

GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

(Urras Osdallean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff)

HOSTELS NEWSLETTER 1993

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

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

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

HOSTEL OVERNIGHTS

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Berneray	561	657	1173	1078	1246	1456	1534	2031
Claddach Baleshare	313	349	435	423	341	425	498	-
Garenin	-	-	-	-	-	1550	1551	2094
Howmore	516	389	615	848	925	633	999	1115
Rhenigidale	<u>364</u>	<u>532</u>	<u>384</u>	<u>118</u>	<u>542</u>	<u>1010</u>	<u>1234</u>	<u>1122</u>
Total	1754	1927	2607	2467	3054	5074	5816	6362

Despite the closure of Claddach Baleshare, overall numbers of visitors to the hostels increased yet again in 1993. Will saturation point be reached soon?

Early in 1993 Mrs Catrina Tosh decided that she was unable to continue running her hostel at Claddach Baleshare and it was with sadness that we saw the hostel close. Mr & Mrs Tosh are to be thanked for making their delightful house available over the years. Many people will retain happy memories of their stay there.

Likewise, Mrs MacInnes at Rhenigidale retired as warden during the year but a new warden has been appointed there and the hostel remains open. We wish Mrs MacInnes a happy retirement and a big thank you for all her work and support over the years. Mr & Mrs Mackay, the new wardens, are welcomed and we wish them many happy years in charge. Warm thanks are due of course to all the wardens at all the hostels for their sterling work through the year.

Visitors to the hostels in 1993 came from all over the world and many were paying a return visit. Two Germans who visited the Western Isles in the summer returned to spend their entire New Year holidays in Berneray. They clearly felt like Lizzie Skinner who in June 1993 wrote "Paradise Found - hard to believe such a place so unspoilt by mankind still exists." Or like Neil of Cape Town who wrote "As close to Africa as you will find in Britain - the people have got time. Wonderful place, wonderful setting. From the seals in the early morning to the tranquility of the sunset. Thank you Gatliff."

HOWMORE

In 1994 the Howmore Hostel will be refurbished and a nearby building restored to provide extra space and improved conditions. The visitors in 1993, nevertheless loved the hostel as it was. Christine Cameron from Fort William wrote in May: "Arrived here with the intention of spending one night and stayed for five nights. Howmore is that kind of place. This is a return visit. I was here ten years ago." Others write of "the visiting chicken Brunhilda who, when you open the door, wanders in clucking peacefully."

The superb scenery around the hostel is often described. Christine Cameron advises that given the choice of climbing Ben More or Hecla "the views from Hecla are much better." John from Exeter warns though "Beware the summit of Hecla as your compass won't work." On 11th August, John, a hardy soul, bathed in Loch Corodale - the loch described in Neil Munro's "Children of Tempest" as being "blue as an angel's eye". John writes "I was drawn down to the eastern side by the loch and the sight of four magnificent deer who bounded away from me. I swam in the murky water, hoping there was no Loch Corodale monster lurking beneath, then stood naked in the sun, drying off in that wild empty valley."

A hosteller in August saw an unusual natural phenomenon which he had seen once before in the Sierra Nevada - a meteor shower. He writes "I saw a flash and a bright line was drawn across the sky in an instant. There were no clouds in that part of the Milky Way, and during the next few minutes bright shooting stars appeared from the east all seeming to converge on a point somewhere around the western horizon."

BERNERAY

Many and lengthy are the writings in the Berneray log book and all are enthusiastic and at times ecstatic. It was here that Lizzie Shinner wrote 'Paradise Found' and describes "A grey day with wind and rain. I walked the west beach and lay in fields of buttercups."

Berneray again proves to be a good place for otter spotting with a number of sightings reported. There are descriptions also of seals singing and of encounters with aggressive nesting birds. Steve from Oxford writes on the 31st July "My eight year old son and I perched on a rock at the south west corner of Berneray looking out towards Boreray. To our right in the bay a seal was bobbing up and down, in the distance gannets were plunging into the sea like darts and directly in front of us an otter was fishing and jumping onto the rocks a mere twenty feet from us. Just to top it all the sun was shining."

