



# DO THE RIDE THING:

A Guide to Responsible  
Mountain Biking in Scotland



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## ENDORSED BY:

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# WELCOME

**Mountain biking in Scotland is world class – with a great network of paths & trails, fantastic purpose built trail centres, an outstanding natural environment and some of the most progressive access rights in the world. This guide makes it easier for you to enjoy Scotland's outdoors by equipping you with the knowledge and understanding to explore this amazing country in a safe & responsible manner.**

This guide will bring to life the real situations which we face on the trails and help you make good decisions when you are out riding. I would also encourage you to try the 'Do the Ride Thing' computer game (on [DMBinS.com](http://DMBinS.com)) to see if your knowledge of the trails is as great as you think!

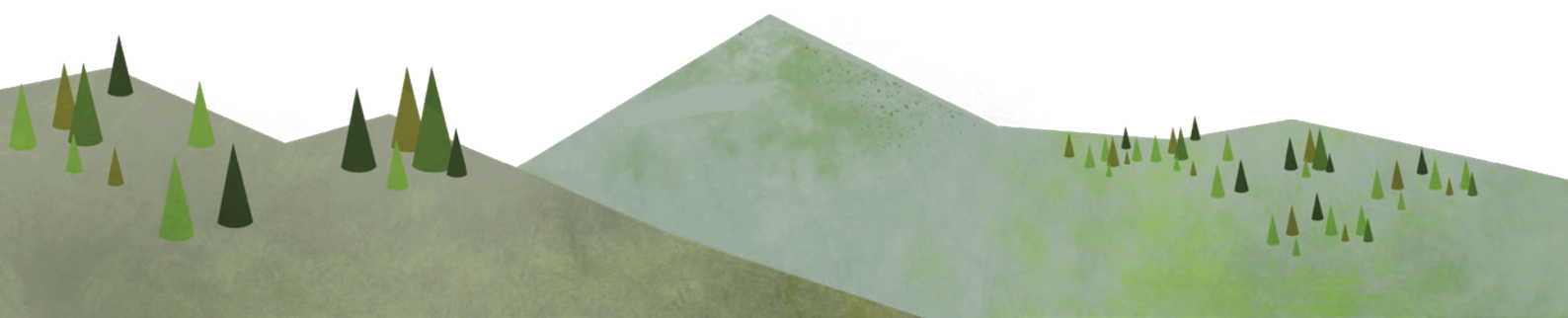
Responsible access is a term you have probably heard and is the cornerstone of Scottish access rights. As users of the great outdoors, it is important that mountain bikers act responsibly. By respecting others and by learning how to share paths and trails, we can continue to promote mountain biking as a responsible and respectful activity.

From canal tow paths, to our trail centres, wider countryside and our rugged and remote landscapes, I love mountain biking in Scotland. I hope this guide helps you to ride safely and responsibly but also inspires you to enjoy getting out there and riding as much as you can.

***See you out there!***

**Chris Ball**

Scottish Cycling National Downhill Coach



# INTRODUCTION

**The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (the Act) has established a right of access to most land and inland water in Scotland. Access rights derived from the Act extend to a wide range of activities, including mountain biking. The Act is clear that a person only has access rights if they are exercised responsibly.**

According to the Act, responsible access means not causing unreasonable interference with the rights of any other person.

Guidance on how to behave responsibly is outlined in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (the Code).

The 3 key principles of the Code are:

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment

This guide expresses the key points within the Code relevant to mountain biking. It also provides good practice guidance, advising on how to behave in a range of situations which you are likely to face when biking in Scotland's outdoors. Do the Ride Thing is relevant to mountain biking on local paths and trails, on routes at purpose built trail centres and on natural trails including those which extend into remote countryside areas.

Do the Ride Thing is aimed at all mountain bikers from families and beginners right through to experienced riders.

We don't anticipate you reading this guide cover to cover every time you plan to go mountain biking. The guide is designed so that you can dip in and out of those sections most relevant to where you are or will be riding on a particular day – especially if you are planning to ride a new route.

