

A D V E N T U R E BIKE RIDER

The TomTom guide to Britain's HIGHEST ROADS



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Britain's HIGHEST ROADS

Welcome to the TomTom guide to the highest roads in the British Isles. When the SatNav company launched their new Rider 400 they approached ABR with a simple vision. 'We want to offer riders inspiring ideas and challenges to help them get the most enjoyment out of their time on two wheels', which was something we wholeheartedly supported.

Our first thought was to look over the Channel for little known undiscovered destinations, incredible scenery and the best roads Europe had to offer. We started with the obvious – the highest Alpine passes, and moved onto the more obscure, the best European Islands. Then someone asked the question, 'by the way, what's the highest pass in the British Isles?' At this stage I'd better point out that this piece isn't about the highest roads but the highest passes.

Well, we could all name the highest mountains in each country and the second highest, in fact we even managed to pin point the top three when we pooled our efforts. But you know, not one of us was sure what the highest pass in the British Isles was, let alone in each of the five countries.

So the idea developed, 'what about a guide to the three highest passes in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland?' Better still, let's also throw in the highest green lane for riders who prefer their


adventures to include a splash of off-road. What both TomTom and us liked about this idea was that it also coincided with a new 'Highest Roads' feature on the Rider 400 where you could select a destination and then tell the device to take you via the highest route. Perfect.

We searched on the net, consulted OS maps and the list was made. What wasn't surprising was that the passes were where we guessed they'd be – in the mountainous areas of the British Isles. But they were not so easy to find, especially those in Northern Ireland and Eire where internet searches offered no or limited answers. For example even our Northern Irish motorcycle contact had no idea of the highest pass in his country.

In time the list was compiled and plotted on a map at which point we realised that we'd probably created the best motorcycle tour of the British Isles, taking in the finest mountain scenery and, even though it was not the objective, the best motorcycling roads.

Whether you want to tick them off one by one or head out on a multi-day round the British Isles tour to knock them off in one hit you're in for a treat with the TomTom guide to the highest roads in the British Isles.

Enjoy the ride



Alun

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Beautiful Britain: fantastic roads and scenery
en-route to Bwlch-y-Groes pass in Wales



WALES' HIGHEST PASSES

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points:
Llanvihangel Crucorney; Hay on Wye

Height: 549m

Incline: No real steep bits but very narrow approach roads

Length: 18 miles



1. Gospel Pass, 549m

I'd have bet money on the highest passes in Wales being up north in the Snowdonia National Park but it's the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons in South Wales where you'll find the rarest altitude.

Unfortunately the old Roman Road known as the Gap Road which tops out at 599m between the highest peaks of the Beacons is no longer legal to ride but the Gospel Pass at the western end of the Black Mountains makes up for the disappointment.

Starting off in Llanvihangel Crucorney, where you'll find the oldest Inn in Wales, the singletrack road heads north through the beautiful Vale of Ewyas following the Afon Honddu river. This is surely one of the finest stretches of scenic road in the country as you head up the steep sided valley with the road becoming progressively narrower and the hedges higher.

At the midway point you'll find the ruins of Llanthony Priory where you can stop and take in the history and refreshments at the café. Continuing north from the Priory the road is a treat, if not a little dangerous, with blind singletrack corners where any oncoming traffic is not visible until the last moment and passing places, even for motorcycles, are at a premium.

After the small village of Capel-y-Ffin the incline increases and you leave the lower wooded stretches and enter high moorland with the pass in view at the head of the valley. The view from the pass is stunning as it extends into Mid Wales and the Welsh Marches whilst way down in the valley you can pick out the world famous town of Hay on Wye.

The run down to Hay on Wye is just as entertaining, first traversing the northern flanks of Hay Bluff (677m) where you'll cross the Offas Dyke Hiking Trail followed by high moorland with wild ponies grazing at the side of the road. The road then steepens and closes in as it descends and once again care needs to be taken for oncoming traffic.

Hay on Wye is famous for book shops and the annual Hay Festival which is one of the top literary festivals in the world. It's a great place to stop for refreshments and for a mooch around the town, discovering all those books you thought you'd never want.

If you're into off-road riding stay an extra day; the Begwns just to the north of Hay are criss crossed with green lanes.





2. Bwlch-y-Groes, 545m



Placing Bala as the start point for the Bwlch-y-Groes Pass means that you can ride up the Cwm Hirnant, one of the best high valley rides in Wales, before dropping down to Lake Vyrnwy and the start of the single track up to Bwlch-y-Groes.

Three roads converge just below the summit of the pass; from Dinas Mawddwy in the south, Llanuwchllyn in the north and the lake road from the west. Whichever road you use you'll not be disappointed, the steep sided valley scenery is simply stunning in all directions.

