

WEST HIGHLAND WAY

Notes on multi-use access

The West Highland Way was one of Scotland's four original long distance routes. Now one of Scotland's Great Trails, it is renowned world-wide for the spectacular scenery it passes through along its 96 mile length between Milnnavie, just north of Glasgow, and Fort William on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands. The route was originally designed and created as a walking route. Since then access legislation in Scotland has changed. Cyclists and horse and cyclists now enjoy equal access rights to walkers, provided they exercise those rights responsibly. Notwithstanding this, some sections of the West Highland Way, such as the narrow path around the north-east corner of Loch Lomond, are impassable with a horse and never likely to be suitable for multi-use. Other parts are accessible with a horse or bike.

These notes have been produced by British Horse Society Scotland to help those interested in using part or all of the West Highland Way to identify location and brief details of features which may restrict multi-use of the waymarked route. Only those which may present an issue for experienced riders are noted below – shallow fords, vehicular bridges, cross drains, gates which can only be opened or closed if dismounted, rough ground, sheep and cattle are all part of riding off-road and so are not documented. Inclusion of a particular feature does not necessarily mean that it is impassable with a horse. Photos have been included where appropriate to help you assess for yourself whether a feature such as steps, a narrow footbridge, gate or gap less than 1.5m wide may present an obstruction to you. Maps identifying sections which are accessible with a horse should be available at <http://bhsaccess.org.uk/ridemaps/scotland> from spring 2015. Both the notes and maps are intended to supplement detailed route guides and other information already available from the route website <http://www.west-highland-way.co.uk/home.asp>.

The background information for these notes has been provided by volunteers who surveyed the route in 2014 as part of a multi-use long distance route audit funded by Scottish Natural Heritage. These notes will be updated as and when notification of subsequent changes is received, but neither BHS or the relevant access authorities can guarantee accessibility or the accuracy of information provided.

Suggestions for parking and alternative routes to avoid restrictions on multi-use are included where information has been provided by volunteers, but do not constitute a recommendation. All route users are responsible for deciding for themselves whether this route, or any part thereof, is suitable for their intended use, taking account of their own abilities, skills, fitness and experience, as well as season, weather conditions etc. Event organisers, groups or commercial operators considering using the West Highland Way are urged to contact the route managers (see route website for details).

Remember that whether on foot, cycle or horseback, rights of access in Scotland depend on access takers and land managers accepting individual responsibility for their actions. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code defines what this means on the ground <http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>. Specific guidance for horse riders can be downloaded from <http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk/responsible-riding.html>.

Courtesy, consideration of others' needs and good communication are the key to sharing paths. Always pass others you meet along the trail at a walk, and elsewhere limit your pace to ground conditions and visibility. On surfaced paths and other well used sections of the route, riders need to be particularly careful to respect other users and clear dung off the path. Although the route is waymarked throughout, sometimes the waymarks may be less readily visible, so make sure you have a map with you and know how to read it.

Milngavie to Drymen

There are several gates on this section which require dismounting to open, and others with a gap to pass around the side, but otherwise no obstructions to multi-use access. A couple of places passable with care are highlighted below.

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
NS543764 Mugdock Wood	Metal gate, space to pass with a horse to side 	
NS544765 Mugdock Wood	Boardwalk, potentially slippery if wet 	





Drymen to Balmaha




All of this section of route is multi-use accessible other than the off-road route over Conic Hill. The path up the east side of Conic Hill is narrow, steep and rocky with numerous steps, and there is a kissing gate at OSGR NS424914. The alternative is to follow the track south from Garadh BanWood past Creityhall to Milton of Buchanan and then the B837 to Balmaha. Horsebox parking is signed off the road in Garadhban Forest is signed at OSGR NS479906.

Balmaha to Rowardennan

The off-road sections of West Highland Way between Balmaha and Rowardennan are mainly narrow, eroded in places, with numerous steps and exposed tree roots which makes most of this section unsuitable for off-road equestrian use. The public road which coincides with the West Highland Way in some parts, and runs roughly parallel for the remainder, offers a multi-use alternative but is narrow, twisting and very busy in summer and at weekends. Parking is restricted to public car parks at Balmaha and Rowardennan.

