

Mountain Biking UK TRAILS

THE NORTH TH STIRLING

Stirling may well play piggy in the middle to the Highlands and the Borders, but it'll still leave you squealing for more...

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To the uninitiated, Stirling can seem to be in a kind of limbo between the wilderness of the Highlands and the rolling hills of the Borders. Somewhere to pass through on the way north... maybe it has some nice transport greasy spoons? It is just known as the gateway to the Highlands after all...

For this reason maybe we had overlooked it as a ride destination, but recently there has been a growing hype on the mountain-bike grapevine that Stirling and Cambusbarron is developing into one of life's must-ride areas, and looking at the riders that are coming out of the area, we thought it had to be worth a look. When you see fast, technical riders appearing and winning races all over the place, you know there must be a great training ground somewhere in the picture. Hooking up with the lads from Stirling Bike Club (yes, those fast riders we're talking about), we followed them through the best Stirling has to offer – and nearly had kittens in the process! ➔



CROSS-COUNTRY

This chunk of Scottish land gives a somewhat bleak image on paper, but get your wheels to the ground and you'll be riding by the seat of your pants. Turn over the page...



DOWNHILL

OK, so the main altitude drop is not of traditionally epic Highland proportions but there are enough berms, bumps and tabletops to provide a stirring descent. Page 110...

CROSS-COUNTRY



When Frosty The Snowman blew up, the fall-out spread for miles

After a murky drive across Scotland to meet up with the lads from Stirling Bike Club, the day looked as though it was shaping into a classic bleak winter affair. Cold, dark and frozen. The same description could have applied to the half-dozen riders – Richard, Ian, Brian, David and the other lads from Stirling Bike Club – who we had agreed to meet in King’s Park; shivering and riding around the thin coating of snow that had fallen overnight.

And so we set off straight away, heading toward Cambusbarrow and the top riding that Richard Barton (yes, Dick Barton!) assured me we would find. We were heading out onto what would be the lads’ regular training ride for a Saturday morning that included riders like Iain Nimmo (Scottish

Elite Champion, among other things) and many other big names on the Scottish scene – so it would be safe to assume it would usually be fast...

The track rose up at a steady rate as Richard explained a bit about the area. Looking at maps, he told me, would show Stirling up as a bit of a blank spot for riding singletrack and more adventurous trails, but on the ground was a whole different ball game. The ‘North Third’ that we had entered was a maze of singletrack, steep paths, rocks and roots. You just had to roll your sleeves up and find it!

Just as he said that, the forest road stopped at what appeared to be a dead end. But it wasn’t – one of the lads up the front just carried on riding up a snowy singletrack through the trees, disappearing

THE NORTH THIRD, STIRLING



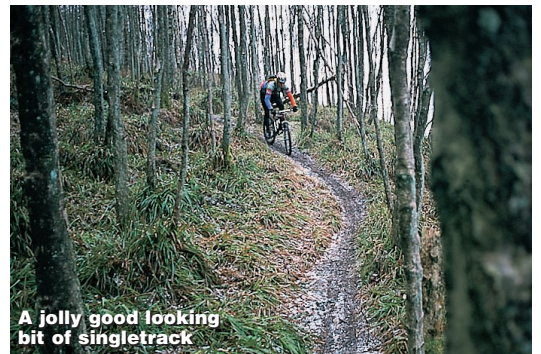
The perils of putting too much talc in your tyres



No! I'm getting pulled towards that magnetic rock! Help!



How far did you say it was to the burger van?



A jolly good looking bit of singletrack



When it's this wide, is it called pluraltrack?

off up a narrow glen. Singletrack at last!

This narrow path climbing easily up the misty glen carried on for some time, heading up a frozen singletrack through woodland until reaching a steep switchback, barely rideable in the frost. Didn't stop the Stirling lads, of course – they flew up it like it was flat... Up, over and we were onto the cliff-tops.

Riding a technical singletrack can be daunting at the best of times, but try doing that with a 200-foot cliff off to your left, then you discover whether you have a head for fear or not. Rocks in the path, a camber towards the precipice and nice frozen roots all conspired to gently encourage my bike towards the edge, but unadulterated fear can be a powerful force and I think it was only that which kept my bike from the edge.