Originally a pilgrim route linking north and south west Wales Bwlch-y-Groes (Pass of the Cross) is also known as Hellfire Pass and was used by both the old Austin Motor Company and motorcycle manufacturers Triumph and BSA as a testing ground for new cars and bikes.

From Lake Vyrnwy the singletrack starts at the westernmost point of the lake riding up from the Eunant Fawr valley onto moorland where the views open out to include the Afen Dyfi valley and the steep sided scree slopes of Graig y Pant. It's well worth taking a diversion down the steep road into the valley before heading back up the pass to Llanuwchllyn.



THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Bala; Llanuwchllyn

Height: 545m

Incline: Moderate single track with loose gravel in paths

Length: 26 miles

3. Dol-y-Moch, 531m



This is a little gem of a road. Having spent the best part of 30 years visiting the Snowdonia National Park as a hiker, mountain biker and motorcycle rider I have to confess that I only discovered the Dol-y-Moch single track pass when researching for this feature. If nothing else this only goes to

show there's so much in our own back yard just waiting to be discovered.

Starting off from Llanuwchllyn, to the south of Lake Bala, a single track road heads up the Afon Lliw valley into what must be one of the least visited parts of the National Park. The road is gated in parts as it raises up to open land and sheep grazing country – keep a careful eye out for the woolybacks, they were in suicide mode when we rode through.

The view to the north is dominated by Arenig Fawr (854m) and Moel Llyfnant (751m) until you reach the high point where the dramatic ridge line of the Rhinogs come into view. The drop down west takes you over the old Roman Road of Sarn Helen and to the mountain bike park at Coed y Brenin, where motorcyclists can take on a few legal green lanes.



THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Llanuwchllyn; Bronaber

Height: 531m

Incline: Moderate single track with gates

Length: 12 miles

HIGHEST GREEN LANE

The Wayfarer, 580m



The Wayfarer is an old drovers trail that crosses the Berwyn Mountains in North Wales. The track runs east-west topping out at 580m with glorious views towards the main Snowdonia ranges to the west and the 784m high Cadair Bronwen to the south.

Setting out from Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceirog in the east the first few miles are along a single track tarmac lane which runs straight

into the Wayfarer trail. On the first section you gain height on rocky but easy ground.

After a couple of miles you cross a small bridge and the route splits with the harder section going right up a short but steep climb followed by a section with deep 4x4 ruts. The left trail has less of an incline and is easier going.

You cross a short boggy section on duck-boards and continue up a rocky climb to the apex of the pass where you'll find a metal box containing a summit log book.

The descent to the east appears to have been subject to remedial work and after a mile or so the track splits. The most interesting trail heads down and to the left which drops over some rocky ground to a stream before skirting the northern flank of Moel Peace where there can be some deep water splashes. The drop down into Llandrillo is a lovely run but there are a lot of gates. The alternative route to the right is on far easier ground.

THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceirog; Llandrillo

Height: 580m

Incline: Rocky and can be very boggy. Big bike friendly in dry conditions for competent off road riders

Length: 10 miles



ENGLAND'S HIGHEST PASSES

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: St John's Chapel; Langdon Beck

Height: 627m

Incline: Moderate on south side a little steep to the north

Length: 5 miles

1. Langdon Fell, 627m



What have the Romans ever done for us? Well, they did build High Street, the Roman Road in the Lake District which is also the highest recorded 'pass' in the UK topping out at 815m at its summit. However, High Street has long been off limits to motorised vehicles and is the domain of walkers so we have to drop down to 674m for Grasshill Causeway to find the highest legal pass for motorcycles in England.

Grasshill Causeway is for the most part tarmac on its northern approach though the final run up to the summit and all of the southern slope are rough, rocky trails better described as a green lane rather than what most people would consider a road.

For the highest all-tarmac pass we have to descend further to 627m and Langdon Fell, also known as Harthop Moss and sometimes Chapel Fell, where we also find a little controversy. Depending on who and what you consult Langdon Fell is sometimes quoted as being joint highest pass in England sharing the accolade with nearby Killhope Cross. Statos have been known to come to blows over the matter but having used a GPS at the apex of both we're declaring Langdon as the highest at 627m and Killhope second at 623m. Let the debate commence.

Langdon Fell is a minor road which connects the A689 at St John's Chapel in the upper Weardale Valley with the B6277 near Langdon Beck in the upper Teesdale Valley. The road itself is only 5.3 miles in length but fortunately for riders travelling to Langdon Fell involves riding through the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one of the most scenic areas of England.

Designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1988, the North Pennine uplands are essentially high moorland scarred by deep dales (valleys) which contain rare Arctic alpine plants, remnants of the period post the last ice age when the region would have been Arctic tundra similar to that found in northern Scandinavia today.

Nearby highlights include a visit to High Force, a waterfall on the River Tees, near Middleton in Teesdale with a drop of 22m, and Cauldron Snout a cataract of 180m which is said to be the longest waterfall in England.



