



NEWSLETTER 12

APRIL 1991

**HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS AND GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST ACTIVITIES 1991**

Another winter is over, and another summer of long Hebridean days is beckoning. The four Hebridean Hostels had more visitors than ever before in 1990, and even more are expected in 1991. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trustees welcomes this upward trend but it brings additional work with it. Maintenance workparties during the quiet winter months are now a feature of the Hebridean Hostels year and the past months have been no exception.

Tommy and Catrina Tosh arranged the rethatching of Claddach Baleshare late last year, this work being grant-aided through Cairdean nan Taighean Tugha, Friends of the Thatched Houses. The thatching was followed by a workparty from North Ely Expeditions who carried out 'heavy maintenance' at the Hostel - principally internal repainting, but also other minor repairs to make good the damage caused by the roof leaks reported in the last Newsletter. Claddach Baleshare reopened for normal business at Easter.

Other volunteers from North Ely Expeditions went to Berneray Island and carried out maintenance work at the hostel, and at long last, removed the last of the bunk beds from the Common Room to the Dormitory. The hostel is now ready for another season of steady usage.

[North Ely Expeditions are a Trust similar to the Prince of Wales Trust that has helped GHHT in the past. We gather that the North Ely Expeditions volunteers (who came mainly from Wales!) enjoyed their trip to the Hebrides, albeit a far cry from their normal expeditions to countries such as Kenya and Turkey. The volunteers were originally asked to work at Garenin but were unable to for reasons explained later, and we thank them for diverting their attentions to Claddach Baleshare and Berneray at short notice.]

At Rhenigidale, individual volunteers (under Arthur Meaby's direction) have worked on outstanding mini-projects within the overall renovation plans and we are happy to report that the fire escapes have now been fitted and the outside toilet/wash facilities (funded by the Schools Hebridean Society contribution to the renovation costs) are now complete. It has been said that the Hostel is one of the best buildings in Rhenigidale village, but I freely admit that the remark came from a totally biased source!

Moreover, for all its years, is a remarkably durable building and is still in good condition after the 1989/90 workparty, so the four Hebridean Hostels begin the main 1991 season in a good state of health.

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

Garenin Hostel will, at long last, open for business on 1st May 1991. Alan Gay, our Clerk of Works/builder/labourer on site has been working frantically throughout April to fit out the building for hostel use after it was finally made available to us in early April. Hostellers arriving on the First will find basic but usable facilities, those arriving four weeks later should find the hostel fitted and equipped to our current standard.

It has been a long and sometimes hard struggle to get to this point, the complexities of working through the Garenin Trust to contractors appointed by the Western Isles Council being particularly difficult at times, but now that we have got to the point where the hostel will shortly be open, we are sure it will be a worthwhile addition to the Hebridean Hostels, a project that Herbert Gatliff would have been proud of, and a 'flag-ship building' in the Garenin village for some time to come.

Unfortunately, we have to report that John MacGregor (who will warden the Hostel along with Pat, his wife) suffered a heart attack earlier this year. John is now back home and recuperating well but sadly is unable to bring fully to the hostel opening preparations the energy and work that he would have wished and has threatened for so long. Pat is fit & able, and is working hard to make the new hostel a welcoming place. We welcome John and Pat to the complement of Hebridean Hostel wardens, and wish John a full and speedy recovery.

**Workparties** - For once, we are in the happy position of not needing to beseech Hebridean Hostellers to join us on workparties. It's not that we don't love you!, it's just that the hostels are currently in good condition, as noted above. But it is unwise to relax in a pool of self-congratulatory glory! John Murdo Webb would still like to hear from members willing to help with hostel maintenance as follows:

If you have particular trades or skills that you are willing to use at the Hebridean Hostels, given adequate notice, say 9 - 12 months, then John would like to put you on his register, so that future renovations or maintenance work can be planned around the known availability of skilled volunteers.

If you are a competent DIY type and are going out to the Hebrides and are willing to give a small part of your holiday to the Hebridean Hostels, then contact John, giving him 2 - 3 weeks notice. John may just have some small repair or maintenance job needing to be done. It could be as simple as taking some key dimension for a future job, or confirming a report of damage received from indirect sources!

