

Maritime Rescue Institute Coastal Notes - 13 June 2006

Last week 'Elektra' a 21' sailing boat slipped quietly into Stonehaven harbour. Nothing unusual about that, you might say, yachts arrive all the time at this time of year. But, this one was a little bit special. On board was Katie Miller, a 19 year old student, following Dame Ellen MacArthur's solo circumnavigation of the British Isles, which took place 10 years ago. Katie is following Ellen's route, stopping at the harbours Ellen visited and hoping to meet some of the people Ellen mentions in her book. Like Ellen, Katie doesn't have a sea faring background. Her home city is Birmingham: it wasn't until her father decided to take them all on a flotilla sailing holiday that she got the bug at the age of 13.

She started out from Hamble on April 21st and is currently in Fort William, having experienced the worst seas of the trip so far in Loch Ness. Follow Katie's progress by logging on to her website at <http://www.thechallenge2006.co.uk/>. All going to plan, she will be back home by August, in time to have a holiday before starting university in September.

But, this is more than just retracing Ellen's voyage: it's a personal challenge for Katie. She wanted to do something more with her gap year than just travel, or work in a shop. She was looking to achieve something that would be valuable both to herself and to society. Therefore, she is using this journey to raise funds for the 'Ellen Macarthur Trust, with the aim of raising £10,000.

The Ellen MacArthur Trust was launched by Dame Ellen MacArthur on 2nd January 2003. The main objects of the Trust are: "To alleviate the suffering and promote the well-being of children and young persons between the ages of 6 and 18 suffering from cancer, leukaemia or other serious illness by providing facilities for sailing holidays." The idea for the trust came in 2000 after Ellen spent some time in France sailing with groups of young people with serious illnesses; she witnessed the joy and feeling of achievement that sailing gave those young people. The Trust takes youngsters on short voyages, which gives a feel for life at sea and a sense of adventure and fun; the crew and children sleep on board.

Katie has worked for the Trust as a volunteer over the past 3 summers, first as general dogsbody, then latterly as crew. She's seen at first hand the difference a sea trip can make to very sick children; the excitement of feeling the boat move to the waves, the thrill of being allowed to steer, the chance to be in control of something, when so much of their life is beyond their control.

It's been really busy at MRI this week as well, with in excess of 100 young people taking part in the Scottish Executive initiative 'Determined to Succeed' through the doors. DtS is the Scottish Executive's strategy for enterprise in education. It aims to help Scotland's young people develop self-confidence, self-reliance and ambition to achieve their goals - in work and in life. In pursuit of the goals, those visiting MRI have been building rafts, learning rope work, putting their trust in compasses and generally engaging in tasks that are quite outwith their usual experience. Judging by the laughter and smiling faces, lessons were being learned in a most enjoyable way. We hope they feel it's been a useful experience for them - it has certainly been a great project for MRI to be involved with.

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