Cycling in the Highlands: Experience Scotland's Natural Wonders on Two Wheels

Wednesday 14 February, 2024

"It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them. Thus you remember them as they actually are, while in a motor car only a high hill impresses you, and you have no such accurate remembrance of country you have driven through as you gain by riding a bicycle."

Ernest Hemingway

It may be a well-used quote, but here at Bike the UK for MS we are bringing Hemingway's words to life for you. Get to know the UK as it actually is by cycling the Scottish Highlands; an unforgettable place to explore and enjoy.

The Highlands of Scotland is the one place that features prominently in the memories of all our alumni. Acting as the grand crescendo of our 1000 mile Land's End to John O' Groats cycle ride and of course the star attraction of the North Coast 500 cycle route; the Highlands are a place like no other in the UK and possibly even the world.

Cycling the Wild Coast of the Scottish Highlands

The coasts of the Highlands bear hard-earned treasures. When you think of the Scottish coastline the first word that comes to mind is often "rugged". Images of towering cliffs and crashing waves as the force of the Atlantic Ocean comes thundering into the British Isles. However, nestled within this brusque exterior hide the other extreme conditions that the coast of Scotland has to offer.

Remote, tranquil and storied coves and beaches. Refuges from a hectic modern life in the 21st Century, but filled with a history of sanctuary from the threats of an outside world for those on the water and the land.

Notable highlights, such as Big Sand beach near Gairloch, are joined by the beaches at Scourie where the campsite for our riders sits right against the water's edge. The quiet Berriedale, where you cross a narrow suspension footbridge to learn of the navigation beacons, standing high above you on the cliffs, that have guided ships returning from the open sea safely homeward.

Cycling Amongst Giants

No place in the UK can give you a sense of scale to match the Highlands of Scotland. We are fortunate to have the ability to enjoy exploring places that once acted as Mother Nature's hostile barrier to all but the boldest.

Ben Hope towers above a rest stop in Tongue on the North Coast 500 cycle. Nearly 1000m high, in the far north of Scotland, it still inspires a mix of awe and mystery in a way that is impossible to replicate without experiencing it in person.

As you skirt your way around the peaks, through the valleys and glens that stand across the vast landscape like wide corridors in a country sized stately home, you can expect every distant horizon to hold new surprises. Not least the towering peaks of the Isle of Skye as you gaze across the water far below from the Applecross Pass – the wildest and most spectacular climb in the whole of Britain.

Beneath your wheels while cycling in the Highlands

For all that the surrounding landscapes inevitably catch the eye, a subtle treat is in store for those learning the Highlands' crinkly contours by bike. The kind of treat that you first notice by the absence of one thing, before being able to savour what has replaced it.

A thin, snaking ribbon of tarmac. Winding away from your front wheel, off towards the distant sky and pointing you at yet-to-be-known experiences. Space to take a deep breath and really experience what it is to ride a bike. What it is to feel the gradient, up or down. The push of the wind, in support of your efforts or as an invisible challenge that you must find spirit from within to overcome.

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Every bike ride is unique, but nothing is quite as unique as the Wee Mad Road; a rollercoaster of a journey taking you from the peak of what human engineering can achieve with the Kylesku Bridge. Immediately showing you that humanity is but a passenger on the wild planet beneath our wheels. What a privilege to sample some of what is normally reserved for “off the edge of the map”.

Above it All

Taking everything in is the theme of these words so far, but you must cast your eyes further still to capture it all. Daylight, taking you almost through the night with long, spectacular performances from the sun as it briefly leaves the stage at sunset, only to be replaced by light shows of a sky full of stars. Perhaps, even an aurora borealis if you have fortune on your side.

Distant beauty dovetails with the chance atmospheric blanket of mist where the world draws in close, creating the feeling of spooky isolation. Every sound is dulled to silence and the unknown of what hides beyond the murk is unknown. How better to experience the vastness of the universe than to have it re-revealed from behind the curtain of dense fog?

The Scottish Highlands: Where the Wild Things Are

Mountains stand immovable and the sea reaches out endlessly, but blink and you might miss the dynamic movement of animal life in the Highlands. At the Falls of Shin, can you gaze down and spot a salmon making the leap against the rushing rapids? Did you catch that seal bobbing in and out of the rocks as you sit on the beach watching the seabirds dive into the waves?

Highland cows stoically standing as statues or lying aside the road as you pedal past. Deer bounding over the open moors, racing faster than a bike on the road. Cycling in the Highlands has enough to fill a camera roll on a phone or a highlight reel in the memory.

Join us for the Adventure

We will be in the Highlands on both our Land’s End to John O’Groats cycle, often known as LEJOG, in July 2024 and our North Coast 500 cycle, or NC500, in August. Cycle the Highlands with us and give yourself the ride that will last long in the memory; all whilst giving back to a great cause and supporting those living with multiple sclerosis.

There is no better way to enjoy everything that the Highlands of Scotland has to offer than with Bike the UK for MS. Our route leaders are there to support you and ensure that you can experience the best of what the Highlands has to offer. Your teammates will be there to share the experience with you and bring every moment to life. Time for a bike ride like no other?

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