



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust Crofter's newsletter 2000

Welcome to the 2000 edition of the Crofter's Newsletter; I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions as to which millennium it is! I trust that you all had a pleasant and enjoyable new year, however and wherever you chose to celebrate it.

HOSTEL OVERNIGHT FIGURES

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>
Berneray	2031	2017	1838	2057	1627	1328	1779
Garenin	2094	1937	2028	2185	1969	1796	1576
Howmore	1115	993	1080	1182	971	1076	1071
<u>Rhenigidale</u>	<u>1122</u>	<u>1090</u>	<u>862</u>	<u>928</u>	<u>812</u>	<u>787</u>	<u>800</u>
TOTALS	6362	6037	5808	6352	5379	4987	5226

Looking at the overnight figures above it is very reassuring to see that numbers are slowly picking up again after a steady decline over the previous two years. During this time there were several factors which may have contributed to this fall in overnight stays, including the strong pound and bad weather. The Trust has been very careful not to be disheartened, but instead to focus on the many unique and positive attributes our hostels have to offer and, to this end we are aiming not only to improve standards but to promote the individual character and history of each hostel and it's surroundings. We hope that more and more visitors will enjoy our hostels, not simply as somewhere to stay for a while, but as an experience in their own right. This seems to have been the case in 1999.

BERNERAY

The island of Berneray saw in the new year with a whole night of events at the community hall including a delicious sit down meal, a firework display on the machair, and then a traditional Berneray ceilidh dance! Everything ran very smoothly, particularly the two minibuses which took everyone home afterwards, driven by hostel warden Alison Gibbs and her fiance Jim Smithdale who both galantly volunteered not to drink all night, and it was a tribute to all those involved in the organisation of this highly successful event that so many people came and enjoyed themselves. The signs of a good night had by all were far too apparent at the hostel the following afternoon!

It is lovely to see that some of Graham MacDonald's friends have been to stay at Berneray to see for themselves why he spent all of his holidays on the island. Andrew Bowman from East Kilbride wrote, "Now I see why Graham loved this place. Time has little meaning, so relaxing, no feeling of needing to rush about." Many of our regular visitors will remember the fun and happiness that Graham brought to the hostel and what a sad loss it was when he died unexpectedly in July 1998. There are now two benches outside Berneray hostel, kindly provided by Graham's family in his memory, and several people have commented on the improvement they make to the hostel, being able to sit comfortably outside and watch the view across the sea.

Once again the log book is full of praise for the island, the hostel, the people, the wildlife, how people cannot bring themselves to leave and how they will always remember their visit. Jane Sallows from Toronto, Canada, wrote, "I may never be back but I will never forget my time here. I will remember the stunning silence whenever the hectic pace of city living gets to me". Glyn and Lorraine added, "This is what hostels are meant to be - I just hope it can stay this way! We wanted to bottle the smells and tape the sounds to enjoy at home after a days work!" Interesting idea!! The Sounds & Smells of Berneray are now available by mail order through the GHHT priced £15 inc. p+p. (only joking!!).

The impact that Berneray has on most travellers is clear from the comments of Stephen McKeourn from Chester. "First came here 12 years ago by accident and this is my first return visit. I was going to say that nothing much has changed but now we have a causeway, electricity, flushing toilets, an immersion heater with the capacity of Loch Lomond.....so things have changed. I've been all around the world since 1986 - Galapagos, Amazon, Madagascar etc. but Berneray will always be my special island".

One final word from Berneray: "The girls on wheels are speechless. What a wonderful setting. Could this have all happened by chance?! I think not! P.S. Tootsie (the cat) does not like curried flavour super noodles!"

GARENIN

As with Howmore, visitors to Garenin have had to cope with a certain amount of disruption during the past year, however, in this case it is not the hostel but the entire village that is in the process of being rebuilt! Thanks to everyone who stayed for accepting that this is only a short-term problem which will ultimately bring a beautiful and characterful village back to life. Jim from Kilmarnock says, "I am a Celtic Scot and am absolutely delighted to see this village being restored!!"

The friendly atmosphere of the hostel even shines through during logistically tricky times such as when there are no beds left (which thankfully isn't very often). "Crowded house, people sleeping on the floor, a feeling like one big family - waiting for two hours while the 2.5kg (maybe!) salmon is guiled - having a fire down the beach - seeing shooting stars together - having a second fire down the beach and grilling apples and marshmallows. This is Garenin how it will always be in our minds." These are the happy memories of Beate Brockmann from Germany which sum up perfectly the whole experience for everybody, and explains why they keep coming back! I won't ask where they acquired the salmon though!!

HOWMORE

Work is progressing well with the renovation of the original hostel building, the new roof timbers having been put in place earlier last year. The new thatch will hopefully be applied to the roof during the next few months, after which the refitting of the building can commence. Thankfully, most visitors have been very gracious in accepting the slightly less than ideal conditions of the temporary dormitory in the bicycle shed during this work. Mike & Helen Boothman from Kenilworth commented, "A great place to stay - even in the bike shed! Sheet sleeping bag and three or four blankets are all you need - warm as toast." They also added, "Nice to go back to the old style hostel - muck in, make friends, discuss life, no TV, imaginative and creative living."

