

# *Crofters' Newsletter*

## *2013*

*Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels in the Outer Hebrides*

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## Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels 2013

This newsletter is for all who stayed at one of the Crofters' Hostels in 2012 and all who support the hostels. The Crofters' hostels are run by volunteers from the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in partnership with islanders. It is compiled from entries which hostellers left in the log books found at the hostel.

The Newsletter presents a look back on how hostellers enjoyed the hostels. This newsletter has appeared, in a variety of formats, every year since 1963, the year after the first hostel opened at Rhenigidale. Electronic copies of the 2012 Crofters' Newsletter and the Hebridean Hostellers Newsletters no 54 (2013), no 55 (spring 2014) & no 56 (autumn 2014) can be found on our web site [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

### Hostel results for 2012

Overnights	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Berneray	2201	2311	2226	2147	2752	2562	2698	2039
Garenin	1577	1620	1301	948	1598	1573		
Howmore	1552	1805	1727	1595	2022	1765	1760	1260
Rhenigidale	1178	1010	1035	919	960	983	994	732
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6508</b>	<b>6746</b>	<b>6289</b>	<b>5609</b>	<b>7332</b>	<b>6883</b>	<b>5452</b>	<b>4031</b>

**Jo Burgess, Editor of the Crofters' Newsletter** writes:

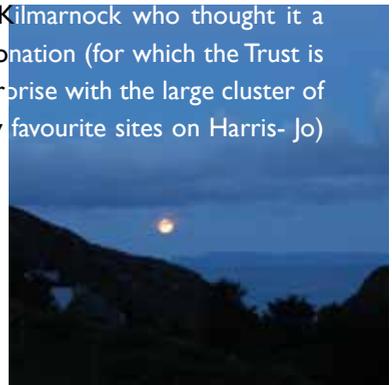
Yet again in 2012 I did not make it to the islands. I was in Inverness for a few days for the big Runrig concert and really enjoyed exploring the town, the Caledonian Canal and out towards the Kessock Bridge but I missed the islands. It was great however to see the band after a year plus of no live concerts, even if it rained and I wasn't well, so heard some of the concert from the medics tent. Going round the back of the stage arm in arm with two medics wasn't quite what I had in mind but finding the Simba Tree at 'The Glass House' was a real blessing.

## Rhenigidale

The first entry is at the end of March from a sea kayaker who described the village as a “gem of a place”. Into April it was cold and wet but “what a haven to rest”. Jo and Helen Worthington from North London described it as cosy and welcoming. Another visitor on a return trip enjoyed a mix of rain and sunshine and wrote “somehow this place is doing magic to me, calming me down from the 50 weeks of work between my stays here”. Carol Ashdown from Northwich enjoyed her stay with dogs Moss and Gwen and felt settled and comfortable. She visited Tarbert and Seilebost describing “more sea, sky and sand in multi blued shades”. Sue thanked Alasdair for his company and caring for this special place.

Kate took over from Alasdair in May 2012 and immediately made an impression on hostellers. One hosteller wrote that their stay was pleasant, comfortable and sociable. Kate’s children Fiona and Alisdair were described as a delight. Hostellers from New Zealand wrote of the resident stag near to the hostel, and found the hostel very cosy. They wrote that they “will remember this gem”

In mid-May cyclists heading north were staying in their third hostel. Tim Dorey from Ross-on-Wye wrote that “we have really enjoyed each hostel, have received a warm welcome in each and met many interesting people”. He was very impressed and thanked Kate for the welcome and the eggs. A few days later Gavin Clark from Blairgowrie enjoyed sunshine and from Clisham had views from Rum to Cape Wrath and St Kilda out to the west. From the hostel, in the evening sunlight he enjoyed wonderful clear views of the Skye Cuillins, with a mackerel sky as a backdrop to the west. By the end of May hostellers reported that the young stag loved having his photo taken! Hostellers from Edinburgh brought the sodden visitors book and rusty tin down from Toddun to dry. Visitors from Germany thought Rhenigidale a very lovely place to be and had the place to themselves. The Wrights from Kilmarnock who thought it a wonderful place with everything ship shape and left a donation (for which the Trust is very grateful). Iris had the place to herself and had a surprise with the large cluster of irises in front of the hostel (They are always one of my favourite sites on Harris- Jo)





