

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS: NEWSLETTER for 1985

	<u>1981</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>	
Berneray	284	242	225	178	200	(162 work parties)
Claddach Baleshare	-	186	156	227	471	
Howmore	339	410	405	367	523	
Rhenigidale	<u>324</u>	<u>299</u>	<u>266</u>	<u>270</u>	<u>414</u>	
	<u>947</u>	<u>1137</u>	<u>1052</u>	<u>1042</u>	<u>1608</u>	

This year saw a substantial increase in the number of visitors to the hostels. This is attributed to advertisements on the ferries and it is intended to publicise the hostels in the same way in 1986.

The hostel in Berneray was closed for most of the season while parties of volunteers undertook major structural repairs and improvements on it. The building now has a new weatherproof roof with thatch, new doors and windows and electricity connected. Very grateful thanks are due to party leaders and the intrepid members who gave their time to work in often unpleasant weather on this project. The Countryside Commission for Scotland must also be thanked for giving a 50% grant to the Trust to enable the work to be undertaken. A large sum is still required to enable the Trust to complete the work in Berneray and an Appeal has been launched for funds. If you have not already received a copy of the Appeal leaflet and you wish to make a donation, please send it to Rev Roger Clifton FCA, Treasurer, The Gatliff Trust, The Rectory, Colerne, Nr Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 8DF.

An increase in the number of visitors meant an increase in entries in the hostel logbooks, and many of these were of great interest. Indeed one entry was made by an Iranian hosteller - in his own country's script! Visitors came this year from twenty countries including Czechslovakia, Austria, South Africa, Scandinavia and Australia to mention but a few.

In the Howmore log, birds, bird watching and an argument on the pros and cons of "twitching" are the main topics featured. The Steller's Eider has departed or died but a new rarity has arrived (indubitably for the sole purpose of keeping the hostel filled) namely a Pied Billed Grebe. On 19th May there is an entry by a dedicated twitcher sic: "Cleaned up on Pied Billed, got Corncrake on 15th May at Hartlepool bowling green so unless another long stayer rarity turns up on this god foresaken windy wet and unpleasant place will not have to come back again (unblocked Stellers in '83). Is it ever sunny and calm here?" Phew, lets move on quickly to a more complimentary and typical entry made only two days before by Beverley Wainwright who says "Climbed Ben Mor on Thursday despite haze an ecstatic view from the top - can't believe this island is so flat - more water than land all the lakes glistening silver with black rims the land looks as though it's been pencilled in by an artist - someones made the water into a jigsaw puzzle by sawing it into bits - just needs fitting together and there'd be no South Uist!".

On 11th July there is an unsigned entry at Howmore "Unlike many of the others who came here looking for that rare North American species of bird, I came looking for that probably extinct species of right whale that used to inhabit the water in centuries past. Thanks to whaling stations such as the one on Harris this whale has not been sighted for at least twenty years. If you get a chance visit the old station on Harris about 3 miles north west of Tarbert on the road to Huisinish. It's an interesting piece of history."

It is a pity that the writer of that piece did not have Jeremy Craven's experience recorded in the Baleshare hostel log on 22nd June: "Incidentally, if you doubt the trek to Rhenigidale might be worth the effort, I'd say go. Perseverance was repaid to me when I enjoyed a half hour performance by a whale in the blue green waters of the inlet half way between the hostel and the road." Another notable experience is described in the same log by Tim Gallbraith on 28th September. "I could make out the most amazing set of antlers I have ever seen. To my surprise there were three stags leaping over the fence in a most beautiful display of power and grace. I have seen many deer, moose, elk but nothing comes close to this sight."

There is a fascinating entry by a German visitor, Lothar Koch at Howmore on 11th July. He writes: "I feel quite at home on this island - not only because of the similar name to "my island" in Germany which is called Juist. Also the inhabitants and their social structure reminds me a lot to the people of that German island many hundreds of miles away. The landscape is quite different though, pure sand dunes - you wouldn't find the smallest rock, sandy beach, saltmarshes and so forth. Here I like the diversity and the abrupt changes of habitats: mountain moors machair lochs and beaches. It's a pity we have to rush on but I have to clean the beach in Juist from the 1st August onwards. I wish we had some of these cosy croft cottages like this on our island."

It is very pleasing to find on reading through the housebooks that a number of local people used the hostels during the year. There is an entry in the Claddach Baleshare log on 8th August when two Lewis girls on a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme expedition say "It is indeed strange to find this place "romantic" "harmonic" and even "outta centre". For this type of lifestyle we live and breathe every day of the year, and, for us, it signifies hard work, muck, wellington boots, awful weather and a heck of a lot of true grit - aye 'tis many things the life of the Hebridean but 'tis not dreamy to be sure."

Another practical and realistic entry can be found in the Rhenigidale log on 25th July when M. McMannon writes: "I first came to Rhenigidale 20 years ago, soon after the hostel was opened. During that time, my several visits at long intervals have impressed on me the changes among which only two things remain apparently unchanging - one is Roddy MacInnes and the other is the expected road from Maaruib. The village is now quiet again in the evenings after the generator era of my last visit 10 years ago, but the electricity poles were a shock as I came over the hill. Inhabited houses have halved in number (but one has been rebuilt!); small children have grown up and gone away (but some have come back). Both deaths and births, of course, but the village is really just hanging on for the road. This seems a pity to visitors, many of whom came here previously because of the difficulty of access (although this is rarely mentioned in the logs). But I have changed my mind during this visit (which would not have been made had the road been completed) and would ask all lovers of the 'old' Rhenigidale to accept this too - that change is inevitable, but the worst change of all is the total loss this place. So cough up the cash EEC and put a new line on the map!"

As the writer says, one unchanging thing is Roddy MacInnes. This comment can be applied to the wardens of all the other hostels too. All four are constantly praised and thanked and are recorded as being not just wardens but local guides, providers of food and beer, story tellers, counsellors and Roddy even seems to have done the duties of a nurse on one occasion! So a big thank you to Mrs MacSween, Mr & Mrs Tosh, Miss MacKillop and Mrs MacLeod and Mr MacInnes. Ceud mile taing dhuibh uile!

And to conclude, extracts from the only entry in the Berneray log this year, written by Bettina Selby in July. It surely encapsulates much of what is delightful in the Outer Isles and describes the type of experiences that the Gatliff Trustees hope that their hostels will enable many to enjoy.

"The first evening I went to the Berneray Week film show and saw four films about the Hebrides ... The next night was ceillidh night and that was super with the hall packed to the doors and great singing from visitors and locals kept me rivetted in spite of my precarious perch on a hard backless wooden bench. Today I should have joined the outing to Boreray and had stayed precisely to do this. But it was a miserable day with mist and rain so I didn't go and now regret it. The previous evening had been the most marvellous I have ever experienced in all the years I have been coming here. The light in the western sky was quite astonishing, long after the sun had set in a riot of yellow and orange hues. I can only describe it as the most unearthly sort of light I have ever seen. Everyone coming out of the ceillidh for a breath of air remarked upon it with gasps of amazement and delight. At lam the afterglow was still lighting up the western sky, quite overpowering the half moon and stars of the eastern sky - it was very difficult to tear myself away and go to bed."

Isabel Steel, Edinburgh  
March 1986