

The Old Man of Stoer

This walk appeared in the Saturday Herald on the 13th of August 2005, four days after my walk. Coincidence? Probably, but I still found it funny.


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COUNTRY WALK TOM PRENTICE

Old Man of Stoer

Location: North-west of Lochinver, Sutherland
Map: OS Landranger 15 (GR 287 924)
Distance: 9.5km (6 miles)
Time: 3 hours
Terrain: Paths and tracks



SCOTLAND'S coastline is dotted with sea-stacks. The Old Man of Hoy is certainly the biggest, but any rock climber will tell you that the Old Man of Stoer in Assynt is every bit as good.

Like Munros and Corbetts, the best ones aren't always the highest. It's debatable whether the Old Man of Hoy is a sea-stack at all – the sea never surrounds it and there is no reason for your feet to go anywhere near water.

The same cannot be said for the Old Man of Stoer. At the lowest of tides you may be able to get across and stay dry, but most of the time you'll need to swim the channel separating the stack from the mainland, or cross by one of the ropes that are sometimes in place.

The Coigach and Assynt coastline from Ullapool northwards is characterised by sandstone cliffs, often surprisingly compact and resilient to the relentless pounding of the waves. That is certainly the case with the Old Man, and the good rock and relatively straightforward access make it a winner with rock climbers.

A walk out to the Old Man and on to the Point of Stoer is most entertaining, and, if the weather is fair, you are likely to see climbers tackling the Old Man and some of the finest mountain scenery in Scotland. Be sure to take a pair of binoculars.

The walk starts from the car park at Stoer Lighthouse, at the end of the minor road leading from the B869 north of Lochinver. Follow the clifftop path north-west, skirting a gully en route, to arrive at the Stoer. If there are no climbers then there'll be gulls in residence on the sheltered landward face and more in the air.

From the stack continue to the Point of Stoer, where the path turns back on itself and continues southwards to gain the summit of Sidhean Mor. At 162m this is tiny but the view can be spectacular. North-east lie the hulks of Ardic and Foinaven. Closer and immediately east, the massive Quinag dominates the view, then the sugar loaf of Suilven, with the bulk of Ben More Assynt between. Farther south and east lie the hills of Coigach, with An Teallach, Torridon and Skye beyond. Across the sea to the north-west lie Lewis and Harris.

Continue south on the path past the lochan to gain a radio mast and a service track that leads back to the car park.

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