



Loch Ness and Loch Lochy are the route's backdrop



Great scenery, steep gradients

Scotland

Lochs, locks and more

Effie White and her family enjoyed a two-day autumn trip alongside the Caledonian Canal



After years of reading other families' adventures in these pages, we decided that it was time for our own. The VisitScotland website found us a Goldilocks route during the October half term: not too challenging, not too boring, largely off road, with good accommodation options.

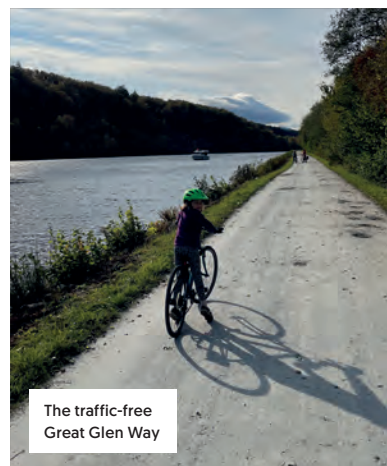
We planned to start in Fort Augustus on the banks of Loch Ness, then cycle south-west along the northern side of the Great Glen to Loch Lochy, overnight there and return via the southern side the following day. That meant a longer [23.5km], hillier

[650m ascent] route on the first day and a flatter, more relaxed [16km, 400m] day on the return.

The autumn weather was glorious. The trail was beautiful, a mixture of Caledonian Canal towpath, woodland singletrack, forestry tracks and occasional quiet roads. There was plenty of time to watch lock gates in action, boats on the canal, admire the views from the higher points in the woodland and eat blackberries.

The children, six and 10 years old, fuelled by cake and Haribo, managed well. While there were sections that we all had to push, it just added to the sense of adventure. The youth hostel was a welcome sight, although the short walk along a busy A-road without a footpath was not. We slept well.

Signs en route informed us that National Cycle Network route 78 on the southern side of the Glen was closed for two years of forestry works. However, returning the way we had come did not seem a hardship, especially as we had seen a promising-looking hotel bar in Invergarry. Our suspicions were confirmed by a warm welcome and an excellent lunch that sustained us all the way back to Fort Augustus, where we dismounted with a real sense of achievement.



The traffic-free Great Glen Way

Northern England Lakes and Dales Loop

Jim Hope and his wife toured this hilly 196-mile route by tricycle and bicycle

AT THE START of May, my wife and I set off to cycle the Lakes and Dales Loop. It's a long-distance road route around the Lake District that dips its toes into the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Starting and finishing in Penrith, it travels 196 miles anticlockwise, amassing 5,001 metres of ascent. I was riding my trike and my wife a hybrid. Both of us had very low gears!

It is a wonderfully varied ride. You cruise along the coastal plain by Grange-over-Sands then travel up and over misty, high fells with steep, two-mile climbs. We were heavily loaded with kit and spares, which was prudent: the first and last cycle shop we saw was in Penrith.

We booked B&B accommodation in advance. We always found somewhere to refuel in the day, including at a fantastic community centre at Ennerdale Bridge.

Many of the roads are good but some are singletrack roads with more grass than tarmac, sometimes strewn with gravel or rocks. The Lakes and Dales Loop is a challenge for anyone, but especially for those using cycles for disabilities. You need experience of such terrain.

It was a strenuous and enjoyable trip that gave us a sense of accomplishment. We rewarded ourselves with ice-creams in Sedburgh later.

The route website is lakesdalesloop.co.uk.



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