2. Killhope Cross, 623m



There may be some debate about which is the highest pass in England with some claiming a tie between Killhope Cross and Langdon Fell at 627m. What is not contested is that Killhope Cross is the highest section of A road in England with the A689, from Hartlepool to Carlisle topping out on Killhope, which also forms the boundary of County Durham and Cumbria

With the Langdon Fell pass just 10 miles to the east and third place Black Hill (609m) a few miles to the north west knocking off the three highest passes in England can be done in short order. However, it's exploring the wild open moors, scenic dales and charming villages of the region which will have most appeal.

Visitors to the area may be surprised to know that the Weardale and nearby Teesdale valleys were once the centre for lead mining in the UK. The hills, moors and valleys are littered with old shafts, quarries and works non more so than Killhope where you'll find the North of England Lead Mining Museum between Killhope Cross and the nearby village of Cowhill. Closed in 1910 the mine was briefly reopened in 1916, during the First World War, and reconstructed in the 1980s for public access.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Nenthead; Cowhill

Height: 623m

Incline: Easy A road on both sides

Length: 5 miles

HIGHEST GREEN LANE

Grasshill Causeway, 674m



Grasshill Causeway, or Coldberry End as it's sometimes known, is the highest legal through-road or pass in England. Tarmac in parts and rough, rocky trail for the rest it's what we'd term as a green lane rather than a road.

If you're up for riding a section of off-road trail then Grasshill Causeway can be completed as part of a round of the three highest tarmac passes in England. Indeed, the start point from the northern Weardale village of Ireshopeburn is only a hop, skip and jump from St, John's Chapel, the junction for the Langdon Fell pass.

Taking the side road heading west from the centre of the Ireshopeburn village continue on tarmac with the Burnhope Reservoir on your right hand side. After a couple of gates the road starts to break up and becomes a trail as you approach the summit of the pass. You're rewarded with fantastic views in all directions from the high point.

Continuing south into the Teesdale valley the trail becomes more rocky and if you're going to struggle then this will be the section. For a competent rider in good weather it's big adventure bike friendly and worth the effort.

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Ireshopeburn; Harwood (B6277)

Height: 674m

Incline: North side moderate south side loose rock and steeper

Length: 5 miles



3. Black Hill, 609m



Black Hill overlooks the village of Nenthead and is a border marker between Cumbria and Northumbria. The pass can be reached by either a tarmac road or a green lane starting from Nenthead or a combination of both - the green lane is easy going and big bike friendly.

Once again we find ourselves in the North Pennine Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and close to what once was a major mining area. Nenthead was one of the earliest purpose built industrial villages dating back to the mid-18th Century when lead and silver mining took hold. Nenthead also claimed to be the highest village in England, topping out at 1,500ft or 457m, but is surprisingly overlooked by the village of Flash in Staffordshire which stands at the heady height of 1,518ft (462m)

If travelling on the A689 from Alston to find the Black Hill pass road you'll need to pass through Nenthead and then take the first left turn after leaving the village. The high spot is about a mile up this road which continues to Coalcleugh and onto Allenheads.

Once again, you really can't take a bad road around this area and discovering the scenery and villages is a pleasure.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Nenthead; Allenheads

Height: 609m

Incline: Moderate - green lane option steeper

Length: 7 miles

SCOTLAND'S HIGHEST PASSES

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Spittal of Glenshee; Braemar

Height: 627m

Incline: Easy going

Length: 15 miles



1. The Cairnwell, 670m

The Cairnwell Pass (Scottish Gaelic: Càrn a' Bhailg) is a mountain pass on the A93 road between Glen Shee, Perthshire, and Braemar, Aberdeenshire, in the eastern Scottish Highlands. It's such a spectacular route through some of the most dramatic scenery in the

British Isles that it has become a regular location for new motorcycle launches and photo-shoots.

The pass signifies the border between the two counties of Aberdeenshire and Perthshire and at its apex is the highest legal through road in the British Isles including Ireland. There are two higher passes, the Corrieyairack Pass (770m) and the Loch Builg Road (729m) though both are subject to Scottish access law and are closed to motorised vehicles.

Historically, the Cairnwell Pass was a drover's route from the Lowlands to the Highlands. It became a 'road' during the 1700s as part of the extensive military road building exercise to allow the Government to deploy forces rapidly to locations in the Highlands if there was a Jacobite rebellion. The pass is now best known as being the home of Scotland's largest and oldest ski centre - The Glenshee Ski Centre.

A mile south of the apex is the Devil's Elbow, a once notorious double-hairpin bend with an often-quoted gradient of 33 percent (1 in 3). The reality is more prosaic, being 17% (1 in 6). The modern road bypasses the old hairpin bends, but the old road still exists and its route can be picked out.

