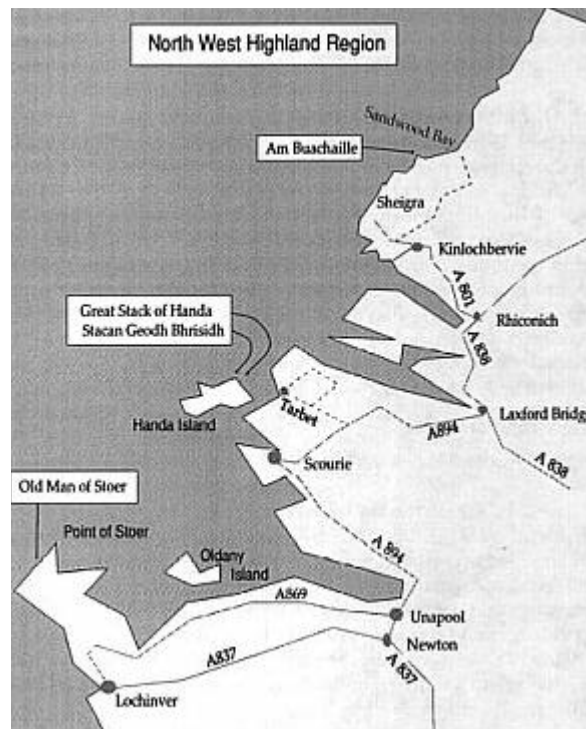


## NORTH WEST HIGHLANDS



This region includes the western Scottish mainland coast running up from Ullapool to Cape Wrath and round it to Whiten Head and Dunnet Head. It also includes the island of Sule. There are superb and classic stacks to be found here. The landscape, particularly in the far north, is as remote and wild as you can imagine. Stacks occur north of Ullapool and the first one is The Old Man of Stoer. (The 1953 North Highlands Guide said that the Old Man was “evidently unclimbable.”)

### The Old Man Of Stoer

MR: Sheet 15 018353

The Rubha Stoer peninsula lies north of Lochinver and sticks out into the Minch. The Point of Stoer is at its tip and the Old Man, a superb stack of Torridon sandstone, is about half a mile south of here. The village of Stoer is 7 miles from Lochinver. From the village go towards Raffin lighthouse, through the village of Raffin. You can drive this

*Stack Rock*



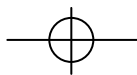
*Above - Am  
Buachaille, the  
Heardsman,  
from the north  
at the sothern  
end of  
Sandwich Bay  
up on the cliff  
top. Andrew  
Walker*

*Right - a view  
from the cliff  
top opposite  
the stack..*





*The line of Ordinary Route and the Tyrolean.*



*Stack Rock*

far but, just before the lighthouse, leave the car and take a track north through a peat bog region for about a mile to the coast and the stack. You descend steep grass slopes to reach it.

Detailed access: Cross a 30 foot channel by swimming across to the platform at its base, or use a ladder(!) and set up a tyrolean. Start from here at a cluster of pegs.

**Original Route** 240 feet VS 5a

1. 70 feet. 4c. Climb the landward face for 10 feet to gain big horizontal cracks going round the left arete - may be slimy, friend protection - to a large corner ledge. Climb up leftwards from under an overhang to reach a groove. Now go directly up a crack to a large ledge on the arête.
2. 70 feet. 5a. Ascend the steep slab/wall via a rightwards curving crack to overhangs and pass through these using a crack. Next, go delicately left to ledges and continue to a cave with a thread belay.
3. 40 feet. 4a. Go rightwards around the arête back to the landward face and go up a ramp rightwards, ignoring the first upward break, to gain a small ledge with a block belay. You may encounter fulmars.
4. 50 feet. 4b. Climb the obvious V-groove to easy rock with the finish up a short corne or ramp to the left. More fulmars may be met on this pitch.

Descent: Make a 150' abseil, mostly in space, down the south east corner to a platform. Then abseil to the base from further right along a ledge. Bring your own ab anchors for safety.

*First ascent: Tom Patey, B Robertson, B Henderson, Paul Nunn, 1966.*

**Ring Of Bright Water** 265 feet E1 5b

Start at the right-hand end of the west (seaward) face.

1. 5b. Climb a short wall to a slab underneath a roof. Cross over to the left around the roof and around the arete to get to a steep flared crack on the north face. Go up this to its top where you traverse left again along a ledge to peg belays on the east face.
2. 5b. Climb the bulge above the stance (crux) to gain a hanging slab. Follow this up to the left to gain the deep obvious V-groove of Original Route. Go up this and a short corner above to the top.

*First ascent: S. Yates, I. Halliday, June 1987.*

**North West Corner** 200 feet Extremely Severe 6a

This ascends the right-hand arete of the land ward face (looking from the cliff top.) A lot of Friend protection is available.

1. 50 feet. 5c. Climb the left side of the arete past a hard section at 20 feet to a ledge and Friend belay.
2. 60 feet. 5b. A layback flake just left of the arete enables you to reach holds leading up right to a resting place on the arete. Move up right on the right-hand side of the

arete and then follow a leftward slanting crack to regain the crest. Go left to a good belay ledge.

3. 115 feet. 6a. Climb the obvious leftward-trending ramp (two old peg runners at the start) to a ledge at its top. (This is the final belay of Original Route. I think this means the belay at the top of pitch 3 of the original route.) Move out right to a large ledge just left of the arete and then follow the arete to the top.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, C. Newcombe, 29 August 1987.*

## Handa

The island is surrounded by sheer cliffs apart from a single small landing beach. It was adopted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1962 and has the greatest concentration of seabirds in the north west. They can create a 'deafening cacaphony of noise.' It also possesses the Great Stack of Handa which is a magnet for climbers. However, climbers are very unwelcome in the nesting season. (Assume 1st February to end-June.) Access to Handa is as follows: Take the ferry from Tarbet which lands at the south east corner of the island at Port an Eilean. There is a well-marked path to the north west of the island and the stack.

