



NEWSLETTER 7

JANUARY 1989

GATLIFF TRUST AND HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS ACTIVITIES '88/'89

Another successful year

Early returns for '88 show that hostel overnights will be at least as good as for '87. After all our efforts it is very satisfying to get a good number of people at the hostels.

The entries in the SYHA handbook have given a lot of good publicity. One hosteller told Trustee Peter Clarke that he had heard that the hostels had been "taken over" by the SYHA but there was no apparent change on the ground. The natural, free and easy, atmosphere remains the same and people seem to have enjoyed themselves just as ever.

Berneray

Marvellous progress with Berneray annex. The concrete slab floor was laid at Easter, the walls built up, renewed where necessary, pointed and levelled. Then the crowning glory, the roof was put on in September. Many thanks to all who came on the workparties. There was glorious weather in spring but it was chilly and wet in the summer.

The annex will be finished off this spring and in use from May onwards. There is to be an official opening by Roger Carr, Chairman of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the main grant giving body, to coincide with the Berneray week. The opening ceremony will take place on 18th or 20th July '89.

The first AGM of the local management company, Osdillian Nan Innis Gail Gatliff, the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, will take place at the same time at Berneray Hostel.

Progress with Rhenigdale

The renovation of this hostel will begin in May 1989. Arthur Meaby has drawn up a comprehensive scheme to put on a new roof, install a shower and electrical wiring.

If you are free for a week this summer and would like to join a workparty at Rhenigdale, please contact John Joyce (all addresses are listed at the end).

See the article later in this Newsletter for news of progress on the road.

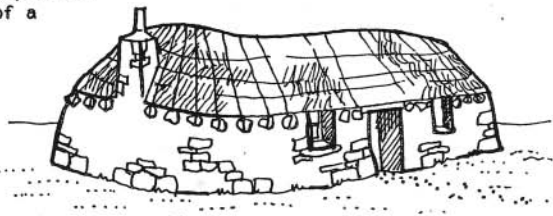
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Garenin

You may have heard that there are plans for a hostel at Garenin in West Lewis. It is quite true that we are in discussion with the local council, Comhairle Nan Eilean, and we hope that a hostel might be possible in the early 1990's.

The story so far: Garenin is a deserted village of former thatched houses. They were occupied until about 1973 when an estate of Council houses were built nearby for the inhabitants of Garenin.

The Council first mooted the idea of renovating the houses as a tourist attraction in 1979 but the time was not ripe for the development. During 1987 senior Councillors became committed to the scheme and in December 1987 Peter Clarke, a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust, visited the village in the company of Cllr. Angus Graham, Chairman of the Economic Development and Planning Committee, Cllr. Donald Maclean and Cllr. Alex Macdonald, Roddy Murray, Depute Director of Planning and Development and Derek McKim, Planning Officer. Cllr. Graham explained that he liked the Gatliff model of a hostel and that he wanted the Trust to run a small simple hostel in one of the renovated houses. The council hoped to establish a trust to carry through the scheme. The hostel could provide accommodation for the volunteer workparties which the local Garenin trust hope to use to renovate the houses.



Subsequently Frank Martin, John Joyce and Gerald McGuire have visited the village. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust has given in principle its support to opening a hostel at the village. Just before Christmas '88 Comhairle Nan Eilean informed us that they would be renovating one building during the forthcoming spring - they would like us to open a temporary hostel in this building as soon as possible.

OTHER HOSTEL ITEMS

Fire bricks, myth and reality

Myth: "If you take the fire bricks out of a stove it increases the amount of heat they give, without increasing the amount of fuel you need to burn" and this seems to be a common myth amongst some hostellers.

The reality is quite different: The bricks are in the stove to protect the iron casing by regulating the heat. If the bricks are taken out the casing is likely to crack. The bricks also keep the hostel warmer by retaining heat and radiating it into the room long after the fire has gone out.

Example: In 1986 a second hand Raeburn stove was purchased for £250 and installed at Berneray. In early 1987 someone took out two fire bricks and the front of the casing broke. As a temporary measure, the stove was patched up and two bricks were put in from another second hand stove for the rest of the 1987 & the 1988 seasons. We have now purchased another second hand Raeburn for £350 and will have it installed at the hostel.

In September 1988, a brand new Squirrel stove was brought for Claddach Baleshare. By October the bricks had vanished. The bricks for this stove are

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costly and troublesome to replace as they have to be ordered from Oban and take about three weeks to come.

