

# Caithness Riders Access Group



## *Loch More Classic*

Maximum Distance – 20 miles

Flat Hard Surface

The information contained in this pack is correct as of 23/03/2006

# *Loch More Classic*

Imagine riding along miles of quiet tracks surrounded by breathtaking scenery, passing lochs and beautiful country dwellings. This was only a dream for most Caithness riders but thanks to CRAG and some local landowners this dream has become a possibility.

**Access From:** - Mybster Inn turnoff situated on the A9 Latheron to Thurso road signposted Westerdale. This can be found just before Spittal if you are coming from Latheron or just after Spittal if coming from the Thurso side. If you come from the crossroads at Watten, follow this road for seven and half miles then go straight across at the junction ahead. Follow the single track tarmac road almost to Loch More itself. A small parking area is available just as you leave the tarmac road and turn onto the orange coloured track. Please leave the route to the forest gates clear and park on either side of the short track.

See the map on page 5 for further details.

**Signage** - Route is waymarked and clearly signposted on the ground with a map panel at the parking area.

**Distance from A9 to Start of Ride:** - Seven and half miles.

**Parking:** - Cnoc a Bhothain, room for 3 cars & trailers maximum

**Contact Telephone Numbers:** -

Scot Rail: - 01845 7484950  
If you wish to check train times

**Landowners:** -

Mr John Thurso MP Ulbster Estates Ltd  
Fountain Forestry  
RSPB Forsinard 01641 571225

## *Ride Report*

Estate road / Forestry road, undulating with no technical sections. There are superb views to Morven and Scaraben, lovely lochs and lochans, abandoned crofts and estate mansions. One of the most remote train stations in the north is along the way. Keep a look out for wildlife as it is plentiful and varied. The route is way-marked, courtesy of Highland Access Project.

This track can be ridden summer and winter. Please take care in choosing your day during the winter or following periods of prolonged rain, as frost and water-logging make the tracks very soft and prone to damage. It is worth considering that the tracks are privately maintained and that in such conditions those living and working in the

area try to limit their own use of the tracks. Generally it may be considered good practice to use the centre of the track or the verge to offset negative perceptions about damage to the track surface, especially in wet conditions. Riding on firm hard surfaces such as wide paths and tracks and well-drained ground causes few problems. On narrow routes, horse riding may cause problems for other people, such as walkers and cyclists. If this occurs, take extra care by giving way to walkers where possible.

Once on horseback head along the orange coloured track and pass along the sandy banks of Loch More, taking in the stunning beauty of the loch with the mountains towering in the background. Approximately three-quarters of a mile down the track, you will see it split two ways. The left-hand track will head across a bridge and cattle grid, and the right hand track will take you through the forest gates.

Take the right hand track and on this track you will come across 2 more cattle grids with access through side gates. These gates are accessible on horseback by the more agile rider but some people may need to dismount to open them. Carry on through the forest passing a smaller loch and head up the hill to the Altnabreac railway line. The track continues alongside the railway line for approximately one and half miles. Keep your eyes open to catch a glimpse of the stunning deer that graze beside the line. Once you reach the small railway station situated off the track on the right hand side you will notice that the track splits in two again. The left-hand track will take you across a bridge heading up to the lodge situated above the loch, take a right and you'll head off across the railway line towards Forsinain farm.

This right hand track goes for approximately 5 miles, eventually meeting the road to Forsinard, exiting at Forsinain farm. You will have to turn back and retrace your steps or arrange to be met at the other end. This is a stunning route but you will have to open another five gates if you continue the whole way to Forsinain farm. After you have crossed the railway line, the track passes through land which now belongs to the RSPB, who are in the process of clearing some of the trees to restore the peatland habitat. They have requested that riders stay on the track and do not make unnecessary stops, in order to minimise disturbance to rare birds and their habitat. The site is recognised in Europe as having extremely high conservation value and is protected by its status as a Special Area of Conservation and as a Special Protection Area. Take great care all year round to avoid damaging the route or disturbing wildlife, but especially during the bird breeding season. Access rights extend to nature reserves and other conservation areas but remember that these places are carefully managed for nature conservation and to safeguard rare animals and plants. Take care to avoid damaging the site or disturbing its wildlife, or interfering with its management or enjoyment by others. Further information can be obtained from RSPB Forsinard. When you come out of the forest, you can stop at the river Halladale near the end of the track, where there is a ford and nice grassy area, ideal for a picnic for horse and rider! The distance from the parking area at Loch More to Forsinain farm is approximately 15 miles. You can also park on ground belonging to the RSPB beside the A897 Helmsdale-Strath Halladale road, should you wish to arrange to be picked up, but please first contact Norrie Russel, RSPB Forsinard to check that this is alright. Alternatively, you can ride down to Forsinard (approximately 3 miles) and be picked up at the hotel where there is ample parking space.