There are 3 levelled pitches for camping

In early June Sam Peak from Cambridgeshire and Leanne from Canada said that this “isolated and beautiful” Rhenigidale .. “was the perfect to relax after a music festival.” Laura and Torsten from Germany were on the seventh night of their *Timeless Way* and thanked Kate and Trust Chairman Peter Clarke– the latter for all the work that he puts into the Trust and “especially his book *The Outer Hebrides The Timeless Way*, which we are following” (which made me think where is my copy – Jo). Melanie from Canada got sunburnt and wrote that the area reminded her of Newfoundland. Graham Brooks from Tunbridge Wells and Laura from South Africa enjoyed their stay and appreciated the heather. Helen, Dave and Tony enjoyed 4 days sea kayaking and saw puffins off the headland opposite Scalpay. In July visitors from the Netherlands loved it. In August Rebecca, Neil and Cathy Atkinson from Stratford on Avon found it peaceful and wrote “we will remember it for a very long time. We hope to return soon”. Another visitor found it a serene setting that “ended my search for something on Harris – a kind place to relax and unwind.” Another wrote “a great little set up at the end of one of the best walks on the island”. Kathie Legge from Castleton and Jeanette from New Zealand found it very restful and snug.

In September seven mountain bikers were grateful for the shelter from the storm. On 14 September Ray celebrated his birthday here and wrote “couldn’t wish to be anywhere else”. Peter Baxter and Angela Benham from Chinley in Derbyshire thanked Kate for keeping a very tidy, cosy hostel and “the best eggs we’ve eaten for a long time”. Into October Janet Appleton from Edinburgh and her dogs stayed and Matt Ludford from Norwich admired the recent work by the work party in the kitchen. Phil Harris from Stirling reported that there was a new visitor book on the summit cairn of Toddun. He was on “probably his 20<sup>th</sup> visit since 1981”. Laura Somerville from Helensburgh enjoyed sitting out on the front bench in the morning sunshine eating her porridge and thought herself in heaven. Brian Cox from Witham too, having arrived wet and tired found the peace and quiet heaven. Jackie and Matt from Taunton walked up Clisham and Toddun and saw the Northern Lights (I am jealous – Jo). John had rain

and wind but had some breaks on his climb up Toddun with excellent views of Harris. In November Alex and Juliet from Dolfor, Powys were glad of the stove and the drying rack. They saw a pair of dolphins in Loch Trollamarig They praised the kitchen refit having been a few times with the old one. They especially liked the water heater but thought a bigger fridge would be even better. They also saw a stag at Molinginis. Visitors from New Zealand thought it a “cute wee hostel in a lovely location.” A student of Lewisian Gneiss stayed in December and met some interesting people including Helen who cooked a chicken dinner with custard and apple pie. They wrote “only one word to add – Area and hostel amazing.”

As usual the Stornoway Running and Athletics Club were here on New Years Eve 2012 on their annual run. They had a great day out and wrote that it was great to be able to come to the hostel for food and a fire – “Awesome place”. The Club run along the Postmans Path from Urgha. (Visitors are welcome.)



