

# GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

(Urras Osdalean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff)

## *Crofters Newsletter 1991*

*Peter Clark (Chairman)*  
264 Alexandra Park Road,  
London, SE19 3QZ

*Alan Busson (Secretary)*  
4 Sambre Road  
Ridgeway View  
Chisleton  
Swindon, SN4 0JB

*Deirdre Forsyth (Vice Chairman)*  
*John Duyck (Treasurer)*  
Richard Genner  
John Joyce  
Philip Lawson  
Frank Martin  
Arthur Meaby  
Pam Moncur  
Jim Souness  
John Murdo Webb

### HOSTEL OVERNIGHTS

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Berneray	200	561	657	1173	1078	1246	1456
Claddach Baleshare	471	313	349	435	423	341	425
Garenin	-	-	-	-	-	-	1550
Howmore	523	516	389	615	848	925	633
Rhenigidale	414	364	532	384	118	542	1010
<b>Total</b>	<b>1608</b>	<b>1754</b>	<b>1927</b>	<b>2607</b>	<b>2467</b>	<b>3054</b>	<b>5074</b>

In 1991 recorded bednights at the hostels increased by two thirds compared to the previous years with all but one of the existing hostels recording an increase in numbers and the Garenin hostel accommodating more people than any other. It was obvious that a hostel was much needed in Lewis but few predicted such a surge of visitors.

From the day it opened in May, Garenin hostel thronged with people. The very first entry in its log was made by Sara Kelly of Canada who writes "We had a wonderful stay and look forward to coming again. Enjoy yourselves as much as we did." This advice was well heeded throughout the summer, visitors record their delight with the building, its location and its wardens. Indeed, in their first season, warden Pat McGregor and her husband, John, are described as "angels". As such they maintain the traditions of kindness and hospitality for which the wardens of all five hostels are repeatedly thanked. Perhaps the most original of the many messages of goodwill and thanks to the wardens was written to Annie & Jessie at Berneray where Susan and Ian Carmichael say "We hope that they

enjoyed our company as much as we enjoyed theirs and may they find winkles as big as tennis balls and enough to fill their sacks".

Visitors to the hostels came from an impressive number of countries and there are entries in the logs written in Finnish, Gaelic, German, Hebrew, Irish, Italian, Scots and Spanish. One of the entries in Gaelic was written by a German, Sammy el Samati. So if you wish to be in a really cosmopolitan atmosphere come to stay in a thatched cottage in the Outer Hebrides!

A great number of cyclists stayed at the hostels in 1991 and they refer frequently to the weather and inevitably to the wind. "Norm" at Howmore on 19th April writes that "Someone described Uist to me as 'windswept'. This is of course the understatement of the century and I find that 'wind scrubbed' or 'wind scoured' far more descriptive". Maggie though enjoyed her bicycle ride to Rhenigidale on 7th May. "The cycle up to Bealach na Ciste was hard enough but the cycle up the new road was even harder. But the view at the top was an unimaginable joy. Again, the sun came out at the right moment for us with its warmth on our backs and the sea far below our feet and Skye away - away in the mist - just shimmering on the horizon, with the steep rocks and the heather all around. And then we were flying down at breakneck speed to arrive, breathless, exhilarated, enthralled and delighted. Rhenigidale was absolutely all and more than everything we had heard or read".

There are many comments on the new road to Rhenigidale, the benefits it has brought and its less attractive aspects. On 20th June 1991 Mr Ackroyd of Shropshire gives a detailed description of the hardships of life before the road. Referring to the difficulty of access he records "Mrs McInnes' husband did the round trip on foot, three times a week for 25 years and when he had a holiday SHE did it. Mrs McInnes worked the radio Telephone payphone for 35 years and has a lovely Caithness glass bowl suitably inscribed to prove it".

Mark Chamberlain, another visitor to Rhenigidale after many years, reviews the changes and concludes that "Probably the saddest change of all is that Roddy is no longer here to welcome those who stay". Indeed many of us remember Roddy McInnes still and wish he had lived to see the advent of the road for which he fought so gallantly for so many years.