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
Craigie Fort NS417908	Steep, rocky path winding up to viewpoint with stone steps.	Narrow lochside path impassable by horses due to narrow metal bridge (28m x 1.1m with metal grid deck) and numerous steps. Alternative is public road.

	 <p>Steep, rough, winding path with some steps leads back down from viewpoint</p>	
<p>NS416914 North of Arrochymore Point</p>	<p>Slatted wooden footbridge 5m x 1.4m, alternate planks non-slip</p> 	
<p>NS411919</p>	<p>Exposed tree roots on steep rough path</p> 	<p>Follow public road</p>
<p>NS398937 North side Lag an Amair Wood</p>	<p>Wooden bridge 7m x 1.45m, four steps down at northern end</p>	<p>Follow public road</p>
<p>NS386951 Carn na Muice</p>	<p>Rough rocky steps</p> 	
<p>NS379958 Allt a Mhuitinn</p>	<p>6m x 1.2m wide wooden slatted</p>	

	<p>footbridge, no railings, concrete ramp either end</p> 	
NS379162	<p>11m x 1.5m wide wooden bridge without side rails</p> 	
NS367971	<p>12m x 0.85m wooden bridge, 4 steps one end and 5 the other</p> 	
NS364974 NS365973	<p>Several series of steep rough stone steps</p>	

Rowardennan to Inversnaid

Diversion in place 2014, survey postponed pending re-opening of main route. Most of the route is understood to be multi-use accessible.

Inversnaid to Inverarnan – impassable with a horse

This section of the West Highland Way is well-known for being the most taxing even for walkers, and although some parts of it might in theory be multi-use accessible, throughout this section there are numerous topographic and other natural and man-made features which makes it impassable with a horse, and very difficult with a bike. The path takes the line of least resistance, often following a narrow strip between crags and loch, with a precipitous slope on either side, in some places restricted by large boulders which would be difficult if not impossible to pass with a horse, in others across boggy ground. Stepping stones over burns have been sited at the easiest crossing, which all too often does not coincide or easily link with somewhere horses might more easily ford or jump across the burn. In various places where steps have been constructed up steep slopes, there is no alternative way round, nor space to pass alongside. Narrow footbridges with steps either end, kissing

gates, stiles and open slatted boardwalks present further restrictions and obstructions, albeit academic given the nature of the remainder of this section. In view of the number of restrictions and impassability with a horse, and the lack of link or loop paths to enable use of smaller parts of this section, individual obstructions have not been individually listed.





Inverarnan to Crianlarich


Awaiting survey information.





Multi-use access onto the West Highland Way between the A82 and Ben Glass Farm should follow the farm track rather than the link path, on which there are several kissing gates, boggy sections and fallen trees. Note that the gate across the farm track at the bridge off the A82 is closed 11 p.m. – 7 a.m.




Crianlarich to Tyndrum

An unavoidable kissing gate in deer fence at the forest boundary just west of Crianlarich obstructs multi-use on the section of West Highland Way through to the A82, but all other gates, bridges, underpasses and steps between Crianlarich and Tyndrum are either passable with care or there is a viable alternative.

There is usually space to park trailers and horseboxes in the main public car park at Crianlarich, and potentially in the trailer/HGV area at the Green Welly cafe.

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
NN375250 Junction Crianlarich Link path and West Highland Way	Kissing gate in deer fence, no alternative 	
NN375251	Stone steps	

		
<p>NN373252 and 368254</p>	<p>Stone drainage channels in line of path – entirely passable with care, at a walk</p> 	
<p>NN364259</p>	<p>Wooden bridge 1.5m wide, non-slip surface, angled step onto bridge</p>  	
<p>NN360275</p>	<p>14 steps down to pass under railway viaduct</p>	



		
<p>NN359216</p>	<p>Slatted wooden footbridge over boggy section</p> 	
<p>NN358277</p>	<p>A82 crossing, well signed both sides, 200m visibility each direction</p> 	
<p>NN358279</p>	<p>Narrow path with stile in fence at far end, gate at far side of next field padlocked</p>	<p>Follow 2m wide grass verge beside A82 for approx. 400m then Kirkton Farm track</p>

		
NN349288	A82 underpass 1.5m wide 15m long 2.2m high, railing to side 	
NN348288	CAUTION - at 2m height cable across track	

Tyndrum to Bridge of Orchy

For much of its length, this section of the West Highland Way follows a broad, firm, hard surfaced track which is ideal for multi-use, although the section east of the railway line is along a much narrower stony path. The two major restrictions on multi-use are the railway underpass and locked level crossing at Bridge of Orchy, and a very narrow underpass and locked gate just north of the regional boundary (see below). Horse riders concerned about trains on the railway line which runs parallel and in some places very close to the track (30m max. separation) are advised to check timetables in advance.

