

BARK & RIDE

2026 Training Guide

A practical preparation guide for riders of all levels tackling the Bark & Ride Charity Cycle in aid of Irish Guide Dogs.

ROUTE	DISTANCE	LEVEL
Dunguaire Castle	60 km	Beginner – Intermediate
Kilmacduagh Round Tower	90 km	Intermediate
Poulnabrone Dolmen	125 km	Experienced – Advanced

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Taking a steady, regular and progressive approach to your preparation will ensure you can complete Bark & Ride 2026 with a smile on your face. This guide is tailored to each of our three routes — so jump straight to your distance and use the monthly advice to build your fitness from now until race day.

Two principles underpin every training plan:

1. **Consistency** — ride your bike as regularly as possible, even if the sessions are short.
2. **Progression** — start at a level that's comfortable for you and increase slowly but steadily.

Remember:

Everybody has different fitness levels, schedules and goals. Adapt these guidelines to suit your own circumstances — and most importantly, enjoy the journey!

60 KM

Dunguaire Castle Route

BEGINNER

The 60 km Dunguaire Castle route is a wonderful introduction to sportive cycling. Rolling roads through stunning Irish countryside, with manageable gradients and stunning scenery, make this the ideal challenge for first-timers or those returning to the saddle after a break.

FITNESS LEVEL

You don't need to be a seasoned cyclist. If you can comfortably ride 20 km today and have 10–12 weeks to prepare, you are well placed to complete this route.

3 MONTHS OUT — BUILDING YOUR BASE

If you're new to cycling or returning after a break:

- Aim for 3–4 short rides per week of 30–45 minutes each
- Keep the pace conversational — you should be able to chat easily
- Focus on time in the saddle, not speed or distance
- Get your saddle height checked by a local bike shop — it prevents knee pain
- Practice changing gears smoothly and spinning at a comfortable cadence
- One longer ride per week: start at 25 km and aim for 35 km by month's end
- Wear padded shorts and use chamois cream — your sit-bones will thank you

If you already have a reasonable fitness base:

- Ride 4–5 times per week and include one tempo effort of 20–30 minutes
- Target a long ride of 45–50 km by end of the month

2 MONTHS OUT — BUILDING ENDURANCE

Priorities this month:

- Ride consistently — 4 times per week minimum, every week
- Extend your long ride by 5–10 km each week
- Target a long ride of 50 km by mid-month
- Try a local sportive or club spin — riding in a group is great practice and motivation
- Eat and drink on the bike during longer rides: aim for a snack every 45 minutes
- If you feel tired, reduce your pace — do not skip the session

60 km Route Tip:

The Dunguaire Castle route has some short punchy climbs around Kinvara. Include one hilly ride per week to build climbing confidence. Spin a light gear uphill — don't grind.

1 MONTH OUT — TAPER & RACE PREP

- Weeks 1–2: Keep your longest ride at 55–60 km to confirm your fitness
- Week 3: Begin tapering — reduce volume by 40%, keep one medium ride of 35 km
- Final week: Easy spins of 20–30 minutes only; rest, sleep and eat well
- Check your bike thoroughly: tyres, brakes, chain, gears
- Prepare your kit bag the night before — jersey, shorts, helmet, gloves, nutrition

Route-Specific Tips

- The route is well signed — trust the signs and enjoy the view
- Start conservatively — the first 20 km can feel easy; save energy for the return leg
- Use feed stations: there is no need to carry large amounts of food
- Kinvara village marks roughly the halfway point — a good mental anchor
- Smile at the volunteers — they've been out since dawn for you!

90 KM

Kilmacduagh Round Tower Route

INTERMEDIATE

The 90 km route takes you deep into the limestone landscape of the route, past the iconic Kilmacduagh Round Tower and through the edge of the Burren. This is a satisfying challenge for regular cyclists who want to push further without committing to a full century-plus distance.

FITNESS LEVEL

Comfortable riding 40–50 km already? You're in great shape to tackle 90 km with 10–14 weeks of structured preparation. Expect more climbing than the 60 km route, so building leg strength is a key focus.

3 MONTHS OUT — FOUNDATION MONTH

Establish your base and build consistent weekly mileage:

- Ride 4–5 times per week; include at least one midweek session of 60–75 minutes
- Long ride target: build from 50 km to 65 km over the month
- Include one weekly climb session — even a small hill repeated 4–6 times builds strength
- Practice your nutrition strategy: aim for 60 g of carbohydrate per hour on rides over 90 minutes
- Practise drinking from a bottle while cycling — don't wait until race day
- Keep one full rest day per week; two if you feel fatigued

2 MONTHS OUT — INTENSITY & DISTANCE

Priorities:

- Long ride: 70–80 km by mid-month — ideally at a local sportive or with a club
- Add one 'tempo' session per week: 20–40 minutes at a pace where conversation is difficult
- Do not do more than two hard sessions per week — recovery is where fitness is built
- Take a recovery week at the end of the month: reduce volume by 50–60%
- During recovery week, still complete your long ride — just at a very easy pace
- Focus on eating quality food: lean protein, complex carbs, plenty of vegetables

90 km Route Tip — Climbing:

The section past Kilmacduagh and toward Gort includes the most sustained climbing of this route. Shift to an easy gear before the gradient steepens, keep your cadence above 70 rpm, and breathe steadily. Never stand out of the saddle for long climbs — it burns far more energy.