From Perth in the south you follow the A93 north through Bridge of Cally and the Spittal of Glenshee at the southern extent of the Cairngorms National Park. From the Spittal the views become increasingly spectacular as you head up the valley to the Cairnwell pass and on to Braemar. From Braemar the natural extension is to head north to the A939 and The Lecht, the second highest pass in Scotland and the British Isles.

The Cairngorms National Park is the largest national park in the UK, containing a big section of the Grampian Mountain range and the Cairngorms themselves, which start to the north of Braemar. Whilst there are no roads through the Cairngorms if you're into hiking it's worth making the effort to trek up on the plateaux, which is said to be the last surviving area of Britain that can be termed Arctic Tundra. This is high and wild country at its best.

2. The Lecht, 635m



There's a lot packed into the 31 miles from Braemar in the south to Tomintoul in the north via the Lecht pass. Nine miles out of Braemar on the A93 you'll come across Balmoral Castle and the visitor centre. It's a worth while refreshment stop even for committed republicans.

From Balmoral take the B976 to join the A939 and prepare yourself for a treat. The A939, as it raises through the twisties out of Cock Bridge and follows the perfect line up the crest of a prominent ridge dropping down from Meikle Corr Riabhach (779m), is one of the most stunning rides in Britain. This section of road compels you to open the throttle but I'm always too busy taking in the scenery to engage with any speed.

Next up comes a steep sided valley and the Lecht Ski Centre with tows to either side of the road and a further seven miles on you'll find yourself in Tomintoul, which at 345m is said to be the highest village in the Highlands though probably more famous for its whisky – the Glenlivet Estate is nearby.

The magnificent A939 through Lecht is another strip of tarmac following one of the historic military roads.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Braemar; Tomintoul

Height: 635m

Incline: Easy A road on both sides

Length: 31 miles

3. Bealach na Ba, 626m



The Bealach na Ba is far better known as 'The Road to Applecross' a small village on the west coast of Scotland and a Mecca for motorcycle riders.

The pass itself is one of the best 'Alpine' stretches of road in the British Isles, but when combined with the ride to the start and

away from the village of Applecross it compares with the best rides found anywhere in the world. Put simply, a motorcycle tour up the west coast of Scotland is a must.

From the junction at Tornapress the road overlooks Loch Kishorn before turning west to ascend the dramatic, steep and rocky slopes of Coire na Ba. It tops out with a series of tight, steep bends just before the apex of the Bealach na Ba.

The singletrack down to Applecross is scenic throughout with views across the water to the Isles of Raasay and Skye. Steep in parts and narrow throughout care needs to be taken, especially with oncoming traffic. From sea level to 626m the road boasts the greatest ascent of any road climb in the British Isles.

A visit to the Applecross Inn and a tour of the peninsular to Torridon are must do's.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Tornapress; Applecross

Height: 626m

Incline: Steep in parts, narrow singletrack

Length: 11 miles

THE HIGHEST MILITARY ROAD



Corrieairack Pass, 770m

The Corrieairack Pass, originally built as a military road by General Wade in 1731, leads across the Monadhliath mountains from Laggan in Badenoch to Fort Augustus on Loch Ness.

There are two notices at the start at the Fort Augustus end. One tells you that the road over the pass is now an ancient monument and is in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland (Historic Scotland), it is an offence to damage it. Another notice, by Highland Council, says that motor vehicles are prohibited. There are also barriers and notices at the southern end.

On the face of it, you'd think that riding the Corrieairack Pass was against the law, and that is most probably the case. However, recent communications between access officers and the general public are not specific and are open to question. No doubt the matter will be the subject of a court case at some point in the future and a legally definitive answer will be provided.

Historically the pass was used before the military road by cattle drovers. Once the road was completed the pass was crossed more regularly. Probably the most regular users of the road over the pass nowadays will be mountain bikers, hikers and the engineers who service the line of electricity pylons that follow the route. Their vehicles are exempted from the order that prohibits motor vehicles.

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Tornapress; Applecross

Height: 626m

Incline: Steep in parts, narrow singletrack

Length: 11 miles

NORTHERN IRELAND'S HIGHEST PASSES

Who's the best person to write about the highest passes in Ireland?
Geoff Hill, of course. At 6ft 7ins, he's already the highest Hill in the country.

1. Spelga Dam, Mourne Mountains, Co Down, 365m



Most visitors to Ireland think that the water supply falls out of the sky, but we have to collect it somewhere in case the Guinness runs out, and in 1894 the burghers of Belfast had the idea of building Spelga Dam to supply the capital with water. Builders being what they are, it was finally started in 1953, and today the result is a serene and lonely lake which is home to wild trout.

It and the dam are also the end point of a choice of lovely rides up from the coast road, which in itself is a great run south from Belfast through the seaside resort of Newcastle, with its grand Victorian era Slieve Donard Hotel. If you're feeling peckish, stay on the coast road to Annalong where The Galley does among the best fish and chips in Northern Ireland.

