

Take scenic route

Have
you
tried?



**FIONA
RUSSELL**

Hit the
new NE250
tourist trail
to explore
the wonderful
scenery
around the
north-east of
Scotland

The North East 250

What is it?: The North East 250 (NE250) is a new tourist trail in the north-east of Scotland.

The 250-mile circular road trip is aimed at drivers but is also a great route for cyclists. It heads through Royal Deeside, the Cairngorms, Speyside and along the coasts of the Moray Firth and Aberdeenshire.

Tell me more: The NE250 follows in the footsteps of the very successful North Coast 500, in the north-west of Scotland.

The idea for the new route was conceived by the owner of Ballindalloch Castle, Guy Macpherson-Grant.

He said: "I believe the North East 250 offers visitors the very best that Scotland has to offer."

"I am excited by the potential of the route to bring more visitors to our area. I also hope that more businesses along the route will get behind it and help make it the success I know it can be."

Jo Robinson, regional director at VisitScotland, sees the NE250 as a welcome asset to the area.

She said: "It's hoped this new route will simulate the success of other similar routes around Scotland and that it will bring economic benefit to the area."

The route: The tourist trail, launched late last year, is circular and takes in a diverse landscape of mountains, moors, coast and rolling farmland in the Cairngorms, Speyside, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Royal Deeside. It can be driven clockwise or anti-clockwise and allows for stops and overnights in a large



number of villages and towns. The route is most obviously started from the region's city of Aberdeen (via the airport or train lines). It can also be accessed from Central Scotland by car at Spittal of Glenshee.

The NE250 website offers an interactive map of many things to see and do on the route, such as castles, distilleries, mountains, ski resorts, coastal villages, beaches, golf courses and forests.

There is plenty to enjoy if you like walking, running and mountain biking with a vast network of trails and paths.

A few examples include trails at Glenlivet Estate for mountain biking and walking, Moray Monster Bike Trails, Go Ape Crathes Castle, Deeside Activity Park and Storybook Glen.

It's anticipated visitors will drive the route over many days, staying overnight in hotels, guest houses, hostels or campsites. It is also likely to attract caravans, motorhomes and campervans.

At Speyside Gardens Caravan Park, near Aberlour on Speyside, Olly and Amy Lyon anticipate

greater numbers of guests. The park was recently updated with a shop, laundry, shower block and chemical disposal point.

Olly said: "There is so much to see and do on our doorstep."

How long will it take?: A long weekend of four days is a good starting point but if you can head off for a week to 10 days, you will have more time to enjoy the sights. I spent four days driving from Spittal of Glenshee clockwise, with three nights in campsites.

I visited two to three attractions each day and enjoyed a couple of coastal trail runs.

Anything else to know?: A North East 250 Passport allows visitors to collect stamps in each sector: Speyside, Royal Deeside, Cairngorms, Moray Firth Coast, East Coast and Aberdeen. To receive the souvenir, you need to become a member of the North East 250 or buy it from a number of businesses along the route and on the website. A completed passport allows you to download a certificate of completion from the North East 250 website.

■ www.northeast250.com

I hired a Fiat Tribute 670 campervan from Open Road Scotland (openroadscotland.com) near Glasgow Airport, and spent four days driving the route. I spent three nights in camping and caravan parks.

DAY 1: Spittal of Glenshee to Aberlour
I enjoyed the Cairngorms scenery, including two ski resorts Glenshee Mountain and The Lecht; visited the tiny church of Inveravon and took a short walk from close to Aberlour Distillery to Linn Falls.

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Mountain bike routes at Glenlivet Estate.
- Smugglers Trails at Glenlivet Estate.
- Tour one of the many Speyside whisky distilleries.
- Visit Ballindalloch Castle.

Overnight: Speyside Gardens camping and caravan park, www.speysidegardens.com

Dinner: Dowans Hotel, Aberlour. See www.dowanshotel.com

DAY 2: Aberlour to Banff

Driving north to Spey Bay I went in search of coastal views and the chance to see dolphins. I visited Findochty, Portknockie, Cullen and Findlater Castle ruins before heading to Duff House in Banff.

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Craigellachie Telford Bridge.
- Cardhu Country house.
- Fochabers Folk Museum and Heritage Centre.
- Moray Monster Trails near Fochabers.
- Ice Cream at Portsoy.
- MacDuff Aquarium.

Overnight: Wester Bonnyton Caravan and Camping Site, Gamrie, Banff. See: www.westerbonnyton.co.uk

Dinner: Banff Springs Hotel. See: www.thebanffsprings.co.uk



DAY 3: Banff to Maryculter

My first port of call was the tiny settlement of Pennan, which was made famous as the fictional village of Ferness in the film Local Hero. I followed another coastal path to Aberdour Bay and back again, before driving to Fraserburgh to visit the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses. The east coast came next with many great attractions including Bullers of Buchan and Slains Castle.

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Peterhead Prison Museum.
- Overnight:** Deeside Holiday Park, Maryculter. See www.woodleisure.co.uk/our-parks/deeside/
- Dinner:** Bought from a local Tesco and eaten in the van.



DAY 4: Maryculter to Spittal of Glenshee
Heading west through beautiful Royal Deeside country the attractions came thick and fast. I chose Crathes Castle, Braemar for lunch and a drive to Linn of Dee for a superb trail run through the Glen of Dee.

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Royal Deeside Railway.
- Balmoral Castle.
- Detour to Stonehaven for the open air pool.

■ For further details of my trip see the blog: New North East 250 Route in Scotland on my website www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk

GEAR
OF
THE
WEEK

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