



NEWSLETTER 9

DECEMBER 1989

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS AND GHHT ACTIVITIES 1989

The Summer of 1989 has been a summer to be enjoyed, not least because of the excellent weather with long spells of warm dry days even in the Hebrides. The benefits of a good summer have been shared by the Hebridean Hostels with good overnight figures being recorded, the successful Official Re-opening of Berneray Hostel and the launch of the Appeal for the Major Renovation of Rhenigidale Hostel. On the not-so-good side was the failure to get Garenin Hostel available for this summer and slow progress on the physical work at Rhenigidale, especially when the summer came to a wet and stormy end in late August/September. Reports on most aspects of activity at the Hebridean Hostels this summer are included in this Newsletter, together with one or two items of general Hebridean interest and a book review - interest in the Hebrides is surging again, as evidenced by the publication this year of at least three quality books about the Western Isles.

**Bednights**

A key guide to the success of the Hebridean Hostels is the numbers who stay. Bednights for Oct. '88 to Sept. '89 were:

Berneray 1078 Claddach 423 Howmore 848 Rhenigidale 118

good figures all round; 118 at Rhenigidale is remarkable considering the hostel closed in May and was in poor condition prior to starting the renovation work.

**Berneray Re-opened and the first GHHT AGM - Alan Busson reports**

Berneray Hostel was re-opened on 20th July '89 with much joy and enthusiasm, with speeches from John Joyce and Duncan Campbell, a plaque unveiled by Philip Lawson, SYHA Chairman and a well attended buffet tea in the Village school.

Compared to the opening of Berneray Hostel, the Annual General Meeting was a more sober occasion. However there was a good response to the AGM from Hebridean Hostellers who had the opportunity to vote by postal proxy or to attend the meeting. The whole point of any AGM is for members to approve the formal business of the meeting, to have their 'say' and raise any matters in respect of the hostels with the Executive Committee that they consider important.

Given that it was the first AGM of the GHHT with unexciting business to resolve, I would call the meeting a success. In addition to 34 proxies received, ten members and two guests attended the AGM at Berneray School.

All the business specified in the notice of the meeting was agreed. The accounts for the period ended 31st December 1988, together with the reports of

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

the Executive Committee and the Auditor were approved. David Brown, Jim Souness, John MacLeod Webb and myself were elected Executive Committee members and Mr W. Ludlow was reappointed Honorary Auditor. The Executive Committee were authorised to determine the 1990 overnight fees. Incidentally, 1990 overnight fees have now been agreed as £2.40 (up to the age of 18) and £2.90 (over 18) in line with the SYHA's Grade 3 Simple Hostel charges. Finally it was agreed that the 1990 Hebridean Hosteller's minimum subscription remain at £3.00

From the discussion at the meeting and some of the proxies received I note that some members thought it would be more appropriate if overnight fees were rounded to the nearest £1.00/50p for simplicity. A few members thought that the Hebridean Hostellers minimum subscription should be raised to £5.00. However the resolutions in the above paragraph won the day, but it is nevertheless important for the executive committee to take all members thoughts on board.

So, where to now? It is proposed that the AGM's alternate between venues in mainland Scotland and at or near one of the Hebridean Hostels. The provisional date for the 1990 AGM is 6th October - further details to be announced.

### Howmore

Howmore was to have been rethatched this year but whilst the Bent has been gathered, Jim Souness has been unable to undertake the rethatching, which is now planned for 1990. Potential volunteers to assist this work should contact Jim.

And after a visit to Claddach Baleshare, Roy Ashworth reported:

Whilst at Claddach with John Joyce, we (John, Tommy and I) decided to build a septic tank and fit a toilet and wash basin in a partitioned outbuilding, much to the delight of Katrina Tosh. This Tommy and I proceeded to do - it was badly needed as various problems were being encountered with the existing chemical toilet. I still think this is the most important improvement made in the hostels this year.

