



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

crofter's newsletter 2001

Welcome to the 2001 edition of the Crofter's Newsletter. The hostel log books show that those people who visited our hostels for the first time last year found exploring the Outer Hebrides very rewarding. We hope you are looking back on your visit with happy memories and will soon return.

Thanks also to everyone who made a return trip to the hostels in 2000. Reading through the log books I have recognised quite a few regular names! I know from my own experience that each journey to the islands is never quite the same and that there are always new sights, sounds, and treasures to discover and explore.

HOSTEL OVERNIGHT FIGURES

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>
Berneray	2031	2017	1838	2057	1627	1328	1779	1602
Garenin	2094	1937	2028	2185	1969	1796	1576	1329
Howmore	1115	933	1080	1182	971	1076	1071	921
<u>Rhenigidale</u>	<u>1122</u>	<u>1090</u>	<u>862</u>	<u>928</u>	<u>812</u>	<u>787</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>824</u>
TOTALS	6362	5977	5808	6352	5379	4987	5226	4676

The number of visitors to the hostels dropped again slightly last year. With the outbreak of Foot & Mouth disease across much of England, Wales, and southern Scotland from late February the islands are likely to be quiet this summer. The hostels have been unusually quiet through March, although a steady increase in visitors was noted in April. At this stage it is impossible to predict which way things will go through the year, but this could be an ideal time to take advantage of some island tranquillity.

Can I remind everyone that all four of our hostels in the islands will remain open unless circumstances dictate otherwise, and that people are still welcome to visit the Outer Hebrides so long as they are sensible and comply with any local restrictions or precautions. You can check our website at www.gatliff.org.uk or contact the Western Isles Tourist Board for up to date information (Tel: 01851 703088). Further details of Scottish Natural Heritage's guidelines for visitors are given on page 4.

BERNERAY

David Caldwell from Edinburgh was privileged to make the opening entry in the year's log book with quite a remarkable sighting to report. "This morning for the first time in my life I met an otter chasing sheep across the road. Five minutes later, while I was trying to shelter from driving hail-stones behind an old gate-post, another large otter walked past me only 12 feet away." He later adds, "I am so grateful that this place exists. If it didn't, I would have to invent it in some landscape of the mind."

Heidi and Andy appear to have stumbled across a particularly friendly and accommodating crowd at the hostel. "What an arrival! The room heated, bread baking and a large amount of scotch pancakes. What else could you want."

A new visitor to the islands, June from Lancashire soon caught the bug (not the midges!). "This is my second day on the Uists. Howmore was lovely but....this!!? This place is the most enchanting yet. The sunshine, white sands, turquoise sea and grey-blue distant mountains. Do I stay for another day or do I go on?" How many times have I seen people in just that dilemma!!

In July the hostel had a return visit from Eric, Jackie & Nikola McEwan from Comrie, this time with the weather on their side. "Four perfect days - on previous visits we have dreamed of what it would be like to be here with good weather too - and now we know.

Andrew Lake, one of our 'just can't keep away' hostellers has been finding inspiration in the nature of the island. "Berneray seems to captivate me. The views and scenery ease my woes, and the peace and tranquility offer solutions in the wind. Well sort of, I'm just glad it was a sheep that caught me psychoanalysing myself..."

The self-imposed semi-resident and very friendly cat, Tootsie, commands more and more coverage in the log book every year, with her past acquaintances coming back, wondering where she might be, and then adding later comments to the effect of, "...and then there was a familiar face at the window"! She was soon foiled, however, by Denise & Ben from America who pointed out, "Don't give in to the pushy cat. She does have a home and it is close by!"

The year at Berneray hostel sounds like it was rounded off very nicely for those resident. Cathy Hemsley and Andrew Midgley from Edinburgh wrote, "Another great New Year - scrabble, cards, whisky, scrabble, cards, whisky, scrabble, cards, whisky, the inevitable walks round the island, and then again, and again. Oh and a ceilidh (!?) with music provided by Radio Scotland."

GARENIN

Extremes of weather are a familiar occurrence to those who visit the islands regularly, as in April when Hedwig from Germany wrote, "Where else do you get to sunbathe on the beach and climb a hill in a snowstorm on the same day?"

Garenin village has now been fully restored to something like its former self, bringing life back to once derelict buildings. In such a setting it was quite fitting that a spot of traditional culture was indulged one dark night in May by Lesha Koop and others gathered. "Dear, dear, and so peaceful the smell of peat fire, the sounds of reading fairy stories and Celtic tunes played on a flute to candlelight." Ronald Sim has another view on the development. "Interesting hostel - I hope it doesn't become overwhelmed/submerged by the adjoining historic replicas." On a similar angle Nigel Easton writes, "Still a beautiful place but I wonder if the romantic isolation and solitude will be destroyed by tourism associated with the new 'blackhouse village' theme-park. (or am I just a selfish bugger?)"

Many people have talked at length about the spectacular walks and their accompanying views to be had along the cliffs in either direction from Garenin. Tim and Joey from Keighley noted, "The coastal walk to Dalbeg can be boggy but rewarding, especially the fine home baking available at the Copper Kettle there!". They had been wild camping but, having escaped a torrent one night, ended up staying two, enjoying the warmth and company of the hostel.

August saw the arrival of Katja and Sacha, two very determined students from Germany who walked all the way to Garenin from Glasgow and were continuing to Inverness! They described it as a very nice and impressive way to discover a country.