In addition to this guide we have developed a computer game which will test your knowledge on how to react to different situations while mountain biking in Scotland's outdoors. We suggest you give this a go to see how responsible a mountain biker you are – [DMBinS.com/riders/do-the-ride-thing](https://DMBinS.com/riders/do-the-ride-thing)

We believe Do The Ride Thing will help you to enjoy our fantastic paths and trails across Scotland.

Do the Ride Thing has been developed by Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS). DMBinS is a project involving a consortium of public and voluntary sector partners who are working together on the implementation of Scotland's strategic mountain biking framework 'The Sustainable Development of Mountain Biking in Scotland'.



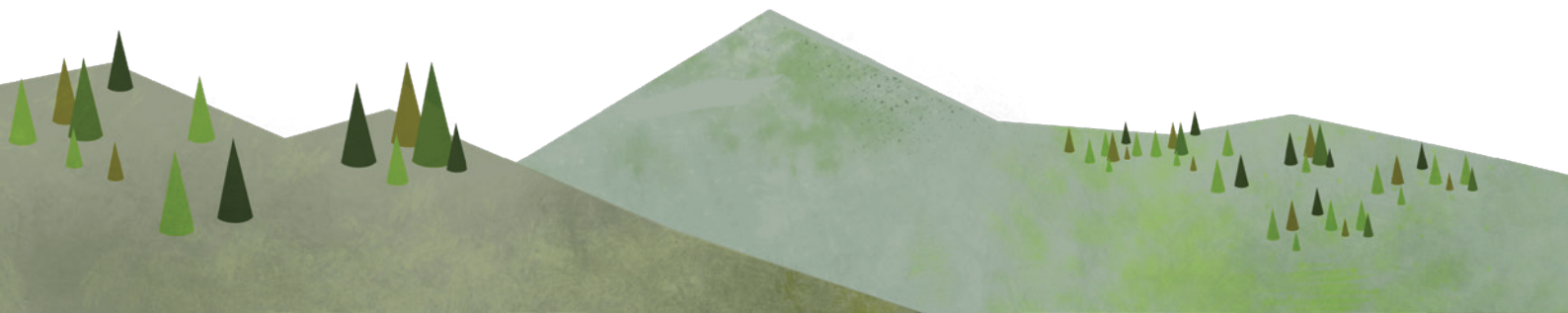
**KNOW THE CODE  
BEFORE YOU GO**

SCOTTISH  
OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

[outdooraccess-scotland.com](https://outdooraccess-scotland.com)

## Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment.



# ROUTE PLANNING

## BEFORE GOING FOR A RIDE

### CHECK THE WEATHER CONDITIONS

In Scotland the weather can change very quickly and it is not unusual to encounter rain/sleet/snow/wind/sunshine all on the same day. It is important to be prepared for anything on the trail and to check the weather forecast before you go.

The weather, both the forecast for the day and the recent weather conditions, should also affect your choice of route. Some trails may become badly damaged if used after heavy spells of rain – which means you will have spoiled them for yourself, other riders and other trail users – not good!

Some recommended weather forecasts:

[www.bbc.co.uk/weather](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather)

[www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

[www.mwis.org.uk](http://www.mwis.org.uk)

### PACK A BAG

Be ready for the worst that can happen – route choice will play a part here - there is more chance of getting caught-out riding a remote wilderness trail like the Torridon loop than doing a blue graded route at a trail centre like Glentress and your bag should reflect this!

It will be useful to take a multi-tool, food & water (to get you through your trip), first aid kit, pump, spare inner tube, chain link, map (& for more remote routes a compass), spare clothes and a mobile phone. And you will want to know how to use all that stuff too!

### SELECT A ROUTE

In Scotland we are lucky to have some of the most progressive access legislation in the world which allows us to use routes across most land - providing we ride responsibly.

To be a responsible mountain biker it helps to think about the environment you will be riding through and to find out if there is anything which might influence your choice of route and your ability to plan alternative routes based on situations you may come across. Good planning will increase the likelihood of you enjoying your day's mountain biking.

