

Driving Edinburgh to Gairloch a personal view

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This is a personal account of driving the route from Edinburgh to Gairloch, supplemented by words and pictures trawled from the Internet. If we have used your material recklessly, we apologise; do let us know and we will acknowledge or remove it.

Introduction to the Area



As a settlement, Gairloch has a number of separately named and distinct points of focus. The most southerly is at Charlestown where you can find Gairloch's harbour. In more recent times the harbour was the base for the area's fishing fleet. Gairloch was particularly renowned for its cod. Much of the catch was dried at Badachro on the south shore of Loch Gairloch before being shipped to Spain. Today the harbour is used to land crabs, lobsters and prawns. Much of this also goes to the Spanish market, but now it goes by road. From

here the road makes its way past Gairloch Golf Club. Nearby are two churches, the brown stone Free Church with its magnificent views over Loch Gairloch and the white-harled kirk on the inland side of the main road.

Moving north along the A832 as it follows Loch Gairloch you come to the second point of focus, Auchtercairn, around the junction with the B8021. Half a mile round the northern side of Loch Gairloch brings you to Strath, which blends seamlessly with Smithtown. Here you will find the main commercial centre of Gairloch.

Gairloch's history dates back at least as far as the Iron Age dun or fort on a headland near the golf club. A thousand years later the loch was used as a haven by Vikings. Very little remains of them except place names and folklore. Norwegian rule of Scotland's western seaboard ended after the Battle of Largs and King Håkon IV's retreat to Orkney in 1263, and for the following two centuries two clans, the MacLeods and Mackenzies fought for dominance of the area. In 1494 King James IV granted the lands to the Mackenzies, who managed their estates from Flowerdale House, a little inland from Charlestown. And they still do: much of the area remains in the ownership of the family.

Gairloch's population is about 600 - 700, although this does depend on what you are classing as "Gairloch". As well as the main population centre mentioned above, there are a number of small communities scattered around the loch itself - places such as Badachro, Melvaig, North and South Erradale. Tourism is the largest single contributor to the local economy, and there are several hotels, self catering and B&B businesses, and (by highland standards) a good number of shops.

There are restaurants, several cafes, craft shops, and - particularly down by the Harbour area - boat operators who can provide visitors with boat trips, whale watching opportunities and fishing. The weather is comparatively mild since the Gulf Stream comes this way (see note below about Inverewe Gardens and the tropical plants there, but there can be extremely strong winds blowing over the region - the hurricane of January 2005 produced wind speeds just offshore of around 120 mph!

The population used to be far higher in days gone by, and the deserted runrig settlements and tumbled ruins of abandoned croft houses remind us that life has not always been easy for the people of the area. Mind you, because of the enlightened view of the landowner, this area was never subjected to the Highland Clearances as many others were. The Gairloch Heritage Museum will tell you all about this through its award winning displays and exhibits of times past.

It's worth mentioning that you will pass the extensive administrative centre and studios of Two Lochs Radio - Britain's smallest commercial radio station, and community broadcaster for the Gairloch, Loch Ewe and Loch Maree areas of Wester Ross. The station broadcasts in stereo on 106.0 and 106.6 MHz FM. It relays Smooth FM most of the time but there are local-specific programmes in the morning and evening.

Route Notes – introduction

The journey is a little under 5 hours, taking it steady. You can do it quicker than that, but not much and it's far nicer to relax and enjoy the scenery! Also, allow yourself some time to stop and enjoy the spectacular views you'll see. I have tried to alert you to places to enjoy these views, but much of what you can see depends on the weather. When thinking about travel time, also remember that there are lots of opportunities for delay along the route – this is not a high-speed motorway journey and most of the way is standard, single carriageway road (a little of it single track). If you get stuck behind slow moving traffic there is little you can do about it! Also, please remember that the A9 has vicious average speed cameras along much of it. They are there for a reason – it's a road that is driven by tourists, often foreign tourists, who are hassled and unsure of how to drive these roads, so they take risks. There are also many campervans, most of them hired, on these roads – and the number is increasing. Drivers can be very good but are often driving a big vehicle that's new to them, and often on a side of the road that they're not used to. Give them respect!