### Great Stac Of Handa

MR: Sheet 27 133487

This great sandstone stack is to be found on the north west corner of Handa almost totally enclosed by the enclosing coast with a narrow geo between it and the Handa mainland. It is about 350 feet high, flat-topped and supported on three legs!

It is quite large so there ought to be many climbing possibilities. It was originally reached by Donald McDonald from St. Kilda going hand over hand across a rope stretched across the top of the stack by being fastened to anchors at either end on the enclosing headlands. When Tom Patey repeated this feat with jumars 600 feet of linked rope was needed and a 120 feet long tyrolean traverse got him onto the summit of the stack.

Detailed access: Yes. The stack is enclosed by a narrow deep geo so you either abseil down into the geo, climb up the stack, abseil down the stack, prussik out of the geo and collapse in exhaustion or look at options 2 and 3. Option 2 is to cross to the top of the stack by 'jumaring' across a rope tied between the two headlands enclosing the Stack. Now abseil down to the bottom, climb back up and repeat the tyrolean to get back to the Handa mainland.

Option 3 starts from the observation that a boat is needed to get to Handa in the first place so why not use it to get round to the geo and land at the base of the stack, climb up, abseil down and regain the boat. That way you need slightly less rope as well as saving bags of energy. Have fun.

*First ascent: Donald McDonald - hand over hand via a rope - 1876.*

*Stack Rock*

**The Great Arch** 350 feet VS

Climb the north face on good rock and with few interruptions from birds. Start at the bottom of a steep green wall on the north face. Go up to a ledge and belay at 40 feet. Ascend a wall on the right to a ledge and go up a steep groove to a point where you can traverse left above the great arch to a hidden corner. Go up this and the wall and overhang that follow to belays. Scramble up 150 feet to reach the top.

*First ascent: Hamish McInnes, G Hunter, D Long, July 1969.*

**Stacan Geodh Bhrisidh**

MR: Sheet 9 135488

This stack is about 350 yards east of the Great Stac and has been described as an 'elegant detached flake.' Walk across Handa to the cliffs opposite the stack. Detailed access: Make a grassy descent from the cliff top.

**Great Corner** 200 feet VS

This climbs up on the landward side from a stance in a corner which is indicated by an arrow.

1. 70 feet. Go leftwards and then work your way up loose rock to the obvious corner crack. Go up this to a belay ledge featuring loose blocks.
2. 130 feet. Ascend flakes to the crest of a ridge. Go right along a ledge for 30 feet and so reach a groove that leads to the top.

Descent: There is a bolt on the summit from which you abseil 50 feet to a ledge on the north west face. You can reach the bottom with another abseil from here.

*First ascent: Hamish MacInnes, G.N. Hunter, D.F. Long, July 1969.*

**Puffin Bay Stack**

MR: Sheet 9?

According to the SMC Journal there is an obvious stack in Puffin Bay. It's so 'obvious' there is no further information about it!

Detailed access: No information.

*First ascent: Hamish MacInnes, G. N. Hunter, D. F. Long, August 1969.*

**Am Buachaille**

MR: Sheet 9 200652

This truly great stack is also known by the translation of its gaelic name as The Herdsman. Sandwood Bay is south of Cape Wrath and is one of the most remote, unspoiled and beautiful bays in Scotland. It is over a mile across from end to end with dunes behind the beach. The southern end of the great sweep of pale pink sand is bounded by a promontory at the end of which is the very prominent and picturesque Am Buchaille. Get on to the road running between Blairmore and Sheigra. A moorland track leaves this for Loch a'Mhuillin. From there a path leads to Sandwood Bay. The distance from the road is 3½ miles.



*Am Buachaille from the shore to the south -right. The stack from the clifftop to the south - left.  
Andrew Walker pictures.*

Detailed access: There is a stubby stack platform north of the Buachaille. Either descend the southmost of two prominent gullies or the vague path on the steep hillside between it and the Buachaille. Walk down to the non-tidal boulder beach shore north of the stack and traverse around until opposite its broad platform base from which you are separated by a 30 foot channel. Low tide is necessary for the next step. If there is a north easterly wind the channel may feature rough water. Swim across the channel and set up a tyrolean for the other members of the party. Low tide is needed for the tyrolean anchor points to be exposed. There are four hours available for the climb before the bottom is awash with the briny again.

**The Herdsman** 180 feet HVS 4c \*\*

Great adventure climbing but the rock is of poorish quality. Start left of centre on the landward face. There isn't a good belay point at the bottom and protection is not good.

*Stack Rock*



*Near the start of the 1969 route - left. On the 'soup plate' section near the top of the 1967 route - right. Andrew Walker pictures.*

1. 85 feet. 4c. Use large jugs to get up the overhanging wall and go right to a prow. Then climb straight up to a ledge below a steep wall. Go left to a belay on a ledge.
2. 95 feet. 4c. Go back right and ascend a wall right of a corner using a thin crack. (The crack above the corner was the original way but is on poor rock.) Reach a deep overhanging corner crack and traverse underneath it leftwards until you can mantle shelf between two large plates of rock. Go across the slab to a crack and make an awkward pull up to the top.

*First ascent: T. W. Patey, J. Cleare and Ian Clough, 1967.*

**Atlantic Wall** 165 feet HVS 5a/b

This climbs the west, seaward face. Start at the left end of the base platform below the south face. Better rock and security than the 1967 route.

1. 50 feet. 5a. A little left-facing corner leads to a roof under which you traverse left to the arete. Up this to an exposed stance.
2. 50 feet. 4c. Go up the overhanging flake on the west face which is strenuous. Relax a bit and carry on up to a big ledge underneath the headwall.



3. 75 feet. 5a/b. There is a big detached block on the right. Climb a thin crack above this to a horizontal break where you can traverse left to another crack which leads up to easier rock and the top. Descent by two abseils.