There are a number of environments that are managed for specific purposes in the outdoors. It is useful to be aware of different land uses and their management needs & activities so that you can plan your route accordingly. Please be aware of the following:

- Forests/woodlands – felling & extraction activity, shooting of deer or game birds and events/competitions.
- Farmland – think about seasonal activity
  - crops eg harvesting & chemical applications
  - animals eg lambing & livestock movement.
- Open Hill – shooting & deer stalking activity and heather burning regimes.

In all land management settings consider environmental sensitivities and your potential impact on ground conditions, plants and wildlife.

It can be useful to investigate your route on websites and guidebooks. Before going out it can be useful to investigate your route in guidebooks or on websites. It is also worth logging into mountain biking forums to discuss trail difficulty and conditions with fellow mountain bikers.

The DMBinS twitter (@DMBinS) feed will also keep you up to date with trail updates from landowners.

Make sure the route is suitable for all your group. Remember mountain biking is fun so make sure your route isn't going to make you or your friends suffer!

If you are part of a large group be aware that you may have more of an impact on the trails and other path users - your route choice should reflect this.

At the end of this guide there is a list of websites which may be of help in your route planning. You should also refer to the full Scottish Outdoor Access Code for detailed advice on the many different settings you may encounter when out on your bike.

### KNOW YOUR ROUTE ESCAPE OPTIONS AND HAVE A PLAN B

Look at your route and try to work out where you could take an alternative or head back if:

- the trails are too wet/obstructed eg fallen trees
- there are land management operations that have to be avoided
- the trails are being used for outings/events the weather deteriorates

### PARKING

If you are using your car to get to your route try to decide on an appropriate car parking location before setting off.

When you park your vehicle it is important not to cause any damage or create an obstruction by:

- blocking an entrance to a field or building
- making it difficult for others to use the road or track
- having regard for the safety of others
- trying not to damage the verge
- using a car park if one is nearby

*"I used to hardly spend any time route planning but the more I got into mountain biking the more I realised that planning my routes to suit the conditions meant I had even more fun out on the trails!"*



## CLOSE TO HOME

As well as the extensive network of paths and trails we have in our wider countryside, we are very lucky to have a tremendous resource of parks, greenspaces and paths and tracks close to where we live.

From every city, town & village in Scotland you can ride pretty much from your doorstep and find some great trails – go explore and you will be amazed by what you find.

## SITUATIONS YOU MAY COME ACROSS

### OTHER PATH USERS

You are more likely to come across walkers, other mountain bikers, horse riders, parents with buggies and wheelchair users close to home. When approaching any of these groups:

1. Be in control and be aware (especially if dogs are around as their movements can be unpredictable)
2. A tinkle of a bell and/or a polite hello to let them know you are there (let horse riders be aware of your presence as early as possible and be confident they have seen you before passing)
3. If the path is narrow you should be ready to give way or dismount.
4. Keep smiling.
5. Give a friendly thank you as you pass.

### SPEED

Because routes in parks and close to home are often busy it is important to be aware of your speed. Be alert to other people (and their dogs) and ensure you ride at a speed which does not alarm or endanger other users. Particular care should be taken on blind corners and in dips where route visibility can be reduced.

### CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

#### TAKE YOUR LITTER AWAY

Don't ruin our reputation and the countryside; as the saying goes, it doesn't take a minute to bag it and bin it!

#### WILDLIFE

Take care not to disturb wildlife or damage natural vegetation.

#### TRAIL EROSION

Be aware of the impact of your riding on local trails. If your trail is showing signs of erosion or is likely to be damaged because of your riding consider using an alternative route.

### NIGHT RIDING

Take extra care your mega-bright night lights aren't shining through peoples windows or disturbing wildlife or other path users. Try to avoid making too much noise as you pass houses on quiet winter evenings – do go out and explore the trails though – night riding is a whole different and exciting experience!