The average speed cameras are real (mostly, although there are some dummies) and operating all the time. They got some stick from people, but have slowed people down and reduced the accidents significantly. In our view it's a more relaxed journey with them there.



OK, that's the warnings. The up-side of the journey is that it takes you right through the most wonderful scenery you will ever see, you will drive the longest road in a single county in Britain (the A832) and the A9 - the longest trunk road in Scotland, highest trunk road in the UK and the road that Q sends the decoy Jag along in Skyfall because "it will be tracked using the traffic cameras". He's right, as you'll see – there are plenty! Bond uses the A82, which sadly doesn't go to Gairloch!

The Journey

Edinburgh to Inverness

It's wise to fill your tank before you start – there aren't many petrol stations on the way, and where they exist they are expensive (luckily there is a Tesco en route – of which more later)! It's also worth having a road map with you.

In the following, driving directions are given in bulleted ***bold italic***, the rest is just stuff we find interesting.

- ***Cross the Forth Road Bridge and travel north on M90***
- ***After the Perth bypass, continue onto the A9, northbound towards Inverness***

You'll have been travelling about an hour now.

Once you get past Perth, unless there are temporary roadworks or you deviate from the main road, you'll see only one more set of traffic lights until you get back to Perth - for literally hundreds of miles! (360 miles to be precise.) It is 137 miles from Perth to Inverness, so settle in! Between Perth and Inverness, the A9 is a mix of single and dual carriageway sections. There are currently a total of nine dual carriageway sections which is approximately 32% of the overall distance, however those sections are relatively short and the route is predominately single carriageway. This part of the A9 is the highest trunk road in the UK and you will pass through the Cairngorms National Park. Watch out for roadworks (they are aiming to make the whole road from Perth to Inverness dual carriageway by about 2021). There are also lots of average speed cameras. They are not bluffing so take notice! HGVs have a special speed limit on this road – they are allowed to travel at 50 mph on the single carriageway parts, as in England but not Scotland where elsewhere they are limited to 40. This is so that they don't cause holdups and encourage dangerous overtaking.

The A9 largely follows the Perth to Inverness railway which is often called the Highland Main Line. Much of the Highland Main Line is single track and trains coming in opposite directions are often timed to arrive at stations at the same time, where crossing loops permit them to pass. Journey times between Inverness and Edinburgh are approximately three and a half hours – about the same as driving and the route is very similar. This means that you'll sometimes see the same train several times as you overtake each other. After Perth the line comes close to the road at a station called Dunkeld and Birnam. You might remember the bit in Macbeth where the witches tell him "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him". If you look to your left as you pass the station you'll see Birnam Hill which is where the Birnam Wood would have been. This is all Macbeth territory.

About 30 miles north of Perth you'll get to Pitlochry where you start the long climb into the Cairngorms National Park through the Forest of Atholl to the highest point at the Pass of Drumochter. This is one of the most dramatic sections of the whole route and you'll see that here, as in other places along the route, the road, the railway and the river are all crowded into a narrow pass. It all starts to feel "very Highlands". You'll stay in and around the Cairngorms until north of Aviemore, so there are plenty of mountains to see. Some of them might even have snow on them, even in the summer.

You will pass through big orange gates – they'll probably be open when you pass, only being closed when the road is blocked by snow. This happens rarely and generally the road is kept clear by snowploughs. The gates are usually only closed when the snowploughs are

actually operating clearing a big fall. However, you will also notice poles all the way along this route. These are about 1.5 metres high and topped with red on the left and white on the right. These are snow poles and allow you to tell where the road is during a snowfall. They can be a lifesaver!