*First ascent: Simon Richardson, R. Clothier, 15 September 1990.*

## CAPE WRATH

Here Torridon sandstone plateau meets the sea as the coast turns to the east. The cliffs are huge and the sea almost always runs a huge swell. It is a magnificent wild and remote place which rewards the adventurous who reach it with splendid scenery, tough walks and memorable experiences. This place is on the edge.

There are two stacks situated one mile south of Cape Wrath, six miles from Sandwich bay. Their names translate to the Old Woman and the Old Man respectively. They are best reached by walking south along the coast from Cape Wrath. If you start from Durness and take a ferry across the Kyle of Durness you can



*A'Chailleach from the shore (left); on the summit with Am Bodach beyond right). Andrew Walker pictures.*

*Stack Rock*



*A'Chailleach South Face route - abseiling off (bottom); looking down to the channel (top). Andrew Walker pictures.*

then follow the track to Cape Wrath Lighthouse. There is a minibus service along this track which is used to take tourists to the lighthouse.

### A'Chailleach

MR: Sheet 9 249737

This is the lesser of the two stacks but is a more impressive sight. Good gneiss rock on the stack and the birds are few.

Detailed access: Scramble down quite easy rocks to the south. Once on the shore there is a ten foot channel between the stack and the mainland which can be swum in calm seas. Unfortunately the seas are rarely calm and enormous waves are the normal situation. Once across set up a tyrolean. If you want to avoid this and have everyone swim over then only one 55m rope is needed.

#### South Face 80 feet H. Severe

Start on the south side facing Am Bodach and climb up right to reach the arete facing the nearest point of the mainland. Follow this to the final overhanging wall which is avoided by a short traverse right.

Descent: free abseil to the base.

*First ascent: Simon Richardson, Guy Muhlemann, Mick Fowler, Nikki Dugan, Chris Watts, 17 June 1989.*

### Am Bodach

MR: Sheet 9 249736

Stack-naming conventions know nothing of political correctness so this, the bigger of the two, is called The Old Man. As with its partner, few birds will be encountered.

Detailed access: There is a narrow channel between it and the mainland which can be stepped over at low tide when the waves are small or infrequent.

#### South Face 130 feet Diff

Climb the south side of the stack by a line of steep cracks and good holds followed by scrambling to the top.

*First ascent: Guy Muhlemann, S. MacIntyre, Simon Richardson, 27 May 1989.*

### Stac Clo Kearvaig

MR: Sheet 9 295737

This fine stack rises to 130 feet at the western end of the Clo Mor cliffs. There are two towers with one large and some smaller jammed boulders between them. They are the same height with a third lower summit to the south. It is usual for the seas to be rough and the currents strong.

Detailed access: Take a boat and land at a large platform at the north east end of the stack.

*Stack Rock*

**Seaward Stack** 180 feet HVS

1. 115 feet. 5a. Move round the the corner on to the seaward face and trend right, then back left to eventually gain a short right-angled corner with a crack in the back. Climb this (10 feet) to a ledge next to the left arete (when viewed from the seaward side). This ledge is level with the highest of the wedged boulders between the summits.

2. 65 feet. 5a. Move up rightwards to a ledge and follow a short but awkward right slanting open groove to easier ground which leads to the top.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, Chris Watts, Guy Muhlemann, Simon Richardson, 18 June 1989*

**Landward Stack** 180 feet HVS

1. 115 feet 5a. As for the Seaward Stack to the ledge next to the arete.

2. 50 feet. 5a. Traverse horizontally across the wall to reach the highest of the huge wedged boulders. Cross this to reach the landward stack and climb a right-angled corner to a corner ledge.

3. 15 feet. 4c. Climb the corner to the top.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, Chris Watts, Simon Richardson, Guy Muhlemann, 18 June 1989.*

The third, south, summit to this stack is unclimbed.

**Stac Clo Mor**

100 feet V.Diff/AI

MR: Sheet 9 300736

Half a mile east of Stac Clo Kearvaig is Stac Clo Mor. It is a 100 feet high sandstone stack, conical in shape with a small (25 feet) finger of rock at its top.

Detailed access: A boat is need to reach it.

1. 100. Climb up to below the rock finger and then lassoe the top and prussik up the rope to the summit. Probably free climbable.

*First ascent: Simon Richardson, Guy Muhlemann, Chris Watts, Mick Fowler, 19 June 1989.*

**Whiten Head**

**The Maiden**

MR: Sheet 9 496686

There are two quartzite stacks here separated by a deep channel and a long way offshore. The eastern stack is known as The Maiden and has a cave at its foot giving the appearance of legs. Tom Patey fell to his death whilst abseiling from the summit after the first ascent. The western stack doesn't have its own name.

The stacks now have a fine complement of climbs with Waterfront Wall being an outstanding severe. They can be reached either by boat or a swim. If by boat then a three mile crossing of Loch Eriboll is needed to reach Whiten Head and the stacks. Low tide is best for landing at the channel between the stacks whilst high tide is

better for landing on the landward side. The plinth beneath the stacks can be reached by an eleven kilometre walk, descending the steep headland and swimming just over a hundred yards. This makes for a demanding day out.

### East Pinnacle

The eastern pinnacle gives an impression of overhanging rock and verticality. There are several routes on it. My impression is that the route descriptions here are not as precise as one would wish. Certainly they vary between sources.

#### Original Route 180 feet VS

The original route up the stack. Treat the description with care. There are different ones in previous printed publications. The pitch lengths or the overall length of the climb are suspect also.

There is a cave on the west side. Start near this.

1. 75 feet. Climb over sharp rocks to the left just above sea level and continue to a stance on the north side.
2. 75 feet. Go up into a steep groove and traverse right onto a wall to avoid an overhanging crack. Ascend the wall for 25 feet, go back left into the crackline and up it to a fine belay ledge.
3. 75 feet. Cross over loose blocks into a bay and go up the left edge of this to a belay.
4. 75 feet. Climb up loose flakes on the left to reach the top. Abseil descent.