### TRAIL DOGS

Access rights extend to bringing your dog with you when you are mountain biking but you must keep it under proper control. Be especially careful around other users, livestock and breeding birds - and clean up after your dog.

For more information on cycling with dogs see - [Dog Owners Guide](#)

### HORSES, LIVESTOCK, CROPS & PARKING

Please see 'Wider Countryside/Into the Wild' guidance on page 9.



*“I spent so much time travelling long distances to ride trail centres, then one day I decided to investigate my local park. I was amazed at the range of trails I found and the size of my smile afterwards. I still go to trail centres but I also like to ride in my local area”*

# TRAIL CENTRES

Trail centres are purpose built facilities paths and trails which have been specifically designed and managed for mountain biking.

Access rights and the Code still apply on purpose built trails – follow the guidance below and you will have a great time.

## SITUATIONS YOU MAY COME ACROSS

### WALKERS

The promotion and management of purpose built mountain bike trail centres means that walkers should be aware of the presence of bikers and be ready to give way on these trails.

Mountain bikers should however still be in control and if approaching walkers (and their dogs):

1. Slow down.
2. Make sure they have seen you (give a friendly 'Hello')
3. If safe to do so continue on your way.
4. If not, wait for them to move out the way and then carry on.
5. Keep smiling.

If you get a chance it may be useful to chat to walkers explaining that the onus is on them to be ready to give way at purpose built mountain bike trail centres.

### OTHER MOUNTAIN BIKERS

When you encounter other mountain bikers on the trail you should:

1. Be in control
2. When approaching a slower rider, keep your distance until they are aware of you, call left or right to let them know which side you are overtaking and overtake when it is safe to do so.
3. When a faster rider comes up behind you – don't be intimidated, relax and look for a convenient spot where you can move to the side of the trail and they can overtake. Listen for a shout of left or right which lets you know what side they are overtaking on.

### TRAIL FEATURES

At trail centres you will encounter lots of fun features (berms, drops, jumps, skinnies) designed to put a smile on your face and test your balance and skill. Types and difficulty of feature will differ depending on the grade of trail (see Trail Grading below). Key things to remember when approaching any feature:

1. Ride within your own ability - understand the grading system and how it relates to your own abilities.
2. For some, possibly more difficult features, that you may not have ridden before, it can help to check them out before riding them.

### LAND MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

Remember that trail centres are also often working environments (eg commercial forests), so it is important to:

1. Respect all reasonable advice/signage - you may want to alter your route.
2. Check relevant websites beforehand for land management operations. (Visit [www.dmbins.com/riders/where-to-ride](http://www.dmbins.com/riders/where-to-ride) for a link to all trail centres in Scotland)

### CARING FOR YOUR TRAILS

#### LITTER

Take your litter away with you – lets face it, rubbish really does make us and our trails look, well, rubbish!

#### SKIDDING

Locking up your brake means more trail maintenance, and more maintenance means less money for improved trails – what would you prefer?

#### PARKING

On many sites, a charge for parking may be the only income source available to reinvest in trail maintenance and development. Visiting a trail centre is really, really good value, so do your bit by sticking a few pounds in the machines.






#### TRAIL FAIRIES

Many trail centres encourage volunteers to help with trail maintenance. You might want to speak to the land manager to see how you could get involved.

