

Chanonry Sailing Club

### **SUP Trip Log – Cromarty to Rosemarkie (15km) – October 2022**

So fortunate are we to live and have the opportunity to play in such a wonderful place, to paddle fantastic coastlines in tidal waters teeming with indigenous bird and marine life, and to be able interact with that natural environment – all on our doorstep. Paddleboarding offers an intimate and joyous relationship, as well as a vulnerability, with that environment ... with the wind, swell, waves, tides ... to be able to pass quietly, slowly and peacefully, with minimal intrusion or disturbance.

The coastline from Cromarty to Rosemarkie is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), notable for its geology and botany, made famous by the Black Isles's most illustrious son, 19<sup>th</sup> Century stonemason, geologist and writer, Hugh Miller. The combination of old red sandstone, horizontal bedding, Moine Schists, Jurassic shales containing ammonite and belemnite fossils, and sea has produced some spectacular erosion features – rock pinnacles, caves, and, at MacFarquhar's bed, a huge sea-arch. Remnants of glaciation are visible around the coast, and the cliffs along the south-eastern coast are set back from the sea by a raised beach.



Often the most enjoyable paddle journeys happen when you can go at 'relatively' short notice when the natural elements – the combination of wind, swell, waves, tide (times) and streams, and time of day – come together to allow your passage.



This was the case during the recent October school half term when favourable conditions – low wind, north easterly swell and tidal assistance – afforded a rare opportunity for a few 'half-termers' (Chrissie, Oliver, Louise, Izzy and Heather) to paddle an unfrequented but local 'classic' SUP trip – from Cromarty, out through the Sutors into the wide-open Moray Firth and along the coast to Rosemarkie (15km). On the day the wind forecast had changed 180 degrees, which could mean an even longer paddle into the wind. So it was with a little trepidation that we paddled out between the Sutors, a plan B in mind, but as it happened the fears were unfounded and the wind remained thankfully light and patchy.

Despite being on our doorstep, once out through the Sutors this becomes a very committing stretch of coast for a paddleboard trip. The coastline between South Sutor and Rosemarkie is varied and interesting – resplendent at this time of year in the morning sunlight and autumnal colours – but is also a well-protected rocky shoreline below high tide for most of its length with few escape options should a trip need to be curtailed for any reason.



Perhaps the most famous inhabitants of the seas around the Black Isle are the Moray Firth bottlenose dolphins' along with common (Harbour) and grey (Atlantic) seal and harbour porpoises. Just through the Sutors, a nearby dolphin was spotted and then another. We stopped and waited, watched quietly, subsequently mesmerised by what followed ... a nature lovers dream ... a small pod of dolphins, including young, gracefully arched their way through our group, close enough to touch, but indifferent to our presence, breaching soon after they passed, then they were gone just as soon as they came.



There's no such thing as the wrong weather! Despite the forecast single figure temperatures, the fine sunny weather left some of 'us' clearly over-dressed for the occasion and over-heating, which necessitated a few welcome and intentional cooling dips along the way, as well as a few red faces by the end evidencing the strength of the sun even in mid-October.

The sea remained kind, although the hoped-for tidal assistance eluded us, so the 13km paddle from the South Sutor to Rosemarkie was certainly well earned by the group. The gentle rolling swell was delightful, but sadly just not enough, despite the best endeavours of Oliver, to facilitate any surfing. However, a reef break, with irregular breakers, provided some short-lived interest and surfing opportunity for some as the group passed.



By mid-afternoon the SUPrs had safely reached their journey's end ... ice cream, coffee and cake at the Rosemarkie Community beach café, all very pleased with their impromptu outing – for some of the group their first long distance sea paddle!

Graham Bull