

Crofters' Newsletter 2006

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk



Iain Mackenzie's view of Scarp where there were, until 1971, permanent residents and a Gatliff Hostel. This features in the extensive gallery of his Hebridean photographs to be found at www.islandsofinspiration.com

'The abiding memory of my visit to Garenin in May was bundling into a car with Duncan the fire-eater, his calm wife Hermione, the enthusiastic Julie and her quiet partner Tim, to go to Callanish and watch the sunset. My photo taken that night is on my wall to remind me of a wonderful evening. The piece of tartan tweed given to me by the warden Colin, after his weaving demonstration for us, also has pride of place. So to Garenin first we go.'

Jo Burgess - Editor Crofters' Newsletter

Garenin

Entries in the early part of 2005 are few. However, in April, Debs and Rachel enjoyed a warm welcome and Catriona, having arrived in the dark, found the morning view stunning. In May, Pedro from Portugal and the Youngs from Newcastle were enjoying the wheatears and primroses.

Elsa wrote that she thought she saw a Norse ship rise, bobbing on the horizon, but when she blinked it was only a distant wave. She also wrote 'many of us like to imagine the times past which formed the island culture and landscape, but equally magical is just being here to see it as it is now on a wet Monday morning'. She also thanked the churchman who recommended she come here after giving her a lift as well as the women who also gave her a lift when she was stranded in a downpour.

Visitors from New Zealand and Holland enjoyed their stay despite a depressing headwind en route. Christine from Hamburg was here for the first time in 11 years and was relieved to find the hostel had lost nothing of its atmosphere and also that the Visitor Centre at Callanish had not meant restricted access to the stones.

When I visited in May, I had a lovely walk to Dal Mor in sunshine, enjoying fulmars on the cliffs and flying above the crashing waves and primroses still growing in sheltered spots. Hermione left a lovely sketch and advised 'Let the spirit of the stones be with you!' Julie and Tim had stayed in all four hostels and found them all different and all wonderful.

Visitors from Switzerland and France (Tom) praised the 'invention' of the shower in this climate while a quick dip was beyond his levels of courage. He was also pleased to see that the hostel had a more lived-in look than the rented cottages and he enjoyed painting the ruins.

In June, Caroline and Richard wrote that they had found all the hostels great and thought it was appealing to stay in an old-style house especially as so many are falling down. Richard took photos of the flash of sun illuminating the thatch as it dipped below the clouds at 10 pm and these can be found at www.liathach.supanet.com. Karen meanwhile met loads of friendly folk who were willing to share, but hadn't

written in the book. Visitors from Austria, Germany and Switzerland did write that they loved it.

In August, Carol and Rhiannon thought it a privilege to stay somewhere so very special and had met people all with stories to tell and had fallen in love with the place. Andrew from Minehead who was cycling found it the windiest place he had been.

In September, a traveller from New Zealand took in Garenin on an epic trip from Skye to Rum, Harris and Lewis. Julian felt that the hostel deserved five stars not one - the other four for atmosphere, the friendly warden, his daughter who translated a few sentences into Gaelic and the last for the unbelievable view. Visitors from Maine had the place to themselves, nearly got blown off their feet in the amazing west wind, but found all the people they met interesting and friendly.

In October, a visitor described the sun setting while on the other side of the sky was a full moon. Angie came planning to camp, but decided to make use of the log fire, with the howling wind and rain outside. Andrew and Suzanne watched the fireworks in Carloway from a distance and enjoyed their first Galliff experience for nine years.

Julie, Tim and their friends returned for New Year. *I was envious on reading Julie's entry, especially as they had such a great time – going to Callanish, eating and drinking with Claus and drinking champagne with the people from the cottages.* On New Year's Day with sore heads they enjoyed the walk along the coast and on 2 January joined the walk up the hill in Carloway, led by the piper Norman from 'Meantime' and featured on Isles FM. Later Colin brought over for everyone 'cloodie dumpling' and custard made by his wife. They baked bread and left in sunshine vowing to return having had the finest and most fantastic of New Year celebrations.