Aerial view of Rhenigidale in 2002

## **Keep in touch. Join the Trust**

We would be pleased to keep you in touch with the hostels. Why not join the Trust? It only costs £10 a year. You will receive this newsletter annually, our Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter which appears twice a year and all other publications including our Annual Report. Above all you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping to keep the hostels going. A membership application form is enclosed. It can also be downloaded from our web site [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk) or sent to you by email. (Please contact [ghht@gatliff.org.uk](mailto:ghht@gatliff.org.uk))

## Berneray



Trustee John Joyce lead a work party here in February painting against a backdrop of the spectacular colours and light effects at this time of the year with the low sun and clear light. Some of the workers from the Telford Church (featured in *Restoration Man* on Channel 4 – Jo) had been staying at the hostel. In April Harry Bottesch and Ena from Edinburgh wrote that it was great to wake up to the sound of the sheep and the sea. The MacGregor family from Strathpeffer too had a great time and enjoyed great craic and a wee dram. Steve who was cycling with a southerly wind behind him wrote “great to be back again. Puts a smile on my face ALWAYS”. Jerome Finlayson and Dougie More from West Lothian also cycling enjoyed fantastic weather. Ben Sadler from Glasgow and Pete McIntosh from Brighton summed it up in one word “wow”.

Carol Ashdown enjoyed odd bits of wild weather, magnificent seas and sky colours and endless photography and wrote “as before just wonderful to be here”. She enjoyed the scones at the Ardmaree stores. She saw no otters or eagles but did see a barn owl and male hen harrier on North Uist hunting and giving a real display. She thanked Jackie for her work and warm welcome.

For Anna it was her first time in a Gatliff hostel. She found it warm and cosy and hoped to come back. By May Tim Dorey from Ross on Wye and Scott Sullivan from Glasgow were enjoying sunshine, a wonderful situation and good company. Anna was back for a visit to St Kilda in beautiful calm weather. Alan Cherry from South Uist wrote that it was one of the most beautiful places and views he’d seen. He enjoyed

a stunning panorama from the top of Beinn Shleiba and wrote “I’ll be back”. He also wrote that he met some inspiring people and thanked Jackie. Anna Davies aged 8 from Rydal in Cumbria wrote that she loved being here so much “I could kiss it”. Paul Davies also from Rydal wrote “it touches my heart and somehow keeps drawing me back.” John wrote “what a wonderful place where the earth and heaven meet”.

In June a hosteller enjoyed seeing a female otter fishing on the south coast. Christine Allonby from Doncaster enjoyed sitting on the bench watching the comings and goings of various birds and the odd seal or two. Listening to the tide coming and going is therapy. Lynsey wrote “a little piece of heaven”. Laura and Torsten from Germany were here in July on their *Timeless Way*. Tim enjoyed the lowest ever spring tide. Alice and David thought it “the most beautiful place they had ever been”. Vicki and Co stayed on an extra night and enjoyed great company and some wonderful accordian playing and cake – the hostel fulfilled its purpose – warmth, openness, sharing and good craic. In July there were also some people in a tent playing loud rave music. Harry was glad to be here again and paddled in the sea which was quite pleasantly warm. Johnny aged 7 from Aberdeen liked the camping and the sheep and did a good drawing of both. Alex aged 5 really liked the birds and did a good drawing of birds and a blue sky.

