

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS



NEWSLETTER 11

NOV/DEC 1990

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLING ACTIVITIES 1990

The seven months that have passed since the last Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter was published cover the busy part of the Hebridean Hostelling year. It should also have been a period which had seen some very positive events happen for GHHT. It is however rather mixed news that we have to tell.

Hostel Usage was at an all time high, totalling 3054 bednights (Oct '89 - Sept '90). Berneray at 1246 (16% up on the previous 12 months) continues to be a success story, whilst Howmore was 9% up at 925 - reflecting reports received that the hostel was full and overflowing at the height of the summer. Rhenigidale recorded 542 nights, although only open for the later part of the summer. Claddach Baleshare was 19% down on '89 with 341 overnights. This, the lowest figure since 1986, undoubtedly reflects the poor state of the hostel due to rain damage following unfortunate (some say stupid) behaviour by a group of hostellers in late '89 - sadly they chose to use the thatched roof as a sun bed, so causing considerable damage to the thatch.

Rhenigidale Hostel was reopened on time on 1st July '90 but the deadline was only just met. That the deadline was met was largely due to Alan Joyce and Roy Ashworth labouring long and hard to complete the roof in February '90 and subsequently due to the efforts of Arthur Meaby and a workparty organised and led by John Murdo Webb. Thanks to a magnificent effort orchestrated from her home in Peebles (many miles from the Hebrides!), the Rhenigidale appeal conducted by Pam Moncur raised £18,136 and guaranteed the success of the Rhenigidale renovation project. A big Thank You is given to all the Individuals, Companies and Trusts that have contributed to the appeal, and a big hearted Thanks to Pam for her hard work. No doubt one or two donations are still coming in to Pam to swell the above total. In the same way, no doubt one or two tail-end jobs on the Rhenigidale renovation project will be completed this Autumn.

Garenin Hostel sadly did not open for business this summer, to the disappointment of both ourselves and John & Pat MacGregor, the wardens in waiting. Garenin Hostel is to be leased to GHHT by the Garenin Trust, which is to be the means for driving forward the whole Garenin Village Project. Unfortunately legal hiccups delayed the formation of the Garenin Trust, and the money to fund Phase 2 of Garenin Hostel renovation has to be channelled through the Garenin Trust - net result, the contractors were not on site in time to complete the renovation work in time for a 1990 opening. Our thanks go to the SYHA, the Tourist Authorities in the Hebrides, to Pat & John and to various other individuals who did their best to ensure that hostellers did not turn up at Garenin to find a

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

building site substituted for an operational hostel. However GHHT is hopeful that Garenin Hostel will open early in 1991.

With the rain pouring down on the hills, and a dry warm day in prospect at the splendid old house that is Loch Lomond Youth Hostel, it's difficult to understand why so few Hebridean Hostellers turned up for the 2nd GHHT AGM. Never mind, the Committee spent the morning in deep discussion, and after lunch, supported by a collection of spouses (and non-voting children!) and two other Hebridean Hostellers, we reported and resolved, voted and thanked, and the AGM was over in 1½ hours. Not a good example of enthusiastic democracy at work, but perhaps your fault not ours, after all you did get an invitation! - It will be nice to see more faces at the '91 AGM (in July in the Hebrides we hope) and the '92 AGM (in May in West Scotland again - May giving more currency to our reports and discussions on the past year, given that we work to the Calendar year).

As a result of the October Committee Meeting and AGM we welcome to the Committee John Duyck (as Treasurer) and Pam Moncur. John, who works for the YHA (E&W), takes over from Roger Clifton as part of the continuing process of separating the activities of the Galliff Trust and GHHT. Pam's appointment to the Committee is our strange way of 'rewarding' her efforts on the Rhenigidale appeal! Also assisting the Committee is Deidre Forsyth. Deidre's legal expertise will obviously help us as we get further and further involved in property ownership, lease arrangements and matters regarding Trusts, Company Law and other legal matters which bring shudders to ordinary mortals like myself.

Workparties for 1991: Dates will be advised in the next Newsletter (April '91) but contact John Murdo Webb if you're a willing volunteer and have time to spare between now and May.

Pay up, Pay up - 1991 subs. Is it only 7 months since I was urging you to pay your 1990 subscription? Well, it's the early bird that catches the worm! Enclosed with this Newsletter is a renewal form. Be sure to fill it in and send it off with your payment, or the supply of Hebridean Hostellers Newsletters and other GHHT bumph will dry up.

Lost slides - did you visit Rhenigidale and Berneray Hostels during 1989 summer and reload your camera at Berneray? Did you leave the used film behind? If so, then you will be glad to hear that Peter Clarke found the film on 25th August '89 and has had it developed.

'You' were a couple travelling by bike; Ms X has dark hair, Mr X has dark curly hair and a red coat. You'll be re-united with your film if you send £4.00 for the cost of developing plus a jiffy bag and 38p postage to Peter Clarke.

And don't worry, there was nothing embarrassing in the photographs!