Hebridean Hostellers has been lucky in recent years to be able to call on Roy Ashworth of Grimsay, North Uist to carry out repairs and maintenance, and we thank Roy for the unsung but significant role that he has played, in addition to his major contributions at Berneray and Rhenigidale. But as the hostel numbers and usage increases, it is unfair for the mainland based Trustees to continue to depend on one individual. And even if Roy is once again our main man on the spot, he may well appreciate a hand, or help with transporting tools or materials. So all potential volunteers should continue to log their interest with John Murdo Webb.

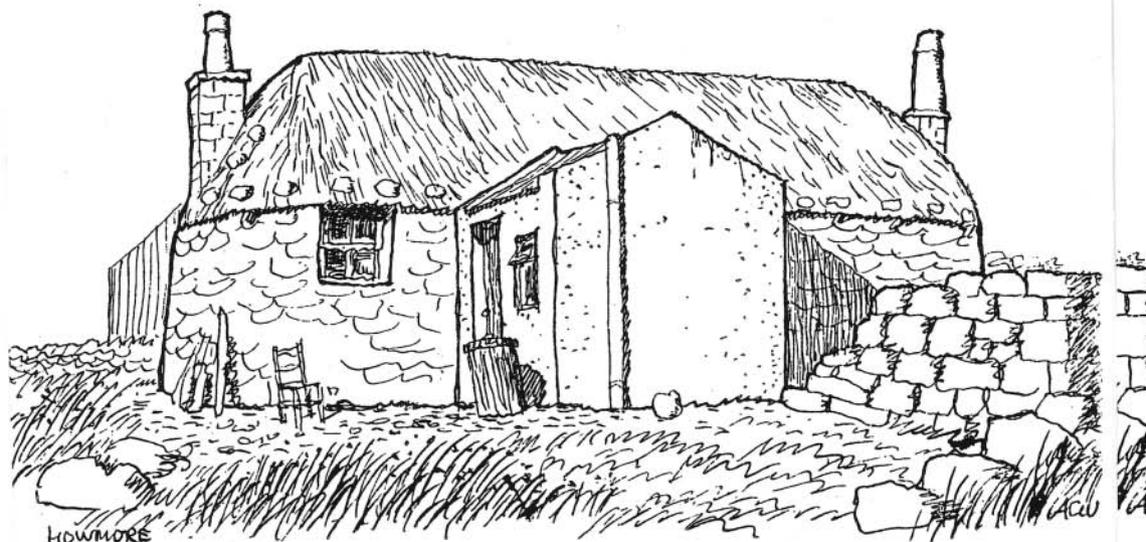
The 1991 AGM will take place on 7th September at a Scottish Mainland Youth Hostel. Details of venue, agenda etc. and copies of the 1990 Annual Report will be distributed during the summer. Our hopes for an AGM in the Hebrides in July were disrupted by a number of factors and a September date is necessary on the mainland due to heavy booking of SYHA hostels in June, July and August. Our aspirations are now for a May 1992 AGM on Lewis or Harris to coincide with opening ceremonies at Garenin and/or Rhenigidale.

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

Thanks to all those members who returned the renewal form (and payment where necessary) enclosed with the November '90 Newsletter. The information supplied has enabled us to cross-check or supplement a lot of the information in the existing membership records.

### Plans for Howmore

Howmore Hostel, illustrated below (drawing by, and thanks to Crispin Worthington of Forres) is likely to be the next major renovation project for the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and Hebridean Hostellers. Situated close to South Uist's spinal road, excellent machair beaches and the Loch Druidibeg Nature Reserve, Howmore has obvious attractions and has been, for the last three years, second to Berneray in the bednight ratings and per square foot of hostel floorspace it is probably our busiest hostel. Which all means that in high season, the hostel



can be overcrowded or hostellers are turned away and the hostel suffers a fair amount of wear and tear. It is an obvious candidate for a major overhaul and provision of a second building for additional beds. All of this work can only be done with the formal permission of the warden - and happily Betty MacDonald has indicated that she would like to see the hostel upgraded - and with clear legal establishment of ownership of the relevant properties, legal rights to use the hostel and so on. And anyone who has dabbled in land matters in the Hebrides will know that few property rights are clearly stated, at time it can be a legal nightmare.