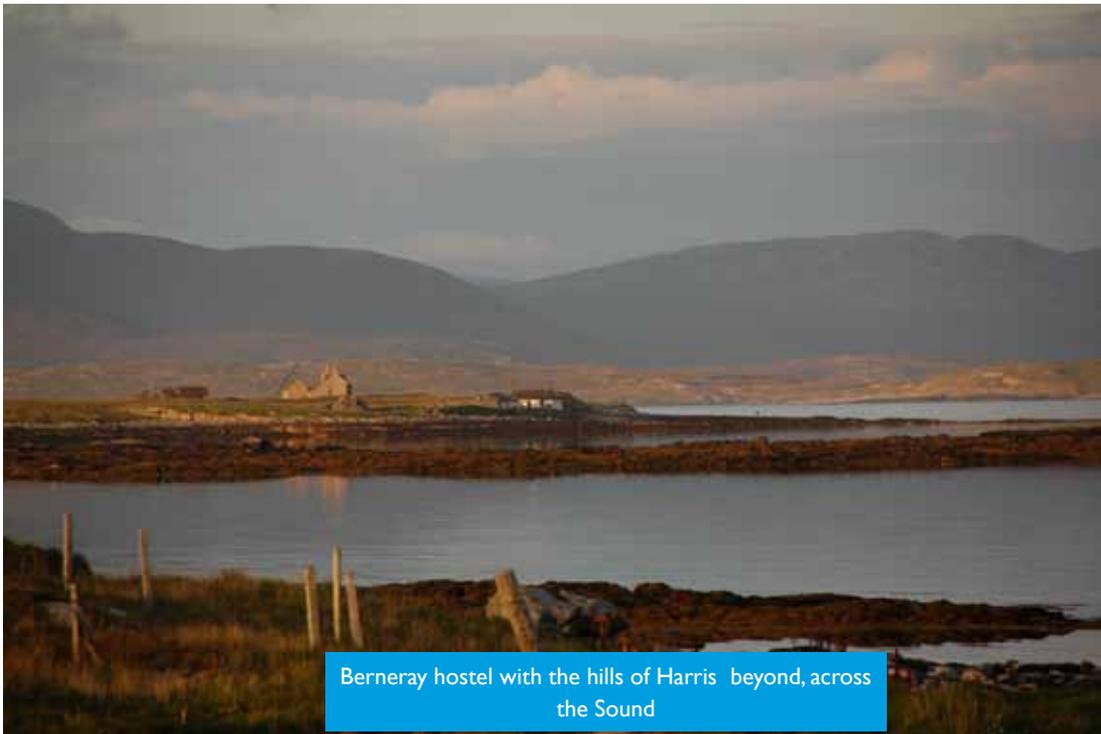
Marsha from Little Rock, Arkansas was back for another good holiday – although by the end of July the weather left much to be desired. She made some new friends and visited some old ones and left counting the days until her return. Alex and Jennie McClare from Callender wrote that the Gatliff hostels had been a wonderful discovery for them. Visitors from Dundee enjoyed it with Mum especially enjoying the Gannets and the Dunlin and a great yellow bumblebee on a thistle. Anonymous wrote “just to rub it in we saw an otter”.



In August Jack and Jan recharged their batteries and fixed the radio. Visitors from Austria especially enjoyed playing in the sand – which they don't have in Austria. Visitors from Kent didn't have great weather but thought it was great place to stay. Some Italian visitors were also here. Elizabeth and Philip from Cumbria were back again and enjoyed better weather than usual with great company.

By September Adam Richards from Oban wrote that the weather had gone to pot. He enjoyed the shower. Jeanette from New Zealand loved seeing otters swimming from the kitchen window. J Pinkman wrote it reminded them of growing up in the good old days “when we sat around Nana's stove, listening to stories and sharing good company.” They enjoyed a picture of Bradley Wiggins in the hostel. Walter saw a pair of otters with yellow highlights glistening in the sun.

In October Kevin from Amsterdam enjoyed the company and the views. There were no entries in November or December but in January a group from Stockport enjoyed great weather and wildlife.



Berneray hostel with the hills of Harris beyond, across the Sound

## Howmore



In March Colin, Peter and Phil cycled here and enjoyed fine weather and star gazing including views of Jupiter, Venus and Mars – and wrote “magical”. Derek and Paula Finlayson from Dunoon were here in April for their fifth wedding anniversary. Nicky and Justin from Glasgow enjoyed the comfort, sharing whisky and backgammon and lots of birds – oystercatchers, redshanks, ringed plovers, lapwings, curlews and possibly sanderlings. Rachel and Keir from Abernethy enjoyed the showy starlings.