At points I found myself deliberately rubbing the tyre on rocks to the inside of the bend, using them to guide the wheel round the path instead of chancing the outside edge. At least then I knew where the wheel was, I figured.

This carried on, to my increasing disbelief, as we skirted the cliff-top, tackling drop-offs, steep climbs and root sections, all on a perfect singletrack no more than about a foot wide the whole way round. What seemed like miles was probably less than one on the really technical section, but at the same time the concentration needed made it pass in no time. Now that's what technical riding is all about. Richard told me riders either love it or hate it. Some decide it's just crazy, and leave. Others ride, and just keep coming back.

After we finished the final descent back

to the motherly comfort of the forest track, I looked back up the hill and realised for the first time why these guys were so damn good on the bike. Speaking for myself, I know I will be back.



RICHARD
CROSS-COUNTRY RIDER



North Third and Cambusbaron offer a variety of trails that are almost 100 per cent singletrack. They range from rocky trails to flat-out downhills with a huge amount of concentration required to get the most speed. Great for climbing and superb for descending. It can either be an all-day outing or a quick blast.

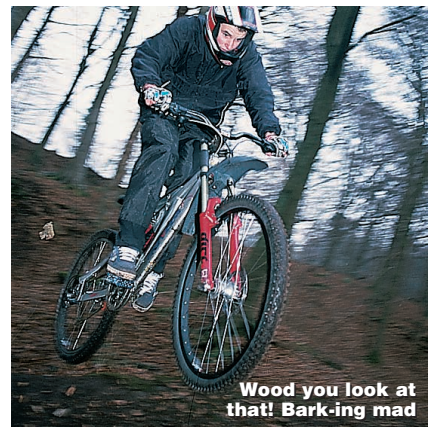
DOWNHILL



Tree what we mean? You need to leaf home and branch out



Mr Colour Co-ordinated™ mossaing about in the woods



Wood you look at that! Bark-ing mad



Take a step to the right...

As with the cross-country riding, Stirling is not known for its downhill scene – but having seen what passes for cross-country riding, we knew there just had to be something going on! Once again the Stirling Bike Club came to the rescue, putting us in touch with Alan Fulton, Mike Hepburn and a few other local lads who make the local woods in Bridge of Allan their local haunt and jump spot.

Mine Woods are named after the network of mine shafts and tunnels scattered around the area, blocked off for many years. The lads have made it their home for around the last three years, digging out jumps, berms and doubles throughout the year, keeping the area challenging and just a bit crazy. As soon as we arrived Alan was riding off one of the biggest drop-offs we had ever seen, landing in an explosion of leaves as he took

a hard turn on landing to avoid a tree.

Apart from the jumps dug out at the top of the hill, a downhill route has been devised too – running from the top of the hill, right to the bottom. While it might not be the largest altitude drop you will find in Scotland, it certainly makes up for that in the fun stakes. From the top, the riders hit a series of berms, a long jump across a path into a tight set of corners, a tabletop, more berms, more tabletops, then drop into a huge bombhole. Railing round the side, the riders are quickly spat out the other side into twisty singletrack, then over a huge set of stairs. Ten feet high...

As we waited at the bottom to catch Alan and Mike on the final section we weren't prepared for them hitting the top of the stairs at speed and clearing the lot, jumping around 20 feet to land and breaking hard all the way down to the road below. I think you

could say we were mightily impressed...

To get to the jump spot the best idea would be to meet the guys and follow them. The format seems to be to meet in King's Park in Stirling, then take the train out to Bridge of Allan and hike up the hill to get started. Get in touch with Richard at Stirling Bike Club and he will point you in the right direction.



ALAN DOWNHILL RIDER



Mine Woods is perfect for practising in what is a naturally testing area – all we've done is modified a small section for some specific training. The woods are full of tracks that can be linked into some really good downhill sections.