If you don't then just double back a couple of miles to the Quarter Road and turn inland as suggested. After that you're on an upsy-downsy B road past little white cottages with signs outside offering the giddy delights of duck eggs for sale, and sheep grazing in pocket handkerchief fields bounded by dry stone walls, then past the Silent Valley, another reservoir which is a lovely spot for a picnic.

You can either take the way I've suggested inland, or for more sweeping and faster A-roads through the mountains from the coast road, just past Dundrum follow the signs for Bryansford, with a potential two-mile side trip to Castlewellan, which has excellent gardens and a maze.

Either way, when you get to the dam and the lake formed by it, downhill from the main road you'll see the old road which ran through the now drowned valley, spookily ending at the water's edge.

And behind the dam you'll find the Magic Hill, where a bike or car left in neutral will appear to run uphill. Scientists will tell you that this is an optical illusion caused by the lie of the land, but locals know the truth. It's the fairies. Either way, it's a great way to save fuel.

After you leave, you can then take one of the roads back to the coast or continue on to Hilltown and Newry down a well-surfaced road with nice twisties, especially if you're heading south via Dublin to the Sally Gap, the highest pass in the Republic of Ireland.

▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Rathfriland; Kilkeel

Height: 365m

Incline: From sea level, but fairly gentle

Length: 16 miles

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND'S HIGHEST PASSES

1. Sally Gap, Co Wicklow, 496m



The road through Sally Gap, through the Wicklow Mountains south of Dublin, was built by the British Army to make it easier to flush rebels from the hills after the Irish rebellion of 1798, and to this day is known as the Military Road.

These days, rather than giving the army a better view of the rebels, it provides spectacular views of the Glencree valley,

the dark waters of Lough Tay, Kippure Mountain and Glenmacnass Waterfall.

Glencree's Visitor Centre, originally built to house soldiers guarding the pass, was used to house German prisoners of war during the First World War, when Ireland was still part of the UK. During the Second World War, when Ireland was neutral, Glencree housed Luftwaffe pilots who crashed in Ireland as well as German agents who were captured trying to plan anti-British activities with the IRA.

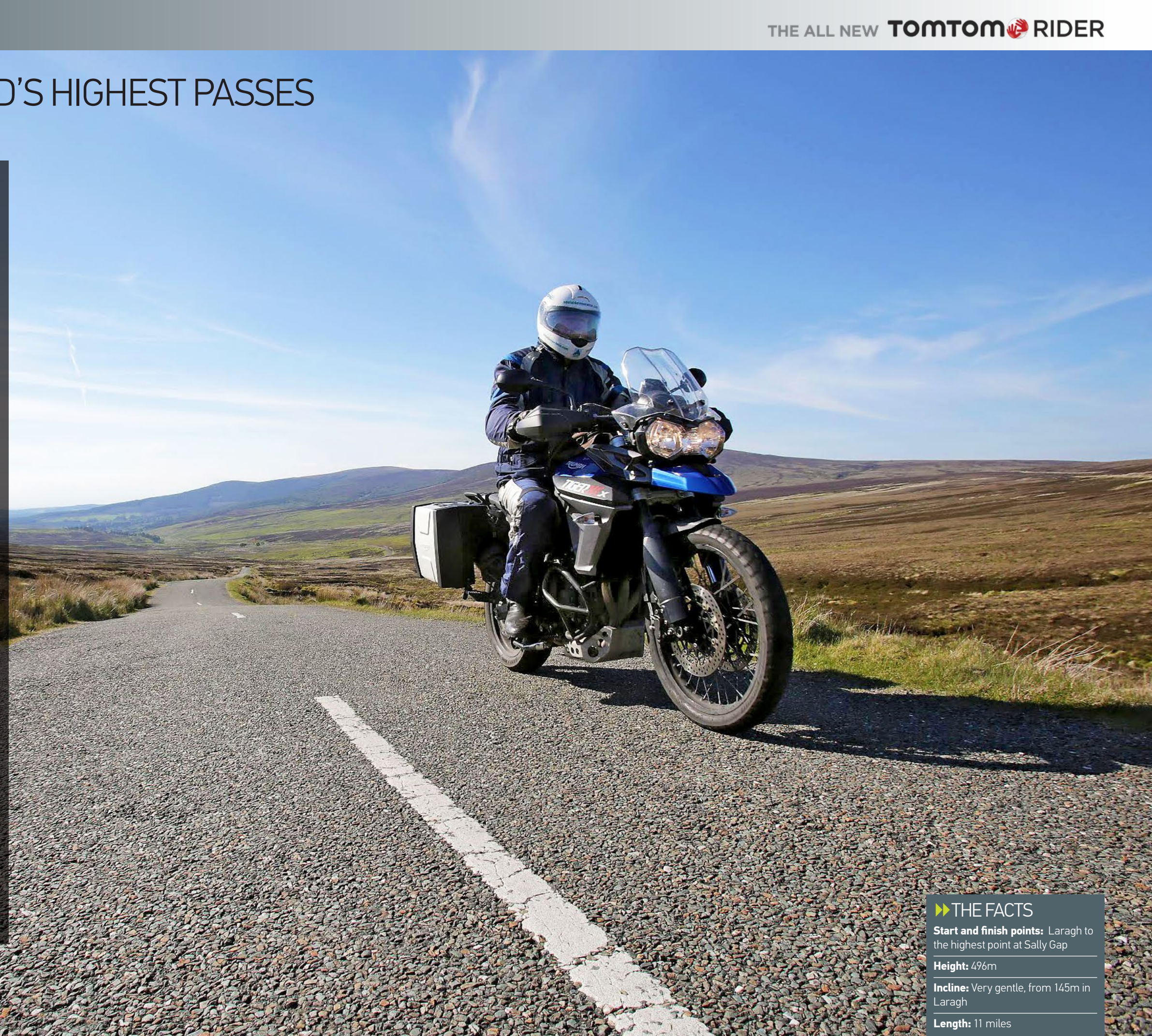
Another great spot in the area is the ancient monastic settlement at Glendalough. Monks arrived in this beautiful wooded river valley in the 6th Century for a bit of peace and quiet. Unfortunately they forgot to tell the Vikings, who raided the monastery four times, the Normans, who pillaged it once, and Henry VIII, who finished the job with the Reformation. Today, it's one of the best preserved monastic sites in Ireland.