In April Jo and Helen wrote that the hostels were happy discovery and really made their trip. Steve enjoyed amazing weather, otters and dolphins. Cara Ezzi from Benderloch and Ffion from Canada had a nice evening of wine and epic jenga while listening to the wind outside. They wrote that the beaches are stunning and the locals are so friendly and helpful. In May the conditions were perfect for cycling. Mike and Lizzie Kendon from Exeter walked the Hecla Beinn Mhor ridge and saw golden eagles and hen harriers. Richard Morris from Shropshire stayed a couple of nights and found it cosy and comfortable. He loved the shell and bone collection on the wall outside. (Some writing in a language I didn't recognise was followed by an unusual name from Lustleigh in Devon shared with a colleague at work (in Devon) and it turned out that it was my colleagues' Mum writing in Norwegian – quite a surprise - Jo). Carol Henry from Glasgow and

Alan from South Uist also got to the top of Beinn Mhor on a beautiful day and enjoyed the views. Dave Banford and Gordon Hodge from Dumfries wrote of improvements to the hostel since their last visit and three eagle sightings on Beinn Mhor. At the end of May hostellers enjoyed eagles, short eared owls, snipe displaying and corncrakes. John Budd and Frances Priest from Leith had a wonderful stay and swam in the loch. Geoff and Rosemary Gilbert from Leeds met some great people and had good conversation and wrote that the bunk was comfy. Alison and Richard Lea from London camped among the daisies and fell asleep to the sound of the snipe and corncrake.

In June Richard and Irene Wrigley from Goring on Thames enjoyed many beautiful flowers. Charlie Scott was on a Graham and Marilyn\* bagging “smash and grab” from Glasgow but kept banging his head on the door lintel. Chris Hunter from Glasgow enjoyed perfect weather, rainbows and beautiful sunsets. Dick and Penny Crack from Carlisle enjoyed a wonderful display by the snipe and heard an owl. French hostellers arrived in heavy rain and were glad of the warmth of the fire and thought it a beautiful place. Chrisine Allonby from Doncaster was here for her birthday in July, hired a bike from Tommy Callister from the Isle of Man and enjoyed the wildlife and the sound of the sea and the stillness. Beth and Erin Hanley from Bridge of Weir met some friendly people and thought it a very sociable place. Laura and Torsten were here on the 15<sup>th</sup> night of their *Timeless Way* walk. Unfortunately the good weather had brought out the flies so the wind was welcome the next day. Kathie who wrote she was 80 years young, found the cottage full of calm and good kind people who took away her stress. She found the peace that she needed. The flies continued to plague hostellers but they found it a relaxed and peaceful place to stay.

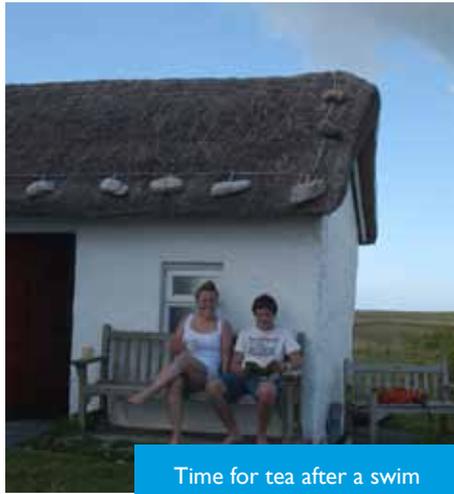
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\* **Grahams** are mountains in Scotland between 2000 and 2499 feet high (609.6 and 762 metres), with a drop of at least 150 metres (492 feet) all round

**Marilyns** are mountains and hills in the British Isles that have a relative height of at least 150 metres (492 ft), regardless of distance, absolute height or other merit.



Howmore hostel with South Uist's famous three peaks in the background. From left Hecla 1820 ft, Beinn Corradale 1,729 ft & Beinn Mhor 2,034 ft (summit in cloud)



In July there was a visitor here from Patagonia and Harry Minns from Caistor saw a Great Northern Diver in the sea and paddled. Matt Ludford from Norwich got wet feet trying to see the rasping corncrake. He wrote that this place feels closer to heaven. A hosteller also wrote “there is definitely ‘more’ in Howmore – good food, folk, talk and tales”.

In August a hosteller accidentally took the logbook to Ullapool and it was returned by Bente who had met him in Ullapool and was heading south so offered to bring it back. Italian visitors wrote in the book later in August.

