

Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal

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STORNOWAY

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Foreword

These walks around Rhenigidale, described and illustrated so evocatively by Neil Pinkett provide an insight into the whole history of Harris. That history which can be read in the hills and deserted settlements around Rhenigidale is brought alive by Neil. He shows how easily accessible it is from the Crofter's Hostel at Rhenigidale.

I hope that those who read this book will be inspired to stay a while at Rhenigidale to walk the ancient network of tracks and ways, and to get to know the area. You will experience the isolation of these gaunt hills, the haunting beauty of Loch Seaforth, see evidence of the depopulation of Harris in deserted villages, relics of agriculture including an abandoned tractor, and experience the fellowship of the residents of Rhenigidale and the hostellers. There is also evidence of hope, and new growth. The power line came into Rhenigidale in 1980, the road came in 1991, and you will see the renovated and new houses in the village. You see too the fish farm in Loch Trolamaraig.

The hostel at Rhenigidale provides a simple but comfortable base for spending a few days exploring the area. It is open all year and overnight charges are modest. No meals are provided but there is a well equipped kitchen for self catering. The hostel is open to all.

For further information about the hostel please contact the Tarbert Tourist Information Office (open all year) or the Trust via its address opposite.

Urras Osdailean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff exists solely to provide youth hostels in the islands off the west coast of Scotland. We welcome feedback on our work and the involvement of all who share our aims.

Peter Clarke

Chair - Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

About The Author

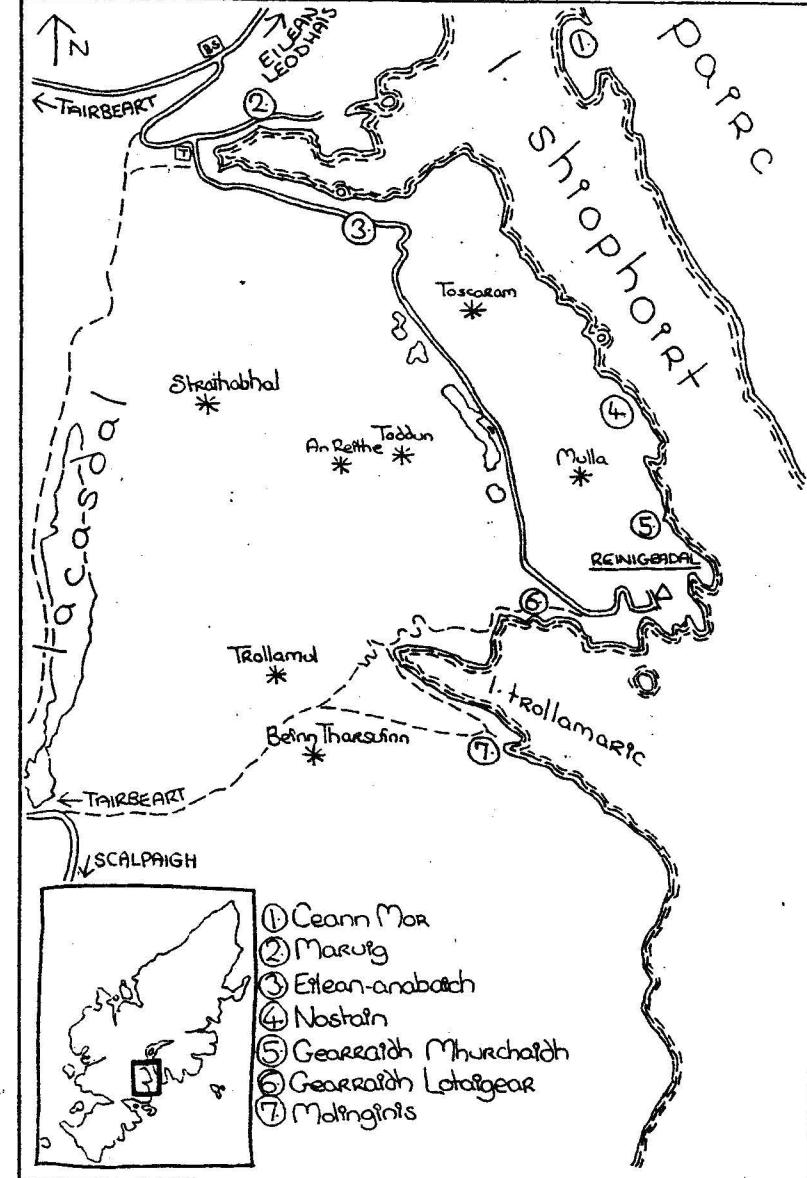


Neil Pinkett has held a close affinity with the Outer Hebrides for some years, including a period of time living in Dalbeg, Lewis. In addition he has visited the Gatliff hostels and their surroundings on numerous occasions, drawing and painting the landscapes and scenery as he travelled. Many of the regular visitors to the hostels will remember Neil's wonderful drawings and enchanted tales in the log books.

