

# GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

(Urras Osdailan Nan Innse Gall Gatliff)

## HOSTELS' NEWSLETTER 1992

Peter Clarke (Chairman)  
264 Alexandra Park Road,  
London, N22 4BG

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

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

### HOSTEL OVERNIGHTS

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Berneray	200	561	657	1173	1078	1246	1456	1534
Claddach Baleshare	471	313	349	435	423	341	425	498
Garenin	-	-	-	-	-	-	1550	1551
Howmore	523	516	389	615	848	925	633	999
Rhenigidale	414	364	532	384	118	542	1010	1234
Total	1608	1754	1927	2607	2467	3054	5074	5816

Yet again, recorded overnight stays in the hostels have risen with visitors coming from all over the world. They came from Hungary and Turkey, Israel and Iraq, Japan, Taiwan and South Africa to mention just the more far flung locations. There were even a handful from Scotland!

The main event for the Trust during 1992 was the official opening of the hostel at Garenin and the re-opening of the renovated building at Rhenigidale. On 3rd July about 200 people including the wardens of all five hostels and Mrs MacSween, retired Howmore warden, friends of the hostels, trustees, local people, Council officials and guests assembled at Garenin to see the hostel officially opened by Magnus Magnusson. After a tour of the hostel, a sumptuous tea was provided for all at Carloway Hall. The party then moved on to Rhenigidale for the ceremony there. The openings were given publicity in the islands by local radio who broadcast interviews in Gaelic with Mrs McInnes of Rhenigidale and John MacGregor of Garenin. They spoke about the history of the hostels and in the case of Garenin about the sisters who lived and worked there.

### THE VISITOR'S VIEW OF THE HOSTELS

Last summer, the weather in the Outer Isles tended to be wet and windy. Cyclists in particular record epic journeys through gales and rain but also the pleasure of arriving at a warm and welcoming hostel. One person wrote

"Walking into a Force 10 gale  
on Berneray  
like running away from something  
in your dreams"

Ronan Cavanagh at Claddach Baleshare in September describes the infinite variety of the weather: "Truly, I must admit the Hebrides have surprised me with their intensity of life. This is very much reflected by the severity of the weather conditions. A blistering headwind and nullifying sea mist is like a living hell but a calm moonlit seashore is a joy for us to exist under when exposed to Hebridean surroundings."

Don Wood at Rhenigidale also writes of the delights of island weather: "Walked back from the pub last night. Darkness fell by the time we reached the top of the zig-zag descent but, between showers, our path was lit by the moon. As we climbed up from the inlet, the moon came out and we saw a silver rainbow from behind us. The rain ceased and we finished the walk in brilliant moonlight with a clear view out to the Shiant Isles."

Many hostellers experienced interesting encounters with animals and birds. At Garenin and at Berneray in particular there are frequent sightings of otters. No-one was more fortunate than A. Evans on 10th March at Berneray who while walking on the West Beach "noticed in the distance... ..an otter with a fish. About 10-15 minutes later the fish had been eaten. The otter then entered the sea and I thought he would swim away. Well NO. He splashed around a few times then scampered up the beach putting two seagulls to flight. He seemed to rush them deliberately. He then sniffed around a couple of spots where he had been eating and started coming up the beach. Next thing, he was rolling on his back in dry wind blown sand.. a couple of times and then he started coming up the mechair!"

The otter then ran towards Mr Evans and he continues "Suddenly there he was five yards away. For a split second we stared at each other. I got a photo with two more of him fleeing and one when he turned round again to look at me."

Probably even rarer sightings than this were made near Howmore hostel where people record seeing corncrakes. Also at Howmore someone had a different and not altogether pleasurable experience when trying to eat limpets! He advises "Don't! If you want to exercise your jaw muscles while not taxing your taste buds then limpets are for you!"

It is encouraging to see several entries in Gaelic in hostel books, mostly by learners. In July 1992 Eonasan Dambling from Massachusetts writes in Gaelic and explains that he learnt it in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Indeed, a Cape Breton friend's grandfather came from Berneray and Eonasan was able to visit his relatives on the island.

At Rhenigidale an anonymous scribe records the well known Gaelic proverb which translated says:

"If you wish to be praised, die  
If you wish to be talked about, marry"

Hostellers write about many things but not about weddings this year although a couple did spend their honeymoon at the Berneray hostel in 1992.

Praise of the hostels and their wardens is an ever recurring theme in all the log books. Comments vary from that of an Iraqi at Rhenigidale: "The mother of all hostels!" to Liz Gatiliff's entry after her first visit to Garenin: "My father [i.e. Herbert Gatiliff, founder of the hostels] would have been thrilled with this hostel." Tom Crawford at Rhenigidale writes "Each hostel is a national treasure." He also says that he has learnt that "Youth includes the young at heart as well as age." A visitor at Howmore says "I have never stayed in a

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Lynn & Richard Genner (GHHT), 45 Godwinsway, Stamford Bridge, York, YO4 1DA.

Howmore Appeal Howmore hostel is an old building and it has been in use since 1966 as a hostel. Its gently aging fabric is beginning to suffer excessive wear and tear. Steadily climbing usage, much of it occurring during the main summer season, has led to overcrowding. Repairs, refurbishment and additional accommodation are now required. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust therefore plans to close Howmore hostel in late 1993 to start the necessary work. It is planned that the hostel will reopen in Spring of 1995 with all necessary repairs and refurbishment completed and an adjacent building totally renovated to provide additional dormitory and wash-room accommodation.

