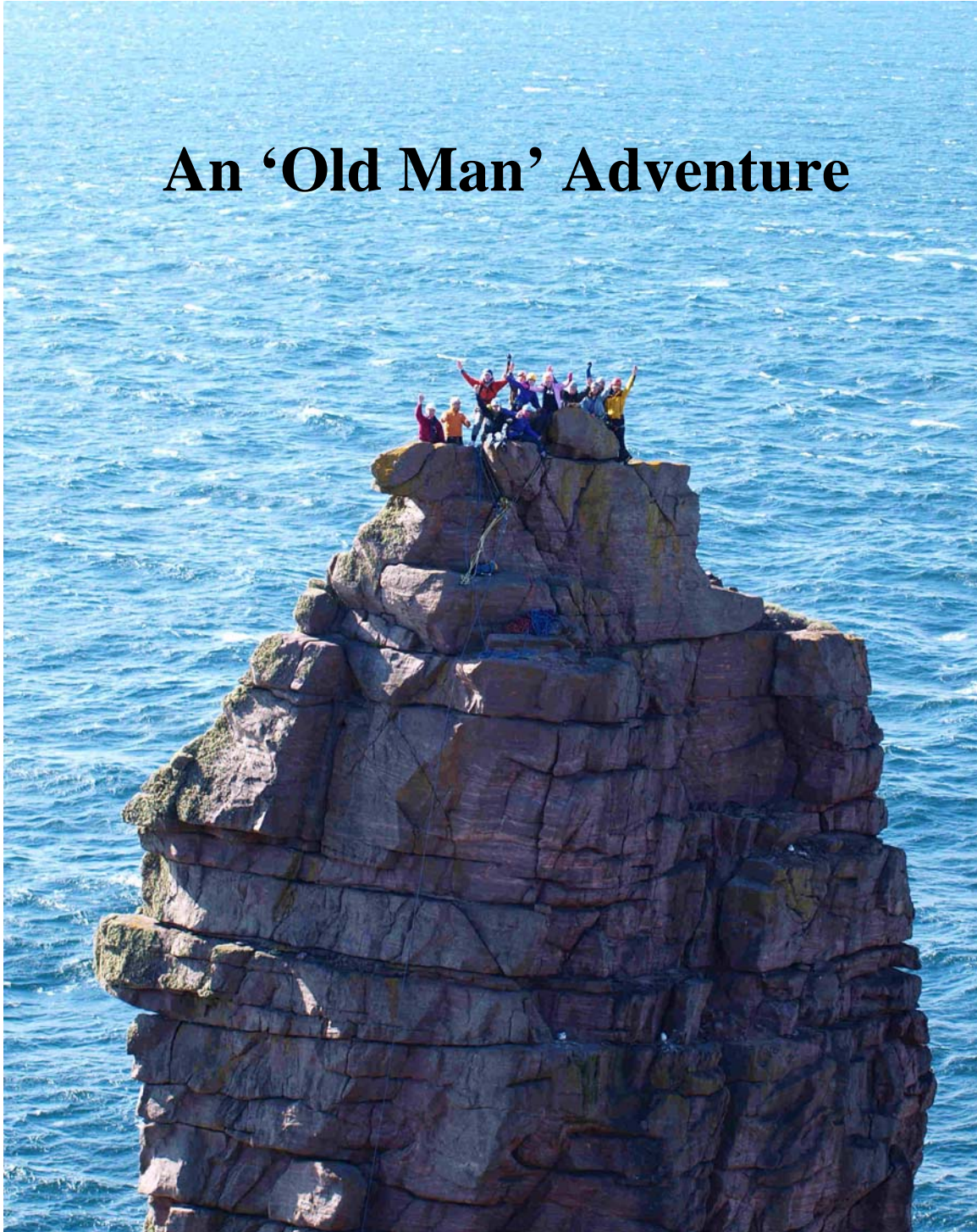


An 'Old Man' Adventure



By Ruairidh Mackenzie

(Climbing facilities officer - Climb @ Inverness Leisure)
(Area youth coordinator for the MCofS)

On Friday 5th June, sixteen climbing friends, all parents and children who climb at Inverness Leisure, set off with an adventure in mind, their ambitious plan was to climb the famous Old Man of Stoer.

I decided that we should perhaps advise other climbers of these plans in order not to cause a gridlock on the route, so I posted it on a few web climbing forums. The outrage from some climbers on the web was a little over the top and one of the posts ran for three weeks, with over 3000 hits. Lots and lots of armchair climbers, objecting to such a large group especially kids hogging the stack. Undeterred the climbing friends headed for Stoer.

The weather on the day was perfect for climbing: sunny and a good breeze to keep the midge at bay. We missed some other teams having an epic with a rubber dinghy and having to swim, but helped them get their stuck ropes down and chatted to climbers from Perth and Oxford, some of whom were quite surprised to meet such young climbers on a much sought after classic Scottish rock climb.

When we arrived at the stack there were already two parties climbing, so we had to wait until they had climbed high enough for us to start safely. I had already decided that the scramble down was a bit risky for the kids so they abseiled down the steep grass bank north of the scramble.

However two kids and two parents were not inspired when they saw the stack and abseil: it was a long day for these guys sitting watching, "don't worry the stack will be there and you can climb it another day".

Our now twelve-strong team started climbing at 11.30am and we soon had all the climbers on the route. Our climbers, some of them national champions at competitions, soon made light work of the route and by 4pm we were all on top.

The whole exercise was quite a logistical challenge for me... We first climbed the stack leaving a belayer fixed on every stance, and

then I climbed the route again with all the kids tied onto one giant long rope, the system worked perfectly. Without the help of some parents and other local climbers we could not have managed this massive potential tangle of ropes and children.

Any parent who is willing to send their loved ones out on an adventure like this warrants some serious respect, big up to these mums and dads and I just loved the great banter we had all weekend.

Some of the climbing community, were not in favor of us climbing the stack in such numbers, some had real issues because they are such young climbers but we kept them all safe all the time and everyone had a really great experience.

Very kindly some of the climbers we met posted on the forums to say they had met us and were very impressed with our team and systems.

A day like this will always be remembered by these young climbers as it has to be really character building. I'm very proud of our day out, more so in the way all the kids conducted themselves on the climb and the way they spoke and helped out other climbers on the route.

I'd like to thank all involved for their encouragement and help on one of the best climbing trips ever. I'd do it again in heartbeat.