If you decide to take the left-hand track across the bridge, head up through the forest and be prepared for the sight that will meet you as you turn the corner. The majestic beauty of Altnabreac Lodge situated on the hill overlooking the loch will take your

breath away. If you are looking for a good fast canter, turn left straight after the lodge and you will have 2 miles of sandy tracks to canter along. This is a no-through route, however, so you will have to retrace your steps. Carrying on past the lodge, another set of forest gates meet you leading out of the forest and through the open moorland. The track here turns slightly stony but the views are amazing. If you continue along this track you will eventually come to a T-Junction. Turning left will take you towards your starting point and past a farm and dog kennels so be prepared for lots of barking dogs. Don't worry, though, as the keeper is friendly and the kennels are always locked. This track follows the river and will eventually take you back to the bridge and cattle grid you saw many miles ago as you set off.

All the tracks mentioned are used by local people so expect to meet some vehicles. During the week, the Forestry workers may be working in the forests with heavy machinery.

Also watch out for the train and take great care in crossing the railway!

### **Caithness Riders Access Group Code of Conduct**

**We would advise anyone planning to ride any route to walk it and assess if it is suitable for them to ride before taking their horse out on it.**

Riders should always proceed with courtesy, care and consideration for all other users and landowners.

Remember that hooves can damage surfaces in wet conditions and after frost. Always try to ride on the middle of the track or the verge.

Be aware that others can be frightened of horses; stop, or proceed with caution, and do not canter past them. Whenever possible acknowledge courtesy shown by other users, especially to drivers of motor vehicles.

Leave all gates as you find them.

Park horseboxes carefully and always leave access points clear.

Clear up all droppings from parking areas.

Take your rubbish and litter home.

Ensure that you and your horse are clearly visible to others.

### **General Information**

During the week, forestry workers may be operating machinery in the forest. Read any signs warning you of forest operations such as tree-felling and extraction and follow any precautions taken by the land manager. This will ensure that you do not hinder these operations and ensure your safety and that of people working there. In

some cases, signs may indicate that it is safe to go along a route if the activity has stopped such as for a weekend.

Beware of the dogs in their kennels when passing Dalnawillan Lodge.

One part of the track passes within 40 feet of the railway line, so it might be a good idea to check out train times before you leave on your ride.

Caithness Riders Access Group is grateful for the information and assistance provided by the landowners in the area, including Fountain Forestry, the RSPB and Ulbster estates Ltd. The Group is also grateful to the Highland Access Project for supplying the signage.

Grouse Shooting & Deer Stalking go on at the designated times of the year. Deer stalking in the forested areas may be undertaken all year round although stalking tends to occur in the early evening or late afternoon. During these times you may not be able to ride the full circular 20 mile route except on Sundays. Relevant posters or information will be displayed in the parking area in the red information panel, although watch out for other information in the area. You will be able to ride the forest route starting by turning right through the forest gates.



**Know the Code before you go ....**

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors. Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water for recreation, education and for going from place to place providing they act responsibly. These access rights and responsibilities are explained in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The key things are:

**When you're in the outdoors:**

- take personal responsibility for your own actions and act safely;
- respect people's privacy and peace of mind;
- help land managers and others to work safely and effectively;
- care for your environment and take your litter home;
- keep your dog under proper control;
- take extra care if you're organising an event or running a business.

**If you're managing the outdoors:**

- respect access rights;

- act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations;
- work with your local authority and other bodies to help integrate access and land management
- respect rights of way and customary access

Find out more by visiting [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com) or phoning your local Scottish Natural Heritage office.

The attached map shows how to get there