*First ascent: Paul Nunn, Brian Fuller, D Goodwin, C Rowland, Tom Patey, 25 May 1970.*

#### March's Route VS 215 feet

This line was taken when Patey's abseil rope and other gear was being recovered. From the large platform on the landward side traverse left along a ledge to an overhang. Climb this on large holds to gain a ledge. The climb starts from here.

Move right and climb the obvious overhanging crack. Bridging is the suggested technique. There is a ledge 50 feet above. Traverse along this to the seaward side of the stack and ascend an obvious crack line directly to the summit.

*First ascent: Bill March, John Cunningham, after May 25th, 1970.*

#### Ode 175 feet HVS 5a

This climbs a prominent line up the steep west face which faces the west pinnacle. Start just right of the cave running through the stack where initial overhangs prevent access to a scoop and right-trending ramp.

1. 95 feet. 5a. Get over the overhangs trending left, move back into the scoop and follow the ramp rightwards to more overhangs. Move right to get to ledges and follow these back left to a belay underneath the prominent central fault cleaving the upper part of the face.

*Stack Rock*

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2. 80 feet. 5a. Go up the steep corner line to an exit on the left. The overhanging final wall is avoided on the left.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, C. Newcombe, 28 May 1988.*

**Funeral For A Friend** 255 feet E1 5b

This takes the eastern face of the eastern pinnacle. Easier climbing follows the good and hard first pitch. Start at the bottom of the east face at the base of a pillar to the left of the cave.

1. 60 feet. 5b. Climb the pillar and go over a small roof to a niche on the right. Move up to the right and go over another overhang to reach a short wall. Climb this to a ledge.

2. 75 feet. 4a. Go to the right-hand end of the ledge and move up a corner above for about 10 feet to reach a ledge and belay.

3. 105 feet. 4c. Continue up the corner then go directly up short walls interspersed by ledges to the top.

*First ascent: Chris Watts, Jon Lincoln, 28 May 1988.*

**West Pinnacle**

There is no information available that mentions how to get from one pinnacle to the other. As you will have got to these pinnacles by boat in all probability then both land and sea options are covered.

**Waterfront Wall** 190 feet Severe \*\*

This superb route climbs the impressive north east corner on solid rock. Start at the north east seaward corner of the stack.

1. 85 feet. Take your own line using good holds to a depression below a steep bar. There is a stance on the right.

2. 70 feet. Climb the small overhang above the stance and then move left to a short and discontinuous crack line. Climb this for about 20 feet to overhangs and avoid them by traversing left to a sensational stance on the arete.

3. 20 feet. Easier rock leads to the top.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, C. Newcombe, 28 May 1988.*

**Maiden Without A Hole** 250 feet HVS 4c

This is a loose route on a face facing the eastern pinnacle. Start in the centre of the east face.

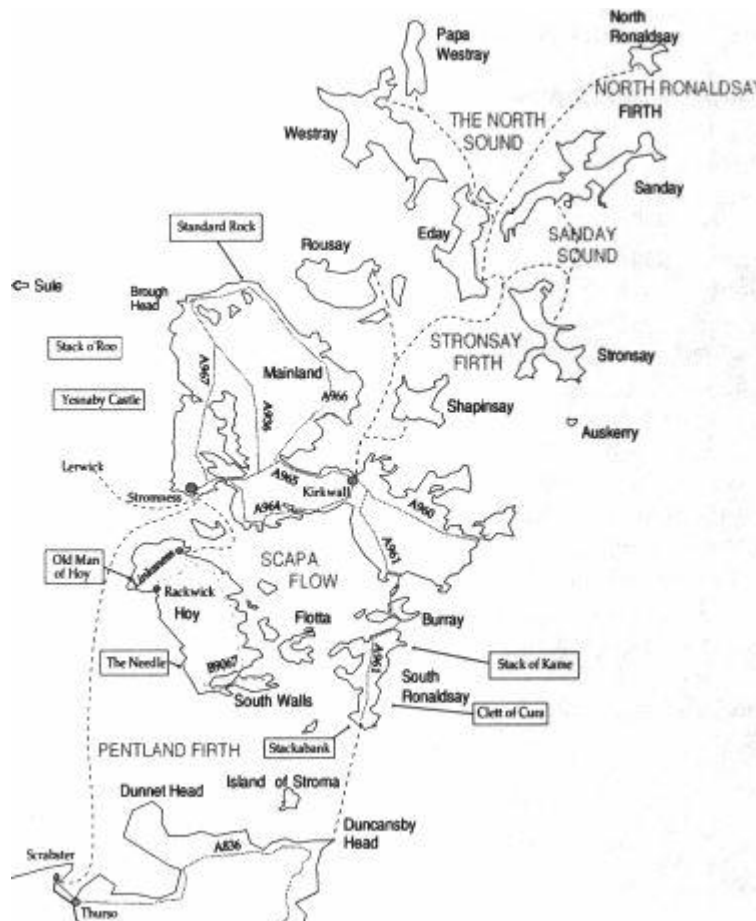
1. 105 feet. 4c Climb awkwardly onto a ramp/traverse line. Move left along this for about 80 feet to a belay stance at the bottom of a shattered groove.

2. 45 feet. 4c. Climb the shattered groove to a large stance.

3. 100 feet. 4c. Move along the ledge rightwards and climb a short wall to gain another ledge. Cross this to the base of the headwall and climb up right in an exposed position to gain the top.

*First ascent: Chris Walls, Jon Lincoln, 28 May 1988.*

## ORKNEY



There are not many stacks here compared to Shetland. Yet, ironically, the group boasts the single most famous stack in the British Isles in the Old Man of Hoy. It also boasts more prehistoric sites than anywhere else in Britain. Orkney differs from Shetland and the difference has been expressed in the idea that an Orcadian is a farmer with a boat while the Shetlander is a fisherman with a croft.