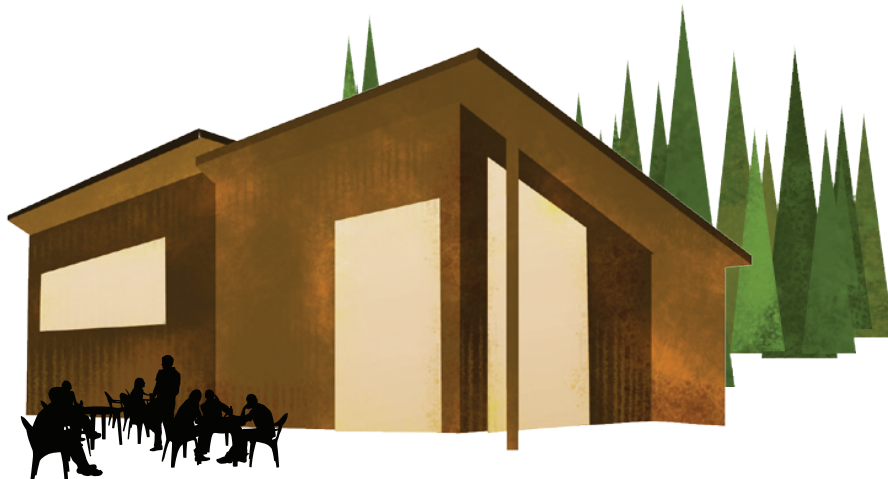
*“I grew up riding the trail centres of Innerleithen and Glentress, working my way up from the easy (Green) to the extreme (Orange). Every stage was as enjoyable as the next and I would recommend them to anyone!”*

# TRAIL CENTRES Cont.

## TRAIL GRADING

Is This For You? Find the right cross-country singletrack trail grade for your abilities			
Singletrack trails			
GRADE		Suitable for:	Trail
	GREEN: EASY	Beginners in good health with basic bike skills. Most types of bike	Relatively flat & wide.
	BLUE: MODERATE	Riders in good health with basic off-road riding skills. Basic mountain bikes	Some "single-track" sections & small obstacles of root & rocks.
	RED: DIFFICULT	Proficient mountain bikers with good off-road riding skills & fitness. Good mountain bikes	Challenging climbs, trick descents & technical features such as drop-offs and large rocks.
	BLACK: SEVERE	Expert mountain bikers with high level of fitness. Quality off-road mountain bikes	Greater challenge & difficulty. Expect large & unavoidable feature.
Is This For You? Find the right non singletrack trail grade for your abilities			
Forest Roads & Bike Parks			
	FOREST ROAD & SIMILAR	Cyclists in good health. Map reading useful (routes not always marked). Most bikes.	Gradients can vary. Surfaces may be uneven or potholed in places. Look out for vehicles & other users.
	EXTREME: DOWNHILL TRAILS DIRT JUMPS FREERIDE AREAS	Extreme level riders with expert technical skills & good fitness. Technical bike skills important. Jumping ability obligatory.	Extreme levels of exposure & risk. Large features.

Source: Forestry Commission





# WIDER COUNTRYSIDE / INTO THE WILD

From our agricultural lowlands, through our straths and glens and to our more remote and rugged countryside, Scotland has an outstanding environment with stunning scenery, wild landscapes and diverse plant and animal life.

It is important to enjoy but to respect and care for our environment and to ensure it is sustained for the future. We all need to be safe and properly prepared when biking in the wider countryside.

The situations you may encounter will be different from those you experience at trail centres or closer to home and we hope this advice equips you with the knowledge on how to enjoy these areas responsibly.

## SITUATIONS YOU MAY COME ACROSS

### WALKERS

It is likely you will come across walkers on your travels. When approaching walkers:

1. Be in control.
2. A quick tinkle of your bell and/or a polite hello to let them know you are there.
3. If the path is narrow you should be ready to give way or dismount.
4. Keep smiling.
5. Give a friendly thank you as you pass.

### FARM ANIMALS & LIVESTOCK

Before entering a field with livestock check to see if there are alternatives. It might be easier and safer to go into a neighbouring field or adjacent land. If your route crosses areas where you find farm animals or livestock grazing please do the following:

1. Slow down.
2. Give them time to clear the path.
3. Keep a safe distance - especially from cows with calves as they can react aggressively.
4. If your dog is out with you do not go into fields where there are lambs, calves and other young animals. It would also be a good idea to read 'Guidance for Dog Owners' (see Learn More pg 11)

### CROPS

Keep to field margins, unsown ground or any existing paths or tracks.

