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DESPATCHED
MAY 1982.

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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Hebridean Hostels

Newsletter for 1981

<u>Overnights</u> (recorded)	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
Berneray	167	469	360	325	284
Howmore	500	480	382	508	339
Rhenigidale	522	597	452	391	324

Once again, fewer bednights were recorded in each of the hostels in 1981 than in the year before. However, those visitors who did come are as enthusiastic as ever, recording glowing appreciations in the hostel log books.

The Trust was most fortunate last summer when Iain Wilson from Edinburgh volunteered to do maintenance work on the hostels. He spent May and June 1981 at Howmore and Berneray and did a considerable amount of repair work on the buildings. Iain also sent the Trustees a most helpful report about the state of the buildings which merits careful consideration. Visitors to Berneray in particular will be in no doubt about the work which Iain undertook there. There are new skirting boards throughout the hostel and, in addition, the living room and the ladies' bedroom have been painted in attractive colours. The doors have been rehung and many less obvious repairs and improvements have been undertaken.

In June, Marjory Maxwell and Pablo Goldaraz undertook the laborious job of scraping lichens and growths off the outside walls of Howmore and Berneray and then applying snowcem. This work has greatly enhanced the outer appearance of both cottages. Pablo got a mention in the 'Berneray' news in the Stornoway Gazette, for a reciting a poem in Spanish at a local ceilidh. Marjory records that he was rewarded with tumultuous applause and a bag of spam sandwiches.

Without a doubt, the most notable event at Rhenigidale this year was the arrival and switching on of the electricity supply. On 26 June, Bill Bound of Stoneham, Massachusetts records: 'They are digging the ditches outside to bring electricity to the hostel. A crew works on the far hill with a gasoline jackhammer to dig holes for the power line poles.' Then on 3 September Tina Kirby from Nottingham writes: 'Tomorrow will be the great day of the switching on of the electricity supply - let's hope this doesn't change things too much except in helping the villagers.' As the advent of electricity to Rhenigidale may well ensure the survival of the community (a road would help even more), Tina expresses a sentiment with which all will agree.

The Berneray log book is full of ecstatic entries about the beauty of the island, the friendliness of the people and the magical effect it has on the soul of the writer. The following entry by Alistair Beck on 18 August is an amusing contrast: 'Spent the day here contentedly doing nothing. Managed to slip on the seaweed

while emptying the elsan and covered myself in brown goo. Ah the simple pleasures of the countryside!'

Simon Griffiths, in a more sober vein, considers what he regards as 'the purple passages' written by 'sentimentalists' in the three hostel log books and goes on to say: 'Occasionally someone gives a sociological analysis of the islands debating the decline of crofting, the effect of the military upon the island communities and culture and upon the role of the lairds, generally contending that the landowners are the malign incarnations of all the qualities that are despicable in human nature. If the sentimentalists were to read these articles perhaps they might put the Uists in their perspective. For the islanders themselves, these islands are just as much part of the real world as the visitors regard their far off homes. The islanders do not regard the Outer Hebrides as perfect so it is surely naive to write about the islands as if they were Nirvana, Utopia, the Garden of Eden, etc.'

But not all the log entries are extremes of sentiment or harsh realism. There are numerous and fascinating accounts of birds and flowers, rocks and shells, walks and people, ceilidhs and dances. As Gareth Lovett Jones says in the Howmore book: 'A very good idea this book, reading it you meet the people who have stayed here before you. The silent room fills with their voices and inklings of their personalities - some recording the events of the day, some giving us wise advice about walking on mountains or in bogs, some meditating on the place, some arguing with the attitudes of their predecessors.'

In 1981 the visitors to Howmore seemed to be the most prolific from a literary viewpoint. A non paying guest of character who resided at Howmore throughout the season and who is referred to frequently is a ginger cat. Marjory Maxwell writes: 'We befriended the dreaded Ginger Cat and named him Fergus. He is adept at opening milk cartons and apparently will eat anything.' Pablo adds, 'The best way of controlling him is feeding him!!!'

Rarer fauna and flora are noted by various people. Billy and Frances Adam and family record seeing in particular, two eagles, five red necked phalaropes and arctic skuas. Robin Payne records finding clover, ragwort tormentil, bog asphodel, knapweed, sundews, butterworts, marsh pennywort, marsh cinquefoil and vetches. He also writes, 'For anybody interested in lichens the ruins of the church/monastery/college are obviously very good.'

One enthusiastic naturalist claims to have found a wolf's skull on the shore. S. Ryan squashes that discovery: '(We) would like to inform the person who found a wolf's head on the west side that we saw a colony of large tortoises on the east, in addition to the polar bear...'

On the serious historical front John Lamont at Howmore quotes fairly lengthy extracts from Prebbles book about the Clearances, referring in particular to the cruel evictions and resistance to them at Sollas in North Uist. He goes on: 'On the South Uist Clearances in 1848 Catherine MacPhee says, 'Many a thing I have seen in my days and in my generation. I saw the women put the children into the carts and take them to Iochdar and Benbecula. Men bound hand and foot looked on helpless without a hand to help them. I saw the big strong men, stalwarts of the world, tied up on the quay at Lochboisdale and led into the ship like cattle. God and He only knows the wicked work of those men on that day.'

Other remote hostels

Peter Munn advises, 'For those who would like a comparable hostel in Wales, may I recommend Bryn Poeth Uchaf and Tyncornel. They are both lit by good gas lamps. Simon Griffiths at Howmore: 'This hostel reminds me in particular

of the hostel at Rackwick, Hoy, Orkney. Called the Rackwick Outdoor Centre it is open in the summer and is just like Howmore - small, basic and relaxed.'

There are many privately owned hostels in Orkney. Anyone interested should write to the Orkney Tourist Board in Kirkwall.

Claddach Baleshare

At Easter 82 the Trust opened a fourth hostel at Claddach Baleshare in North Uist (GR 805627). Like Howmore and Berneray the building is a traditional thatched cottage. It is situated by the sea beside the causeway from the mainland of North Uist to the island of Baleshare. The new hostel is roughly halfway between Berneray and Howmore and will soon, it is hoped, be as fondly esteemed as all the other Trust cottages. Tell your friends about it and come to stay there this summer!

The Trust has spent £1500 in establishing this new hostel - a donation, however small, sent to the Treasurer would be very welcome indeed.

Perhaps this new hostel will cause delight to more young people like Claire Coatham aged nine from Thorner near Leeds who wrote last summer in the Berneray book: 'I did a project on black houses at school after I had seen them in Harris. I have always wished I could stay in one. Now my wish has come true.'

April 1982

Isabel Steel
Edinburgh

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