A number of comments were made in praise of the shower and other facilities, the best two being, "The shower's one of Scotland's finest", and, "Thanks for the most comfortable toilet paper of all Scottish hostels" !!

howmore

The original hostel building at Howmore now has a neat new heather thatch on its roof timbers. All being well it will be fitted out internally during the course of this year. Back in April Morag Donaldson wrote of her first visit to the hostel for quite some time. "Its great to see the hostel is still here and not much changed after 15-20 years. Hope it'll still be here in the next 15-20." With any luck the new roof and other renovations should see it through at least that long.

Steve and Emma from Newcastle were lucky enough to see not just one, but two otters playing on the beach and in the sea when they went to admire the sunset. David Caldwell, having had otter encounters on Berneray, was kept awake at Howmore by corncrakes, only to be rudely awakened early the next morning by a cuckoo. He didn't seem to mind too much though! Other visitors experienced some birds even closer to hand. "Beware of the talking starling nesting in the other building. Woke us this morning saying "Hello, how are you, hello...". Very bizarre."

A lone cyclist from New Zealand whose parents had emigrated from Inverness around 1912 came by the hostel while checking out their stories of the Highlands. "Having a great time and enjoying the scenery and the people." On a similar mission, in September Calum and Aneg had travelled from Tasmania, "to see the ancestral Clanranald burial grounds from which we descend, in our VW camper 'pants'".

A couple of parties have gained a mention in the book over the year. Rhona Bean was invited to a 40th birthday bash on the beach complete with barbeque and bonfire. Then in early October Brian Wilson and his colleagues who had just completed the thatching work indulged in a well earned celebration. "Re-thatched the old hostel with heather - despite a week of gales and rain, and Willie's enormous meals. Great party on the last night, and a mega bonfire with all the waste! Leaving today - sore heads, sore fingers. Back next year perhaps."

rhenigidale

As with all the hostels, Rhenigidale has seen a number of improvements made recently to maintain the standards and environment for our visitors. It is always difficult, however, knowing just how far to take these improvements whilst still retaining the essential character and style of the buildings themselves. On this subject Jo has a fair point: "The hostel is just right on the comfort/character balance...matching curtains and sofas not worth an extra Tourist Board star."

The last decade has seen the village of Rhenigidale connected by road and then by public transport. Dave B. from Kent was most appreciative. "Stayed two nights here and all I can say is I am so glad there is a bus out. I really don't think I could walk the zig zag path to Tarbert again." It is strange to think that up until just ten years ago this path was the only overland access to the village from Tarbert. David Carter didn't even know anything had changed until he arrived. He explained, "I walked six miles only to find they'd built a road since my map was printed!"

In June a group of seven students from Lews Castle College in Stornoway, who had just finished their courses, came to the hostel to hold an end of degree party. Roddy Murray (B.A.!) wrote, "Four of us hardy souls walked in from Urgha in glorious weather, while two (lazy sods!) stayed in to make the punch. Yes, by the time we came off the hill Joanne and Fiona were well and truly punch drunk! Excellent food, excellent drink, excellent hostel, and at one point even Joanne relaxed!" Nice to see the calming influence of Rhenigidale gets to everybody! Of course when you're really relaxed you see so much more. Niall Riddell wrote, "Wonderfully secluded place - if you're careful you can feel really isolated, and even more careful you will see the eagle. It flew right past me - ten or twenty yards away - enormous bird. You almost feel like an explorer on a new found frontier out here!"

For all of us lucky enough to have discovered Rhenigidale the following words from Richard Harrison capture the feelings of many. "This place will be carried into my memory - and visited frequently."

Cathy Hemsley from Edinburgh adds a final note of caution:

"These hostels are greatly appreciated, especially because of the direction the SYHA/YHA seem to have taken. We don't need drinks machines, pool tables and packed lunches made for us. A dry space, water and some cooking facilities is fine. I've spent valuable time in Gatliff hostels in the past and will be back in the future. Thankyou GHHT." The spirit of Herbert Gatliff shall live!

walks from the gatliff hostel at reinigeadal - neil pinkett

This beautifully illustrated guide to walking in the Rhenigidale area of North Harris is now available from GHHT at just £3.50 including p+p. Orders should be sent to: **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street, STORNOWAY, Isle of Lewis, Western Isles, HS1 2ND.**

Cheques should be made payable to '**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**'.

The book will also be on sale at Tourist Offices in Tarbert and Stornoway, as well as at Rhenigidale Hostel.

'THE COMEBACK CODE' - SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE'S GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS

This Code outlines sensible precautions for those coming back to the countryside. Please follow this advice to avoid endangering farm animals and people's livelihoods.

- Do not touch or feed farm animals.
- Do not enter enclosed fields with farm animals.
- Avoid farm steadings and yards.
- Do not leave waste or scraps of food or litter.
- Obey official signs
- Do not park your car in areas where farm animals gather.
- Keep dogs on a lead at all times.
- Clean your boots and vehicles between visits to the countryside.
- Respect advisory signs and requests from farmers and other land managers.

HOSTEL PRICES - 2001

The overnight charges at the GHHT hostels in 2001 are as follows:

18 and over - £6.50 / under 18 - £5.00 / camping - £3.25 / day charge - £0.90

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 further details please see the enclosed leaflet.

Thanks to everyone who has stayed at the hostels and helped to make them such enjoyable and friendly places. I hope that a little bit of their charm and character has been fixed in your memories and that you will return again soon. Finally, many thanks once again to our wardens Betty, Alison, Alasdair & Cathy, and D.R. for their excellent work in the day to day running of the hostels. It is greatly appreciated by all.

Lawrence Washington - May 2001

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