'Western Isles' or 'Outer Hebrides' - Peter Clarke asks: Do you refer to the islands as the 'Western Isles' or the 'Outer Hebrides'. Personally I speak of 'the Hebrides' when I want to conjure those magical elements of the islands culture, history, people or landscape. When I want to be precise, or am in an administrative mood, I refer to the 'Western Isles'. Confusing isn't it?

On a recent visit to Stornoway I discovered that this confusion isn't just afflicting travellers. Islanders suffer from it too. Indeed so strongly do they feel about it that there is even talk of the local Council (the Western Isles Island Council) trying to change its name to the Outer Hebrides Council.

The matter is not assisted by the Gaelic title of the Council - Comhairle Nan Eilean. Literally translated it means 'Council of the Islands'.

Schools Hebridean Society - The April '90 Committee meeting was attended by Richard Young, Chairman of SHS, with the sad purpose of reporting that the SHS was to be wound up during the summer of 1990. The SHS's final report leaves no

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

doubt that the school children that did venture to the Inner and Outer Hebrides on SHS expeditions found the islands very interesting, surprising, challenging and enjoyable. But the sad fact is that camping in the sometimes unfriendly Hebridean climate, combined with high transport costs no longer competes with trips to France, Spain, Italy and various ski-ing resorts. As a result the SHS Directors have sadly but wisely decided to wind up the SHS.

The GHHT is one of the recipients of the balance of the SHS's funds, and GHHT gratefully thanks the SHS Directors for their contribution of £2,000, to be used to meet the costs of improved toilet and washroom facilities in a new external block at Rhenigidale Hostel - SHS has long connections with this hostel. Other recipients of the SHS funds are a Church of Scotland project to create low cost hostel accomodation and an Outdoor Centre on Jura (with the 'by-product' that the project will guarantee Church of Scotland Ministry on Jura) and the Watch Groups - the Junior Branches of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Camping equipment has been given to two Scout Groups and the Jura Project. Those curious for further details of these projects should contact Rob McDermott, Treasurer of SHS in its final years.

Arnol Blackhouse (the showpiece tourist attraction on Lewis) has been renovated and restored to its original shape this summer. Apparently when the Historic Buildings and Monuments commission took over the blackhouse in the 1960's, the byre-end roof was rebuilt with the same profile as the rest of the house, which HBM now knows was a mistake. Mr Bruce Walker, Senior Architect of HBM, is quoted in the Stornoway Gazette of 16 August '90 as saying: →



Garenin Hostel

One of three new drawings of GHHT hostels from the pen of Eric Duggan. The three drawings will be used in various GHHT leaflets and publications in the forthcoming months.

[Next Newsletter April '91, copy to me, Richard Genner, by 31/3/91, please]

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

"The blackhouses in each township had their own peculiarities of construction each linked to local circumstances and practices. Sadly, it is now highly unlikely that we will ever understand or indeed record all the variations. What is certain is that HBM did the right thing in taking one of the best examples of the Lewis blackhouse into care, even if it did get the roof height wrong in the first instance."

The article continues by saying: What has emerged from the roofing error is a greater understanding blackhouse construction and design. For without the error a series of experiments on the smoke control features of the house might not have taken place. It was through these experiments that many of the subtle design features of the blackhouse were rediscovered. The slope towards the byre end of the dwelling is so important because the inhabitants used the heat produced by the cattle and their dung to augment the heat from the chimneyless fireplace. Mr Walker further commented:

"The tapered roof not only allowed this to happen but accentuated the convection currents rising from the cattle to form a curtain of warm air. This prevented the smoke from penetrating the byre while it was occupied by the cattle. During the rest of the year when the cattle were in the fields, the smoke was able to penetrate the byre and preserved the timber, coir and turfs by coating them with peat tar."

In many respects the blackhouse was ahead of its time; its specifications match those now cited as the ideal low-cost, low-energy greenhouse of the future. Much to the chagrin of an experimental unit at Manchester University, who had devoted several years' research to the subject, their findings exactly described the blackhouse. According to the research team the house of the future must be long and low to save on structural materials, highly insulated to conserve heat, low in the walls but open to the ridge of the roof to reduce wind resistance, heated by a single central heat source with heat circulating above the room dividers, minimal windows to reduce solar gain during the day and heat loss at night - the basic specification of the blackhouse.

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 View, Chisledon, Swindon,

SN4 0JB, (0793 740124).

Treasurer - John Duyck, 29 Homesdale Road, Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent, BR5 1JS.

Buildings Officer - Arthur Meaby, 33 Stratford Close, Colwick, Notts, NG4 2DL.

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

Workparties - John Murdo Webb, 6 Tyndalls Park Mews, St. Michael's Hill,

Bristol, BS2 8DN, (0272 466198).

Thatching work - Jim Souness, Creag Mhor, 12 Buccleuch Street, Innerleithen,

Peebleshire, EH44 6LA, (0896 830504).

Newsletter Editor - Richard Genner, 42 Lamberton Court, Pencaltland, East

Lothian, EH34 5BL, (0875 340044).

Gatliff Trust

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

Schools Hebridean Society

Rob McDermott, - The Blue Coat School, Metchley Lane, Harbourne, Birmingham,

B17 0HR.