



NEWSLETTER 20

MAY 1995

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS AND GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

As I sit here compiling the newsletter it means it must be May and summer approaches. Although as I look out my window and see the snow falling, I wonder what kind of summer lies ahead. Now is the time to plan the holidays, one trip to the travel agents to collect all the brochures and browse through destinations such as Spain, Italy, Greece... HOLD ON, WAIT A MINUTE - when was the last time you visited the hostels? If you can't remember straight away, then it has been too long - why not rediscover the pleasures of hostelling this year.

If it is deserted, sandy beaches you want, try the west beach on Berneray, if it is living history, try the former blackhouse at Garein. Remote? Despite the new road, Rhenigidale can still offer a tranquil option. Of course if you insist on having an unfinished building site on your doorstep as happens in so many mediterranean holidays then Howmore is the place for you. Seriously, there is still the usual accommodation at Howmore which among other things is convenient for the excellent walk to the top of Ben Mhor.

BARRA HOSTEL

We have now raised £23,000.00 towards the cost of the hostel, from charitable donations and seek a further £12,000.00. Should you know of any person or organisation able to further our cause, please contact the Chairman, Peter Clarke at the address below. The site chosen is that of a redundant school which has an ideal layout for a hostel and will provide the much needed southern link in the GHHT chain of hostels.

LATEST NEWS!!!! - CNE (Comhairle Nan Eilean) have agreed to accept an offer of £25,000.00 immediately - the balance to be paid over a period once the hostel is open. Solicitors have now been instructed, so WATCH THIS SPACE! The building will require some work, we will be assessing what needs to be done to get the place ready for Spring next year.

HOWMORE REFURBISHMENT

Since last reported, four work parties have been organised to assist Brian Wilson (stonemason) at Howmore. The building is now ready to have the roof built on to it. This work should be completed by the end of May. Once the roof is on, internal work can be carried out

regardless of the vagaries of the weather, which has been instrumental in holding up our progress so far. Completion date for the whole project is Easter 1996. If members wish to be involved in work parties please contact Diane Waddell at the address below.

#### COMMITTEE MEETING - 11TH MARCH 1995

Unfortunately there were two resignations at the last meeting. Alan Busson leaves us as Secretary due to family commitments - congratulations Alan on the addition to your family. Angela Gallagher leaves us as Treasurer due to extensive work commitments. Thanks to both members for the hard work they have done.

#### BERNERAY WEEK 1995

To commence 17th July. Please note the hostel is extremely busy during this week and if you have a tent you are welcome to pitch it in the grounds or nearby and use the hostel facilities for £2.00 pp. Last year a hostel team won - so good luck to all who enter. There is a possibility that an Australian Folk Group will be performing during the week.

#### HOSTEL FEES

These have been increased to £4.00 from 1st January 1995. I am sure you will agree that this represents extremely good value for the fun and friendships to be had at each and every hostel.

#### CHECKMATE

The priceless Lewis Chessmen the most famous and distinctive Norse chess pieces in the world, return to their homeland for the first time since their discovery 164 years ago, in the white sands near Ardoll at Uig on the west coast of Lewis. The pieces are 850 years old and made of carved walrus ivory. They return to their home to be the centrepiece of an exhibition to mark the opening of a new Lewis museum.

Plans by the Isle of Lewis Chess Club to use the pieces in a commemorative tournament to mark their return in July, involving British Grandmaster Nigel Short and Viking Grandmaster Simon Adgestein have been vetoed by the British Museum who own and have loaned 57 of their 83 pieces for the exhibition. The BM said they must not be touched or removed from their guarded, glass armour-plated cabinet. The National Museums of Scotland have also loaned 11 pieces for the exhibition. Western Isles MP Calum Macdonald said "This is utterly ridiculous. They should be allowed to use the pieces. They are made of ivory and chess is hardly a contact sport. What damage could they do?".

In his letter to the British Museum, Club Chairman Alasdair MacLeod says "we would request that Nigel Short and Simon Adgestein be permitted to play with actual pieces rather than a replica set. They would of course be expected to wear gloves and remain under the continous scrutiny of security guards. The pieces were made to be used and are diminished by being otherwise constrained." We await the next move!

### HARRIS - SCALPAY BRIDGE

Plans by the Western Isles to build a bridge 334m in length from Harris to Scalpay by December next year may be delayed due to a shortfall of £500,000.00. Having received only 65% of the requested 75% funding from Highlands and Islands partnership, they are now looking to the Scottish Office to help with the 10% difference. The Council will be paying the balance. This bridge will enable the 400 inhabitants of Scalpay to be in continual contact with the Isle of Harris.

### GAELIC CENTRE ON SKYE

Ambitious plans are underway to create a 'university' for the study, interpretation and enjoyment of Scotland's Gaelic culture. This will incorporate degree-level courses, library, archives, audio-visual material and all sound recordings in Gaelic by BBC Scotland and other such far flung sources as a university in Nova Scotia, Canada and the Irish Folklore Dept in Dublin. It would also be the home to the National Gaelic Theatre which is soon to be formed.

A site has already been secured on the Sleat Peninsula on the Isle of Skye, architects are busy planning and accountants have got their calculators out. The majority of funding is hoped to be provided by the Millennium Commission and it means "Bail' Ur Ostaig" (meaning New Village or Township of Ostaig) could be a reality by the year 2000.

The existing college for Gaelic studies in Ostaig will eventually be absorbed into the the new Gaelic Centre and presently offers summer courses in Gaelic for Learners, Highland Dance, Piping and Drumming and more. Fees start from £100.00. for five days. If interested contact: Gavin Parsons, Short Course Organiser, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, An Teanga, Isle of Skye, IV44 8RQ.

If you can't make it up to the Islands this summer and live in the southwest of England, Jo and Gary Sage of 58 Prideaux Road, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 OJS would like to make contact with others who wish to learn and practice Gaelic.

### SKYE BRIDGE

It appears that the days of the trusty CalMac fleet 'workhorses' who sail back and forth from Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin, more than fifty times a day are coming to an end. They have been part of a lifeline to the Western Isles which has existed for thousands of years. They are now to be replaced by a toll bridge, that looks like a motorway flyover and mars the first view for many visitors of the majestic isle of Skye. The Project Manager has been quoted thus "we opted for a low-profile design that would blend in with the environment rather than stand out from it". Tourists, I am sure, will have a rather different opinion.

Anyone who remembers Gavin Maxwell's heartrending story of Tarka the otter in 'Ring of Bright Water' will be pleased to hear that although the cottage where he wrote the book has now been overshadowed by a large rising span of the bridge, the otters themselves have been catered for. Engineers have bored five tunnels and created two new habitats for them, including fresh water pools and low walls are being built to prevent them crossing the road. Otters have been reported as using the tunnels.