Also worth a visit are the magnificent formal gardens at Powerscourt the inspired fabrics and colours at reinvented traditional weavers Avoca and Avoca village itself, the setting for the Ballykissangel TV series.

And the ride? The road from Dublin is motorway and dual carriageway, then well-surfaced open sweeping single carriageway through the hills, sundappled woods, lakes and rivers of Wicklow, Dublin's back garden, to the pretty villages of Roundwood and Laragh. In Laragh, follow the Sally Gap sign over the high moors on a decent and twisty B road. Stop halfway at Glenmacnass Waterfall for a great photo.

If you want to stay locally, Aughavannagh Cottage, beautifully restored by owner Dave Deighan, is up a leafy lane in a wooded valley with a stream burbling through the garden.

What to see: To the north, Glencree and the fabulous gardens of Powerscourt Estate. To the south, the ancient monastic site of Glendalough. On the road itself to the Gap, halfway up is Glenmacnass waterfall, tumbling into an emerald valley with a white farmhouse for a view which begs to be photographed. Or just admired.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Laragh to the highest point at Sally Gap

Height: 496m

Incline: Very gentle, from 145m in Laragh

Length: 11 miles

2. Glenshane Pass, Co Derry, 288m



If you're looking for twisties, look elsewhere; the Glenshane Pass has just one sweeping corner, but it makes up for that with great views to the west of ancient white farm-houses, emerald meadows, shadowy woods and grazing sheep, and to the east the glittering expanse of Lough Neagh and the Sperrin

Mountains beyond.

It's named after Shane Crossagh Ó Maoláin, a notorious highwayman, who roamed there in the late 17th Century. However, these days, it's a peaceful scene, and best of all, at the top of it you'll find the Ponderosa, at 947ft above sea level the highest pub and restaurant in Ireland.

There's been a pub here since 1858, but its current name comes from the Seventies TV series Bonanza. Best of all, it's been recently gutted and refurbished by new owner Karl McErlean, a keen biker local boy made good, who's based in China as president of the huge GIII Apparel Group, whose 237 factories, among other things, make Man Utd's replica kit.

Apart from the Ponderosa, if you're heading on to Derry, stay in the beautifully restored and friendly Saddler's House or Merchant's House and treat yourself to dinner in the brilliant Brown's.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Maghera and Dungiven

