

Top to bottom: Curnelloch Burn, looking north towards Craignaw. Crossing White Laggan burn. Craignell Farm. Runic axe head



Weekender

Galloway Hills

The gravel track between Clatteringshaws and Glentrool offers spectacular Scottish scenery. **Jeff Frew** is your guide



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The narrow valley that links Clatteringshaws with Glentrool takes you through a landscape of lochs and glens in a wild corner of south west Scotland. I was introduced to this route by Galloway Cycling Holidays (gallowaycycling.com), a friendly local cycling business.

You can start at either end. From Clatteringshaws, you soon join National Cycle Route 7. Remnants of tarmac take you as far as the Old Edinburgh Road, then the surface becomes the hardpack and gravel typical of forestry access roads.

The Southern Upland Way runs to the north of the Clatteringshaws Loch, and it merges with Route 7 on the approach to the Loch Dee. The views will make your spirits soar, while the gravel riding is some of the finest in the world. Our day was made perfect when, on the shores of Loch Trool, we spotted otter kits and adults after hearing their whistling calls.

Nearby is the site of an unorthodox battle fought in 1307, when Robert the Bruce tumbled boulders down the steep slopes onto an advancing English army.

While you can retrace your route from Loch Trool, it's worth adding a loop through Glentrool Forest. The return to Clatteringshaws offers different views from before – plus coffee at the café if you time it right. ●

Bags of fun

This route is fine in autumn too. You might even camp out... cyclinguk.org/autumn-bikepacking



Weekend ride

GALLOWAY HILLS

• **Route name:** Clatteringshaws to Glentrool. • **Start/finish:** Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre. • **Map:** OS Explorer 319. • **Ride length:** 63.4km [39.4 miles]. • **Climbing:** 798m. • **Bike type:** gravel, CX, hardtail MTB, tourer. • **Ride level:** regular (beginner with care). • **GPX file:** cyclinguk.org/route/galloway-hills

**1 Loch Dee**

After a little over nine miles you get your first views of Loch Dee and the high mountains surrounding your route. White Laggan is a bothy to the south of the loch. Look for the Saltire painted on the gable end.

2 Rune stone

To the right of the track is a flat sculpture of a stone axe head, with an ancient Irish poem called 'The Mystery' engraved on it in runic text (poemhunter.com/poem/the-mystery-11/). Up ahead you can see The Merrick, the highest peak in southern Scotland, from whose summit you can see Snowdon.

3 Glenhead

Crossing over to the north side of Loch Trool over a foot bridge at Glenhead, the feel of the ride changes. You ride under a canopy of oak and beech, with cascading falls tumbling from the peaks high above on your right.

**5 GLENTROOL VISITOR CENTRE**

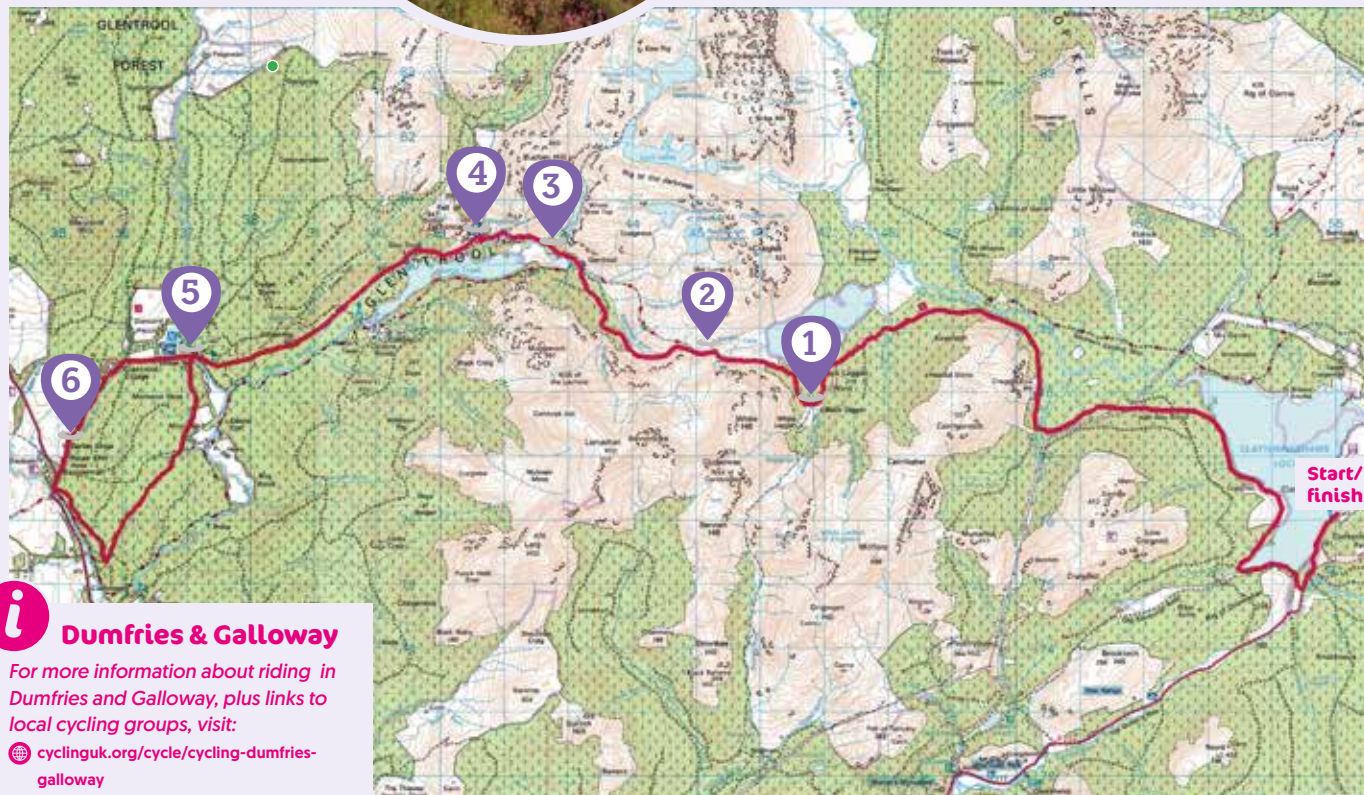
There's ample parking here if you're doing this ride in the opposite direction. There's also a café on the banks of the Black Linn if you can't wait until House o' Hill for something to eat.

4 BRUCE'S STONE

There's an amazing view of Loch Trool from here. It's said to be the least light-polluted place in the UK. [All of this ride is within the 300 square miles of the UNESCO Dark Sky Park.]

6 House o' Hill Hotel

A good place for a meal, a pint, or a bed for the night. The ride continues on tarmac for a while, with tight bends and a steep descent under lichen-covered oak and beech trees. From the Visitor Centre (5), retrace your route to Clatteringshaws.

**Dumfries & Galloway**

For more information about riding in Dumfries and Galloway, plus links to local cycling groups, visit:

cyclinguk.org/cycle/cycling-dumfries-galloway