The beautiful and ever changing landscapes, the 'Bahamas style beaches' and wildlife impressed most visitors. Mouna from Belgium "Slept in the dunes (at Berneray), in the

meadows among the wild flowers and red bumble bees, swam in turquoise light green sea (dead cold) and had a bonfire on the beach". Angus at Garenin "especially enjoyed the different colours of the stones on the beach when they were rain wet".

Wildlife too is a source of joy, with flowers, birds, seals and even otters being observed. Caitlin Munro at Rhenigidale records that "An otter came scampering out in front of me and went over a small hill. I went to the edge of the hill and there he was, head tilted to the side, watching me admire him. Then he was gone over the side and into the water an instant later. What a sleek brown beautiful animal he was!"

At Howmore a less attractive creature is described by Bill from Manchester: "horseflies are like normal flies except larger, fiercer and noisier. They also carry very small petrol driven chain saws with which they drink your blood".

At Claddach Baleshare, the most notable character, as always, is the cockerel and descriptions of his early morning concerts are many. Suggestions vary from Stuart's "just put a bit of superglue in his mouth" to Norm's "take a grenade with you and strap it to the cockerel and set it for 6.00 am". The bird does have its supporters too. One person advises "Don't complain about the cockcrow. Would you rather have a lorry thundering past?" Another says "Claddach Baleshare must be one of the most beautiful places in the world. To be woken at 4.30 am by the cockerel is a delightful experience - to sit and watch the sunset - the moon come up - we will never forget this place".

Historical and archeological sites are also the subject of comment. The museum at Kildonan in South Uist receives mention for the first time in Howmore's log for 1991. In July, Ian Fisher of Edinburgh writes "Some of us loved the museum at Kildonan with its living traditions and good teas". Alison Davie also recommends the museum and says "if possible get to the Tuesday evening presentation 'A Taste of the West' bagpipes, singing, etc".

At Garenin, Mark Chamberlain on 9th June gives a lengthy description of walks from the hostel and local places of interest. It will be useful to refer to this as some indeed did this year. Callanish stones inevitably come in for frequent mention in the Garenin log.

One place hitherto never mentioned by hostellers is Vallay, an island near Sollas in North Uist. In 1991 a Howmore resident writes "For unconventional tourist visits, visit the old house on the island of Vallay. A trip back in time, history and architecture".

The main pleasure of visitors though, seems to be their encounters with the people of the islands. Christine writes in the Berneray log that "although the island is beautiful in both sunshine and the rain, it really is the people who make your stay the most enjoyable of all". This view is reiterated many times. Hostellers comment repeatedly on the friendliness and hospitality of the people they meet, upon the fact that people wave to them as they walk or cycle along, about attending Gaelic services, ceilidhs and dances, hearing Gaelic spoken and sung and seeing tweed hand woven by people like John Macgregor at Garenin.

In turn even some hostellers are admired by locals as was Robin who gave this tip in the Claddach Baleshare book: "And guys when approaching Sollas never mind the cold, strip down to the figure hugging shorts and T-shirt. Three women and a pram gave me a wolf whistle and it was a very good wolf whistle too!"

The finest tribute is, of course, that many visitors assert that they will return. For example at Garenin someone says "I'll be back, as they say, Garenin is perfect, full of friendly people." Claddach Baleshare: "First hostel I've ever stayed in and longing for my next day in one. Can't imagine that any other hostel has such attractions to it as this one. Sand, sea, surf, great scenery and friendly people". And at Berneray. "we only came here by accident because we couldn't get the ferry from Lochmaddy - it was one of the best accidents that ever happened to me. It was heaven collecting periwinkles (sic), watching sunsets and early rises, seeing seals, walking the island and staying in such a beautiful place".

*Isabel Steel*  
*Edinburgh*  
*January 1992.*

---

Membership of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust is taken by joining Hebridean Hostellers. Hebridean Hostellers is a supporters group for the crofters hostels, 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 a yearly distribution of the GHHT Annual Report. Further details of the Hebridean Hostellers membership (which costs £3.00 annually) can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to: *Lynn Genner (GHHT), 42 Lamberton Court, Pencaitland, East Lothian, Eh34 5BL*