descent, which was a combination of all of those put together with a lot more stones added. For the first two miles, it was like climbing down a ruined wall with the river in the middle of it and as there did not seem to be any path other than this we decided this must be the road. For the last hundred yards it was a smooth grassy road which finally emerged onto the main road in Glen Lyon just by the war memorial. Although it had been strenuous, it had been a most enjoyable experience and we were really none the worse for it – at least after having had tea at Fortingall. We were now, of course, back to civilisation and we could pick and choose where to stay the night. We landed lucky at a farmhouse beyond Aberfeldy.

The last day of a holiday is usually uneventful and this was no exception in our case. Our glorious tour finished up with picking up the main body of the Fife DA at Bridge of Earn – we had tea with them and so home.



TOUR PROFILE

Elevation ▾ *Nothing selected – click and drag below to see the stats for a specific part of the Tour.*



▲ **Highest Point** 1,800 ft

▼ **Lowest Point** 0 ft