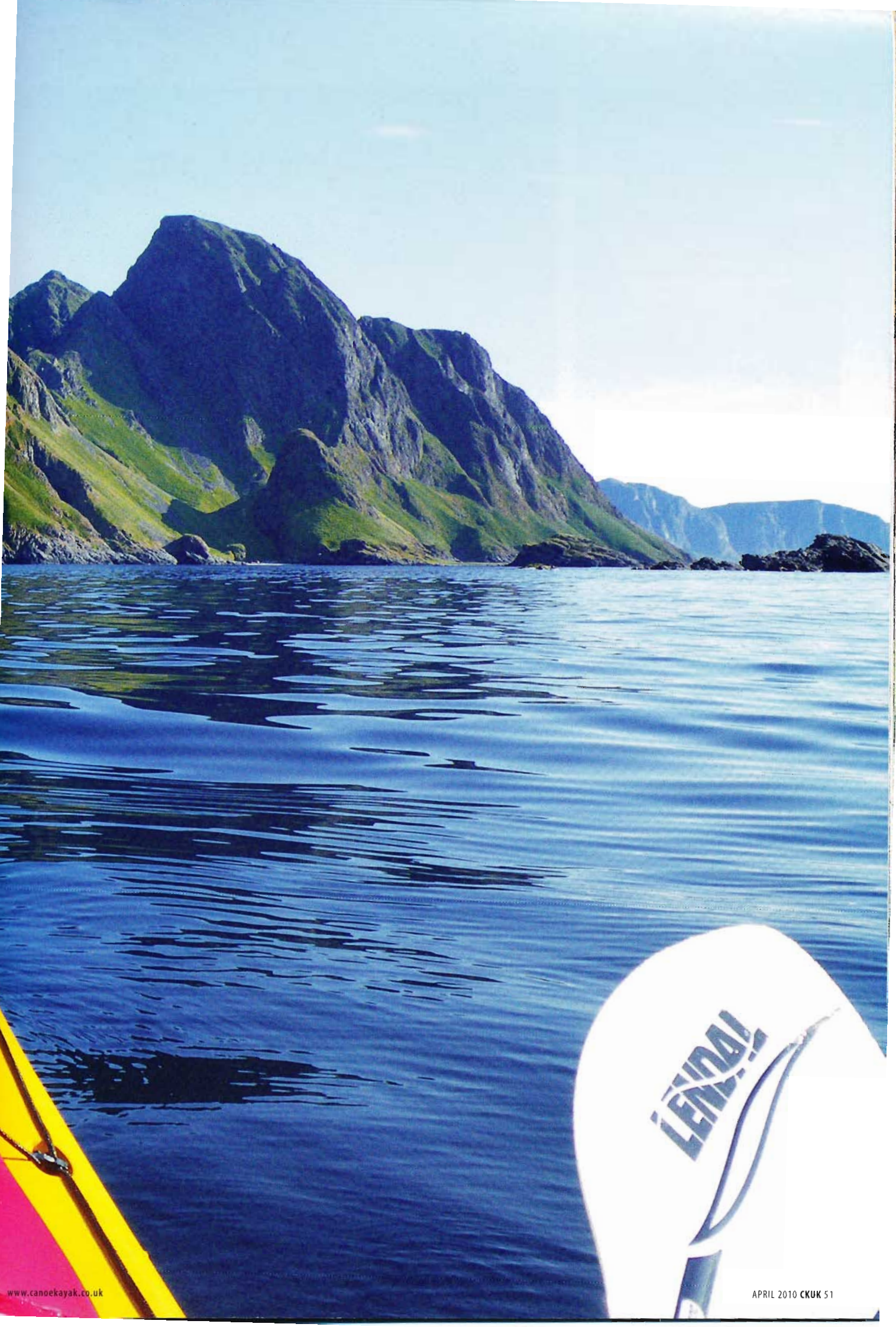


Sea Kayaking The Maelstrom

Article and images by Olly Sanders

Level Five Sea Kayak Coach Olly Sanders fulfils an ambition to cross Norway's formidable Maelstrom tidal race.

The stretch of water between the southern tip of the Norwegian Lofoten Islands and the islands of Moskyn and Vaeroy is infamous for the rough and circular water known as the Moskensraumenn or Maelstrom! A four-metre height difference has been recorded between the shallower water of the race and the deeper water, in certain wind and tide conditions, and it can reach speeds of up to ten knots. It can be a terrifying place to be in a sea kayak!