Moral: Please do not take the fire bricks out of the stoves and stop other people from doing the same - it is pointless and expensive.

OTHER HEBRIDEAN ITEMS

The last thatched house in Harris

"It's the end of an era" summarised Neil Shaw of Kyles Scalpay in August '88 as he watched the thatch being removed from his neighbour's house for the last time. The house was the last inhabited thatched house in Harris and has been the life-long home of 82 year old Donald Fenton and his sister Betsy Ann (80). The house is to be renovated and the Fentons intend to move back in when the work is complete. It won't be the same house however, it will have a slate roof, running water inside and electricity for the first time.

Donald and Betsy have given the following interesting insights into their lives up 'til August past: "We were born and brought up in this house, but Donald is now too old to be rethatching it and there is nobody else who can do it for us" "We were very happy in the house. It was a ceildidh house, people coming in all the time. That's all gone now. The young ones wouldn't bother coming in. They are too busy at the television."

"The tilley was very good but the electricity will be handier than bothering with paraffin and meths all the time. We were very comfortable in the winter however, with the Tilley and a good fire."

"The old house had become a tourist attraction. We were fed up with tourists stopping to take photographs. There are photos of our house all over the world" The old roof structure was very sturdy and difficult to remove - "The rafters weren't tied together with the usual metal nails, everything was held together with hardwood plugs and heather and reed ropes. It was amazing how much material was removed from the roof". Donald had always maintained the thatch himself and wasn't in the least surprised that it took several lorry loads to cart away the old thatch. "It was myself that put it all on" Donald is reported to have said.

"It's so sad to see it go" said neighbour Neil Shaw "With the thatch went the memory of many people no longer alive. It is a really old house. When I was young none of the eighty year old men of that time knew when the house had been built"

Almost there.. The rocky road to Rhenigidale is nearing completion, and with it the long battle by this remote community to win a vehicular link with the rest of Harris. Completion of the road is expected by mid-summer '89. The new road can be seen snaking off to the south from above Loch Maarraig on the Tarbet - Stornoway road and a superb aerial view taken from the south appeared in the West Highland Free Press of 14.10.88, but unfortunately is not suitable for reproduction in this Newsletter. A half page article appeared in *Scotland on Sunday* (a new Scottish 'quality' Sunday paper) on 30.10.88, from which I quote the following extracts:

'At the beginning of this century there were around 100 people living in Rhenigidale, having settled there after being cleared from other land, and 23 children at the school. Now there are 9, another about to move in, and a single pupil at the school.'

'If it were not for the new road to Rhenigidale there would probably be nobody living there. The steady stream of dedicated walkers who travel the well worn

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path would find a ghost village at its end. There would be no hostel for them to sleep in. The group of modern houses would be empty and roofless with moss growing between their stones like the carcasses of more ancient crofting settlements along the coast'

"Mains electricity arrived 6 years ago and there is one telephone but that was not enough to ensure a viable community. It was absolutely necessary to have this road," said resident Kenneth Mackay. "The population had got too small to sustain itself without an easier means of getting in and out. Without the road, believe me, we would have gone the same way as St Kilda"

"It will mean the place can never be the same again" said Angus Campbell who is renovating the family croft which has lain derelict for several years. "But why should we live in hardship if we can prevent it. Nobody has to live like that, not these days. We are not a museum after all."

'There is talk of another two empty houses being restored, and perhaps a tea-room to cater for the inevitable deluge of curious visitors who will drive to the end of the new road.'

Cal-Mac to sail on Sundays to the Hebrides? Caledonian MacBrayne, the ferry company which operates all the principle Hebridean Island ferries, is proposing a limited Sunday summer service on the Uig (Skye)- Tarbet (Harris)- Lochmaddy (N. Uist) route in '89. Cal-Mac claim that there is a clear demand for Sunday services. Their claims and proposals have been supported by many Islanders, particularly those employed in the Tourist and Hotels trade. Ranged against these are the many Islanders who keep the Sabbath. They claim that there is no evidence to support Cal-Mac's claims, that the company is being insensitive to the tradition of the Outer Hebrides and that the working week during the summer is already long enough for the ferry crews.

As in so many rural issues, it is a case of tradition against progress. Hebridean Hostellers is all about traditional Hebridean houses, yet Sunday sailings will make it much easier for members (especially from the South) to get out to the Islands.

Currently the situation is unresolved, but regardless of the outcome, members are reminded that our Hostels are situated in parts of the Hebrides where the Sabbath is strictly observed, so you are asked to adjust your activities accordingly at our Hostels on the Lord's day.