Like Shetland the main island in Orkney is called Mainland. To its south and west is Hoy, famous for the Old Man whilst to its south and east is South Ronaldsay. Between these three islands is the large natural harbour of Scapa Flow. North of Mainland there is a set of smaller islands, such as Westray, scattered around the Stronsay Firth.

*Stack Rock*

Orkney is generally reached by taking a daily P and O vehicle ferry from Scrabster, near Thurso, to Stromness on Mainland. The crossing takes 2 hours and takes place twice a day. You can reach Scrabster by car, by rail to Thurso (from Edinburgh), or you can fly to Kirkwall airport on Mainland some 10 miles to the east of Stromness. Lastly you can take a weekly P and O ferry to Stromness from Aberdeen but it is a long trip. We will describe stacks on Mainland first followed by Hoy and South Ronaldsay.

Mountain Rescue: Get to a telephone and dial 999.

## Mainland

Orkney can be likened to a capital letter H. Hoy and South Ronaldsay are the two lower legs. Mainland is the crossbar. The stacks are on the west and north coasts. We will go round Mainland in a clockwise direction starting from near Stromness.

### North Gaulton Castle

165 feet HVS

MR: Sheet 6 217136.

This stack, used in a Rover advert - they helicoptered a Rover car and lowered it onto the stack - lies to the north of Stromness and about two miles south of Yesnaby Castle. Drive up the A967 to Ouholmslie, take a minor road west for just over a mile to Caulhome and then a track for two miles or thereabouts to Mousland. Now walk north west for about a mile to the coast and the stack.

Detailed access: Apparently a huge tyrolean can be rigged up to gain the base of the stack. This involves stretching a rope between two sections of coast either side of the stack.

My guess is that this stack hasn't been climbed since the first ascent and the details of that are lost

Climb the stack in two pitches.

*First ascent: Pete Minks, Cliff Phillips, Easter 1970.*

### Yesnaby Castle 115 feet EI

MR: Sheet 6 218158

An absolutely magnificent stack with through caves at its base that you can walk through. Yesnaby Castle is off the west coast of Mainland near the Stone Age village of Skara Brae and the Brough of Bigging.

Drive north from Stromness on the A965, then the A967 for four or so miles to the junction with the B9056. Take this and then the minor road running west to Yesnaby in half a mile. There is a car park at the end of this road and the stack should be





*Pictures of Yesnaby Castle stack. There is quite a wide channel to cross to get to the stack.*

visible to the south east. Walk south along the coast to the Brough of Bigging promontory and find the stack off the north west side of this.

### Stack Rock

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Detailed access: There are cliffs to descend by abseil and a channel to cross by swimming. A boat maybe a useful alternative.

Climb the south face. Descend by abseil and then prusik or jumar back up the cliff abseil rope.

*First ascent: Joe Brown and party, July 1967.*

**Yes, Please** 115 feet? E3 6a

Climb up an overhanging finger crack on the seaward edge.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, Crag Jones, Julian Freeman-Attwood, Oct? 1996*

### Stack o'Roo

Sev

MR: Sheet 6 228219

This stack is situated north of the Bay of Skail however the Landranger Sheet 6 map doesn't actually show it. Drive north from Stromness again on the A967 to the junction with the B9055 near Hestwall. Go left on this for about a mile, then north on the B9056 for over four miles to Knowes of Yonbell. A track goes left to a radio mast and beyond. Go to the end of this - 1¼ miles, park the car and walk to the coast in less than a ¼ of a mile. Now tramp south along the coastline to reach the stack, hopefully, in less than a ¼ of a mile again.

Detailed access: No information.

The climb has been described as loose and dirty.

*First ascent: J. Upton, E. Sweeney, A. Harris, K. Toms, May 1970.*

Now we go out to sea for a brief diversion:

### Sule

A very isolated stack in the sea north of Cape Wrath and south west of the lighthouse on Sule Skerry. It is 41 miles west of Brough Head, the north west tip of Mainland.

### Sule Stack

MR: Sheet 6 563179

The stack is composed of granite, is about 120 feet high and home to gannets and storm petrels.

Detailed access: Explore around the stack from your boat.

*First ascent: Unknown.*

Back on Mainland we come to:

### Standard Rock

MR: Sheet 6 301304

Found just off Costa Head in the far north of Mainland. It lies east of Brough Head. Once more drive north on the A967 but this time to a junction with the A966 very near to Brough Head. Now go east on the A966 for 3½ miles and, just past Swannay Farm, take the track for about a ¼ mile northwards to the coast and the stack a further ¼ mile north east.

Detailed access: Descend the cliffs guarding it and then puzzle out how to gain the base of the stack.

### SR Climb?

*First ascent: Done but no details.*

### Hemp Stack

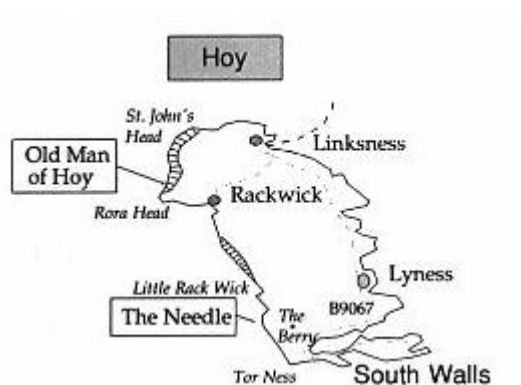
MR: Sheet 6 441061

This stack is 2 1/2 miles south from Kirkwall. Drive south from Kirkwall on the A961 and take the fourth track on the left to Gaitnip. Park the car and walk for less than a 1/4 mile to the coast. There are cliffs immediately opposite the stack but these give way to steep slopes a short distance to the north.

Detailed access: Unclear.