In late 1997 Neil married Krista Reich from Canada, and soon afterwards they together moved back to British Columbia in search of a new adventure. At the time of going to press, they are now managers of a small hostel in a beautiful and remote part of the Rocky Mountains at Athabasca Falls, in the Jasper National Park, where they are reminded of the unique character of the Gatliff hostels. However, in contrast to the Outer Hebrides, where the worst you could do is suffer an attack from a defensive Arctic Tern, part of Neil's job now involves deterring any inquisitive bears from wandering too close to the hostel!

Anyone familiar with the hostels of the GHHT who may be considering travelling in this part of Canada will certainly find a warm welcome at Athabasca Falls, no doubt with many stories to be shared.

THE REINIGEADAL AREA



KEY TO THE MAPS

- the route for each of the walks, except for road sections
- other path
- road
- bridge
- buildings (including ruins)
- the Galtiff hostel
- shielings
- rollercoaster
- coastline
- stream
- loch or lochan
- *^{1733'} accurate height, usually the highest point on a hill, otherwise the highest place reached on a walk, measured in feet
- .750' other approximate heights (in feet) on the routes for each of the walks

Please note that all the maps in this book are hand-drawn and not accurate to a tee. It is recommended that you take a good scale map with you when walking in the hills.

the following four symbols are to provide a rough impression of the nature of the terrain over which each walk passes, with the duration of each in miles:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | road |
| 2 | good path or track |
| 1 | rough, sometimes unclear path |
| 2 | pathless terrain |

- | | |
|----|--|
| T | telephone box (at the Morrig junction, the nearest payphone to the hostel) |
| BS | bus stop, (now sporting a very much appreciated rain-shelter) situated at the roadhead. buses going north and south, monday to saturday. |

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Special thanks to Alastair Mackay for his helpful information about this part of Heardath.

Thanks also to Peter Clarke and to Krista Reich, and also Lawrence Washington for showing me where the Breathing Stone lives.

SOME VARIATIONS ON PLACENAME SPELLINGS

There are a number of variations on placename spellings in print, on different maps, in guide books and on road signs, (those in capital letters are the ones I have used in this book).

CEANN MOR: Kenmore

EILEAN-ANABAICH: Eilean-an-abuich

EILEAN HEARADH: Isle of Harris

GEARRAIDH LOTAIGEAR: Gary-alteiger; Gearraidh Aletteger

LACASDAL: Laxadale; Locasdail

MARAIG: Moorvug

MOLINGINIS: Molinginish; Molingeanais

NA-H-EILEANAN SEUNTA: The Shiant Isles

NOSTAR: Noster; Nostain

PAIRC: Park

REINIGEADAL: Rhenigdale; Rainigdale

SCALPAIGH: Scalpay

SHIOPHOIRT: Seaforth; Shiphoirt; Siophort

STRATHABHAL: Straval; Strival

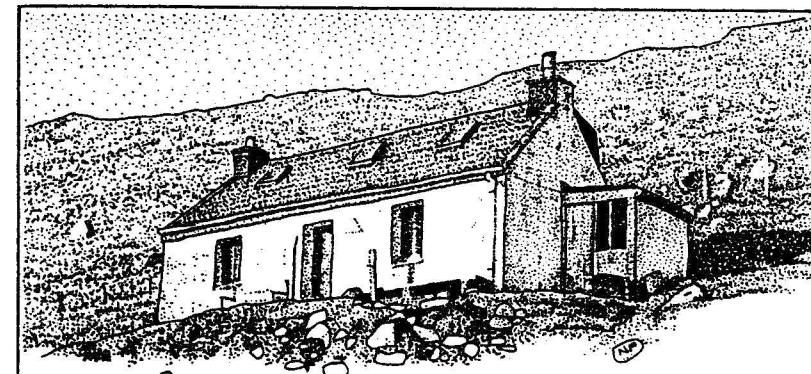
TAIRBEART: Tarbert

TODDUN: Todun

TROLLAMARIC: Trollamarig; Trolamaraig

TROLLAMUL: Trolamul

Unexpected snow, May 1981.