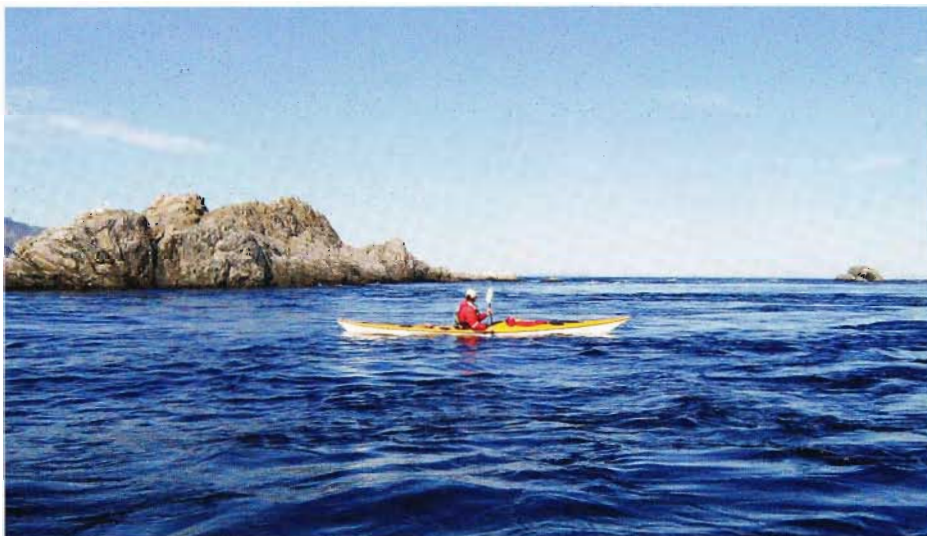


It is a 35km journey from Moskenes to Vaeroy on a committing coast with no roads and the paddle out needs to be timed precisely to safely cross the race. I had paddled the southern tip before hugging the shore to avoid the current and I remembered looking out to sea and thinking that the islands looked fantastic. Since then it had been a long-term ambition of mine to come back and do the trip, with the right conditions and company. That opportunity came recently when Nigel Robinson a well-known coach from Pembroke and I came to the area to paddle and climb. We were working for a few days for Jann Engstad of Lofoten Kayak to fund the trip and he had a couple of NDK Explorer sea kayaks for us to use.

Jann knows the Islands like nobody else in terms of sea kayaking, and he gave us the local knowledge we needed and with the forecast looking good we were all set to challenge the Maelstrom. We drove down to Moskenes and got on by the ferry point. It was an hour and half paddle to the southern tip and then out into the race. We found out later, when Jann looked at the photos, that we had arrived an hour later than he suggested hence the strong current!

A Day At the Races

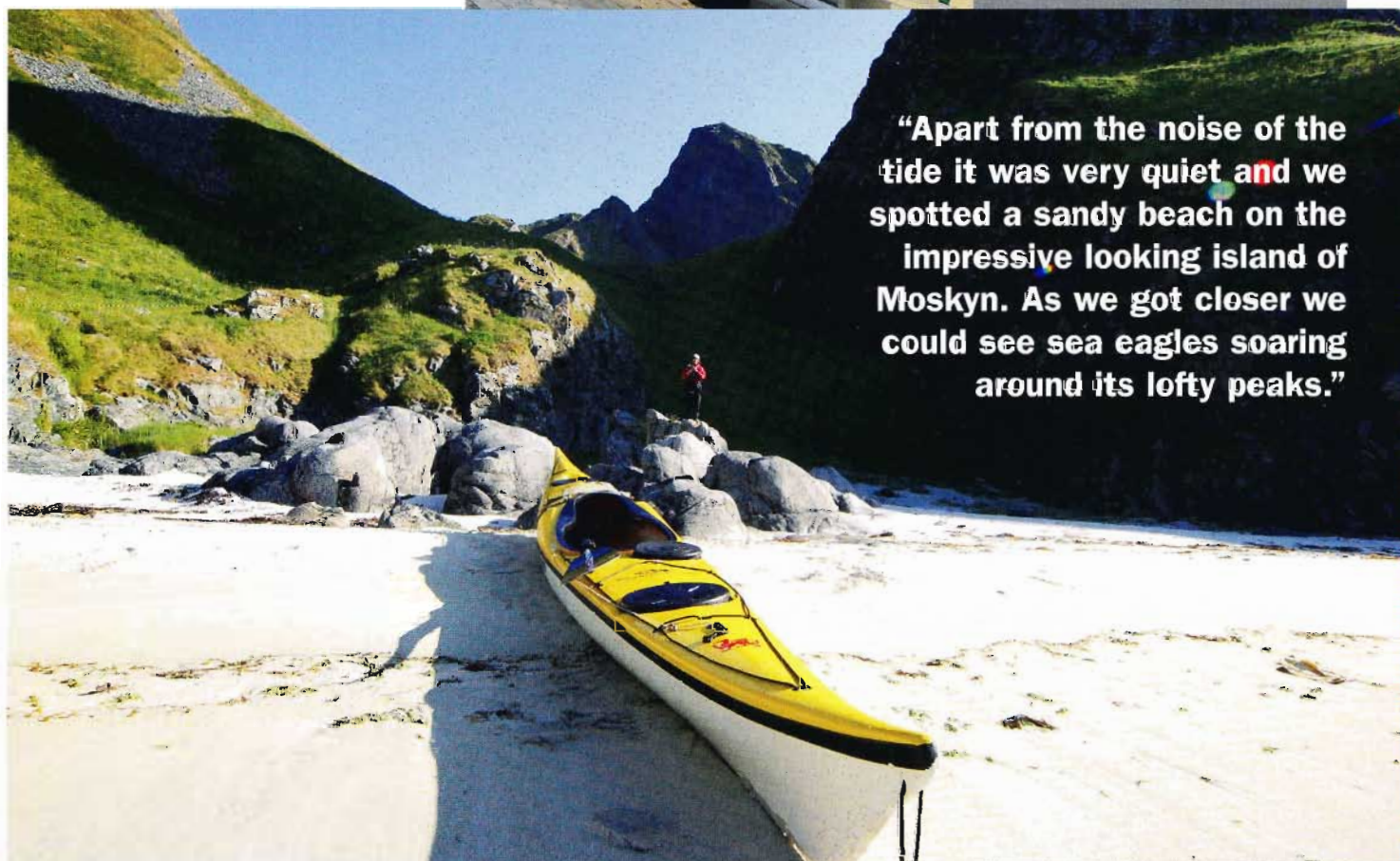
You link a series of rocky island to get to Moskyn and then onto Vaeroy. We could feel the tide as we ferried across and the wave and swell were forming larger waves at the back of the race. On the second