Howmore

In February, visitors found plenty of sunshine and saw a Golden Eagle over Eriskay and heard the howling greylags across the loch.

Someone in April wrote that they had started staying in hostels in 1954 and Howmore brought back many memories. Having camped in nearly windless conditions, Les, Sandy and Jean retreated to their car when they got blown away by a gale at 3.00am. The following night they stayed in the hostel.

In May, a Hebridean wren was found in the dormitory, while Paul saw three otters fishing on the lochan and a hen harrier swooping in the church car park. Betty was specially thanked for her help with the stove by visitors from New Zealand and Canada.

In June, Mairtainn left a Gaelic Poem. *Even with the help of my Gaelic Dictionary I am not sure about some of the words from the handwriting, but it starts -*

Ann's a'mhionadh, shuas a'bheinn – On the moor, under the mountain

Ri-taobh na alltain's fraoich - Beside the stream and the heather

Jane and Issack (now 9) were back at the end of June - playing scrabble, enjoying the

company of children and adults from Canada, France, Edinburgh, London, Leeds and Lancaster. All became friends.

At the end of June it was recorded that the only noise was the wind blowing outside and the birds singing. Corrine at the end of June recorded that it was so sunny and hot that the tar melted on the road.

Neal wrote 'It's a very old place and makes me think of all the people, the ones that have stayed in this place as a hostel and as a home before that.' He was returning to Edinburgh and felt rejuvenated.

Andree and Jean-Louis from France praised the islands and the view. Nancy from Bradford went up Beinn Mhor and recommended being prepared as it is very wet in places. She recalled very strong winds on the top.

In August, Anna and Moira recorded fabulous flowers and interesting changes in the weather and, in particular, the wind direction for their cycling. A Runrig fan visiting in August wrote that they would come back. Many recorded enjoying the company of their fellow-travellers. Sarah felt very grateful for her first Gatliff experience and looked forward, like many others, to coming back soon.

In September, Howmore hosted a couple from Winnipeg who were fulfilling a lifelong wish to visit the Hebrides and for them this was the wonderful conclusion to a memorable visit.

In November, German visitors wrote in Gaelic - 'Moran taing agus slan leibh' - many thanks and 'bye for now.'

Berneray

Cyclists arrived in February in a gale, pleased to find the shower installed, gathered scallops and saw loads of birds including red throated diver, eider and redshank. Despite lambs and daffodils, there was snow on the lower Harris hills. An anonymous visitor returned for the first time in three years to find the hostel as warm and welcoming as it had been on previous visits. Island life was exactly as remembered; the scenery even more magnificent.

In March, another anonymous visitor wrote that the clear, dazzling sun was so low in the sky, it illuminated the spectacular never-ending views in a stark light. They went striding along endless beaches barefoot and held a seal's gaze for a few minutes as he drifted past the jetty. Other visitors arrived in fog, but enjoyed a moonlit stroll along the beach. Also in March, Isobel saw puffins and newborn lambs and another visitor wrote 'thank you for simplicity and beauty in its essence and the opportunity to share.'

In April, Ruth enjoyed one of those evenings that she will always remember- good company, atmosphere and perfect setting. Debs and Rachel wrote that they 'found Berneray to be the heart of the Hebrides in position and emotion. Our hearts will never be the same again as a part of them will always remain on Berneray.'

William and Mildred from Nuneaton were here celebrating their Golden Wedding Anniversary. They came looking for a café and instead enjoyed the views from the hostel and watching the seals. Graham from Alnwick had just come back from the Falklands and wrote that he had gone from one wilderness paradise to another - except it takes longer to get here! Sunrise over Harris at 6.00am was one of the most beautiful he had ever seen and he will return. Camilla and Hatty, heading south, recommended the fish and chips at the Rodel Hotel.

In May, Lindsey was back again writing that this place 'draws you back, sorts out your head and tugs at your heart.' Jonas from Belgium found the scenery stunning and a good place for freeing his mind and reloading his batteries - he loved it. Susan and Ian returning after six years found the magic still here and someone described the island as a little slice of heaven on earth.