*First ascent: Unknown, so to avoid getting in dire straights mount private investigations.*

## Hoy



Hoy is the quite large island forming the western border of Scapa Flow. It is linked to Mainland by a ferry running from Stromness to Linksness on Hoy - if the weather is not too severe. You can then take a taxi to Rackwick Bay and its attendant youth hostel, B&B facilities or campsite. Provisions can be bought at Longhope on Hoy or at Stromness.

*Stack Rock*



*The Old Man of Hoy seen from a passing boat looking eastwards.*

There are two stacks here; the Old Man of Hoy is justly famous and is probably the most developed stack in the United Kingdom in terms of the number of routes on it. The Needle is an outrageous adventure in its own right and well worth the trip.

Mountain Rescue: There are facilities at the police station in Wick and a telephone in Rackwick.

### **The Old Man Of Hoy**

MR: Sheet 7 175009

This is the most famous sea stack in Britain as a result of the Bonnington, Patey and Baillie TV extravaganza. It is composed of rather decaying Orcadian sandstone standing on a granite plinth and features five climbs ranging from an acceptable EI right up to E6. The stack is found just to the north of Rora Head which is east of Rackwick.

It is a 1½ mile walk to the stack. Go diagonally up the hillside from the old schoolhouse. The cliffs start at Rora Head and run north to St. John's Head where it is the third highest sea cliff in the British Isles at 1,128 feet. Conachair on St. Kilda is the highest with the Kame on Foula next.



*The Old Man of Hoy seen from the cliff top.*

Detailed access: Descend the 400 feet to sea level down steep grassy slopes which involves a traverse over what can be steep and slippery mud. At sea level you can reach the stack without swimming by crossing the boulder bridge, presumably the remains of the arch that once connected the stack to the Hoy mainland. We'll describe the climbs going round the stack in an anti-clockwise direction starting with the east face.

*Stack Rock*



*The Old Man of Hoy seen from the sea looking roughly east at the west face.*

**Original (or East Face) Route** 460 feet E1 5b

This is the original route up the east face of the stack and a memorable excursion well worth the trip. Careful attention to ropework and your descent pays dividends here.

1. 70 feet. 4b. A relatively easy pitch up sound, juggy, easy-angled rock. Ascend the shattered pillar rising from the boulder bridge up to a large ledge known as The Gallery. In the nesting season you will probably meet a fulmar here.

2. 120 feet. 5b. The big pitch. After downclimbing a short way traverse right onto the east face for 30 feet to a big corner crack. Go up this on sometimes small and indistinct holds to belay in a triangular niche on the right at the top.

(Leave a rope on this pitch tied to the belays at either end. It is necessary for the abseil descent.)

3. 80 feet. 4b. Go right and then move back to the left over ledges to regain the crackline. Follow it to another large ledge.

4. 120 feet. 4b. Ascend the wall on the right then go straight up to the bottom of the final corner.

5. 70 feet. 4b. The final corner crack is like some Orcadian version of Cenotaph Corner but not nearly so tough. Climb the corner. Towards the top where the stack is split right through a seeming gale can issue from the crack in the corner.

Descent: Two or three abseils down the face up which you have just climbed get you to the top of the big overhanging section - pitch 2. The next abseil involves descending below the overhangs and then swinging back in to a relatively small ledge. Use the rope left behind on that pitch (clip it into your harness) and thus pull yourself to the belay ledge. The last one down has the most fun as this guide rope has to be untied from the top belay leading to a real 'out-in-space' ab experience. Now abseil to the bottom of the stack.

*First ascent: Tom Patey, Rusty Baillie, Chris Bonnington 1966.*

#### **A Few Dollars More** 450 feet E3 5c

This is thought to be the best route and takes the obvious line of cracks in the north face. From the bottom of the south face cross over the west face by an obvious break to the initial buttress of the north face. A belay is gained by 30 feet of scrambling.

1. 150 feet. 4c. Go up the open groove and then follow a chimney in the right wall. At the top cross a ledge to the right and the main groove. Go up this to a ledge surmounting the initial buttress.

2. 100 feet. 5c. Step right onto the wall and climb a groove and flake to its top. Now ascend steep rock to a break in the overlap. From here climb a crackline to reach a bigish cave.

3. 100 feet. 5b. Ascend the steep crack at the left end of the cave to gain ledges near the left arete. After climbing short walls on the right you reach a grass ledge situated below the middle of the final wall.

4. 100 feet. 5b. Now go up the wall using thin cracks to arrive at a bottomless groove which is followed to a ledge on the left. Ascend a crack and a wall to the top.

Descend as for East Face Route.

*First ascent: Murray Hamilton, Pete Whillance, Paul Braithwaite 1984.*

*Stack Rock***Ancient Mariner** 550 feet E2 5b/c

The destination of the climb is the crack-cum-chimney above the half way point of the west face. To get there entails starting on the south face and crossing over. You start at a point 40 feet to the right of the arete between the west and south faces.

1. 150 feet. 5b/c. Go up a wall for 30 feet and then up a groove until you can traverse left along an obvious line about 10 feet below the top of the groove. Traverse into the centre of the wall, climb up for a few feet and continue the traverse to the arete and go up this to a ledge with a very large block. Now watch your second calculating the pendulum possibilities if he or she comes unstuck.
2. 150 feet. 5b. Onto the west face by climbing a short groove on the left and then crossing over into the target crack line across steep rock. Go up the crack to reach a belay. There are lots of ledges on the way.
3. 150 feet. 5a. Relax and romp up the crack for a rope length.
4. 100 feet. 4c. Relax some more and go up to the large grassy terrace on the right. From its top climb a wall on the left and then a corner to reach the top. Wow.

An abseil descent of A Few Dollars More provides a 4 pitch descent minus the rope antics involved in descending the Original Route.

*First ascent: Arnis Strapcans, ANO, 1982.*

**South Face** 495 feet E2 5b

This climb provides some exciting positions in the middle two pitches where it passes through a series of overhangs.