Social life in Berneray is also the subject of comment with visitors describing ceilidhs and dances and contact with and hospitality from local people. On 10th July, Louise Roy records that "Yesterday I dropped my camera on the West Beach and didn't discover until I'd walked round the edge of Loch Brusta. As mentioned this is a nesting area and what with the dive bombing terns and oyster catchers and the wind and the lateness of the hour I began to feel small against the power of the wind and the sea. This "pretty little island" has another side perhaps. After walking round in circles for a while I returned here feeling tired and a bit foolish. This morning someone dropped in having found my camera on the beach. Call me superstitious if you will but I feel like the island taught me a little respect. Anyway I learnt it."

One of the oft mentioned characters at the hostel is Roy, the warden's dog. One person wrote about "the warden Roy. He should be given an honorary doctorate in hostelling." Roy obviously wasn't at hand on 3rd October when Doug Craig warned that "Some local feline friend made an uninvited visit one night through

an open window and was so base as to savage someone's cheese. If you use the 'fridge' (window ledge on the land side of the kitchen) beware of the resident blackbird. As I was writing this he was sampling someone's bacon!"

Prosaic and poetic - it's all there in the logbooks!

RHENIGIDALE

Unfortunately, the Rhenigidale logbook only starts on 5th July so much is lost. The main descriptions relate to the wet walks although Vera from Belgium writes "I like it here as well when there is rain and mist." Others endorse this view. Janet Walmsby from London was luckier than many when she walked to Tarbert by the old path on a warm July day. She says "The journey was breathtaking and as big a challenge for me as running the London marathon. For expert climbers it may be a doddle. Where I live in Kings Cross, London, there are no hills to climb."

Hostellers constantly express appreciation of the dramatic scenery and wildlife such as seals and otters. Another Belgian visitor writes "The views to the Shiantas are stunning: no human signs at the horizon."

The wet weather drew many appreciative comments about the comfort of the hostel. On 22nd September Jocelyn Gamble from Australia wrote "I have never been so appreciative of a hot shower and a pot belly stove. The exhaustion of last night has been soothed away into a peace and tranquillity within."

The stove caused a drama of its own on 7th August when the chimney went on fire! Luckily the warden was at hand to cope with the situation and no damage was done.

Despite the weather, all visitors at Rhenigidale obviously are deeply moved by the scenery and location and would endorse the poem by Wordsworth copied by Jo McWalters in the Howmore logbook:

"Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk
And let the misty mountain winds be free
To blow against thee; and in after years
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms
Thy memory be as a dwelling place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies"

GARENIN

As at the other hostels there is a theme running through the Garenin book in the summer of '93. It's a dead whale washed up on the shore below the hostel! Mike from Dingwall writes that "The dead whale attracted twenty people to the hostel last night. Wonderfully heavy seas made the carcass bounce playfully on the shore. Needless to say, the inevitable aroma attracted comment and the council eventually took action. This was vividly illustrated in the logbook by Petra who writes "Scotland: the country where the whales blow up!"

Writers comment about the peace and beauty of the area, the wonderful views and places of interest.

On 7th September Keith Allen from Edinburgh describes his bicycle journey from Barra to the Butt of Lewis, staying in the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels on the way. He concludes with a description of the Butt which he reached from Garenin.

"The Butt of Lewis is a pleasant contrast to the extremities of other lands: No café, no car park with ranks of coaches, no branches of 'Odin's Gifts' selling tartan gonks, Loch Ness monsters and replicas of the Callinish standing stones. Just a lighthouse, spectacular rocky headland, shags, gulls and gannets and beyond all that, the vastness of the Atlantic."

Hostellers frequently record their appreciation of the kindness and hospitality of the local people at Garenin and interesting conversations with John MacGregor, husband of the warden, and the temporary warden (and hostel hero) Roy Ashworth.

In July, Wendy from New Zealand writes "There is a magic in the air around Carlaway and if you are to stay for longer than a day you are danger of never leaving. It has something to do with the open friendliness of the people, the *click clack* sounds of the weavers looms and the stillness of the Atlantic air."

Despite the vagaries of the weather, steepness of the hills, thieving blackbirds and lack of facilities - "From far away I hear a washing machine call my name" - hostellers are sad to leave the islands and long to return. To them all we dedicate the ancient Celtic prayer copied out by Lesley and Bill in the Howmore book:

"Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the Prince of Peace to you."

Isabel Steel,
Edinburgh
January 1994.

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 Hebridean Hostellers membership (which costs £3.00 annually) can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to:

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