*And so do many of this summer's visitors to Claddach Baleshare!*

### Rhenigidale

I asked Arthur Meaby for a report on this summer's workparties at Rhenigidale. But he went one better and sent the Rhenigidale Renovation Logbook. So the following report is very much 'from the horse's mouth'. While obviously a lot of hard work has been done and the volunteer workers have found time to enjoy themselves, the most interesting aspect of the logbook is the truly international nature of our workparties - as well as the four UK countries, volunteers have come from Germany, Denmark, Eire, France, Italy, Finland, Holland & Spain. And this is some extracts from what they had to say:

**First workparty 8 - 22 July:** "Welsh bully boy volunteers came in May to gut the building. Once we volunteers were installed in one of the neighbouring buildings, we surveyed the scene. We had lots of food and drink but the tools and materials had not been delivered, apparently such a delay being the custom on the Island." *But by the 22nd:* "We finished the floor, including digging out the two trenches under the future concrete block walls, one wall was started and most of the major physical stuff - lugging timber, sand, gravel, dead sheep and who knows what up the hill at Calvary." "But I will not forget the time here, this place has got so many beautiful spots, beautiful memories.... The people here are amazing - they are so friendly and taught us so much."

[This workparty was responsible for manhandling the materials to site, and for laying a concrete floor on a waterproof membrane, throughout the hostel].

**Second Workparty Mid July - 5 August:** "Everybody appears to be tired now, having

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

expended all their energy over the last two weeks - as far as the work is concerned, we finished the second wall yesterday." "Last night was weird - dancing on a hillside to bagpipes and listening to Ishbel sing her Hebridean songs." "I think everybody is quite sad to leave.... I will never forget this workcamp or this beautiful, peaceful place." "Thanks to Chris for leading things. And to the people of Rhenigidale for welcoming us into their community."

[This workparty built two internal walls, cast and fitted 6 lintels, laid the joist-bearing wallplates and laid the first few joists, replumbed the water supply, temporarily installed a toilet and laid a new path].

**Third Workparty 15 - 25 August:** "We arrived at Rhenigidale on Tuesday 15th. The house proved to be a bit of a culture shock but as time progressed, things really improved and by the time of leaving, we have become quite attached to the old place. The workparty was a mixed bunch from all walks of life, as a team of workers the Gatliff Trust could not better them" (*However workparties 1 & 2 wish to dispute this! - Editor*). "Suppose I ought to write something nice - but I'll write the truth - it rained a lot, this is the Scottish monsoon. Some good days with sunshine and showers (& rainbows)." "Well I'm glad that I came up here - it has been great fun." "We completed the path, fixed the rest of the joists and the noggins, temporarily laid the upstairs flooring and provided temporary wiring & portable inspection lights.... This workparty would like to pass on their thanks to the really friendly neighbours whose help and support life would have been less tolerable."



**Fourth workparty 14 - 28 September:** "I am just leaving the last workparty of the season. We had hoped to complete the replacement of the roof, but due to delay caused by bad weather and only having three volunteers, we have only got about one third done. This means that we have major work to complete next Spring"

So the workparties were obviously enjoyed by our volunteer workers, and in no small part due to the hostel's neighbours in Rhenigidale, so a big thank you from us for their contribution. But the weather has slowed progress later on and the project is now a little bit behind schedule. Can you spare some time next year and help the hostel re-open on time in 'July 90? If so, read on:

### Future Rhenigidale Workparties

Two workparties are being organised to catch up on the delays referred to above:

End Feb/Early March '90 - John Macleod Webb is organising this workparty with

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

the specific aim of completing the roof work, an essential requirement if later workparties are going to lead to the hostel being re-opened next summer. A number of skilled workers have been lined up but potential volunteers can get further information from John MacLeod Webb.

14 - 21 April '90 - This workparty, led by John Joyce, then intends to push on with the internal work. Additional volunteers are definitely required for this workparty, contact John Joyce.

And then into early summer: for details of workparties being planned to complete the work on Rhenigidale Hostel, get in touch with Arthur Meaby, who will be pleased to add you to his mailing list.

### Garenin Hostel, West Lewis by Peter Clarke

Plans are now well advanced to ensure that the fifth crofter's hostel is opened for use on 1 June 1990 at Garenin, West Lewis. This is a prime position only 8 miles from Callinish Stones, said to be second only in importance to Stonehenge.

The hostel will be opened in the first Black House to be restored in this deserted croft village set in a peaceful bay on the rugged coast of West Lewis. Until 1973 the houses were occupied but when the council built an estate of council houses nearby the residents moved out.

In the late 1970's the Council realised the tourist potential of the village if the houses were restored, but the time was not ripe for the development. During 1987 senior Councillors became committed to the scheme and in December 1987 a representative 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 local Councillor Alex MacDonald, together with Roddy Murray, Depute Director of Planning and Development and Derek McKim, Planning Officer.

