



The Ards Peninsula

This rural ride runs along quiet lanes from Bangor to Portaferry in Northern Ireland. **Stephen McCrory**, who helped create it, is your guide

The Ards Peninsula and the sheltered waters of Strangford Lough are well known for their wildlife and natural beauty. Less familiar is what lies inshore: a network of quiet country roads and lanes, tucked away from busy, coastal A roads. They trace a green spine down the peninsula and offer relaxed, rewarding cycling.

Improved Greenways from Belfast through Comber and Newtownards now provide easier access to the peninsula by bike. The Ards Peninsula Quiet Ways Trail was launched by Ards and North Down Cycling Campaign, in partnership with Ards and North Down Borough Council. It begins in Bangor and guides riders from the colourful Victorian terraces overlooking Belfast Lough to the tidal narrows at the mouth of Strangford Lough.

This is not a direct route – and that is very much the point. The trail meanders along narrow roads that once linked farmyard to farmyard. Blackthorn and gorse line the verges, while fields shift with the seasons, with lambs in spring or crops of barley and potatoes later in the year. History is never far away: a working windmill stands near to the stumps of others. Glimpses of castles, baronial houses, small churches and fragments of ancient woodland



appear unexpectedly around bends in the road.

Short diversions can add depth to the journey. Mount Stewart's neoclassical house and celebrated gardens provide a striking contrast to the surrounding farmland, while nearby Greyabbey offers a quiet pause among the atmospheric ruins of its Norman past.

The riding itself is gently demanding. Rolling drumlins, shaped by the last Ice Age, create a steady rhythm of short climbs and descents that keep the route engaging without becoming arduous. As the road heads south, the

peninsula narrows and flashes of water begin to appear first on one side, then the other.

Near the tip, riders face a choice: turn east towards the wilder Irish Sea coast or west to the calmer, wooded shores of Strangford Lough. Both offer memorable views and abundant birdlife.

The route finishes in Portaferry, where powerful tides surge through the narrow channel and the ferry battles its way across the lough. It's an ideal place to stop, refuel and reflect on a ride that takes in some of Northern Ireland's best quiet roads. ●