

The top of Mamore Gap: check your brakes now!

# Inis Eoghain hundred

Dave Atkinson nips across the Irish border for a scenic lap of the Inishowen peninsula...



Inishowen, at the top of Donegal, offers fantastic opportunities for beautiful and testing coastal riding. What's more, the area has an officially sanctioned and (mostly) well signed route that's perfect for everything from a day's hard graft to a long weekend of sightseeing.

It's technically a scenic route for cars, but don't let that put you off; as soon as you're off the main road sections you're likely to go without seeing another vehicle, or person, for hours. And once you've ground out the lumpy miles to Malin Head, struggling against headwinds that have had nothing to batter for thousands of miles, you'll get that wilderness feeling that all end-of-the-

road locations share, wherever in the world they may be.

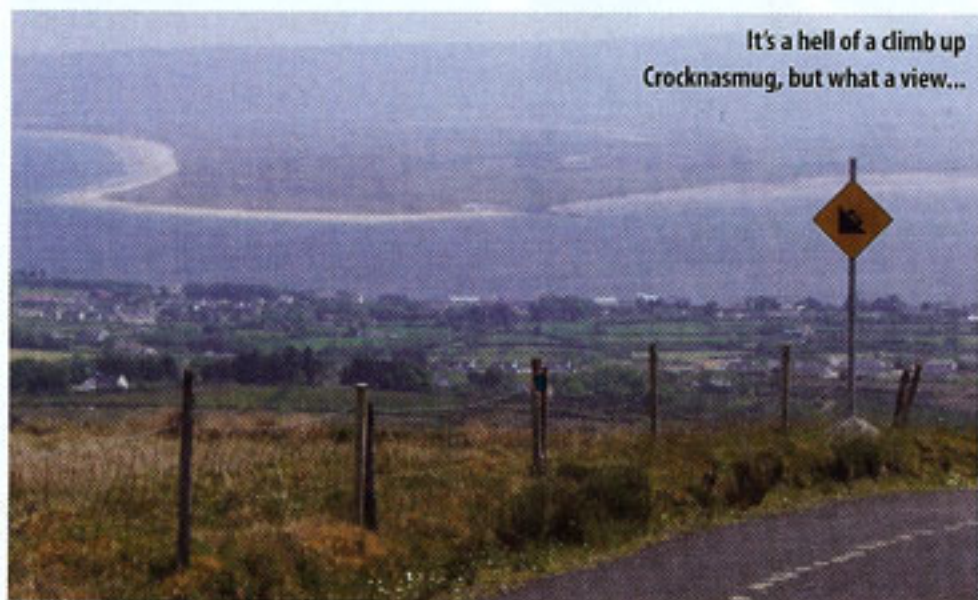
The loop starts in Muff, by a big sign next to the Texaco station. It's fairly standard main road fare until Buncrana, where the route loops back and climbs over the headlands towards Fort Dunree. Skirting along the side of the Urris Hills, the road saunters into a huge glacial valley, and the only way out seems to be straight on up a seemingly endless climb. The good news is that you'll soon notice a left turn: this is the route, not the road straight ahead. The bad news? This is the Mamore Gap, a true killer of an ascent, straight up the side of the valley for 2km, hitting 25% at its

steepest. Wondering where all the hairpins are? They're on the other side, making the descent to Dunaff a truly joyous (and dangerous) thing. Check your brakes...

Through Ballyliffin and Carndonagh the roads are flatter and wider, before Malin and the push to the Head. This is physically and mentally tough – a loop of steep climbs and vicious headwinds to Nowheresville and back. It's truly beautiful though, which must be why people would choose to rent a static caravan here, and there are plenty to choose from! And the steep climb up the dead end road to the most northerly point? Like Samuel Johnson once said of the Giant's Causeway: worth seeing, yes, but not worth going to see.

Back over the hills via Culdaff is hard going, and the last tough section to Stoove features a steep drop to a beautiful secluded cove, and a real grind to the top of Crocknasmug that's repaid with unbelievable views over Lough Foyle. The coast road back to Muff is flat and not particularly busy, and Greencastle and Moville offer plenty of chances to get a final pint before home. ■

It's a hell of a climb up Crocknasmug, but what a view...



## Inishowen facts

**Distance** 100 miles

**Duration** 1 day or a weekend

**Maps** OS Ireland Discovery 3

**Getting there** Muff is about 10 miles from Londonderry, with good road connections to Northern Ireland and Eire. The nearest ferry terminal is Larne, train connections to Londonderry are available from Larne and Dublin.

**Route directions** The route is fully signposted, but there are a couple of places where it's not obvious. It's a good idea to mark the route on your map at the start using the big sign by the Texaco station in Muff as a guide. Sometimes the signs just have the viewpoint symbol and an arrow.

**Eating and drinking** There are plenty of pubs on the route, some of which serve food. Carndonagh is the obvious choice for a halfway stop.

**Where to stay** Inishowen has lots of B&Bs, see [www.ireland-ac.com/donegal](http://www.ireland-ac.com/donegal) for a list. There are hostels in Moville and on Malin Head.

**Bike shops** Take a decent toolkit with you because the nearest bike shops are in Londonderry (10 miles).

**Organised riding** The Foyle Cycling Club organise a mass ride of the route every year at the end of August, with a couple of hundred completing the course.

[www.foylecycling.net](http://www.foylecycling.net)