When Julie and Tim had two very special days here, Julie described the big beach round the south and west coast as being 'truly unbelievable' - she had to pinch herself that she wasn't dreaming. Tandem cyclists, John and Carly, were here at the end of May, impressed by the views and the help of the warden. At the very end of May three generations of cyclists arrived in beautiful sunshine and really enjoyed the camaraderie - even if they don't manage to return, the memory will always be with them.

In June, Simon wrote 'until the day I die I will never forget this place and the people I have met here - I can only hope that heaven is as beautiful.' Sue and Robert hadn't been here since 1971 but found few changes - 'still the same wonderful place.'

Jonas and Yvonne enjoyed the walks along the beaches and the quiet night. Johnny, aged 3, liked making sand castles on the beach. On their way round the island Kath and Lynne were dive-bombed by lapwings, yelled at by nesting redshanks and had a good sing-song with German and Swiss visitors. They met the three walkers they'd encountered at Rhenigidale and later saw their footprints in the sand. 'How many times in our busy lives and on our busy streets can we be certain who has passed by. All our responsibilities, schedules and cares are forgotten as we contemplate footprints in the sand.' Judith described the sing-song too.

Anna wrote in Gaelic 'Chaidh me a'snamh anns a'mhara'- I went swimming in the ocean. The Larssons from Sweden, on their first visit for seven years, found it still as enchanting. Many visitors wrote of the good company throughout July and for some, two nights turned into four. For others there was craic (talk) and ceoil (music).

In August, Rose met old friends from a previous visit and they had a celidh. Joyce first heard about Berneray from an islander in 1965 when she started Nursing in Glasgow. She finally got here - finding it a wonderful and emotional experience. Also in August, a visitor watched an otter and her young feeding in the bay and enjoyed arctic terns and skua overhead. Carol and Rhiannon had seen an otter complete with his breakfast in his mouth - others had seen porpoises - this was their first time in the islands and they wondered when they could get back.

Ruth, here in September, had a great week including a trip on the Crimsay fishing boat with crashing waves and spray. In October it was mainly dry and the Crumblies from Nottinghamshire held their own Beach Autumn Olympics. They enjoyed, on the journey from Lochmaddy, the company of Mrs Morrison the 82-year-old former Sollas schoolteacher, who they described as a great ambassador of the community.

Andrew Cotton visiting in November wrote in memory of his late Uncle Ron, who knew Herbert Gatliff and was a long-standing warden of the Earls Court Hostel. He left half his estate to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. Andrew hopes that his uncle's love of remote hostels and the experience they provide for young people will live on through this legacy. On 11 November Force 9 winds meant no ferry - 'no silence just wind and wave wonderful' - wrote one stranded visitor. The last entry, on 11 January, was from a visitor who had blown in from Wisconsin !

Several people were here for New Year including Claire, Rob, David and Alice. All made new friends, had no hassle, met great people and had loads of fun.

Rhenigidale

An anonymous contributor here at the end of January had a quiet time in the warm with the winter outside. The next entry is in March when a visitor from Tiree mused that whilst it is majestic to soar like an eagle, ferrets don't get sucked into jet engines!

Tom, also here in March wrote that it was a great shelter and Richard Young from Newcastle found 'the welcome as warm as ever.' *I'm glad another Schools' Hebridean Society person has visited.*

In April, Callum and Dawn wrote 'to go where the eagles dare and arctic hares run free. To be where the wind cleanses the innermost part of your soul. Peace, freedom and tranquillity reign. A world apart from the rest.'

An anonymous writer wrote that the hostels are an important reminder in this nation obsessed with the selfish pursuit of wealth and comfort, that co-operation (between hostellers), generosity (on the part of the wardens) and simplicity make a much better life than constant competition.

In May, a middle-aged person with ME for six years got up Clisham, while Ellen and William learnt a lot about names, sheep and what a real cuckoo sounds like. Another visitor saw the cuckoos displaying despite the cold, wind, hail and rain on the path to Urgha. Angela from Sydney and her friend spent two nights by themselves with the stove and a bottle of single malt, watched the clouds from the bench outside and wrote 'what a place.'