For sale - Scottish West Coast Ferry Company. Sunday sailings is one problem for Cal-Mac, another is the current Government's privatisation programme, which could see Cal-Mac sold off during the current term of office. Options most often touted as being favourites at the Scottish Office are:

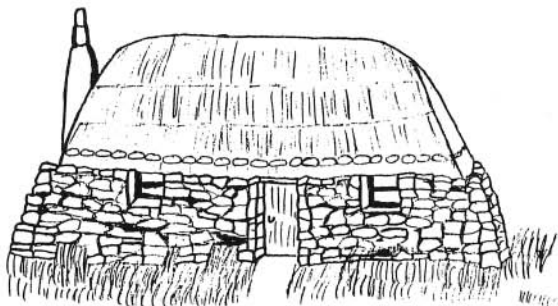
1) A management buyout and 2) Sale of three separate companies managing i) Clyde Coastal ferries ii) Inner Hebridean ferries and iii) Outer Hebridean Island ferries, possibly working from a Headquarters in Stornoway. At this stage, it's a wait and see situation, but an obvious fear for Island Councillors is the effect on socially necessary but heavily subsidised services.

Under new management. Well, management is an exaggeration, for management, read editorship! The six previous editions of Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter have been edited by Peter Clarke, with production costs met by various individuals/ companies. As membership increases, so do the demands on Peter's time and so do the production costs. As a result I (being Richard Genner) have taken over the Editorship, and Hebridean Hostellers is to meet the cost of its Newsletter, hence the change to A5 format which is cheaper. I apologise for the late production of this Newsletter - distribution was originally planned for November '88, we missed this deadline simply because Peter and I failed to get our act

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together - and have held back production since then in hopes of firmer News on workparty dates and on Garenin.

Like all editors, I shall constantly need material and I welcome suitable contributions (i.e. with Hebridean connections) including black and white drawings, at any time. I shall also be pleased to receive copies of magazine articles and newspaper cuttings of relevance. (To save postage, I shall only acknowledge receipt of contributions of an original nature). The next Newsletter will be published in late April, *deadline for contributions is 12th April.*



Been to a workparty? Need a rest? After a £1.5M refit, the former Hebridean ferry Columba returns this year to the waters off the Western Isles as the luxury liner Hebridean Princess.

Carrying a maximum of 65 passengers, mostly accommodated in luxury suites, the liner will sail from this May on 3, 4 & 7 day cruises, departing from Oban and calling at Islands of both the Inner and Outer Hebrides. The best food and wine is promised including traditional Scottish fare and not-so-traditional barbeques on deck. Fresh food is promised (but from where you may ask?).

The snag is the price, ranging from £450 to £1,400 for 7 day cruises. The disappointment is the address for details: Hebridean Island Cruises Ltd, Bank Newton, Skipton, North Yorkshire, tel 0756 748077.

Gatliff Trust, Hebridean Hostellers, Osdillan Nan Innis Gall Gatliff - confused?

The Gatliff Trust was founded by Herbert Gatliff in 1961 to support and perpetuate his many charitable interests, amongst which (but not exclusively) was an interest in Youth Hostels in the Western Isles. Herbert endowed much of his personal wealth to the Gatliff Trust and on his death in 1977, Frank Martin became Chairman to continue Herbert's interests and work.

Hebridean Hostellers was formed in 1985 to provide greater support, both financial and physical, to the Hebridean Hostels and it has been enormously successful in that short time. Not only has the heavy drain on Gatliff Trust funds caused by losses on the 4 hostels been stemmed but major work has been undertaken at the the hostels, which consequently are in much better condition. But even this work would not have possible without the voluntary labour of Hebridean Hostellers members.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, to give the English name to this charitable organisation, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, has day to day responsibility for management of the hostels. Members of Hebridean Hostellers are automatically members of this Trust. But I will say no more. All being well, Peter Carke will explain the niceties of this Trust in the next Newsletter.

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Thinking of visiting Jura? The Outer Hebrides do not hold exclusive rights to exciting, beautiful, awesome island scenery. Though often dramatically different, the Inner Hebrides are worth visiting. Of these Jura is one of the most rugged and a useful base can be found at David Mack's Bunkhouse, halfway between Feolin Ferry and the road end at Ardlussa. For further details, contact David Mack, Knockchrome, Craighouse, Jura, tel. Jura 332.

We wish you all the best for 1989 and hope that you will be able to support our activities during the coming year.

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Addresses

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