The Executive Committee, meeting in Stirling in early April, agreed that we should make Howmore our next major project after the dust has settled at Garenin and Rhenigidale. It will not be easy, once again cash has to be found, plans drawn up, skilled workers and labourers found and so on. So if you find things a bit crowded at Howmore this summer, if you need to fight for room at the stove, if the hostel seems to be full of other peoples wet clothes, then bear with us - and be prepared to help when the cry goes out for financial and physical help.

**Cal-Mac Sunday sailings to the Hebrides.**

The Sunday sailings to the Western Isles, referred to in Newsletter 7 have been in operation between Uig on Skye and Lochmaddy on North Uist for the past two summers and have been commercially successful, according to the operators, Caledonian MacBrayne. This year's summer timetable includes sailings to Tarbert but these have recently been suspended by the Cal-Mac Board, presumably because the company has not been able to reach agreement with island representatives on the sensitive issue of breaking the Sabbath. Future aspirations for Sunday sailings on the Ullapool - Stornoway route have also been put on ice.

The same source also tells me that Cal-Mac would like to put a vehicle carrying ferry on the Newton - Berneray - Leverburgh run. Whilst undoubtedly of convenience to many islanders and tourists, this would sadly bring to an end the Tuesday and Thursday Lochmaddy - Tarbert sailings, which in fine weather are a mini-holiday cruise in their own right.

**Hebridean Economics**

According to an economic study of the Western Isles carried out by the Fraser of Allender Institute for Comhairle nan Eilean, if all the fish caught in Western Isles waters were processed locally, then the Islands would have an additional £15.9M of output, an additional £3.3M of household income and about 460 more jobs. The study states that the £15.9M output would reduce the islands balance of trade deficit to an estimated £55.3M (at 88/89 prices).

Other statistics included in the report: - Average household income in 88/89 was £9,036 and the average per-capita income was £3,256 - 70% of the Scottish average and 64.8% of the UK average. Weekly household spending is also 30% behind the Scottish average, Hebrideans spending less than mainland equivalents on housing, tobacco and drink but more on vehicle purchase.

Local government is the biggest employer, 2,275 jobs, followed by fisheries, 1,408, and construction, 1,197 jobs. Tourism generated £4M of output and 231 jobs, way down on fish farming which generates £14.6M and 428 jobs. Textiles, Harris Tweed had an output in 88/89 of £13.6M providing 988 jobs, whilst in 88/89 fish processing contributed £11.1, rather less than half of the possible £27M.

**BOOK REVIEW**

by Peter Clark

**An eye to the Hebrides** by Mairi Hedderwick (Canongate, Edinburgh, £12.95)

When I feel homesick for the Hebrides, I pick up Mairi Hedderwick's book *An eye to the Hebrides* and am instantly transported. Here are all the evocative images of the Hebrides, all those nooks and crannies which never cease to surprise and delight, drawn and painted in water colours, with a pithy and perceptive commentary from Mairi. Here is the unique gaelic blend of the human and physical environment which so inspired the early ecologists. In the Hebrides society has to co-exist in harmony with its physical environment, there is no question of we humans dominating. We must treat it with respect, if not awe.

During six months of travelling in an old camper van, Mairi visited each of the inhabited Inner and Outer Hebridean islands in turn and threw in the ultimate island, St Kilda. She visited forty islands in all. So, you see, it is the stuff of dreams. If she had set herself the task of visiting all the islands, whether inhabited or not, she would still be at it!

Mairi visited Rhenigdale, where she comments "One of the several Outer Isles Gatliff Trust bothies completes the township. The newly done up houses are smart and ready for the new road. Waking the next morning under the tin roof of the bothy I could hear the diggers already at work high up on the hill behind."

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

Some extracts from the final Schools Hebridean Society Report:

AAA "Is South Uist part of the United Kingdom?" asked the man from the Prudential.

"I'm not sure but I can ask" (One never knows with anything around Scotland). I telephoned then and there.

"Richard, the man from the Prudential is here. Is South Uist part of the United Kingdom?"

"Absolutely" said Richard. The Prudential was relieved and grateful and gave SHS its insurance.

\*Richard Young, last Chairman of SHS.