In September it was windy but the hostel was described as very comfortable. At the end of September Matt from Norwich arrived thoroughly soaked so was glad that the storage heaters were on. Jane Coomber and Martin Frost from Debenham were back in October as were the Howmore maintenance crew fitting a new shower and toilet. Hostellers were here for Hogmanay and Tom here in January wrote that “this is like hostelling used to be when I was 18 (1980). I wish all hostels were like this”.

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The hostels welcomed visitors not just from Scotland, the rest of the United Kingdom including Ireland, Wales and the Isle of Man, but also France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Slovakia, Iceland, Finland, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Austria, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Belarus, Norway, Taiwan, China, Singapore, Korea, America, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The geographical spread of those visiting the hostels never ceases to amaze me.

# The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in 2012

## Trustees

Peter Clarke (Chairman & Company Secretary)

Matt Bruce

John Joyce (Work Party organiser)

John Humphries (Editor Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter)

Philip Lawson (Treasurer)

Julian Paren

**The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust** is dedicated to running Berneray (20 beds), Howmore (16 beds) and Rhenigidale (12 beds) hostels, in partnership with islanders, to a sound basic standard. Its goal is to provide hostellers, including young people of limited means, with the opportunity to stay a while to get to know, and maybe come to love, the unique culture and natural environment of the islands. (We are part of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA) family.)

## Berneray

The hostel was visited by two work parties during 2012. A new Morso Squirrel stove was installed in the common room. Taken together with the new 75 mm rigid insulation and the timber partition installed between the common room and dormitory, the room should now be much more comfortable. New storage radiators were installed in the kitchen/common room and the 'honeymoon suite' to provide background heating especially when no hostellers are in residence. Three rooms were re-decorated to a high standard. Three new FLB wood doors were fitted.

New smoke alarms were installed in the annexe. A new carbon monoxide detector was fitted in the hostel to replace the old battery powered model. Plastic covers were installed in the side channels of both wash rooms. A broken bunk was replaced. Four new chairs were provided for the dormitories. Additional food storage boxes were provided. The kitchen sink was fitted with new taps. The water filter in the shower was cleaned and replaced.

Stornoway Canoe Club annual Christmas trip from Leverburgh 15th December 2012.

Visitors welcome!



All outside walls of the main building and the annexe were scraped, treated with bleach and painted with white exterior paint. The thatch was inspected and found to be in satisfactory condition. One small area of broken wire was found on the annexe roof. This issue was dealt with and sealed with marram grass and stranded wires. All the stones were re-ropped.

A new edged stone filled pathway was created between the hostel and the annex. The wooden gate at the southern entrance to the hostel was repaired. All the outside walls of the annexe were scraped, bleached and painted with white exterior paint. All window catches in the main building were replaced with new catches. We take this opportunity to thank Alex Caldwell, David Cuthbert, Dave Golding, Alan Helsdon, Nigel Milnes, Frances Passey, Adrian Wallace and Jude Warrender for working as volunteers at the hostel in 2012 alongside our tradesmen Rob Plaister & Eddie Webb.



Work Party tea break! (l to r: Frances Passey, Eddie Webb, John Joyce, Dave Golding)

## Howmore

Work parties visited Howmore on two occasions during the year. During 2012 three dormitories and a hallway were created in the thatched cottage by installing insulated stud partition walls. The building was completely rewired for lighting, emergency lighting, smoke alarms and wall power sockets for hostellers. A storage radiator was provided in each room. The source supply and consumer units were updated to comply with



current regulations. Then all the new partition walls were plaster-boarded and skirting boards, door frames, facings, doors and door furniture were fitted. Necessary timber repairs were carried out. All of the rooms and space were prepped and painted; likewise

the woodwork and the doors were varnished. New curtains were fitted in dormitories. The exterior was painted white.

A new electrical connection to the thatched cottage was created. New smoke alarms and emergency lighting were fitted in the main building.