The total cost of this work is thought to be about £50,000 and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust aims to raise at least half of this by public appeal. The Howmore Appeal will be launched in April or May of this year. The Appeal will be co-ordinated by Trustee Pam Moncur and Pam will welcome help in any of the following areas:

- 1) Assistance with correspondence, envelope stuffing, artwork, etc.
- 2) Suggestions as to whom/which charities/trusts/companies can be approached for financial assistance.
- 3) Donations to get the Appeal underway.

Any recipient of this Newsletter who can help on any of these areas is asked to contact Pam at 28 Rosetta Road, Peebles, EH45 8HJ, Great Britain.

Success of the Appeal and the subsequent repairs, refurbishment and renovation will ensure that Howmore continues to operate as a crofters hostel into the next century. Please assist the Trust if you can. Thank you.

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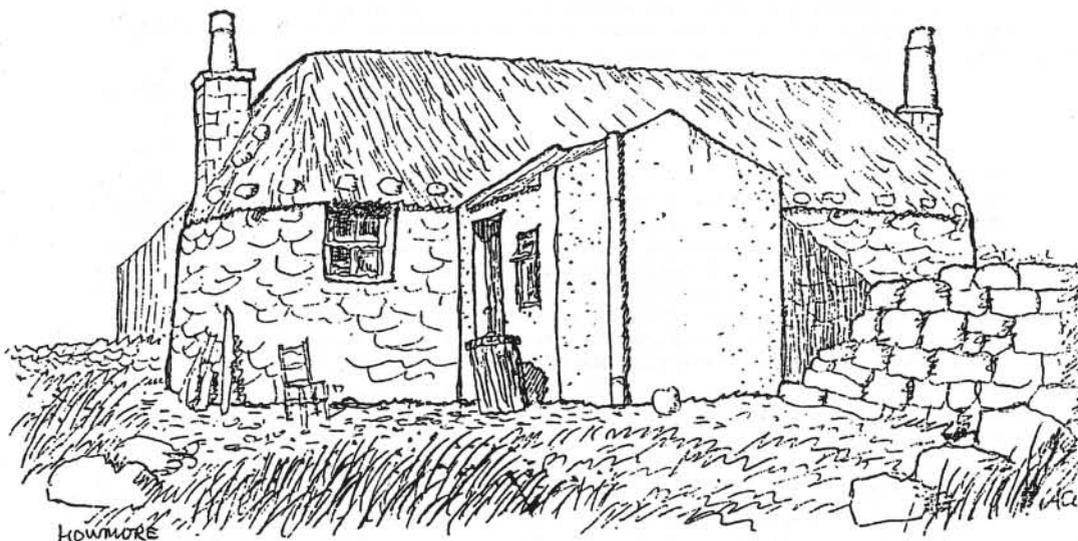
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Howmore Hostel  
(drawn by Crispin Worthington)

All that remains is to thank the wardens of the five hostels who make it all possible. So to Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Tosh, Miss MacKillop and Mrs MacLeod, Mrs McInnes and Mr and Mrs MacGregor - *mòran taing dhuibh uile!*

Isabel Steel,  
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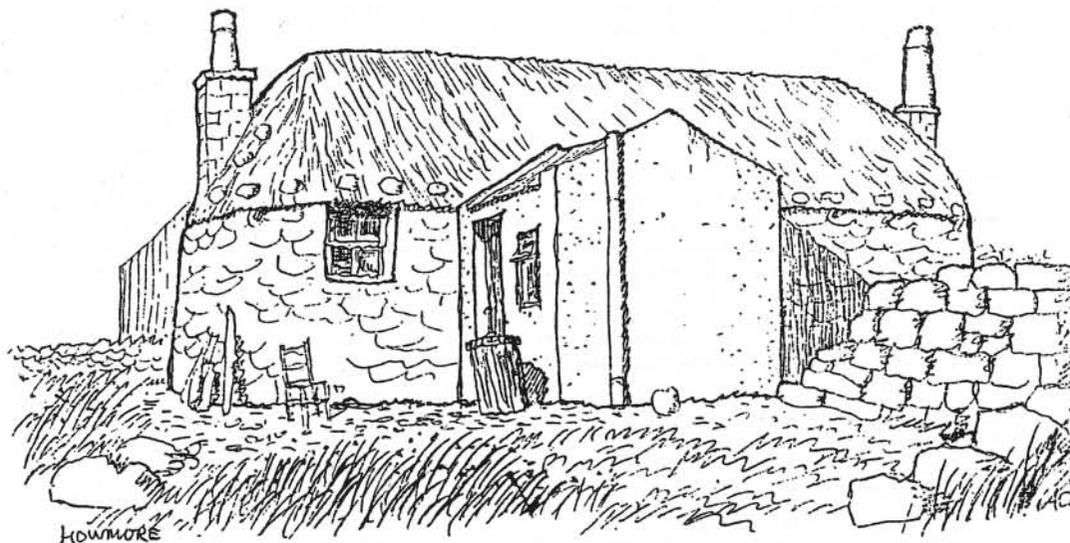
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