

# GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

(Urras Osdallean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff)

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS - NEWSLETTER FOR 1990

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John Murdo Webb

### HOSTEL OVERNIGHTS

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Berneray	200	581	657	1173	1078	1248
Claddach Baleshare	471	313	349	435	423	341
Howmore	523	516	389	615	648	925
Rhenigidale	414	364	532	384	118	542
Total	1608	1754	1927	2607	2467	3054

Hostel overnights were substantially increased this year except at Claddach Baleshare. This was probably due to the poor condition of the hostel caused by roof damage in 1989. The hostel will now remain closed until the roof has been rethatched.

The number of visitors to Rhenigidale is particularly impressive when one considers that the hostel was only open from 1st July. In the early part of the year an enormous amount of work was done on the building by volunteers to whom grateful thanks are due. Supremely, thanks are due to Roy Ashworth who worked at Rhenigidale for months and gave unstintingly of his time and skill.

Unfortunately, progress has not been so satisfactory at the new Garenin hostel which is still not open, much to the disappointment of all and particularly John and Pat McGregor, the enthusiastic wardens elect.

Visitors in 1990 came from all over the world from places as diverse as Turkey and New Zealand, Sweden and the U.S.A. We hope that all felt like Ian Maiden who succinctly wrote in the Rhenigidale book "Made it. It was well worth it."

He does not appear to be one of the cyclists who pedalled over the new road on 17th July when Sheila Hyslop writes "We cycled here from Stockinish - not far as the crow flies but a wee bit hilly - our wee legs were nearly dropping off - lucky really that we had that meringue and cream in Tarbert or we may not have made it! An ambulance passed just before we left the main road and we thought - how did they know we were about to die? Maybe they do the trip every day checking for dead cyclists!"

A more elaborate evacuation from near Rhenigidale was described on June 30th - "Today a chap fell on the zig zags coming from Tarbert and broke his leg. A boat put out from Scalpay to pick him up. He had to be lifted by helicopter in

the end." The writer comments "I think I'll walk up the road on Saturday for the bus!!"

Although it has its dangers, it is often while walking that hostellers have their most memorable experiences whether it is glimpsing otters in Berneray, watching spectacular sunsets in Uist or gazing at great vistas from the top of Harris hills.

For example, Dale Balen from Australia writes at Howmore on 29th August - "got taken for a blow along the beach by a helpful wind that whipped the sand and sea into ever changing patterns. Loved the houses, their heads of thatch covered by hairnets and held down by a necklace of rocks - beautiful patches of colour in the weeds and in the lichen on the old abbey ruins."

Mike McNiven at Berneray on 23rd May says "we climbed to the cairn this morning and had the sweep of the sands below us, a magnificent sight - a pale turquoise sky, a blue black sea on the horizon with brilliant turquoise green sea in the foreground, all in sharp contrast to the white sand."

Alex J. Badenoch in Berneray at the end of July says "On Saturday evening it was exceedingly clear, the full length of the Cuillins on Skye were sharp and clear and the full range of the mountain mass of the mainland of Scotland was visible up to Cape Wrath."

At Claddach Baleshare on 12th August 1990 Jonathan Hewitt describes a good day out - "Today I cycled out to the end of the Sidinish road and walked round Loch Obisary and up Eaval - spectacular views across the islands and north to Harris, east to Skye. Simply wonderful."

As well as appreciating the beauty of nature and the landscape, the visitors also enjoy encounters with local people and experiences of island life.

At Claddach Baleshare, Daren Peckham and friend lent a hand at bringing home the peats: "We met Mrs Tosh who invited us to go and cart some peat with Mr Tosh, so we did, and it was fabulous. He took us onto the moors on a bumpy trailer where we loaded it full. Too full!! Needless to say we couldn't fit back on so he left us in the middle of nowhere while he trundled off to unload. Hours later we heard the tractor return. We put another half load on and travelled back. We really enjoyed our short stay at Claddach Baleshare."

Martin Padget on 13th July writes "Yesterday had a couple of drams with South Uist's Gaelic bard, Donald MacDonald. I was suitably humbled. He spoke of Byron and Thomas Gray as influences - combined with the wealth of his knowledge of Gaelic poetry and story telling and "contemporary events". A most modest man self-consciously living out the twilight of old style Gaelic culture."

Hazel Jones of Australia was also meditating on times long gone when she wrote at Berneray "I was thinking of my great great grandmother, Kate MacDonald who left the Isle of Mull in 1833 never to see her ain folk again."

They were hard days then and the work was hard too, but not necessarily unhappy days as Monique Parker points out in the Claddach Baleshare book on 27th May 1990. "This place reminds me of the Auvergne of my childhood and brings back wonderful memories of a simple life. I wish I could tell A.G.B. (who wrote in the log on 16.6.88) that there was something about the life of simple country people in the past which we have regrettably lost. Working hard and "slogging"

is something many people do today. That work does not exclude pleasure or happiness."

Reading through the log books, certain names and topics appear again and again, for example the cats and cockerel at Claddach Baleshare, Ranson, the four legged tour guide at Howmore, dances and ceillidhs in Berneray and the friendliness of people everywhere. As always it was the hard work, the warm welcome and the kindness of the wardens of all the hostels which attracted more comment from visitors than any other topic.

To the wardens and to the Trustees and volunteers who labour to keep the hostels wind and water tight, provisioned, clean and happy - a metaphoric bouquet and a big Thank You.

Isabel Steel,  
Bridge of Allan,  
February 1991.



#### Berneray Hostel

One of three new drawings of GHT hostels from the pen of Eric Duggan. The three drawings will be used in GHT leaflets and publications in the forthcoming months.

Membership of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust is taken by joining Hebridean Hostellers. Hebridean Hostellers is a supporters group for the crofters hostel, providing workparties, financial support and general assistance to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. As well as providing much needed support to the crofters hostels, Hebridean Hostellers are kept up to date with events and activities at the hostels, and on topics of general Hebridean interest by means of a twice-yearly Newsletter and yearly distribution of the GHT Annual Report. Further details of Hebridean Hostellers membership (which costs £3.00 annually) can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to:

Lynn Genner (GHT), 42 Lamberton Court, Pencaitland, East Lothian, EH34 5BL.