Christine from Hamburg ambled along the coast, enjoyed wonderful company and made nettle-tea from the nettles outside. Visitors from Spain and Italy climbed Clisham and wondered where the South Harris Forest was ! Anita cycled here hoping to beat depression and a visitor from the Netherlands found it beautiful, walked,

watched the bay and met some great people here. Julieve from New York found it one of the most beautiful places on Earth - loved the solitude, landscape, weather and kindness of the people.

Mel thanked Alasdair for his hospitality and information and recommended the neighbour's eggs. 'I stood on the bridge, enjoyed the rushing river yet 'fada bho abhainn an t-sluaigh' (far from the crowded river) and it was just what I needed.'

In June, Iain wrote in Gaelic that he was very pleased to stay in this hostel as did Janni – both delighted to find a Gaelic-speaking warden. Izzie and Co from Aberdeen called in on their way to and from the Butt of Lewis. Tom from Brittany mused that 'there are no such things as grey days, simply inadequate observation – for grey is a feeling.' This helped him with his painting and the beauty of the place still reduces him to tears.

In July, there were visitors from New Zealand and from Poland. They enjoyed pollack and mussels and wrote that they will remember it for the rest of their lives. Danish visitors meanwhile just enjoyed being out of the rain.

For Peter from Northumberland it was a lovely refuge in a beautiful location and a sanctuary from the August rain. Having cycled from Barra, Jennie from Glasgow wasn't sure how she would get her bike up the hill.

In September, cyclists from Austria, plus Jackie and Andrew all battled through heavy wind and rain and were relieved to be here. Peggy from London had desired for many years to visit the Hebrides and at the age of 82 years, 11 months and 15 days her ambition was realised.

In October, the Crumbles from London wrote that they had enjoyed a fair dose of 'Hebridean Gale Therapy - trial by stormy blast.' Undeterred they will return.

Yvonne and Rob from Glendevon YH thanked Alasdair for his fine welcome but found walking over hard work. Kate and Vernon took a drive to Alasdair's birthplace, took in Callanish and saw St Kilda.

The Stornoway Running Club were here again for New Year and wrote:

'The Harris Hills were wet and boggy
But we all made the finish, wet and soggy.
Stopped off en route for a dip in the sea
Splashed about and had a quick pee.
Great ceilidh in the Rhenigidale hostel
Not quite the Ritz, more like a borstal.
Time to go home now, happy and fu'
We'll be back next year, look forward to seeing you !'

Back in April, however, Rich Sylvester had summed up the experiences of so many visitors to the Gatliff hostels - 'We walked here, we stopped here, we ate here, we talked here, we slept here, we left here. Thanks to Herbert Gatliff and all who have kept the place alive.'

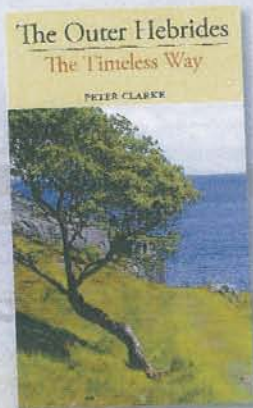
Garenin	- Lewis
Rhenigidale	- North Harris
Berneray	- North Uist
Howmore	- South Uist



The Outer Hebrides

The Timeless Way

by PETER CLARKE



Largely off road and using long forgotten routes, Peter Clarke walks from the Butt of Lewis to Vatersay, the isles' most southerly inhabited island, across moors and mountains, beaches and rivers, past working crofts, weavers' cottages and fishermen's wharves. He visits historic villages, ancient chapels and castles, thatched hostels and beehive houses.

This 230 mile long distance walk is described in eleven chapters which paint a unique picture of these lively and friendly Celtic communities.

HOSTEL OVERNIGHT FIGURES

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Berneray	1328	1779	1602	1505	1858	2056	1896	2201
Garenin	1796	1576	1329	1225	1316	1522	1631	1577
Howmore	1076	1071	923	1034	1222	1627	1561	1552
Rhenigidale	787	800	824	767	803	892	956	1178
TOTALS	4987	5226	4678	4531	5199	6097	6044	6508