Cllr. Graham explained that he liked the Gatliff model of a Crofter's Hostel and that he wanted the trust to run a small simple hostel in one of the renovated houses. He had been to Berneray Hostel and had been very impressed by what he had seen. The council has bought four of the houses and plans to renovate them via a new body Urras nan Gearranan (the Garenin Trust).

The village is in an idyllic setting. Only a mile and a quarter away at Dalmore, there is a fine sandy beach. Most of the key tourist attractions in West Lewis are within easy distance of the hostel. The Dun Carlaway Broch is 3 miles away, on the road to Garenin. The whalebone arch at Bragar is 8 miles away, the folk museum at Shawbost 5 miles away. The Lewis Black House, Arnol 10 miles. All these attractions can easily be visited from the hostel in one day by the hosteller in a hurry.

No advanced bookings will be taken, but a warm welcome all year round can be guaranteed. The wardens will be John and Pat MacGregor, local weavers. Charges will be as per Grade 3 SYHA hostels.

There will be two dormitories (8 beds), common room and kitchen, wash room with shower and wc. The building has been renovated to a high standard and will be rethatched with straw, the traditional Lewis thatching material. The hostel will include a number of historically important features. For example, the flat stones from the hearth, all carried by hand to the house are to be fitted around the two fireplaces to make a decorative feature.

John MacGregor, who takes a keen interest in local history, has found a traditional wooden Lewis settle, which we hope will become a feature of the common room. Settles, made by the crofters, are fast disappearing. John has also found a number of traditional tweed blankets which will be hung from the walls. None are now produced in the islands since they require a 72 inch loom; the 36

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

iron looms now in use in the islands cannot produce such wide material.

Much work is still to be done on the house, including the reroofing of the second part of the house but the Council is confident that it can be done in time to hand over the building to the Hostels Trust to carry out commissioning works, well ahead of the 1 June 1990 opening date.

### The rest of the village

It is for the Garenin Trust to drive along the scheme, but as yet it is still looking for ideas about how to use the other houses. Amongst those being discussed are a tea shop, museum and public conveniences. The Garenin Trust would welcome ideas about the other houses.

### **Other GHHT Hostels**

Our first loyalties are to the four existing hostels and to Garenin. Attempts to move beyond these loyalties encounter two difficulties - money and available properties. But with time even these difficulties can be overcome. So the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust's long term ambitions are for crofter's hostels in areas such as Ness and Uig on Lewis and on the Island of Barra. Opportunities could exist on some of the Inner Hebrides Islands such as Tiree. Certainly we feel that the crofter's hostel concept could be extended to some of the Inner Hebridean islands. Members are invited to contribute thoughts and ideas on how and where GHHT should expand. Contributions to John Joyce or Peter Clarke for general consideration, and possibly inclusion in these pages.

### **The Rhenigidale Appeal**

£28,825 is needed to fund the major renovation of Rhenigidale Youth Hostel. Of this sum, the Countryside Commission for Scotland is contributing £16,695, and the Western Isles Council £1,250. This leaves £10,880 to be raised by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust by means of the Rhenigidale Appeal. Pamela Moncur of Peebles has volunteered to organise this appeal and has been given a good start by the SYHA which has contributed £500, the Ernest Cook Trust £400 and the J & L A Cadbury Trust £250. So £9730 to go.

A Rhenigidale Appeal Leaflet has been produced, a copy of which should drop through your letter box soon. It will also be distributed to all users of Rhenigidale Hostel over the past four years, major companies in Scotland, England and Wales, and in the New Year to members of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Pam has got the Appeal off to a good start, but she cannot perform miracles - if you think that your company would contribute to the Appeal, or if you know of some other prospective source of financial assistance, write to Pam. If you receive two copies of the Leaflet, pass a copy onto a friend, or to a rich relative!

Pam's address is 28 Rosetta Road, Peebles, Peebles-shire, EH45 8HT. Send any suggestions and/or donations to Pam. Alternatively donations can be sent to the GHHT Treasurer, Roger Clifton.