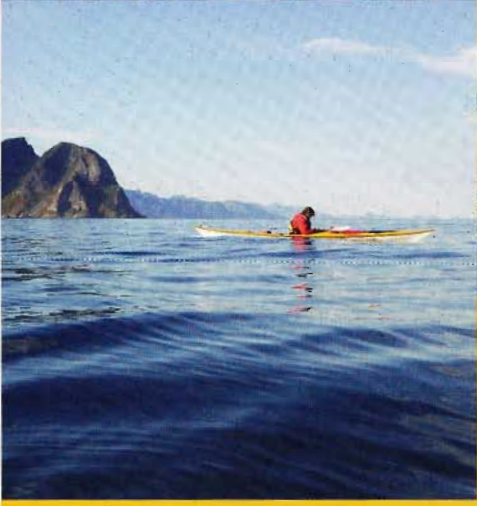
↑ Nigel gets stuck in as the race starts to run.

← Olly & Nigel enjoy well-earned beer...
Followed by chips. Perfect!

↓ A sandy beach on Moskyn provides
a much-needed rest spot.



“Apart from the noise of the tide it was very quiet and we spotted a sandy beach on the impressive looking island of Moskyn. As we got closer we could see sea eagles soaring around its lofty peaks.”

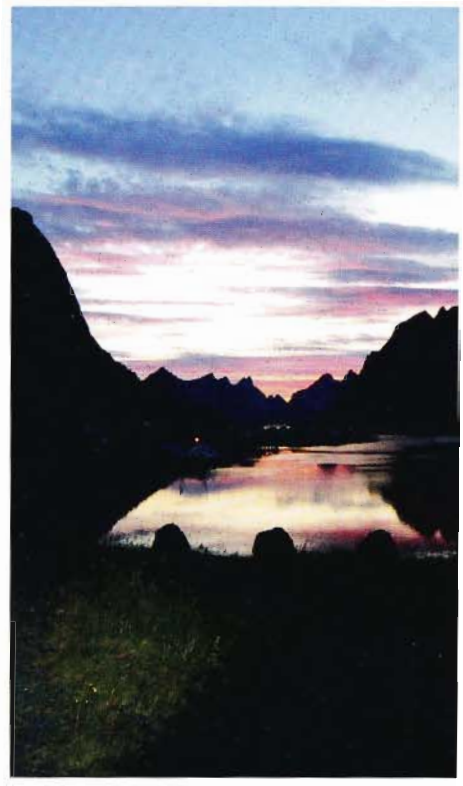


↑ Pulling the boats up at Vaeroy

← Linking the small islands together gave us some fantastic paddling all the way to Vaeroy

↓ Time for a java break
- there is always time for good coffee

“The company, the place and the trip had given me one of the finest days on the sea that I had ever had, and one that, on reflection, will always inspire and remind me how special sea kayaking can be.”



set of islands the speed was building and I was unable to ferry glide and dropped down to the outcrops and hoped to paddle up close in. Nigel had chosen to stay high and we had now become split.