1. 70 feet. 4b. Climb up to The Gallery as for the Original Route.
2. 120 feet. 5b. Now the climb changes character and forces a way up a big wall heading for the bands of overhangs above. Ascend the corner on the left, step onto the wall and go up this steeply to a flake by which you move leftwards to reach a belay ledge. The position is somewhat exciting.
3. 60 feet. 5b. To the left a crack passes through the overhangs. Climb this using the horizontal breaks to gain a recess on the left which provides a belay.
4. 150 feet. 4c. Another big pitch but at an easier standard. Climb rightwards to regain the crack and follow it once more past another set of overhangs and horizontal breaks to reach The Haven, a grassy ledge.
5. c130 feet. 4c. Embark on a rightwards traverse to gain the base of the final corner of the Original Route on the east face. You end up out of sight and sound of your second.
6. 70 feet. 4b. Climb the corner as for Original Route watching out for the gale blowing from the corner crack.

*First ascent: Joe Brown, Ian McNaught-Davis, 8-9 July 1967 - 2nd BBC day.*

**South East Arête** 520 feet A4

This route has been superseded by A Fistful Of Dollars

*First ascent: Dougal Haston, Peter Crew, 8-9 July 1967 - 2nd BBC day.*



**A Fistful of Dollars** 465 feet E5 6a

This is a direct and free version of the aided South East Arete. It is a big route in every sense and wimps need not apply. (That rules me out.) You are advised to have a rack with lots of Friends 1-3 and Rocks 1 - 9, mostly large ones and a leader, a good one.

1. 70 feet. Climb up to the gallery as for the Original Route. Above is an overhang with a flake to its left.
2. 130 feet. 6a. Climb the corner on the left for 30 feet and then step up onto the steep wall from the top of a pinnacle. Go up rightwards to the flake on the left of the overhang, climb up to the left and ascend the flake/groove to its top. It is now possible to traverse rightwards towards the arete and meet a thin crack. Ascend to a narrow and long ledge on the right.
3. 80 feet. 5c. Now go up the arete until you can step right to a crack in the overhang and then move up to a ledge on the right. Go up ledges on the right side of the arete and then climb another thin crack through another overhang and so to a squarish ledge with old peg belays.
4. 90 feet. 5c. Go up and cross over to the left side of the are te. Now climb up to a good crack on the left and up this to reach a nice ledge on the arete. From here climb a crack on the right going left to insubstantial-looking ledges on the left at its top. Ascend the wall and go over a small overhang after which you go left to the arete. Belay ledges are 20 feet further up.
5. 100 feet. 5c/6a. Another big pitch. Carry on up the arete to an overhang which you take on its left and so reach a niche. Ascend the finger crack above to gain small ledges on the headwall. Climb rightwards up and across the wall and then go up cracks to reach the arete and the top.

*First ascent: Murray Hamilton, Pete Whillance, Paul Braithwaite, 1984*

After The Old Man anything else on Hoy might seem is a bit of an anticlimax so here is the very antidote needed-

**The Needle**

200 feet XS 5c

MR: Sheet 7 242901

There are some cliffs south of Rackwick Bay and this stack is at the southern tip of them. Go south on the B9047 on Hoy to Saltness (MR:7 274901). From here walk westwards along the Glen of the Berry to the coastline and the stack. It is an excellent adventure.

Detailed access: A grassy promontory juts out from the main cliff almost level with the top of the stack. The promontory forms the south side of a geo biting deeply into the cliffs. An abseil stake is in place at the end of this promontory. Remove clothes and abseil 200 feet directly into the sea in the geo. Swim across to ledges on the far side

*Stack Rock*

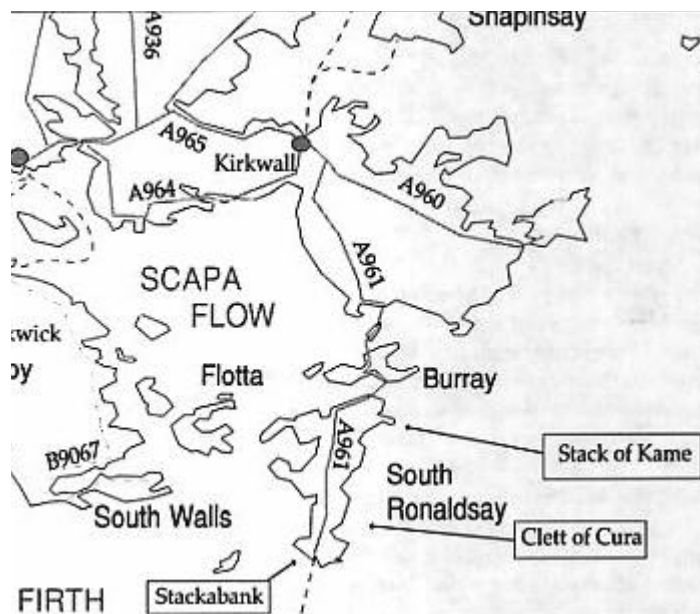
and traverse round until opposite the stack. Now swim across to ledges on the south side. Are we sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

1. 50 feet. From the landward corner of the south side trend up leftwards and then back right above overhangs to a good ledge.
  2. 100 feet 5c. Climb through the band of overhangs above at the obvious place near the centre of the south face (crux) and trend rightwards to a shallow depression which leads left to another good ledge. Serious.
  3. 50 feet. Move round onto the seaward face and climb up to the summit.
- Descend by abseil and then swim back to the promontory and jumar back up to the clifftop or swim off to the south.

*First ascent: Mick Fowler, Steve Sustad (alt), Nikki Dugan, 27 May 1990.*

Advice: Abseil and swim with clothes in a polythene bag. It will help to keep you afloat and give you something dry to wear. A separate polythene bag could contain your gear and be pulled across separately.

### South Ronaldsay



You reach South Ronaldsay either by catching a ferry from Stromness or taking a passenger ferry from Duncansby Head on the Scottish mainland.