The road and railway stay together as you pass by Pitlochry, Blair Atholl, go over Drumochter Summit (495 metres). Traffic Scotland have a couple of live traffic cameras here which are worth a look

(<https://trafficscotland.org/livetrafficcameras/view/?cam=86>

and

<https://trafficscotland.org/livetrafficcameras/view/?cam=65>)

You then reach Dalwhinnie. Look out for the Distillery – it's very pretty.

You'll have been travelling for about 2 hours now - about another 15-20 minutes will get you to the Ralia Café.



About 65 miles north of Perth is the Ralia Cafe. Good coffee and toilets. It's well signposted off the A9, and you need to take a slip road to the left and follow a small road to reach the café. It has a fantastic sculpture (The Coo), made in metal, that's worth seeing! Afterwards, you will re-join the A9 a bit further up.

In another 16 miles watch out for Aviemore and, depending on the time of year, all the skiers. Aviemore is bypassed so you don't have to go in (we would advise you not to!) but it has a petrol station (expensive) with a Costa machine – there isn't much north of Aviemore until you get to Inverness (about 40 miles).

About another 10 miles further on, you'll go over the Slochd Beag Bridge (although you probably won't notice it). This is a road bridge over a road bridge over a railway bridge over a river! Then you'll reach the Slochd Pass (405 metres – not so high as Drumochter, but significantly further north so tends to be more troublesome in winter). After this watch for the Tomatin Distillery. Soon afterwards the railway leaves the road and continues its journey to Inverness via Culloden Moor to the east of Inverness. You'll go pretty much straight on North to Inverness.

After a long climb, you go down the other side and get a lovely view of Inverness and the Moray Firth. As you drop down towards Inverness, unless you have a need to go in, you'll bypass it. But do check your fuel because there are very few opportunities to get any until you reach Gairloch in another 70 miles, and that's expensive. We normally fill up at Tesco (they have 24 hour fuel and a cafe) and if you want to do that, take the road signposted *Hilton* and *Culduthel* and on a later signpost *Inshes Retail Park* then take the second exit at the roundabout – you'll then see Tesco. There's a nice café in the main shop and the petrol station is cheap! Easy to get back to the A9, too, to continue your journey but at the roundabout just outside Tesco, it's easy to miss the correct turning – head for "Wick (A9)".

You'll have been travelling for a little over three hours now – that's "on the road" and doesn't allow for holdups or stops. You're well over half way, though.

- ***Stay on A9, bypassing Inverness and cross the Kessock Bridge over the Beaully Firth***

Inverness to Garve



The Kessock Bridge is, in my view, one of the most beautiful bridges in the country. It's not as grand as the Forth Bridge, of course, but it forms an impressive slope that you drive up onto the "Black Isle" and the views, particularly to the left, are spectacular.

You will now cross the Black Isle, which is neither black nor an island! It's a peninsula between the Moray Firth and the Cromarty Firth so with the sea to the east has water on three sides. It's called Black because when it was uncultivated (18th century and earlier) it was heathland that turned black. It is now mostly green. On the right just before the bridge is the stadium for Inverness Caledonian Thistle football club. When they beat Celtic 3-1 in 2000, the famous headline was written – "Super Caley Go Ballistic, Celtic Are Atrocious" after the song from Mary Poppins, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. You had to laugh!

- ***At the Tore Roundabout, take the second exit onto the A835 (signposted Ullapool and Dingwall)***

From now on, you'll notice that most of the signposts are bilingual – Gaelic and English, with Gaelic coming first. Gaelic is important here and the schools teach it as the second language. Do remember that in Scotland, Gaelic is pronounced "gallic" and NOT "gaylic". If you say it wrongly, they won't correct you ... but they will judge you!!!

Just past the next roundabout you'll notice that Gairloch (*Geàrrloch*) appears on the road signs for the first time on your journey – still 57 miles away, though. In the village of Contin look left and you'll see the Ross-shire equivalent of garden gnomes – in this case, cows! It's that sort of place. Speaking of which, in Tarvie there is a cafe with an old man sitting outside – always ... rain or shine. It's a little spooky.