Height: 288m

Incline: Gentle

Length: 13 miles

2. Priest's Leap, Co Kerry, 462m



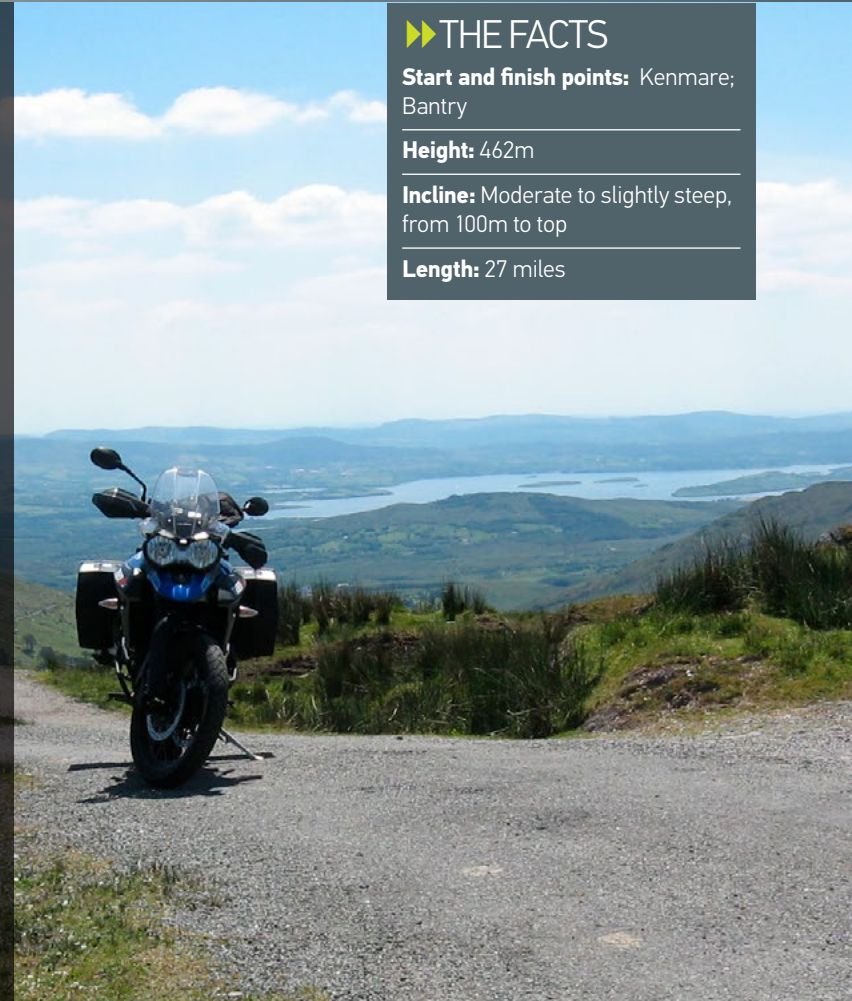
When Ireland was under British rule, Catholic masses were banned, and being a priest was not the healthiest of occupations. Pursued by soldiers across the mountains, one spurred his horse to make a miraculous leap from a peak in Kerry into neighbouring Cork.

Today, stand by the stone which marks where the horse took off, gaze down at the fabulous view of Bantry Bay, and let your imagination wander...

The road there from Dublin via Cork is motorway, turning into dual carriageway then A road to Kenmare, an attractive town of pastel buildings with lots of good restaurants and lively nightlife. It's a good spot to base yourself for exploring the Ring of Kerry, a great ride, or the forests and lakes of Killarney.

From there, take the N71 south for six miles towards Skibbereen, then turn left at the sign for Priest's Leap up three miles of very minor road. The first mile is tarmac, the next farm track and the last hard-packed gravel which looks mildly intimidating in places but is a doddle even for wusses like me.

And once you get there, the view of Bantry Bay from the pass is Stunning and lots of sheep wearing oxygen masks because of the altitude.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Kenmare; Bantry

