

Gallovidian Gravel takes Cycling UK's bikepacking routes north of the border. While the

existing Great North Trail runs the whole length of Scotland and more, this new route will be the first in our Adventure Series located entirely within the country.

Scouting out a new route near the Scottish Borders in March throws up all sorts of challenges. One of the biggest issues was the weather. In order to launch a new route in the summer, all the legwork must take place in the preceding winter months. Yet despite the storms, wetter weeks and darker days, we're proud of what we've produced so far. At the time of writing, the route is still being finalised. We're launching it on 25 June, so I can't share all the details relating to the locations visited or the direction of travel. But I can tell you everything we put into creating it!

Scotland is a world-class cycling destination. Off-road riders may know it best for its 7Stanes mountain bike trails, its downhill track at Fort William, and the emergence of Innerleithen as a trail-riding honeypot. Yet it also offers some of the best untouched landscapes



Top right: Climbing gently on gravel tracks, heading east from Kirroghree Forest. **Above:** Soggy but our spirits weren't dampened as we visited the ancient ruins at New Abbey



Photos: Mick Kirkman

in the UK. If you want to explore what southern Scotland has to offer for adventure riding, saddle up for Gallovidian Gravel this summer.

Definitely Mabie

Our first day started in Mabie Forest, just outside of the official start point of Dumfries. The town is a gateway to Dumfries and Galloway. A statue of its most famous resident, Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, watches over you from his plinth opposite Greyfriars Church.

Crossing the river Nith you leave behind the bustle of Dumfries until you return via the picturesque bridges days, nights, miles and smiles later. The town is well connected and easily accessible thanks to a good road network and a train station. There's a wealth of places to stay to suit all pockets, and with plenty of history and intrigue, Dumfries is more than just a start and end point for the route.

Our first day coincided with a yellow weather warning. Heeding the maxim that 'there's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing', we donned our waterproofs, unpacked

our positivity and sense of humour, and set off. We embraced the rain and Irish Sea breeze with enthusiasm as we knew the sort of scenery that awaited.

Braking for cake

The first sections of the route incorporated a varied mix of surprisingly good, segregated cycle paths and back streets, leading to forest fire roads and quiet country lanes. This set the tone of the entire

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ride. We've worked hard to ensure our latest route is firmly geared towards a gravel or adventure touring bike. The climbs are longer and steadier, slowly revealing epic scenes that you should have the breath to enjoy, rather than

rising up out of the ground like steep ramps.

Remaining on the coast, we took refuge in one of the coastal villages along the way to escape the rain and refuel. Taking time to stop and visit local eateries plays a significant part in creating our Adventure Series routes. Local shops and places to eat are fundamental to these more remote communities, and by promoting and encouraging