1 MONTH OUT — SHARPEN & TAPER

- Week 1: One final long ride of 80–85 km to confirm your readiness
- Week 2: Reduce volume by 30%, maintain intensity on one midweek ride

- Week 3: Taper fully — easy spins only, no hard efforts
- Final week: Rest, sleep 8+ hours, hydrate well, eat carbohydrate-rich meals
- Do a short 20-minute shake-out spin two days before the event

Route-Specific Tips

- Split the 90 km mentally into three 30 km segments — this makes it far less daunting
- Pace the first 30 km conservatively — resist chasing faster riders early on
- Use every feed station: top up water even if you're not thirsty
- The Kilmacduagh tower vista around km 45 is worth a pause — you've earned it
- Bring a light gilet or rain jacket — Irish weather is famously unpredictable
- If your legs feel heavy at km 60, it's normal — keep spinning and the feeling passes

125 KM

Poulnabrone Dolmen Route

CHALLENGE

The 125 km Poulnabrone Dolmen route is the crown jewel of Bark & Ride — a full-day epic crossing the breadth of the Burren, touching the Wild Atlantic Way and sweeping along the Atlantic coastline before the demanding return inland. This is a ride that will test your endurance and reward your preparation.

FITNESS LEVEL

You should already be comfortable riding 60–70 km. With 12–16 weeks of structured training, a rider with solid base fitness can complete this route confidently. Expect significant climbing, exposure to coastal winds, and 4–7 hours in the saddle.

4 MONTHS OUT — EARLY PREPARATION (OPTIONAL)

If starting 16 weeks out, use this phase to establish habits:

- Ride 5 times per week; build to 70–80 km on your weekly long ride
- Include one strength-based session: hill repeats, or 3–5 × 5-minute hard climbs
- Practice fuelling: 60–90 g carbohydrate per hour for rides over 2 hours
- Begin experimenting with race-day nutrition (gels, bars, real food) to find what suits your stomach

3 MONTHS OUT — BUILD PHASE

- Long ride: Build from 80 km to 95 km over the month
- Include one weekly tempo session (20–40 min at a hard but sustainable effort)
- One session of hard short efforts: 4–6 × 3-minute very hard efforts with 3 minutes rest
- Keep one full rest day and one very easy recovery spin per week
- If entering a sportive this month, use it as your long ride — don't add extra training on top
- Focus on bike fit: any discomfort at 80 km will become pain at 125 km — get it addressed now

2 MONTHS OUT — PEAK & RECOVERY

First three weeks — peak training:

- Long ride: Build to 100–110 km in one ride — take breaks if needed
- Maintain two quality sessions per week (one tempo, one harder effort)
- Total weekly distance should be your highest of the training block
- Sleep 8+ hours; prioritise protein and complex carbohydrates

Final week of the month — recovery week:

- Reduce volume by 60–70%; keep one medium ride of 50–60 km at easy pace
- This recovery week is when fitness is consolidated — do not skip it
- Use the extra time to check your equipment, plan nutrition for race day

125 km Route Tip — Pacing & Fuelling:

At 125 km you will burn 2,500–4,000 calories. You cannot carry enough food to replace all of this, but you must fuel consistently to avoid 'bonking' (complete energy depletion). Eat something every 30–45 minutes from the very start — before you feel hungry. Target 60–80 g of carbohydrate per hour from a mix of bars, gels, bananas and feed station food.

1 MONTH OUT — TAPER & PEAK FORM

- Week 1: One final long ride of 90–100 km, well-paced, no heroics
- Week 2: Reduce volume by 40%; keep efforts sharp with 2 x 20-minute tempo rides
- Week 3: Full taper — easy spins of 40–50 minutes only
- Two days before: 20-minute very easy spin to keep legs loose
- Night before: carbohydrate-rich meal, early to bed, kit bag packed

Route-Specific Tips

- Break the 125 km mentally into four segments of ~30 km each with feed station goals
- The coastal section into the Atlantic wind can be savage — expect slower speeds and stay in your drops
- The Burren climbs demand patience: stay seated, spin a light gear, breathe slowly
- By km 90 your legs will be tired — this is normal and manageable if you've fuelled well
- Ride with a buddy if possible: sharing the work and the craic makes the miles fly
- Every volunteer, every cheer, every kilometre you ride raises vital funds for Irish Guide Dogs — remember the cause when it gets tough

And Finally...

No matter which route you've chosen, the most important thing is to start the line on event day. Bark & Ride is about more than cycling — it's about community, compassion, and making a real difference to the lives of people supported by Irish Guide Dogs. On the day, there will be hundreds of fellow riders, enthusiastic volunteers, and beautiful west of Ireland scenery to carry you through. Trust your training, enjoy the ride, and finish with a paw-some sense of pride.