STIRLING

Hang onto your technical riding helmets for this cliff-topper

Distance **22km (13.7 miles)**
 Time taken **2 hours**
 Elevation gain **200m (656ft)**
 Level **Expert**

According to the local boys, this ride is one of the best in the Stirling area. It isn't recommended for beginners, however, as the technical trail can wander worryingly close to the cliff edge at times! Rocks, roots and tight bends add to the experience, but do try to stop now and again to take in the wild views.

- **GR789928** The best place to park is King's Park in Stirling. Exit the park gates, turn right to the roundabout, turn right here again and head down the main road for 1km, turning left at the pub. Climb the hill for 100m and take the first left. Follow this through the abandoned quarry (staying left where track forks) to the road on the other side. Turn right until you get to a ford and bridge on your left.
- **GR771907** Cross the ford and follow the road into the trees for about three-quarters of a mile up a slight gradient.
- **GR778902** At the T-junction, turn right and ride up the hill into the trees until you get to a solitary house with a gate blocking the way.
- **GR774898** Once through the gate, head to the left and continue to climb until the fireroad ends and a path continues.
- **GR770893** Follow this path to the right past a small stone building, and

- continue along the singletrack path.
- **GR765894** After about 500 yards you come to a track that is almost wide enough to drive a 4x4 up but the gradient is steep. It is rideable, but an easy gear may be needed!
- **GR764895** Once this track ends, the singletrack proper starts. Follow this windy trail along the top of the cliff, making sure to watch for overhanging branches, tightly spaced trees and some rather good downhill drops. This part lasts just under a mile.
- **GR762899** The track brings you out at the bottom of a fireroad. Cross over and climb up the side of the next cliff – this probably isn't rideable at all due to the roots and steps at the top, but give it a go anyway!
- **GR762903** Perhaps the most technical bit of the cliff ride... The trail lulls you into a false sense of security as you slowly start to increase the pace. Be very careful here as the drop is perhaps 100 feet down. A few sections involve negotiating drops and fallen trees, but again this simply adds spice.
- **GR770907** At the bottom of the track you are almost back at the car (if you parked at the ford). Ride up the road you drove down and turn left into the quarry where you can gain access through a Public Right of Way to Polmaise Woods. Cambusbarron is on the other side of the woods, which are littered with varying levels of singletrack. Almost all of these tracks can be reached from the three main tracks up to the woods.

A STIRLING RIDE

GETTING THERE

Stirling has to be one of the easier places to get to in Scotland. Heading north, the M80 is signposted well from the M8 and the west. Coming from the south, head up the M73 north, which will bring you to the M80 and Stirling. Trains run into Stirling too.

STAYING THERE

Stirling has plenty of accommodation, from cheap B&Bs to flash hotels. Another option is to travel 20 minutes outside Stirling and stay in the place provided by the local bike shop, Wheels of Callander (01877 331100). It could be handy having a bike shop, service centre and accommodation all rolled into one! For more options, contact the Stirling Tourist Board on 01786 475019.

EATING THERE

Stirling has plenty of eating places all within a two-minute walk from the town centre. The locals would recommend Corrieri's in Causewayhead (north of the town centre) – good prices and bike-friendly.

BIKE SHOPS

Heading out to Wheels of Callander (01877 331100) isn't a bad idea, it has excellent stock and provides a service centre. Otherwise a trip out to Wheelcraft (Clachan of Campsie – 01360 312709), near Lennoxton, is worthwhile for the best wheels and coffee in Scotland. Stewart Wilson Cycles is also in the centre of Stirling (01786 465292).

YOU NEED TO KNOW...

- The whole forest area is littered with singletrack. Chances are the paths aren't marked on the maps (they only seem to show the major forest tracks) but take a scout around and you'll find so much more. Even better, hook up with the local lads and be led out for a rollercoaster ride!
- Above all, remember the cliff-tops are extremely dangerous and a real no-no in the wet – those rocks and roots could see you off the edge in a flash.
- To find out more about the ride potential of Stirling, visit the local bike club's website (www.stirlingbikeclub.org.uk) where you can get in contact with members who may be able to suggest other local rides.

M PROFILE