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
NN327335	Narrow railway underpass 1.2mm wide x 2.2m high with some overhanging tree roots further restricting width. Passable with care if dismounted but some horses may dislike. On west side of underpass steep stone paved section leads down to locked gate across track adjacent to stile.	As the underpass is the only means of crossing the railway line, the only alternative to avoid the locked gate is to ride up the very busy A82 from NN332318, rejoining the West Highland Way via a field gate at NN328331. Argyll and Bute Council have been approached to replace the stile with a bridlegate (or locked gate with a 2-in-1 gate) and to pursue proposed installation of a multi-use bridge with ramps either end across the railway, but implementation has yet to be timetabled.

		
<p>NN300396</p>	<p>One-way heavy metal gate with step onto 1.5m wide path leading to railway underpass with 13 relatively steep steps with narrow tread back up on west side. Most horses would struggle with these steps.</p> 	<p>Phone Network Rail and arrange to get gates on level crossing unlocked tel. 01397 707724 (Phil Bradley)</p>

Bridge of Orchy to Inveroran

No obstructions or restrictions, bridlegate alongside main locked gate.

Inveroran to Kings House, Glencoe

This section of route follows the old drove road, which is now a wide firm stone track. There are gaps or self-closing bridlegates alongside the main gates across the track.



Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
<p>NN270526</p>	<p>Locked metal barrier to stop illegal vehicular access</p>	

		Ample space for cyclists and horse-riders to get around side. Mobility buggies might find it more difficult.
NN266538	Metal gate across track 	
NN262545	Cattle grid across track 	

Kings House, Glencoe to Kinlochleven

This section of route is passable with a sure-footed horse but includes various narrow footbridges, rocky outcrops, fords and sections of steep rocky path which some inexperienced horse-riders may find challenging, particularly during or after wet weather.

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
NN220566	Narrow wooden footbridge across steep rocky gully – passable with care with a horse but will probably require removing tack, nowhere to safely tie horse while transporting tack across bridge	In dry weather it may be possible to ford the burn upstream

		
Devils' Staircase	Steep, narrow, rocky path, paved in places, with open cross drains – passable with care but horse-riders and cyclists should take particular care to respect other users 	
NN213582	Paved ford with stepping stones across	Easily forded alongside stepping stones, although burn is very flashy after heavy rain
NN213593	Narrow wooden footbridge with rail along one side	Ford burn east of bridge
NN193617	Wooden bridge over River Leven, width restricted by barriers either end, some worn planks	Use road west of river to avoid bridge

Kinlochleven to Fort William

Location / OS Grid Ref.	Feature/description	Alternative access to avoid restrictions
NN183624	Wooden footbridge, no side rails. Narrow stony path, steep in places, through woodland with some low branches and stone cross drains.	Burn easily forded adjacent to footbridge. Alternatively to avoid this section of path continue west of B863 to NN175623 and follow track up past Mamore Lodge to rejoin West Highland Way at NN172630 (note: gate off B863 intermittently locked)
NN175626	Stone paved section of narrow path through	Use vehicular access track past

	wood	Mamore Lodge as above
NN168631	Wooden plank bridge, may be slippery when wet	
NN166632	Metal gate with stile and raised quad-grid adjacent	Main gate unlocked
NN118691	25 wooden steps, followed by further shallow stone and gravel steps. Ground alongside is steep boulder bank on which it is difficult to stand upright on foot, so impassable by horse	Use alternative route following Old Military Road north from Blair Chaorainn through Blarmachfoldach to NN097725, fork right just before cattle grid on track skirting south of Cow Hill. On entry to forest, fork right at sign to Glen Nevis on track leading steep downhill to rejoin West Highland Way just above the graveyard at NN118725, or alternatively bear left on cycle route down to Braveheart Car park in Glen Nevis