The road goes on through all sorts of countryside and scenery – it's the full set of stuff to look at as you pass through on your way to Garve, which you get to next. There's a level crossing here and you'll see that the railway is single track since it's all single line working here. Then you will see Loch Garve as you leave the village.

Garve to Achnasheen

Outside Garve, look for a left turn on the A832 (signposted Gairloch and Kyle of Lochalsh) – also signposted the “Wester Ross Coastal Trail”.

Take this left turn onto the A832 - don't miss it because if you do you'll end up in Ullapool which is nice but a long way from where you want to be.



You now cross the country on one of the few coast to coast roads in the UK and the longest road in the UK in a single county (Ross and Cromarty) – you will leave the road in Gairloch, but that's some miles further on!

You will be passing through some wonderful countryside on the way. From Garve to Achnasheen you are in Strath Bran and you follow the Skye Railway line – this is mostly good road and you'll enjoy it. The railway is single-track and you might see a little train on it – unlikely because there are only four per day in

each direction (well, it's one train that goes backwards and forwards, but you know what I mean).

As you drive this part you will see evidence, if you look, of hydroelectric power stations. The National Electricity Grid is relatively recent in the Highlands. It's just too far away from the main power stations and has too few people to be worth bringing it up here. It's now connected and as you came up the A9 you'll have seen the pylons which often share the route with the road, but in the 1940s and 1950s, long after the rest of the country had electricity, there was none here. For example, in 1943, only one in a hundred crofts in the Highlands had electricity - people used oil lamps and the like. But this was holding back the industry here, especially agriculture, so the hydro electricity project “Power to the Highlands” came into being, using the natural benefits of the area (hills, rain and so on) to good effect. Most of the power stations still exist and supplement the grid.



The first one you will see is at Grudie Bridge, soon after Lochluichart alongside the Loch of the same name, on the A832. It's a big building on the right. This one is fed by a 6.5km long tunnel leading from Loch Fannich, high in the hills to the north-west. It generates 18.7 MW of power, which was enough to keep the area supplied with electricity. Others you'll see are much smaller and maybe only supplied a small community. Watch out for small concrete dams with a little hut beside them. Quite small installations, but they changed people's lives. There is

one shortly after you enter the single-track part of the journey (see below).

It's desolate but beautiful country. This is Wester Ross – part of Ross and Cromarty which you've been in since just north of Inverness, but Wester Ross is – well – different. You entered Wester Ross just after Garve (if you like Game of Thrones you will of course see the connection with Westeros – a sentiment with which George Martin agrees). It covers about 1,500 square miles and has a population of 6,000 people which makes an average population of 4 people per square mile – but of course most of the people are in the larger

towns and villages – over a quarter of them are in Ullapool alone, so there are big spaces without anyone! You'll feel this as you drive through – we think it's rather wonderful. You will often be the only car on the road as far as you can see.

At Achnasheen you will see the railway station on your left. The station toilets always seem to be open and can be welcome! Don't be misled by the sign to "village centre and shops". There really is nothing here except the station, so don't go that way expecting coffee. There is, however, a duck pond with actual ducks on it.

The road divides just outside Achnasheen with one road following the railway line to Kyle of Lochalsh and the Isle of Skye. The other road (the one you'll take) goes towards Gairloch. The roundabout is the last you'll see until you come back this way (about 100 miles there and back).

Achnasheen to Gairloch

- ***At the roundabout, take the second exit staying on the A832***

You'll have been going for 4 hours by now. Less than an hour to go – but it is the trickiest bit.

This road was built around 1843. Before that it was barely a track. As you drive, you'll begin to see some of the scenery that brings a lot of people this way. There are mountains all around – this is the Highlands, after all, and it's difficult to single some out for you. It is worth stopping, if you have time, at the Glen Docherty Viewpoint on the right hand side of the road about six miles along from Achnasheen. It's at the top of a long hill down to Kinlochewe and the view is spectacular. To find it, watch for a dry stone wall on the left of the road shortly after the road starts downwards and a sign that directs you to a car park and the



viewpoint on the right.