### Stackabank

MR: Sheet 7 433868

This stack is on the west coast near Greenvale. The Duncansby Head ferry docks at Burwick in the south of South Ronaldsay. Take the A964 northwards for 1½ miles to Lyth and, at the first junction where two tracks meet the A961 on the left take the north west track for over ½ a mile to Greenvale. Walk less than a ¼ mile north west to the coast and the stack. The stack has been climbed but the details lost.

Detailed access: The stack appears to stand on a small finger-shaped promontory which may be exposed at low tide. Walk onto this promontory and out to the stack.

*First ascent: Unknown.*

### Clett of Crura

MR: Sheet 7 463874

There is a rather greenish route on the landward face of this stack. Take the A961 north from Burwick for two miles to where a minor road goes south east to Linklater just over a mile away. Once there park the car and walk ¾ of a mile or so northwards around the coast of Wind Wick to the Clett. Unfortunately it is offshore. Detailed access: Swim across.

### Seaward Face(?) HVS

This climbs the seaward face.

*First ascent: Unknown*

The landward face of this stack offers a rather green route with the difficulty concentrated into a short section.

1. 80 feet. 5a. From ledges at the base of the landward side gain and climb ledges in a depression left of centre. At 65 feet a short overhanging crack has to be climbed which is followed by a few feet of easier climbing to the top.

*First ascent: Steve Sustad, Nikki Dugan, Mick Fowler, May 1990.*

### Stack of Kame

MR: Sheet 7 490924

In the north east part of South Ronaldsay a bulbous headland called Grim Ness sticks out into the sea. The Stack of Kame is on its southern tip just to west of the mouth of a geo. Just south of where the A961 comes south from Burray across Churchill Barrier number 4 onto South Ronaldsay the B9044 goes south south east to South Cara. Take this and then, in under a ¼ of a mile, take the first minor road on the left.

Follow this ¾ of a mile north east to the coast and then south south east for 1¾ miles to the end of the road and subsequent track at Head on Grim Ness. Walk a third of a mile in the same line to the stack.

### Stack Rock

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Detailed access: It seems that landward access is feasible from the map so go for it.

*First ascent: Unknown.*

## Eday

Landranger sheet 6 shows a possible stack here.

### Stackie Geos

MR: Sheet 6 574287

The B9063 runs to the south of Eday. At its end by the pier take a track due south, go right at the second junction and then first left on a minor road to Green. Walk a short distance to the coast and explore.

Detailed access: No information.

*First ascent: We don't even know if there is a stack to ascend!*

## Westray

### Castle of Burrian

MR: Sheet 5 504429

It is noted in an Orkney tourist web site that the Castle of Burrian is an imposing rock stack on the south east corner of the island. It was the site of an early Christian hermitage and the remnants of buildings can be seen on its top.

Detailed Access: Leaving Pierowall, travel south on the B9067, fork left (S.E.) on the B9066. Go five miles to a telephone, then 750 yards further to a farm road on the left. This leads to Rack Wick; follow the shoreline a half mile N.N.E. (Thanks to Jim Thompson for directions.)

*First ascent: Early Christians.*

## Fair Isle

This is the most remote inhabited island in the British Isles, lying halfway between the Orkneys and Shetlands and rising spectacularly from the waves. It is where the Fair Isle knitting pattern comes from. This pattern of knitting has been traced back 2,000 years to Balkan nomads. An alternative story traces it to a wrecked Spanish galleon from the armada.

Apparently the composition of the dyes that go into the wool is still kept a secret. The island is owned by the National Trust of Scotland and there is an observatory on the island to monitor bird movements. The 75 inhabitants live in a village with two churches, a post office, shop and village hall all within sight of one another.

There are six, possibly seven, stacks around Fair Isle, most of which are on the west coast. This coast is generously bestowed with cliffs, geos, stacks and skerries. We will go round the island in a clockwise direction starting in the south. Landward

access directions will be provided but a boat would be a useful accessory for most west coast stacks and essential for the Stacks of Skroo.



Mountain Rescue: There is a coast guard station in the south of the island by Stonybrecks.

### Fogli Stack

MR: Sheet 4 194709

From the ferry terminus go south on the minor road to Stonybreck. From here walk south west to Malcolm's Head and go out to its north west tip where you will find Fogli stack separated by a channel from the shore. It seems a substantial pyramid-shaped stack.

Detailed access: Cross the channel and explore the stack.

First ascent: Unknown.

### Hundi Stack

MR: Sheet 4 199714

Go to Stonybreck and walk just over a ¼ mile north west to and along the coast to the stack. It seems to be on the south of a geo and may require a swim to get to.

Detailed access: Try a boat.

First ascent: Unknown.

### Breiti Stack

MR: Sheet 4 201725

*Stack Rock*

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From the landing place walk south west to the airfield and then due west for  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile over the hill of Burrashield and so to the coast. Breiti Stacks is a substantial structure with a channel between it and the shore.

Detailed access: No idea so you will have to explore.

*First ascent: Unknown.*

### **Stacks of Skroo**

MR: Sheet 4 209742

There are two or three stacks here which are in a very unsheltered position. Expect heavy swells. Take a boat north from the landing place in North Haven and sail round Skroo headland. You will encounter the stacks a mile west from here.

#### **Skroo Stack 1**

*First ascent: Unknown*

#### **Skroo Stack 2**

*First ascent: Unknown.*

There may be a third stack here.

### **Stacks of Wirrvie**

MR: Sheet 4 223734

The name implies more than one stack although the map shows just one possible item. We'll assume two. They are the only stacks on the, most probably, sheltered east coast. Either take a boat from North Haven or walk north from the landing pier.

Actually you cross westwards from Bu Ness and take the north (left) fork at the minor road junction. Go about a mile from the junction, walk a few yards east to the coast and hunt for the stacks.

Detailed access: Descend cliffs and investigate.

#### **Wirrvie Stack 1**

*First ascent: Unknown.*

#### **Wirrvie Stack 2**

*First ascent: Unknown.*