### **The Wall of Support - Wanted : Administrative Lintels**

Hebridean Hostellers and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust provides a 'wall' of support to the four existing hostels and will do so for the fifth at Garenin and any subsequent hostels. Whilst the foundations of this wall are good, and there is no doubt about the strength and commitment of the individuals in the wall, there are several gaps which at best are being filled or bridged on a 'best as able' basis by the existing members of the GHHT Committee. At the GHHT Executive Committee Meeting at Stirling on 21st October, the Executive discussed the best way of filling or bridging these gaps in the wall so that the support

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

to the Hostels is as solid as possible without putting unreasonable strain on individuals in the wall. The clear conclusion was that additional 'building blocks' and 'lintels' are available in Hebridean Hostellers if members can be encouraged to volunteer. We already have one such volunteer in Pamela Moncur of Peebles who is master-minding the Rhenigidale Appeal. So if like Pamela, or myself (Richard Genner), you cannot get out to the Hebrides every year, are you willing to help with the organisation and administration of Hebridean Hostellers and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. Typical gaps believed to exist and where 'bricks' or 'lintels' are required are:

Publicity	Minutes Secretary	Librarian/Archivist
Building Work-Specialists	Appeals/Fundraising	Insurance Adviser
	Covenants Organiser	Leases/Legal Adviser

Contrary to what was said 7 lines above, one job requiring an annual visit to the hostels, preferably at the season's start or end is that of Inventory Officer, which goes to show that whatever your skills and available time, we can probably devolve and reshape existing ancilliary duties to take advantage of your involvement, leaving our existing 'corner stones' i.e. the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, etc. to concentrate on the core activities of their posts.

Definite volunteers, possible volunteers and the merely curious should get in touch with John Joyce or Peter Clarke in the first instance.

### BOOK REVIEW

#### **Fragile islands or fragile arguments? by Peter Clarke**

*The Fragile Islands. A Journey through the Outer Hebrides, by Bettina Selby*  
Price £12.95 From Richard Drew Publishing, Glasgow.

Any new book on the Western isles is to be welcomed. The more attention the islands get the better. Every new writer brings some new insight, some view of the islands that I (the reader) had not previously penetrated. Each new writer stands the chance of reaching the audience that no-one else has reached.

I quite willingly bought Bettina Selby's book; I knew that she had been at the hostels. In fact she has stayed in the shell of Berneray Hostel in 1985, just ahead of my working party. Conditions there were OK but not a patch on their current warm and dry glory.

After the workparty I wrote to her suggesting she might write an article for the Newsletter. We spoke on the phone and I learnt more about the book. Fresh from her trip, she hoped that a major theme in the book would deal with the way incomers were so prominent in the islands. This theme contradicts the image of a declining community, looking inward and suffering the depletion of the young and talented leaving the island for the mainland.

Being an amateur sociologist, my appetite was whetted. I always like to work out how societies work. If you are involved with voluntary organisations which need community support, you have a vested interest in knowing how a community ticks. You may want to get it to tick for you. More important you can make sure that you are ticking with it, otherwise you might find that you have not got the community support you need.

Moreover I wanted to read an optimistic view of the islands, to confirm my own view that the islands have a bright and very positive future.

Four years later I got my chance. I read the book easily enough and found it interesting, and entertaining. Bettina had stayed at three of the four hostels and was positive, indeed glowing, about their facilities. But I was irritated that she continually referred to the Trust as the "Gatliffe Trust", a common error in the islands but a great pity that it is repeated in the book.

There were a number of insights, but much ancient history already known to the informed reader. Most disappointing there was, in fact, little analysis about the role of the incomers. Instead there is a presentation of episodic evidence. Better research would have produced a list of key people to be interviewed in order to explore a theme. Instead the theme seems to have sprung out of chance contacts. These were the people whom the author happened upon on her travels.

OK, this might make good travelogue but why then are the incomers insultingly referred to as "white settlers"? That didn't go down too well in the islands. Equally breath-taking, the pen pictures in the book written as if their subjects were never going to read them.

Poor Bettina. Visiting Uist in August only two months after the book was published, I not only found that the book had been read, it had been digested and spat out. One person, who occupies several pages, snatched it out of my hand, read and re-read the offending sections. Over a very pleasant dinner he told me he had been sent a draft of the relevant pages and had offered a number of suggestions and improvements. They were, apparently, all rejected with a note saying that the passage had been sent for information and not amendment.

The news that Bettina had been seen at Howmore on 20 August and was said to be heading north, was greeted with a firm "good"; verbal retribution was clearly in mind. (She turned back due to torrential rain).