Height: 462m

Incline: Moderate to slightly steep, from 100m to top

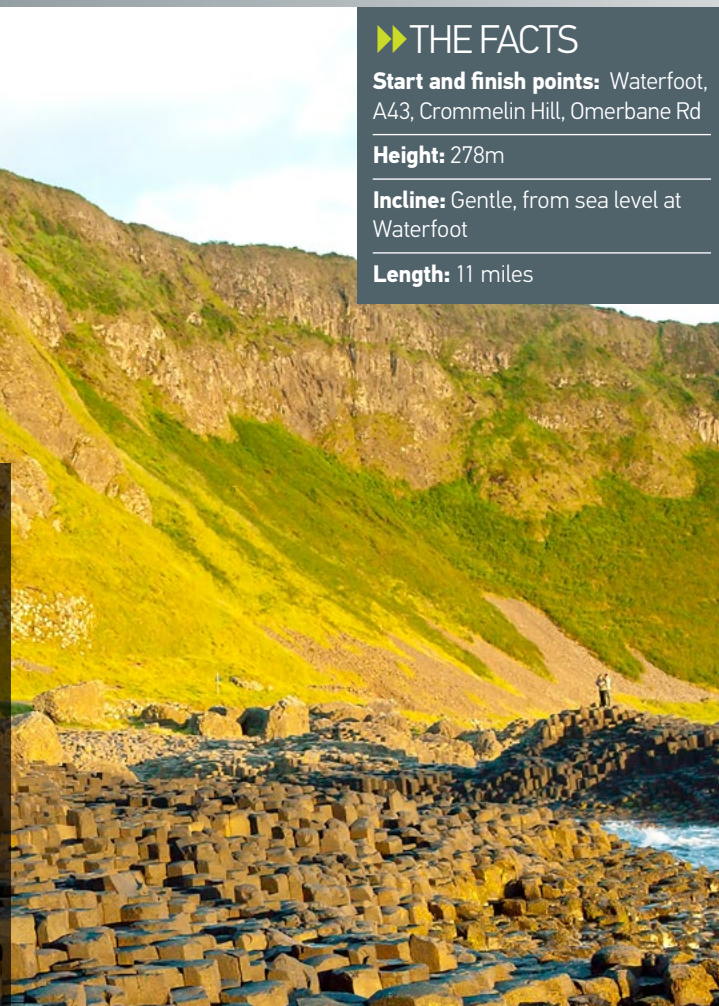
Length: 27 miles

3. Skerry West Road, Co Antrim, 278m



An inland diversion from the fabulous Causeway Coastal Route between Belfast and the Giant's Causeway this takes you up through Glenariff, the so-called Queen of the nine glens of Antrim, through lovely Glenariff Forest Park.

Once you're there, you can continue on gravel road to almost 1,200ft, but either way, the coastal views are glorious. After six miles, stop at Glenariff Forest Park and take the scenic Waterfall Walk through forest glades and past splashing falls.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Waterfoot, A43, Crommelin Hill, Omebane Rd

Height: 278m

Incline: Gentle, from sea level at Waterfoot

Length: 11 miles

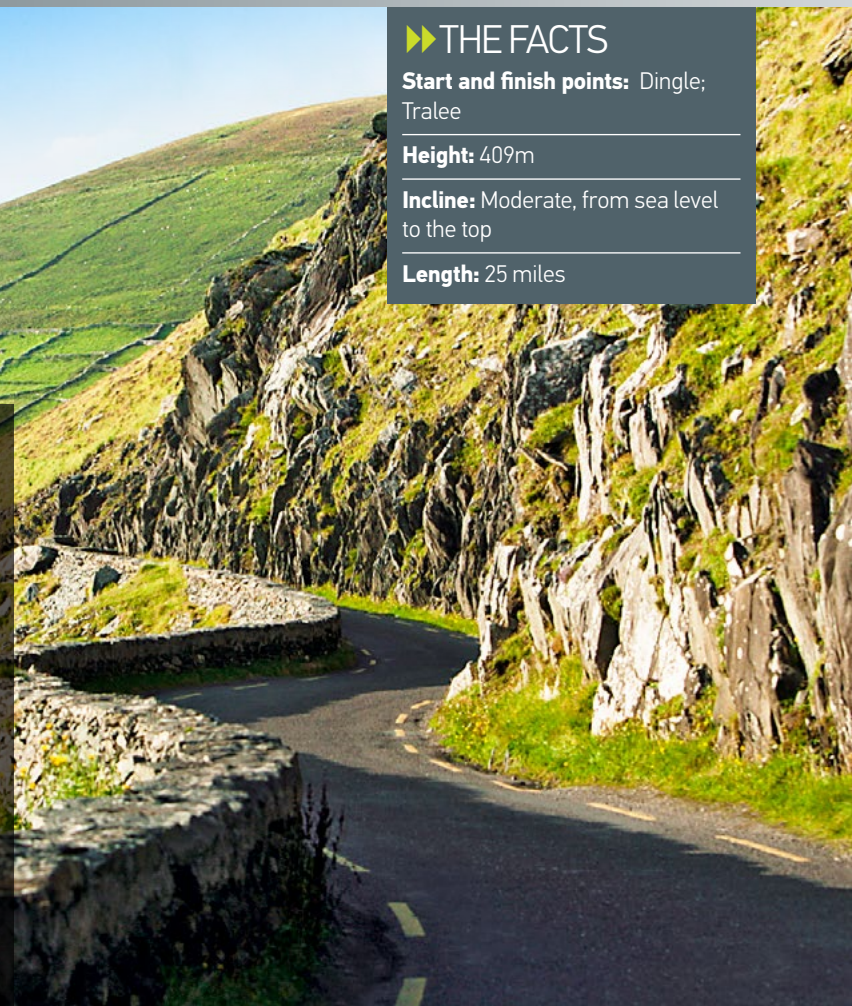
3. Conor Pass, Co Kerry, 409m



With its sinuous symphony of curves soaring up the mountain from Dingle and down the other side, this is a glorious biking road.

Start in Dingle, take a spin around Sleah Head past the beach where Sarah Miles cavorted in *Ryan's Daughter*, then climb on. You're in for a treat.

In Dingle, take a boat out to see Fungi the dolphin, who's been entertaining visitors for the best part of 25 years. Sample the huge whiskey collection in Dick Mack's tiny, atmospheric pub and eat at the fabulous Global Village restaurant.



▶▶ THE FACTS

Start and finish points: Dingle; Tralee

Height: 409m

Incline: Moderate, from sea level to the top

Length: 25 miles

RIDE YOUR WAY



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