The outcrops contained a colony of gannets, living out in the middle of this wild place, and I managed to work my way up using small gaps and finally reunite with Nigel. Apart from the noise of the tide it was very quiet and we spotted a sandy beach on the impressive looking island of Moskyn. As we got closer we could see sea eagles soaring around its lofty peaks and we landed for a bit of much-needed food. We had been working really hard in the race and a rest was very welcome

We still had a long way to go, but the worst of the current was behind us and we launched back in to the water and paddled around the island and started linking the last of the small islands out to Vaeroy. We had certainly underestimated the length and workload of the trip and we were fairly tired as we paddled into the main port of Vaeroy at 9pm in the evening. We asked a local if we could get food anywhere and he pointed us to

a building with a veranda, where we managed to persuade them to do us some chips, washed down with a cold beer. A great way of celebrating our crossing and to regain some much needed energy.





Reflections On The Sea

The ferry back to Moskenes went at 11pm and we paddled round to the pier, got changed and waited. It arrived with the usual Norwegian efficiency and we carried the boats on and went onto deck to fully absorb the trip back.

It didn't disappoint, with a blood red sky and the sun dipping behind the horizon, the beauty of the place truly staggered us and we even managed to blag our way onto the bridge and chat to the Captain about the area.

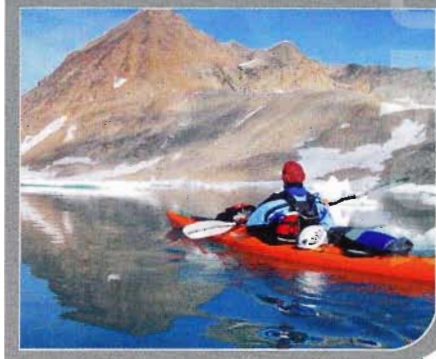
The drive home was equally memorable, despite the hour it was still dusk like light and the pink and orange sky transformed a journey, which I had done a few times, into something even more special. At 3am two very tired sea kayakers collapsed into bed, with very little conversation!

The company, the place and the trip had given me one of the finest days on the sea that I had ever had, and one that, on reflection, will always inspire and remind me how special sea kayaking can be. 📷

Olly Sanders

A climber and paddler, Olly has been heading out on expeditions for over 20-years, be it climbing in the mountains or paddling on the sea. Nominated in 2004 for the Piolet D, Or for a first ascent in Alaska Olly is a M.I.C and a BCU Level 5 Sea Coach. After working full time at Plas-y-Brenin, the National Mountain Centre for ten years he runs his own coaching company Rock & Sea Adventures. Recently Olly has been combining his passion for sea kayaking and climbing to do first ascents in remote areas such as Greenland. Olly's always up for a trip as long as there are no polar bear encounters and a plentiful supply of decent coffee!

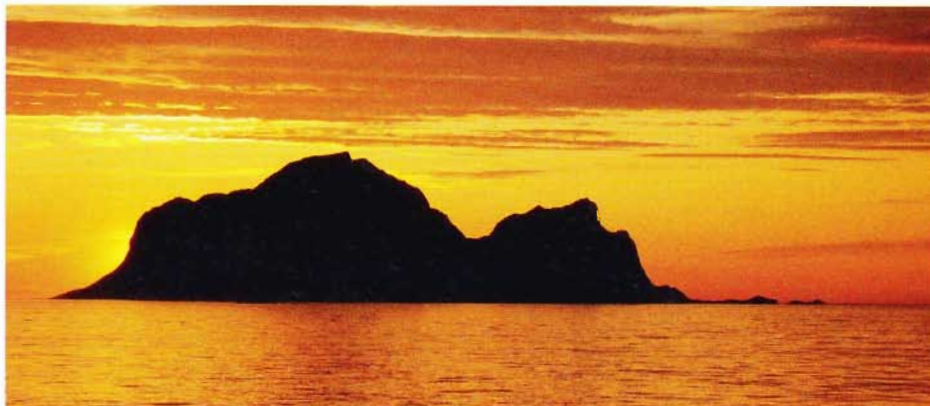
Check out www.rockandseadventures.co.uk for more info



↑ Simply breathtaking sea kayaking.

← Getting ready to load the boats on to the ferry.

↓ The sunset as we headed back on the ferry was staggering



For sea kayak routes a little closer to home check out the places to paddle section at www.canoekayak.co.uk