Pass through Kinlochewe. You might wonder why this village is called Kinlochewe when Kin in this context means "at the head of". It's all a bit odd as Loch Ewe is the sea loch on which you find Poolewe, some fifteen miles to the North West. The answer lies in the fact that until around 1700 Loch Maree, which is on your right, was also called Loch Ewe. The name was changed to commemorate St Mealrubha (or Mael Ruba), who is credited with bringing Christianity to Wester Ross. Loch Maree is absolutely beautiful and has in it the only (I think) instance in Britain of a loch on an island in a loch. Isle Maree has the remains of a chapel, graveyard, holy well and holy tree on it, and is believed to be the 8th century hermitage of Saint Mael Ruba. The wooded shores with lovely glimpses across the loch make a stark contrast to the scenery you've already passed through.



But there is a darker side to this road since it's one of the "Destitution Roads". There are several stretches of the A832 like this, and as you pass alongside Loch Maree you are on one of them. This stretch of road is one of several to be known as the Destitution Road. It

was built during the Highland Potato Famine of 1846-1847. This is the same famine - brought about by potato blight - which hit Ireland much harder and led to a major emigration to America. Those crofters judged as "destitute", that is they had no savings, animals or food, could work to build the road in exchange for oatmeal rations. The daily ration of oatmeal was initially set by the Central Board at 24 ounces (680 g) per man, 12 oz (340 g) per woman and 8 oz (230 g) per child. They would get this if they worked 8 hours per day for 6 days a week. The term is also used to mean the emigration route from Scotland to the US as a result of the Highland Clearances which didn't affect this part of Scotland as badly as the areas further north east of here – Sutherland particularly.

For the rest of the journey you'll be skirting Torridon, which is strictly speaking a village but the name is also applied to an area that includes Loch Torridon, Torridon Forest, Glen Torridon and the Torridon Hills. (The Highland Naming Committee didn't spend much time on this area!) The Torridon Hills are really mountains - 1,100 metres high and when you can see them, they are spectacular! The Torridon Forest blocks your view of the mountains much of the time. The best you get at this point in your journey is a view of Beinn Eighe to your left just past Kinlochewe. The views get better when you reach Gairloch.

There are a few hydro stations along this but they are very small – keep your eyes open. For example, the Kerry Falls power station is located 4½ miles southeast of Gairloch. It has a generation capacity of 1 megawatt (MW) making use of a gross head of water of 56m (183 feet) from Loch Bad an Scalaig to produce an average of 5 million kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. Originally built to supply electricity to the isolated community in this area, the scheme is now part of the national electricity supply network. You'll see the dam on your left shortly after you begin the single track section described next and after the road turns back to dual-track you'll see a sign for the generating station itself.

There are some tricky driving bits that follow, including some single track road with passing



places – remember that this is still an A road and this bit is used by quite big lorries and coaches (and occasionally very large static caravans)! Be careful! I have included some notes at the end of this booklet. This difficult driving is only for a few miles, though – the road gets much better later! When you see the

turning to Badachro the difficult bit is over.



As you drive along, you'll see the village sign for Gairloch and then a bit further on Gairloch Harbour on your left then a petrol station and the Gairloch Hotel on your right. Stay on the A832.

Gairloch isn't a single place, but is actually a collection of villages and hamlets. The villages are Charlestown, with Gairloch Harbour on your left, then there's Auchtercairn which has the high school, community centre, Police station and so on, then there's Strath. But there are also several smaller settlements like Smithstown and so on.

Just after the Shielling Restaurant on your right is the GALE Centre – good coffee and cakes and free wi-fi.

Watch for a left turn onto the B8021 just opposite McColl's "supermarket" (OK, but there is a better shop further along your route).

