

Scots waiting to make waves by rowing across Atlantic

Mike Merritt

An adventurer is battling fierce winds off the US coast in his latest attempt to row solo across the north Atlantic Ocean to the Outer Hebrides.

Niall Iain Macdonald set off from Norfolk, Virginia, six days ago and had covered just over 130 miles yesterday. He hopes to complete his 3,400-mile rowing challenge in three to four months and will be rowing for 12 hours a day.

Meanwhile, another Scot hoping to row across the Atlantic is still waiting in New York, bogged down by bureaucracy.

Duncan Hutchison, from Lochinver

in Sutherland, has spent his working life at sea, including most recently in the offshore oil industry. He spent three years building the boat in which he was hoping to leave New York on May 19.

But he wrote on his blog: "We're in New York, my boat is too but it hasn't been cleared by customs yet!!! So sorry about this delay but as soon as I have a new Day 1... and it is coming soon... you will all be first to know!"

Mr Hutchison, a volunteer lifeboat crewman, said that he was expecting it to take between 90 and 100 days to row back to Lochinver. Mr Hutchison, 52, is raising money for Water Aid. For Mr Macdonald, a 44-year-old freelance

broadcaster, it is his third attempt at rowing the North Atlantic — a project previously named NY2SY — as he planned to go from New York to Stornoway.

His first attempt in 2014 ended when he suffered a bad accident on board only nine days into his adventure. He said: "I remember when we went back out to get the boat in 2014, on that day we found her. When I saw the boat on its own in the ocean, I felt 'I should be on it' — and I knew that I was going to try again at some point."

However, the time was not right for a second attempt until last year. Then he spent six weeks in New York waiting for



Niall Iain Macdonald aims to row home to Stornoway from Norfolk, Virginia

a weather window that would allow him to clear land safely — but it never came owing to a series of low-pressure systems. Mr Macdonald, who lives in Lewis and was born in Inverness, is

hoping to raise at least £100,000 for the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) and to raise awareness of mental health issues in general, having had his own struggles in the past. He has so far raised nearly £21,000.

His 24ft boat — an ocean rower — has been renamed *Alba*, the Gaelic name for Scotland. Donations can be made via justgiving.com/NY2SY.

An earlier message stated: "Sorry for the lack of contact. Battling the ocean & myself these last few days. #NY2SY #SAMH."

Only 13 people have successfully rowed solo from west to east across the north Atlantic.

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Step by step Runners from 26 countries took part in the eight-day 248-mile Cape Wrath Ultra race across the Highlands; 110 people completed the full distance

How moody teenagers are (literally) losing their mind

David Sanderson Arts Correspondent

Teenagers are unfairly demonised by a society that is just beginning to study the enormous loss of grey matter in their brains during adolescence, according to a leading neuroscientist.

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore said that moodiness, risk-taking, sleepiness and embarrassment at parents should be sympathised with and understood in the context of the changes in the adolescent brain.

MRI studies showed that between childhood and adulthood the brain underwent a substantial "pruning" of its synapses and an "enormous" 17 per cent reduction in grey matter in the pre-frontal cortex, she said.

The professor of cognitive neuroscience at UCL added that the education system should be altered to take the changes into account. She advocated allowing later starts to the school day to help circadian rhythms, or the biological clock, and an appreciation of the "Key Stage 3 dip" when the educational

performance of children falls between the ages of 11 and 14. Professor Blakemore said that rather than teenagers being mocked for their moodiness, laziness and recklessness parents should speak to them about the changes.

She told the Hay Festival that teenage behaviour had been put down to sex hormones, puberty and changes such as starting secondary school. "The teenage brain is not broken, it is not dysfunctional, it is not a defective adult brain; it is a formative period in life where the brain is changing in really important ways where neural pathways are malleable and passion and creativity run high," said Professor Blakemore, whose book *The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain* brings together the latest studies. "We should not demonise this period of life we should understand it, nurture it and celebrate it."

She said it was impossible for scientists to judge the impact of technology on the younger brain, and added that concerns about social media should not detract from other teenage stresses.

JIMMY HYLAND/JHP VISUALS