INTRODUCTION

The Gatliff Hostel is the first house that the traveller sees across the valley, before following the last few hundred yards of road down into Reinigeadal. The hostel opened at Easter 1962 and since that time it has provided shelter and warmth and a place to cook for many travellers in the Islands. In the early years it was very much like a bothy, hostellers brought their own cooking utensils and slept on simple campbeds and there would be an open fire in the fireplace. "we won't go cosy" was the motto of the man behind the idea to open small hostels in these islands, and Reinigeadal and the other hostels in the chain mirrored his ideals. Herbert Gatliff, that man, was quite an activist, deeply involved in the youth hostels movement, he donated a sum of money to the SYHA for them to use to set up a hostel in the Outer Hebrides, but they were reluctant and in the end Herbert reclaimed his donation and did it himself, after a friend of his, touring the islands, chanced to meet Roddy MacInnes in Reinigeadal and got talking with him about the idea of opening a hostel. Roddy owned an empty house and he was very interested in such a venture, and so it was that the next spring the first

Gatliff hostel opened, with Roddy as warden. One of the many special things about staying in a Gatliff hostel is that each individual warden, in their time, has added so much to the place simply through their presence, and many people from the world over have, over the years, left Refnigeadal enriched by the kindness and hospitality offered to them by Roddy and the succeeding wardens, his sister-in-law Mrs Marion MacInnes, her daughter Mrs Katie Campbell, and Alistair Mackay the current warden. And perhaps also they might have learned a little more about the land they were travelling through. Roddy died in May 1986, and the future of the hostel came into doubt, but the Gatliff Trust put in a bid for the building and was successful. Roddy had campaigned for many years for a road to be built to Refnigeadal, and he knew that the first phase of construction had been approved and was getting underway in the spring of 1986. The road, when it did reach Refnigeadal in 1991, had the added effect of making the hostel accessible to many more people, for instance the annual overnight figures in the mid 1980's were around 400 per year and by the mid 1990's they had risen to around 1000. Cyclists travelling up or down the chain of islands could now stop by, whilst others arrived by car. Nowadays the hostel logbook has tributes to the gradients of both the Tairbeart Path and the new road, and maybe a few less instances of hungry hostellers writing that they feel forced to leave to go in search of food, as there are now more easy options than walking in to Tairbeart and back to replenish food reserves, such as the once-weekly visit to the village by a mobile shop. The hostel closed for a time so that work could be done on the building. The extensively refurbished hostel re-opened in July 1992, with Magnus Magnusson doing the honours.

2.

The name Refnigeadal means Dale of the Rowan Tree Bay and like many placenames hereabouts, it contains elements of Old Norse as well as Gaelic. There was no village in Refnigeadal as such until the second half of the 19th Century when people were cleared from the fertile west of Hearadh and some of the offshore islands by the landowners to make way for sheep. For those people who settled in Refnigeadal life would have been hard making a home on this wild coast.

Refnigeadal had a school, which would remain open as long as there were enough pupils to justify it. Sometimes, if there weren't enough children, those of school age had to board away from home. The school building also served as a church. When the road finally reached Refnigeadal, the school closed for good.

It wasn't until 1980 that the village received electricity, which the locals had campaigned for for some time.

This book is intended to be a brief insight into a wild and beautiful region of Hearadh, the first of the Gatliff hostels, and a collection of walks starting from and ending in Refnigeadal, just a beginning. When walking in these hills, have respect for the land and the weather. The weather can change dramatically during any day. If there is any prolonged rain, the streams running off the hills will swell into torrents, swiftly becoming uncrossable, so it would be wise for instance to consider the Sheep Track to Molinginis closed if you can see the white trails of streams in spate running off of Beinn a Chaolais, from the hostel. Of course, it doesn't always rain, rather there is a healthy mixture of everything, and for those who find their way to the Gatliff hostel, a warm and welcoming place to stay awhile.

3.