AAA "Never before have I really come to grips with birds and plants. I have just enjoyed them vaguely. Now, I was really looking, really noticing details as they were pointed out. Everyone around me seemed really enthusiastic about noticing and identifying and the excitement was catching

Then there were the locals - the human beings who shared their life and their countryside with us outsiders. They were so kind and calm and friendly and humorous and helpful. I will always remember feeding a motherless lamb from a bottle in Mary's kitchen."

(Both extracted from the report on the SHS 1987 expedition to South Uist)

AAA "Many unspoilt islands off the North West coast of Scotland provide an ideal opportunity for people to live, for a short while, a life that is less restricted and less complicated than usual. With the combination of mountain and sea, of beauty and solitude, the Hebrides offer untold adventure for those who seek it".

(The introduction to the SHS aims, but equally applicable to solo visitors to the Hebridean Hostels)

The next Newsletter will be published in November '91, and will be a meagre four pages unless articles, drawings, travelogue, etc. are forthcoming. Contributions to me, Richard Genner, at the address below by 31st October please.

### Addresses

#### Hebridean Hostellers/Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

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(081 888 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.

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

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#### Gatliff Trust

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

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS

### Partnerships with Islanders

Peter Clarke

When Herbert Gatliff agreed to support the new hostel at Rhenigidale in 1961, he did so "for the time being". He was convinced that the SYHA would come round to his point of view that they should take responsibility for the hostel. Their response, however, was to return to Herbert the £500 he had donated to the SYHA to open a hostel in the Hebrides.

But if the SYHA couldn't be prevailed upon then local management, partnership with Islanders, was the answer. Despite changing circumstances Herbert never dropped his desire to work in partnership with islanders.

In 1963 the SYHA opened Stockinish hostel. This must have dashed any lingering hope Herbert felt about SYHA involvement because in 1965 the Gatliff Trust readily agreed to support the Hostel on Scarp and, in 1966, at Howmore.

Herbert had another very good reason for keeping on with the idea of partnership with Islanders. His Trust, the Gatliff Trust, was not just a hostels trust, it was a vehicle for his involvement with the youth hostelling and outdoor movement. Herbert was a revered and influential figure on this stage. He was one of the founding fathers of youth hostelling in the British Isles, a life member of both YHA & SYHA, and an honorary Vice President of the YHA. He played a leading role in the creation of the Council for National Parks in 1963.

Of course, over the years and particularly since his death, the hostels side of the Gatliff Trust has assumed a much greater importance. Most of the trustees appointed since the 1960's came into contact with the Gatliff Trust via the hostels. The creation of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in 1988 was entirely consistent with these antecedents. On the one hand it allows the Gatliff Trust the opportunity to return to its other root in the outdoor movement. But it also allows the Hostels Trust to make progress towards Herbert's other ideal, partnership with islanders.

Partnership with Islanders could benefit the Trust in so many practical ways. We have a growing band of supporters in the islands. We must build on their interest and commitment. We need more of their muscle, their goodwill and their contacts. We need their active support, advice and inspiration.

The Gatliff Trust was never just a bed provider. It had other motives in providing the hostels. It wanted hostellers to visit the Hebrides to look at the marvellous natural environment. But Herbert was also interested in the human ecology of the islands. He wanted young travellers to use the hostels as a base for gaining an understanding of the Hebridean's way of life. The unique crofting life and gaelic culture of the islands provides many pointers for improving our society in general. To achieve that aim we must understand local aspirations.

During the early 1970s each hostel log book contained a firm injunction from Herbert to get involved in the local community, to offer help on the crofts, or get the shopping for an elderly person in the village.

The Gatliff Trust has always worked with the grain in the Hebrides. It is not ours to intrude, nor must we encourage intrusion from hostellers. We do not want a natural environment to be preserved to the detriment of the islander's way of life. Herbert always promoted a realistic view of the islands, and wanted to give our hostellers meaningful contact with islanders. What better way of doing that than by integrating islanders with the Trust, its structures and operations. Then their life will become our life, our Trust will become their Trust and we will go forward together.

A debate on the issue of partnership with islanders is timely. Positive action in favour of partnership with islanders should follow promptly. The opportunity for progress is there and should be seized. It may be possible to achieve it over the next five years.