Perhaps she was as well not to have touched upon the religious issues in the islands, though this gap was another of my personal disappointments with the book. The jacket biography tells us that Bettina has a degree in comparative religion, so she would have been well equipped for that task. At one point she talks to some young people about their religious views. Their comments give some hope of a tolerant future, but overall the book gives little idea of the theological basis of the Free Church or any of the splinter churches it has spawned.

On a lighter side Tommy Tosh has now forgiven Catriona for giving the impression that she (and not Tommy) rethatched Claddaach Baleshare Hostel. My copy of the book is embossed with Tommy's thumb print as he gripped the page tightly, rolling with laughter.

Then followed the piece in the Independent, on 19 August, adorned with a photo. of Claddaach Baleshare (North Uist) hostel. The caption proclaimed "South Uist: a cottage looks out at the long waves tumbling on to the beaches from the Atlantic". In fact the front of the building faces East; the photographer (Anne Hills) would have had her back to the sound between North Uist and Baleshare islands.

Yes, as you can see, I found the book entertaining. Do buy it or borrow it from a library but don't tell anyone in the islands that you've read it! If you do, your only defence will be that you don't believe a word.

#### What the Papers said

The Guardian of 21.7.89 carried a photograph of the new Berneray Hostel Annexe and the Harris Sound, with the caption;

'Room with a view... This youth hostel on the island of Berneray was re-opened yesterday, part of a chain running across the Outer Hebrides. The cottage-hostels, run by the Gatliff Trust, are not meant to provide five-



## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

star accomodation or even to match the traditional youth hostels. But *they provide beds in places other forms of accomodation cannot reach*, and attract great loyalty from regulars. Visitors to Berneray can stay as long as they want - although the island, between Harris and North Uist, has only 120 people on it, and no pub, never mind a hotel. Renovation by volunteers included putting in showers and toilets, and restoring an outside wall washed away in February by the highest tide in 20 years.'

The Italics are mine, but I rather like that phrase - it seems to sum up a good part of what Hebridean Hostellers and the GHHT are about.

The Stornoway Gazette of 29.7.89 has a photograph of the main Berneray Hostel building and in an article quotes the following from the speech of Duncan Campbell, Director of the CCS, and our principal guest at the Re-opening:

"One of the many priorities of the Countryside Commission for Scotland is promoting access to the countryside and allied to that is the provision of accomodation for walkers. The activities of the Gatliff Trust fall right into that in that they provide this very memorabile accomodation which helps promote access to the countryside. It's very important in this day and age to enjoy the physical and spiritual benefits in being out in the country particularly in places like the Uists.

Hostels of this sort enable walkers and cyclists to get about the country on a limited budget and, in addition, it brings jobs to the countryside"

A West Highland Free Press article dated 25.8.89 states:

'A £15,000 contribution from the HIDB to the recently formed Garenin Trust will be spent on renovating and upgrading a run-down byre on the west of Lewis to provide the island's first youth hostel, as part of an ambitious heritage, visitor and community centre. After improvements to the byre end of No 5 Garenin, the building will be leased to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, who operate a chain of simple hostels in the Western Isles. The Hostels Trust will then spend a further sum fitting out the building.

### Addresses

#### Hebridean Hostellers/Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

Chairman - John Joyce, 2 Beaumont Road, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 3QZ,  
(01 653 8376).

Vice-Chairman - Peter Clarke, 264 Alexandra Park Road, London, N22 4BG,  
(01 888 2449).

Secretary - Alan Busson, 4 Sambre Road, Ridgeway, Chisleton, Swindon, SN4 0JB.

Treasurer - Roger Clifton, Colerne, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN14 8DF.

Rhenigdale Organiser - Arthur Meaby, 33 Stratford Close, Colwick, Notts,  
NG4 2DL.

Rhenigdale Workparty - John MacLeod Webb, The Old Swan, Dunkerton, Bath,  
BA2 8AW.

Rhenigdale Appeal - Pamela Moncur, 28 Rosetta Road, Peebles, EH45 8HT.

Howmore Workparty - Jim Souness, 6 Fernoch Drive, Lochgilphead, Argyll,  
(0546 2106).

Newsletter Editor - Richard Genner, 42 Lamberton Court, Pencaitland, East  
Lothian, EH34 5BL, (0875 340044).

#### Gatliff Trust

Chairman - Frank Martin, 20 Cornwallis Avenue, Bristol, BS8 4PP, (0272 292350).

**Next Issue** : April '90, contributions by 31 March '90 please.