Outside drainage works were carried out and stone and/or chip paths were created at entrances, between the buildings and on the pathway through the gates. Area cleared and reseeded. The track was bordered with stone, in-filled from where it leaves the metalled road and the drainage was improved too. Outdoor benches were cleaned and varnished. All outside hostel signage was refreshed. Upkeep of guttering and down pipes carried out. Concrete storage plinth created.

The outbuilding roof was sealed to stop leaks and the interior walls were rough pointed to stop wind and rain coming in. A new chimney flue was installed and a new Morso Squirrel solid fuel stove was fitted.

We thank Dave Golding, David, Liz & Vicky McArthur, Sue McClymont, Jean Mills, Frances Passey, Meg Richards and Ben Staples who worked with our tradesmen Rob Plaister and Eddie Webb at Howmore.

## Howmore Appeal

in 2013 we launched an appeal for £47,000 to improve the hostel. We want to create a comfortable safe haven from which the next generation of hostellers can get to know and come to love the Outer Hebrides.



In 2011 bought the hostel buildings. (hitherto it had been held on a long lease). The funds the appeal sought were necessary to upgrade the level of service and comfort to Visit Scotland One Star standard (which incorporates all current International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF) standards. **November 2014:** £30,000 has been received to date. Thank you. If you can help we would be grateful for your contribution, however small. See [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

## Rhenigidale

Steve Glover and his wife Liz installed a new fitted kitchen at the hostel. This was shortly before the visit from the Visit Scotland Quality Inspector. In confirming the hostel's one star quality award the Inspectors said, "there has been some excellent new shelving and storage fitted in the kitchen. The heavy duty plywood and pine shelving looks very good and there is customised storage. The stainless steel work tops should be very hard wearing and will be easy to clean. The kitchen has been freshly painted. The lounge area is comfortable. The furniture is old but in good condition. The mattresses have blankets which add to comfort."

We thank Fraser Binns, Dux at Sir E Scott School, Tarbert, who has been doing myriad jobs around the hostel on a weekly basis for the 'community service element' of his Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award.

12 May 2012 was the 50th anniversary of the opening of Rhenigidale hostel. This was marked by a visit from Mac Hoskin who, in 1962, had been responsible for finding the hostel. The event was covered by the *Stornoway Gazette*.



Mac Hoskin (r) with John Butterworth on his first visit to the hostel. Mac said, "Not having to book, indeed not being able to book, is the great attraction of the Gatliff Hostels." John agreed, "What I like best about these simple Hostels is their locations - stunning."



## **Jo Burgess, Editor of the Crofters' Newsletter**

I first came into contact with the Trust when I led the 1985 Schools Hebridean Society (SHS) expedition to Rhenigidale. At the end of the three week camp, bad weather meant that the boat coming to collect us and all our camping gear could not land. In the days before the road there was no option but to wait for the weather to improve. Roddy MacInnes, the warden (and owner of the building) kindly let us stay in the hostel whilst we waited.

In 1989 I was one of the directors who had to take the difficult decision to close down the SHS (which had been operating for 25 years). When we were deciding how to distribute the financial assets, I asked that a contribution was made to the appeal to improve Rhenigidale. This is commemorated on the plaque in the hostel.

I paid visits to the village over the following years and kept in contact with Kenny MacKay and his wife Moira. In 2002 my husband and I stayed in the old school-house at the time when the Trust was celebrating the 40th anniversary of the hostel and I went on the walk along the postman's path with other Trust members.

I joined the Trust to support its work.

When the GHHT asked if I would become a Director\* and suffer the hardship of travelling to the islands for a meeting once a year, I jumped at the chance! Although I stood down as a Director some years ago I have continued doing the Crofters Newsletter because I find it very enjoyable going through the log books and celebrating the joy and pleasure the hostels bring.

My joy and pleasure when visiting the islands over the years has been heightened by my long standing relationship with the music of Runrig. I have been a fan since 1981 and like to take every opportunity to share my passion with others – hence the lyrics in the front of the logbooks. One day I hope to find that a young person who was with me in 1985 has gone back to the Hostel and written in the log book.

\*Jo served as a Director from February 2003 until May 2008.

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