### HORSES

Beautiful creatures they are, but you don't want to spook them - it is potentially dangerous to the horse rider, the horse & you (and your bike!) When approaching a horse and rider:

1. Slow down.
2. Offer a big friendly hello and make sure you are heard.
3. Be confident they have seen you before going past them.
4. If the path is narrow you should be ready to give way or dismount.

### FORESTRY/LAND MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

These are places we enjoy but be aware that they are also places of work.

Follow these steps and we can all get along:

1. Do some research when planning your route – See Route Planning (pg 5)
2. Follow any reasonable advice/signage - you may need to alter your route.
3. Avoid crossing land or follow signs and notices when shooting and deer stalking is taking place. For info on stalking see - [Heading for the Scottish Hills](#)
4. Have a Plan B in mind! - see route planning (pg 5)

### GATES & CAR PARKING

Leave gates as you find them and don't lock your bike to gates. Keep access points clear, ensure others can use the road or track, try not to damage the verge and use a car park if nearby.

### CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

#### TAKE YOUR LITTER AWAY

If you take it out there, take it home!

#### SENSITIVE SITES

There are trails that cross areas which are particularly sensitive due to rare animals or plants – be especially careful to stick to the trails in these areas.

#### WET/BOGGY GROUND

It rains in Scotland and our trails can have wet/boggy sections.

If there are small puddles ride straight through or walk around however if the trail has long sections of boggy ground it might be time for your Plan B.

If going off-trail, especially in winter, avoid wet, boggy or soft ground and avoid churning up the surface.

#### SKIDDING

Anyone can pull a skid but locking your brakes could cause damage to the trails, potentially ruining them for yourself, other path users and mountain bikers!

### INTO THE WILD

Putting the mountain back into mountain biking!

Safety is paramount in remote areas as help may not be close at hand. It is important to be able to navigate, and to be aware of the possible consequences of a breakdown/crash - and to pack/behave accordingly.

Unlike purpose built trail centres, the routes into wilder areas will have no grading so it is important to plan your trip to suit your wants and abilities and to remain flexible and have a Plan B should you need to turn back/divert. If you have planned your route (see page 4) successfully you will have a great time!

If you do get into difficulties and require help from mountain rescue in remote areas you should be aware of where you are, dial 999 or 112 and ask for the police who will then contact mountain rescue.



## LAND MANAGEMENT

Access to the land is integral to the enjoyment of mountain biking. Land owners have a duty to manage their land responsibly with regard to access rights and must not obstruct or unreasonably prevent people from exercising responsible access. It is important to develop good relations with land owners to ensure mountain biking is part of a sustainable future.

### BUILDING TRAILS

One of the key issues for land owners and managers relates to unauthorised trail building. Such trail building can impact on biodiversity, land management practices and could endanger yourself or other users. If you are interested in building your own trails it is important to speak to the landowner. Many land owners and managers will be happy to discuss proposals with you helping to ensure trails are developed in a sustainable manner. Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS) can also provide advice and guidance on trail building. Please contact us on [info@dmbins.com](mailto:info@dmbins.com)

### GETTING INVOLVED

If you are interested in local access issues, especially to convey a mountain biker's perspective, you might look for opportunities to offer your advice. You may be interested in the work of the local access forum or in DMBinS clusters. We encourage you to get involved to represent the interests of mountain biking and its positive integration with land management and other interests.

### INFORMING OTHERS

If you contribute to forums and blogs, you can help inform other mountain bikers and encourage responsible mountain biking by letting them know of any land management sensitivities or works taking place and by describing route conditions. It might also be useful to detail how difficult or challenging a route is to help fellow mountain bikers in their route planning.



*“It is important mountain bikers and land owners & managers form partnerships to work together to understand each others’ needs and ensure responsible decisions are made by both parties”*

## LEARN MORE

[Try Our 'Do The Ride Thing' Interactive](#)

[Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

[Skills and Guiding Courses](#)

[Leadership Courses](#)

[Paths For All - Shared Use Guidance](#) (Coming in Late 2012/Early 2013)

[Dogs](#)

[Where To 'Go' In The Outdoors](#)

[Organising Events](#)





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