More compliments abound regarding the new hostel building. Jon from London, who stayed in September, wrote, "The first time I stayed at Howmore was in the old hostel which was small and friendly but in serious need of renovation. The new hostel retains the good atmosphere of the old one but is a vast improvement in terms of facilities."

Many complimentary remarks were made also about the excellent work of the warden, Betty MacDonald: "Thankyou to Mrs. MacDonald for a lovely clean environment", and, "Special thanks to the warden, the place was immaculate and a joy to stay in".

On 7th December David Caldwell from Edinburgh wrote, "I would love to come back here to escape the Millennium!". Well the very next entry in the log book, from Walter and Elizabeth, Bedford, on 31st December says quite simply, "That's exactly what we did." Excellent choice!

Of all the many comments about the wonder and beauty of the hostel and it's surroundings, they are summed up perfectly by Meinir Evans from Wales who writes, "Excellent place for moments of clarity and a sense of communion with people and nature. Diolch yn fawr." I couldn't agree more!

Rhenigidale

The simple comforts of Rhenigidale hostel and the beauty of its surroundings continue to reward those who make the extra effort to visit this quiet outpost of North-East Harris. In September Whitney Lomas from Colorado wrote, "What an absolutely extraordinary week I have had in this most magical of places. With little over 2 months left in my travels I can't imagine it getting much better than this little white hostel and its calming views." Coming to terms with the scale of the population density of Rhenigidale, Jon-Paul and Minerva from The Hague, Holland, commented "We hope to return to this very small village, where there live less people than in our apartment block." Lesley Wilcock, of Aberdeen, has been enjoying the wildlife: "I feel I have become an expert in sheep sociology - definitely my favourite hostel."

Once again there are many comments praising Alasdair, the warden, who never sees anyone go hungry when they fail to bring in sufficient provisions with them! Many of you noticed that the visitors book had mysteriously vanished from the summit of Todduan and, as Simone from Germany says, "I don't think the book was eaten by a sheep!" By the time you read this the replacement book will be on the mountain.

BREVIG, ISLE OF BARRA - PROPOSED YOUTH HOSTEL

I know many of you have been wondering how the situation stands concerning the proposed hostel at Brevig, on the Isle of Barra, and I am sorry to say that this will no longer be going ahead. Here is the official statement on this matter:

"It is with great regret that the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust (GHHT) announces its withdrawal from the project to create a 20 bed youth hostel at the old school, Brevig, Isle of Barra.

The GHHT, a charity with solely voluntary trustees, works in partnership with island communities. There are hostels on the island of Berneray (in the Sound of Harris), Garenin (West Lewis), Howmore (South Uist), and Rhenigidale (Harris).

Peter Clarke, the Chairman, commented, "circumstances have invalidated a 20 bed hostel in this location. We thank all those in the islands, and elsewhere, especially our donors who supported this project."

GHHT retains the hope that a youth hostel will be established on the island of Barra. To this end the GHHT is willing to work in partnership with voluntary bodies who might wish to pursue such a project.

All donations received by the GHHT for the Brevig project will be refunded forthwith, once interest has been calculated."

Anyone requiring further information regarding this issue can contact Peter Clarke. See addresses on the back page.

RHENIGIDALE BOOK

Neil Pinkett's book, entitled "Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal", is currently having the final touches put to it and should hopefully be available later in the year. The walks are accompanied by Neil's own excellent illustrations, making this guide a 'must' for the regular visitor, as well as a handy reference for those exploring the area for the first time. Anyone interested in purchasing a copy can email me at the address below and I can let you know more details when the book becomes available.

TRAVEL WRITERS

Have you ever thought of becoming a travel writer? Well why not do exactly that and write about the fantastic times you all have in the Outer Hebrides whilst visiting our hostels. If you know of a local, or even national publication such as an outdoor group or university newsletter/magazine, or local newspaper that may be interested then get in touch with them, write a piece about your travels, and help spread the word about the Gatliff Hostels and the Western Isles.

MEMBERSHIP

If you are not already a member of the Hebridean Hostellers, why not join and help us to support the hostels. Annual membership is currently £5 per year. For details please send a stamped addressed envelope to the Membership Secretary. (address shown below)

Finally, our sincere thanks go to Sandy Mitchell who is now stepping down from the position of newsletter editor for the trust. It has always been important to maintain contact with our hostellers and supporters, and she has handled this worthy task well.

Lawrence Washington has taken over as editor. I have held a great love for the Outer Hebrides for ten years now, having become a regular visitor to the hostels, sharing in the company and stories of many fellow travellers and, of course, the wardens. It is with great pleasure that I now take on the responsibility of keeping in touch with you all. I am open to any comments or suggestions for the newsletter, which can be sent to me via the trust's Stornoway address or you can email me (see below). As some of you will already know, this annual newsletter goes out to all hostellers who have stayed in our hostels in the previous year and left their name and address in the register.

Thanks to all of you who stayed at our hostels during 1999 and for helping us to maintain them to their cosy and friendly standards. I look forward to reading all your comments from your next visit to the Western Isles. Also a huge thankyou to our four wardens Betty, Alison, Alasdair, and D.R. for their excellent work in the day to day running of the hostels. It is greatly appreciated by all.

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