



GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST
CROFTER'S NEWSLETTER 1996

It was great to see so many visitors returning again and again, for some people it was a pilgrimage of many years since they had last seen the hostels and still Claddach Baleshare is missed! Then there are the people who make it a point of honour to return year after year and they all meet up (usually at Berneray for the Berneray Week of fun and games) like one big family. I personally recognise the names, Neil, Dennis, Lawrence, Jim and Eva from a couple of years ago when I had the pleasure to meet them all on Berneray - if you meet Neil do ask to see his etchings!!! (seriously, an excellent artist).

As always visitors young and old, have enjoyed the remoteness and tranquility provided by these hostels. Not only do people come from every corner of the UK to visit but from every corner of the globe as well! They have been moved to write poems about almost anything from the infamous Morso stove to their aching legs and backsides! The logbooks have also stirred people to paint and sketch their feelings when words fail them! These logbooks are invaluable, not just for passing information on to the next hosteller, but to give the GHHT an idea of who likes what!

RHENIGIDALE

The passing of Mrs Marion Macinnes will bring sadness to the many hostellers who visited Rhenigidale over the years. Marion was a kind and gentle person who had a welcome for everyone. When Roddy Macinnes passed away in 1986, Marion readily stepped into the breach as warden until ill health forced her retirement a few years ago. Marion gave a warm welcome to Rhenigidale and it was always something special to have a cup of tea at Tigh-na-Mara, her softly spoken words and her warm smile epitomised the best of the islands.

The present warden Alasdair has been showered with praise for his patience in giving directions to all the hostellers and sharing with them the secret places of Rhenigidale. The log book is also full of praise for the wonderful Morso and full of woe about aching limbs and vertigo attacks

Fiona from Switzerland comments on hiring a car in Stornoway 'do you know how I got the car? I didn't intend to hire one, I suddenly had the idea, being a big fed up with the bus services and of course I didn't bring my driving licence. Thought well, it's worth a try. And

believe it or not, I could rent the car without a driving licence and without showing any paper of identity! Lewis is really a special place, where else could you do that?'

Belinda and Norman find themselves aiding a sheep in labour 'Thanks to Alasdair for getting over bread and beans from Tarbert, so we had to help a distressed sheep finally deliver her lamb. Actually, we only got involved after half an hour of trying all houses in village for someone who knew what to do! Anyway, the lamb is alive and well and vocal today'.

At the end of May Pete Grove and Simon Forse arrived by canoe at 11pm, having waited for calmer conditions. 'A beautiful, moonlit evening paddle'. However, there are other unusual ways to get to the hostel. John and Gloria Ramsay arrived on a tandem in August called the 'Clean Machine'!

Full marks to the Murgatroyd family, Maggie, Steve, Jenna 11, James 9, Alice 7 and Mr Bunny (age unknown), for walking over from Tarbert - a lesson in fortitude to all of us. They wrote the following 'A brilliant walk (except for the packs). James needed two blister plasters but he made it in the end. Daddy thinks he visited in 1980. We'll be back!'

Peter Clarke our chairperson and Morag climbed Todden and placed a visitor's book in a tin box within a cairn inside the stone circle surround the trig. Future walkers testify to this and some have even put biscuits in the tin to aid the journey back down!

A final say from James of Forest of Dean 'I arrived just before a huge wind and rain storm having walked for a month- mostly camping - from Shiel Bridge. I have wanted to walk the Highlands like this since I was fourteen. It's been spectacular. It's hard to know if I got what I wanted... It's the sense of freedom that the Highlands provides. The right to roam, camp, fish anywhere, swim and dry off in a million bright pools, the Highland welcome too - so different from England. Thank you dear Gatliff, Rhenigidale, Western Isles, Highlands. With love.

HOWMORE

As visitors will have seen this year, the old hostel has now been closed due to the leaking roof etc and temporary accommodation is being provided in the new building. There seem to be a few teething problems but these should all be sorted in this coming year. There appear to be a cat and kitten that have adopted the hostel and also talk of a visiting dog who steals onions?!?

There are a lot of entries about climbing nearby Beinn Mhor and the wild and windswept beaches near the hostel. Also, entries from members of a work party who visited in June.

Bill Johnston a veteran visitor of these hostels and islands has once again managed the trip and was pleased to read the log books and discover previous visits of his in 1981 and 1986. Bill provided some beautiful line drawings of the hostels which were printed in the members newsletter last year. He also mentioned hearing distinctive call of the corncrake which seems to be making comeback on the islands.