- **Take the B8021 (for Melvaig and Strath).**

Following the road, you get close to the tip of Loch Gairloch (or, strictly, The Gair Loch). It's a sea loch, so is tidal. If you can, it's worth pausing to look out straight down the loch and if the weather is with you, you'll see the Isle of Skye. It's a lovely view.



You will pass the converted cottage that now houses what I referred to above as "the extensive administrative centre and studios of Two Lochs Radio". Continue up a short and bendy hill with white cottages on your left and enter the village of Strath. There is a good licensed supermarket here (another McColls) with a car park opposite. This is a very good place for supplies and they have a sort of Subway setup where you can specify sandwiches and salad that you fancy and a machine that does reasonable coffee. Beside the car park is a café called the Mountain Coffee Company which, in my view, is not all that good, but is quirky so may be worth a visit. A little further up on the left is Morrison's butcher – fantastic meat, sausages, bacon, etc.

Things to see and do when you're here

It might be quiet here and you might need a car to get about, but there's plenty to do and see.

Shopping

- Kenneth Morrison is a butcher as you go into Strath. Really good meat, plus ok fish and vegetables. Get your meat here and veg. from McColls just down the road.
- McColl's in Strath – nearest supermarket and mentioned in the route notes. Open every day and they have pretty much everything you need ... but the word need is important here – they don't have everything you might want!
- Pharmacy - further along the road towards Gairloch and on the left.
- Buddha by the Sea – quirky little place a bit further along the road. Mostly for tourist stuff but have some useful bits and bobs.
- Farm and Garden – next to the Gale Centre and has hardware stuff (but there is a proper hardware shop nearby – see below). The only place round about for gas.
- The Shop on the Pier – at Gairloch Harbour which is worth a wander around anyway.
- Les Buchan Hardware – a proper builders' merchant. Near Gairloch Harbour and difficult to find. It's behind The Old Inn – drive through their car park to find the shop.
- There's also the petrol station (24 hours – they have an automatic pump) and the Bank (with a cash point) between Auchtercairn and Gairloch Harbour.

Cafés (in alphabetical order)

- Bridge Cottage Café, Poolewe – really good for coffee, cakes and lunch. No wi-fi.
- Coast Coffee at Gairloch Harbour. Good coffee and seafood lunch to die for! Good wi-fi.
- Gale Centre – not really a café, but they do reasonable coffee and tea and quite good cake, depending on whom from the support group has made them! Good wi-fi.
- Inverewe Gardens coffee shop. OK, but a typical tourist attraction café and if you're unlucky your visit will coincide with a coach load of visitors! Better to go to the Bridge Cottage if you have time.
- The Steading – in Gairloch and beside the Museum. Good for lunch and coffee but no views ... a steading is a shed. Good wi-fi.

Museums, visitor centres and other places

- Gairloch Heritage Museum. Quite a good little museum focussing on the local area. It has the old lighthouse "innards" on show, which is fun. Currently on the corner of the A832 and B8021, just where you turn right towards Strath, but moving soon.
- Poolewe Swimming Pool. A swimming pool in Poolewe – quite a good, half-size one and we can honestly say it's the best swimming pool for miles around. In Poolewe, past the post office, first left, first right.
- Beinn Eighe visitor centre. Not massive but quite informative. Has a hide and some well laid out walks. On the main road just on the west side of Kinlochewe.

