

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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CROFTERS' HOSTELS - 16TH ANNUAL NEWSHEET

HERBERT GATLIFF Just as last year's newsletter was being distributed the Trust's founder, chairman and principal benefactor died at the age of 79. Tributes have appeared in a large number of the publications of outdoor bodies. This Trust is Herbert's own memorial and will last as a permanent tribute to his life and work.

In the late forties Herbert was introduced to the Outer Hebrides by John Cadbury, then National Chairman of the Youth Hostels Association (England & Wales) and currently its President. Herbert immediately developed an interest verging on a passion for this beautiful, barren, wild and windswept part of Scotland and returned every year for the next twenty years. These hostels were started in 1962, a year after the Gatliff Trust was established. The first, Rhenigidale, was in memory of Keith Chambers, Chairman of YHA London Region, who died in 1955 while climbing in Cornwall. Herbert's interest lasted to the very end of his life and he was keenly aware that a hostel on Berneray had just opened; these hostels are a living memorial.

1977 RESULTS This was Berneray's first year and with 167 overnights it was a good result; Howmore and Rhenigidale were very slightly down on last year.

Overnights:

	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
Berneray, North Uist	-	-	-	-	167
Howmore, South Uist	665	508	680	514	500
Rhenigidale, Harris	486	214	569	530	522

The total number of visitors was approximately 400 from sixteen mostly European countries but also including USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Approximately thirty visited all three hostels.

Although overall the overnights of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association showed a slight decrease, Stockinish Youth Hostel did well to record an increase of over 400 to 2717 overnights. This undoubtedly contributed to our own good result. There is now a chain of four hostels from South Uist to Harris linked by the Newton Ferry (North Uist) - Berneray - Rodel (Harris) small boat ferry.

RHENIGIDALE Roddy MacInnes, the warden, continues to take care of the hostel and its visitors. The housebook and logbook entries show that the large majority appreciate the experience, as Barbara Short from Mount Vernon, USA, says:

"Sitting in the half-grey daylight of evening, surrounded by the usual cooking bustle that dinner brings on, I feel that leaving is a far off thing, yet it is tomorrow. When I first read the thoughts written in this book I wondered at the affection I found in people's phrases, now I understand how living in this place can grow into you and I feel privileged to be able to write in here too, expressing my own affection.

"I want to thank Roddy for being here to help the hostel run on and for

letting me shear a sheep for the first time and for many good things. I suppose the weather, sunny the entire week, was a blessing from above. Well, it is a god blessed place."

HOWMORE Mrs MacSween, the warden of Howmore, also comes in for deserved praise for her work in the writings at this hostel. A number of visitors have been rewarded with sightings of Stellers Eider and Golden Eagles.

BERNERAY Miss Katie Macdonald wardened the hostel during the year and was very popular with the visitors. Following the death of her sister she has moved to Skye and Miss Annie MacKillop has agreed to become warden.

Isobel Steel's entry in the logbook captures the magic perfectly:

"Berneray! My favourite island of all the Outer Hebrides - and I have visited every one of the inhabited isles bar Bernera, Lewis. This island seems to possess that same quality of light, indefinable and beautiful that elevates Iona above all others. To see a sunset on Berneray on a summer's evening, standing on the flower covered machair, listening to the birds - swans, corncrakes, cuckoos, peewits, snipe - and gazing from Skye to St Kilda in one sweep of the eye is an experience that mentally throws one to one's knees in awe. The beauty is intense and almost painful to experience."

VISITORS Several people visited all three hostels including Jean Brazier from Bristol who provided a concise and frank report on the state of the buildings and equipment for the Trustees. Alan Bullock (Birmingham) and William Johnston (Newtonabbey, Northern Ireland), visitors in previous years, stayed at all three, as did Camilla Wickens (Edinburgh), Liz Scott (Aberdeen), David Bowles (Plymouth) with Chantrel Bertrand from Bayeux, France, and Jack and Mary Hughes (Redhill). Dick Patten, an officer of YHA Southern Region stayed at Rhenigidale and Mick Guest of YHA Midland Region visited Berneray.

THE FUTURE The Gatliff Trust provides financial assistance and practical help to support these crofters' hostels. They enable young people from many nations to explore and experience a landscape and culture which is probably very different from their own. Many visitors are willing to help with work on the crofts and in return their holiday experience is that much richer. This newsheet can only give a glimpse of the adventure awaiting the young visitor to the Outer Isles.

Two of the entries in the Berneray logbook recalled the hostel on Scarp which closed when the island was evacuated in 1969. There is no doubt that the small islands have an atmosphere which isn't present on Uist or Harris. If there was a prospect of re-establishing the hostel on Scarp the Trust would give it a high priority for support.

Please tell your friends of these small, very simple and friendly hostels. If you have suggestions, comments or offers of help the Trustees would be pleased to hear from you. We are particularly in need of a person or group with graphics experience who could design a leaflet and poster describing the hostels in the Outer Hebrides. A working party may be arranged to make Berneray weather-proof in July if efforts to get the work done by local people fail. Please let me know if you are interested in joining it. Our Annual Report and Accounts will be available soon; please send a stamped, addressed envelope (9"x4") if you would like a copy.