Someone has written at length about being 'adopted' by the work party in July. He recalls 'Kate from NZ made Nettle Soup. It was quite nice - the only real skill required is in picking the nettles (a plastic bag is recommended for use)' also 'Sunday night we had a venison roast, how many hostellers can profess to that? And we've had mussels twice. The much talked about salmon however, has not emerged'.

Several people have commented on the corrugated iron roof of the new hostel and have put in a plea for the old hostel to be rethatched and not replaced by another tin roof - rest assured, it will be thatched.

GARENIN

The log book was full of praise as usual for John MacGregor's wonderful stories, the tweed being made nearby and the incredible sunsets.

The new stove started off well, then had a wee hiccup which has now been fixed and is back to normal. Julie from Edinburgh writes 'Took the tip from Fiona of Switzerland and baked potatoes in the Phoenix. They were better than delicious!'

Rajko Schmidt waxes lyrical about the hostels 'and they are all different - the peaty plains of Howmore, the lochans of Claddach Baleshare, the endless beaches of Berneray, the rugged mountains of Rhenigidale and the cliffs of Garenin'.

The infamous hospitality of the islands is cherished by Birgit of Germany 'This place is magic and so are the people. Yesterday we just ask for a lift to do some walking and ended up being invited for dinner. The couple even waited for us to give us a lift back to the hostel!'

Lissa Stiles-Robertson of New York writes of the Garenin of the future 'life returning to this village as Arras nan Gearranan, of the Gatliff Trust together, bringing we travellers here and teaching the old ways, and moving into the future. But both sides of the coin must be cherished, it would be a shame if this became either a museum piece for tourists (intact, but lifelessly frozen) or fell derelict through lack of care and money (hence, sadly, the need of tourists; but lucky for us). It must live again through local knowledge and care and involvement - I hope the school blossoms...'

There have been several entries in the logbooks this past year of honeymoons! 'Today we got drenched on a beach near Uig and the sand was driven in sheets. Yesterday we ate supper on the beach under an umbrella with a bottle of wine. Tomorrow, maybe it'll be dry by the end of the day ... this is my idea of the perfect honeymoon' writes Bobby of London! Jill and Max of the Netherlands who stayed in August agree and will be back for their honeymoon!

BERNERAY

As most people know by now Annie and Jessie retired last year after being wardens for 18 years, and there were many people who returned to Berneray last year to wish them well. Alison Gibbs has taken over as warden and Graham MacDonald writes 'the hostel is now in your hands, be yourself and the hostel will mould itself to you'.

There appear to have been several keen ornithologists staying at the hostel last year and have faithfully recorded sightings in the log book including that of the corncrake. Chris Scargill managed to count 51 different species but then having stayed there for months at a time he was well placed to do so.

Stornoway Canoe Club had an 'exciting' paddle over to Berneray in early March when they came over from Leverburgh. They hope to return in better (warmer?) weather.

Visitors from Stancliffe Hall School in Derbyshire described their stay as 'spiffing' and 'every item I own is now covered with sand so I have a good souvenir to take home with me'.

Bill Johnston made it from Howmore to Berneray and found he was entered in the logbook as being here for the opening in July 1989.

I think Jackie and Eric can claim fame as having visited the hostel more times than anyone else by making their visit in July #42!!!

Clarence from Hong Kong was surprised to get sunburnt during July but then concedes that it could well have been windburn during his walk around the island.

Lawrence Washington was a member of the victorious Hostel team during Berneray Week and which managed to beat 'the newly formed and supposedly invincible Calmac team', thus making three years in a row for the hostel. The trophy can be seen in Angus and Mary's shop.

Judy and William 12 highly recommend 'a clamber up the big hill in the middle of the island. We came up from behind where the community centre is and came down on the side of the church. The view is magnificent, we saw the mainland and Skye and the mountains of Harris and the maze of islands'.

BEDNIGHTS FOR PAST SIX YEARS

	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>
Berneray	1456	1534	2031	2017	1838	2031
Cl. Baleshare	341	425	493	-	-	-
Garenin	1550	1551	2094	1937	2028	2185
Howmore	633	999	1115	993	1080	1118
Rhenigidale	1010	1234	1122	1090	862	928
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TOTAL	5074	5816	6362	6037	5808	6262

If you would like to become a member of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust then please contact Peter Clarke (Chairman) at 264 Alexandra Park Road, Wood Green, London N22 4BG. Membership is £5.00 per annum and you will receive three newsletters per year and of course be helping the trust to maintain these hostels.

Sandy Mitchell, March 1997