

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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Hebridean Hostels

Newsletter for 1982

Overnights recorded:

	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Berneray	-	167	469	360	325	284	242
Howmore	514	500	480	382	508	339	410
Rhenigidale	530	522	597	452	391	324	299
Claddach Baleshare	-	-	-	-	-	-	186
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Total visitors	1044	1189	1546	1194	1224	947	1137
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As can be seen from the above table, the overall number of bednights recorded in 1982 has increased on 1981 although there were fewer visitors to Berneray and Rhenigidale this year. It is interesting to observe that in 1976 when the Trust only operated two hostels there were about the same number of visitors as in 1982 when four hostels were open. Does this indicate that the same number of visitors come each year and spread themselves between the available hostels or simply that numbers have dropped by about 100% over the years? The Scottish Youth Hostels Association reported considerably reduced figures this year so the Trust has done creditably in increasing its overnight stays.

Claddach Baleshare

After much planning, expense, organisation and hard work by Trustees and friends, Peter Clarke and two helpers arrived at the new hostel in April with a van load of furniture and utensils. A few days later, John Joyce and party and Arthur Meaby followed and the house was prepared for the first visitors.

Reading the entries in the log book for this hostel leaves one in no doubt that it was a great success from the first. Glowing appreciations of the house, its position and Mr and Mrs Tosh, the wardens, comprise most of the entries. 'Beautiful place for a hostel.' 'This hostel is great.' 'Certainly for me the perfect type of hostel.' 'It has been really good staying here, almost like living in someone's house, as it is so comfortable and well equipped.' 'Fantastic hostel, home from home, loath to leave, warden great and very helpful.' 'An idyllic spot.' 'The ideal way to run a hostel.' 'A superb new acquisition for the Gatliff Trust.' 'A wonderful addition to the chain.'

Sadly, the Trust was served with a Notice to Quit this 'idyllic spot' and had to leave by the end of September 1982. This shattering blow was magnificently mitigated by Mr and Mrs Tosh offering their thatched cottage to the Trust for use as a hostel. So there will be a hostel at Claddach Baleshare (GR 803628) this summer, only in a different house. Be sure to pay it a visit!

Berneray

The island and people of Berneray continue to be held in great affection and esteem by hostellers, who constantly refer to the beauty of the place and the friendliness of the people. This summer the hostel roof was rethatched. Lachlainn MacPhail describes the work: 'We watched interestedly and talked at great length about island life while they 'pulled' the marram grass used for the skilful thatching process. (The hostel much needed this covering.) This 'pulling' process involved picking up a bundle of stems and pulling it apart making five sheafs and putting these together lengthwise, this being repeated two or three times to obtain a nice even sheaf. The sheafs were tied in bundles and stacked against the hostel wall ready for the actual thatching and praying that it didn't rain overnight.' Unfortunately, the description ends there and does not detail the rest of the operation. We can report that despite this, the much needed work was completed.

The big event in Berneray within the next few weeks will be the commencement of the vehicle ferry service. The ferry is built and ready but the terminals are not yet complete. The service to Harris from North Uist will operate as before.

Howmore

Howmore, also, was rethatched during 1982 and now looks very trim. It had a large number of visitors this year and the literary output in its logbook constitutes more reading than the total of the other three logs! On 27 May there is an unsigned entry, probably by G or J Lomas which reads as follows: 'First stay at a Gatliff Trust hostel after 46 years membership of YHA. It takes us back to the early years. If only every hosteller would do their share and realise that simple need not mean dirty and untidy this type of hostel would be a much more viable proposition in other parts of Britain; filling a great need. Sincere appreciation of this one and of the efforts of Mrs MacSween.'

An interesting memory is recorded by Gustaf von Sivers: 'Iain the warden's nephew used to bring water to an old woman who used to live here. When he shared our lunch today it was the first time in twenty years he had had a meal in this building.'

There are a number of useful tips in this log, for example how to gather cockles at the South Ford: 'Scrape away the top inch or so of sand with a slate, stick, knife, bit of wood or anything and you will find lots of cockles (white shells in two halves) one or two per square foot or even more. You need plastic bags or other containers and have to collect a lot because there is not much eating when you get rid of the shells. Boil them in ordinary water for fifteen minutes. You can eat them then or take them out of the shells and fry them first.'

Ian Hawthorn gives an illustrated account of how to make and operate a sort of sledge for carrying drift wood along the beach. Anyone wanting to gather wood should refer to page 19 of the Howmore log! Kevin Donnelly describes the view from the top of Ben More: 'This is what you see: St Kilda

(very prominent on the horizon even from the top), Benbecula looking very flat with lots of water, the Harris hills. The hostels at Claddach Baleshare and on Berneray (through binoculars), the Waternish peninsula on Skye with big sea cliffs and caves, the Cuillins on Skye (finally clear of cloud at the end of the day, Sgurr nan Gillean, Corrie Lagan, Inaccessible Pinnacle, Cioch, etc). Fishing boats in the Minch (you could see people on them through binoculars and hear when they started their engine). Sgur na Ciche at the head of Loch Nevis, Rhum looking a magic island all day, Canna, Eigg, Muck, Ardnamurchan, Ben More on Mull, Coll, Tiree, Barra, Sandray. The view of Loch Eynort when you reach the top of Beinn Mhor is enough to make you fall off the summit ridge. Glen Hellisdale looks spectacular and remote. Signs of lots of cultivation in the past in Glen Uisinish. On the way down you can watch the Monach Islands move on to the horizon and St Kilda sink beneath the sea.'

Rhenigidale

The remoteness and difficulty of access to this village continue to impress visitors to the hostel there and most of the entries comment or reflect on these features. In particular Gavin Kay writes: 'Magnificent views from the top (of Toddun) - one realises again just how much of Harris is water, and how glaciated it is. Saw three golden eagles - first a pair glided in, did a short tumble dive, and flew off. The third made a long gliding circuit of the mountain, then came in to land. Only in the Himalayas have I seen eagles. Come to think of it, only in the Himalayas have I walked into villages as remote as this one!'

Remoteness has its problems, of course, as Ros Ravell discovered. Kevin Donnelly reports: 'Ros Ravell has managed to badly sprain her ankle while eating a Mars bar on the flattest part of the track on the way out, and is now consultant oracle in a tent at the start of the path, complete with a new set of crutches from Stornoway hospital.'

Many mentions of flora and fauna are made at Rhenigidale this year and most visitors seem to have glimpsed eagles on Toddun and some saw otters near the cave at the mouth of Loch Seaforth. Robert Payne of Aberystwyth did not see eagles but he did compile a list of no less than 24 plants/trees and 16 different birds which he personally observed. Perhaps most fortunate of all observers was Chris ? in April: 'I think I saw the most spectacular northern light performance ever.'

At the time of writing this newsletter the long sought Rhenigidale road is in the news again, a local paper having suggested that the product of a 1p rate should be committed to starting the project. Some councillors have expressed interest. We shall see

The future

The Gatliff Trust looks forward to a busy and constructive year in 1983. It is planned to proceed with negotiations for the acquisition of a building for a further hostel in North Uist and it will be necessary to raise funds to provide for this and other improvements and repairs to buildings.

While the Uists and Harris are now excellently provided with hostels, Lewis and Barra are barren of such accommodation. Should anyone be aware of a suitable building in these islands please contact one of the Trustees at once!

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In conclusion here is a comment by Tim Edensor on the logbooks: 'The logbook is great. I hope EVERYONE writes something in here. I was up all evening reading it and I haven't guffawed so much for ages. Some real nutters come here. Long may they continue to do so.'

March 1983

Isabel Steel
Edinburgh