- Inverewe Gardens. “Further north than Moscow but with palm trees” is what they say. It’s a lovely place if you like gardens. In the summer, you can be plagued by midges here, but if there’s a bit of wind you’ll be fine. Through Poolewe on the left.
- Perfume Studio/Image Studio. We just don’t “get” this place, but worth visiting if you want to say that you’ve been to Mellon Charles (which could be an instruction as well as a place), and very nice for a coffee. Turn left from the A832 after Poolewe for Aultbea and follow your nose (LOL!!)
- Arctic Convoy stuff. Loch Ewe was used as a mustering point for the merchant ships that took supplies to Russia (Archangel and Murmansk) during the war. There are relics and indications all over the place – worth looking up on the ‘net before you leave. We can recommend the drive to Cove (up the western side of Loch Ewe) where there is a memorial and some old gun and searchlight emplacements, protecting the sea entrance to the loch, that are worth a look.
- NATO “Z-berth” – a fuelling depot for nuclear submarines, that can be seen in Loch Ewe from the Ullapool road out of Poolewe but which appears on maps as “pier”. It’s still operational.



Scenery

- Red Point – at the very end of the B8065 which goes through Badachro and similar places up the east side of Loch Gairloch. It has a super viewpoint from which you can see the whole of Skye as well as Raasay, Harris and Lewis.
- Road to Applecross – a must do! I’ll let you look it up, but this sign says it all. The drive is fun (except for motor caravans coming the other way – these are often hired by those who normally drive on the right and certainly don’t know about Scottish roads usually - so the drivers don’t know what they’re doing!)



Places to eat posh-ish

There are very few restaurants in the area and those that are here are attached to hotels. If you want to eat out, book! Here are a couple we’ve tried and enjoyed very much – take a look at their menus to see if they’re what you want.

- The Shielling Restaurant (01445 712888). Next to the Gale Centre on the A832 towards Inverness.
- Mytle Bank Hotel (01445 712004). Take a right fork after Strath but before you get to the A832.

We can recommend both of these, but neither are up to really fine dining standards – you just won’t get that up here – but they are very nice if you’re celebrating.

Driving Single Track Roads in Scotland



Some roads in Scotland, especially in the Highlands and islands, are single track. This is a road that has two-way travel but is not wide enough in most places to allow vehicles to pass one another.

Some of the paragraphs from the Highway Code below give some good advice.

The Highway Code, section 132:

Take extra care on country roads and reduce your speed at approaches to bends, which can be sharper than they appear, and at minor junctions and turnings, which may be partially hidden. Be prepared for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists walking or riding in the road. You should also reduce your speed where country roads enter villages.

Driving on country roads needs to be taken steadily, and drivers must be ready to stop at any time to avoid unexpected hazards. Roads can become narrow at old bridges and places where there are stone walls on both sides of the road. Give slower, non-motorised road users such as walkers, cyclists, horse riders and farm livestock or wild animals enough time and space to move either into a passing place or off the road. Pass wide and slowly.

The Highway Code, section 133:

Single-track roads. These roads are only wide enough for one vehicle. They have special passing places. If you see a vehicle coming towards you, or the driver behind wants to overtake, pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite a passing place on your right. Give way to vehicles coming uphill whenever you can. If necessary, reverse until you reach a passing place to let the other vehicle pass.

Many passing places are marked by either black and white poles at the roadsides or special square passing place signs, but some passing places are not marked. Drivers using single-track roads must be able to reverse to a passing place in order to let other vehicles pass. Sometimes drivers must reverse more than a metre or two. Driving onto verges to avoid reversing is not recommended, as cars may be damaged or get stuck in roadside ditches. In Scotland it's usual to give a friendly wave as 'thank you' if another road user has reversed or waited for you to pass. It makes all the difference!

The Highway Code, section 134:

Do not park in passing places. Parking your car in passing places to watch birds, photograph the scenery, or to leave your vehicle while you go for a walk, prevents other road users from using passing places. If your car blocks a passing place and stops other drivers, cyclists or horse-riders from allowing vehicles to move by, dangerous situations can occur. If you must stop in a passing place for a short time, be prepared to drive on immediately.

Parking in or near entrances to farm tracks, in field gateways or at cattle grid gates can prevent access by farmers and others who live and work in the countryside. 24-hour access to gates is often required, either by people whose homes are up farm tracks or by farmers who may need to move livestock or large farm machinery. It may not be easy to see that these access points are in regular use, but that is usually the case.