

Setting the scene. I wanted to test out the the new cycle carriage on the West Highland Line, so the plan was to catch the train in Glasgow, alight at Rannoch Station and cycle back to Dunkeld, some 53 miles. My daughter wanted to test out a long distance cycle with full panniers as she is in training to cycle from Lands End to John o’Groats this Summer.

Booking the trains worked fine. I booked ourselves and our bikes on the same train to Glasgow, with myself boarding at Perth and my daughter at Stirling. There were only two possible West Highland Line trains from Glasgow. One was seriously early and would have required an overnight stop in Glasgow. The one we chose left Glasgow at 12:22, arriving at Rannoch at 15:09, when we would start our ride.

Perth/Stirling to Glasgow. Our train was the Intercity. 5 coaches but only 2 bike spaces. Although the coaches have been upgraded at great expense, the cycle accommodation is in a cupboard, with hooks to hang two bikes. Whoever would want to hang their bike up? Certainly not me - too short, too weak, with an electric bike which exceeds the weight limit. And remember the panniers!

My bike protruded into the corridor, obstructing the door. Fortunately the ticket collector was really helpful. He told me that the coaches are now being refitted for bike transportation by removing four rows of seats. There wasn’t enough room for my daughter’s bike in the “cupboard” [even without panniers], so she spent the journey tucked into a corner with her bike.

Problems were exacerbated by the fact that the earlier Inverness train had been cancelled due to staff problems, and this was Cup Final day, so the train was already full of happy Hearts supporters!



Queen Street Station. A glass frontage overlooking George Square now extends across the width of the station, which makes it a really pleasant space. Time for a cup of coffee. Cup Final supporters were “raising the roof” with their singing.



The West Highland Line. My expectation was that there would be a single carriage dedicated to some 20 bikes and other bulky luggage such a rucksacks, skis, golf bags etc. Also I expected that the carriage to be decorated with lovely pictures. We saw the train

with the lovely pictures but it was sitting at Crianlarich. Ours was an ordinary train with the usual bicycle symbol to indicate the bike compartment. The space was quite compact, with slots for 8 bikes, four on each side of the corridor.

These slots could also be used for other equipment, and there were shelves which could be lowered in place of bikes. I think there were three of these special compartments on the train.

The train splits at Crianlarich. One bike compartment on the two-carriage section went on to Oban. The two bike compartments on our four carriage section was heading to Mallaig.

So technically there are 24 bike spaces altogether. But it would have been a squeeze, and if all the spaces had been used for bikes,



our panniers could have been a problem.

As well as ourselves, there were four cyclists in another compartment further up the train.

The cycle ride. The first thing to do was stoke up on excellent cake at the famous Rannoch Station cafe. Well worth it because we only needed small snack stops on our ride to Dunkeld. The cafe staff also helped us get our bikes over the Victorian pedestrian bridge, to the start of the road. There is no level crossing.

Vital statistics. The shortest route with least climb is via the Schiehallion road and Aberfeldy. Distance 53.5 miles. Moving time 4hrs 36mins. Total ascent 534m. Total descent 780m. With the prevailing wind behind us, it really did feel there was more downhill than up! Despite the panniers.

Try it and see. It's a great ride!

The scenery is spectacular and you may even see an eagle. We did.