



Newsletter 26

May 1998

GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

Welcome to 1998 and if you believe the papers and forecasters it is going to be a hot summer, supposedly the hottest for 136 years so what better reason to visit the hostels and reacquaint yourself with the Highlands and Islands! There is lots of information in this newsletter and as always I welcome input from you the members, regarding items of interest. Sadly, at the end of March this year, John MacGregor (warden at Garenin) passed away suddenly. Many hostellers will remember John for his amusing anecdotes and helpfulness, our sympathies go to Mrs Pat MacGregor.

AGM CANCELLED

Please note that the AGM will not now be held at Lochmaddy on 20th June 1998 as previously stated, due to unforeseen problems with getting the Annual Report and Accounts to all members within the legal timelimit. The new time and place will be advised to you as soon as possible.

BARRA APPEAL

After twelve months of complete frustration over Barra, just after Easter there was some movement on the legal side. To cut a long story short there are problems with the crofting status of the land on which the hostel stands. They are not insuperable problems, but they do take time to resolve. This is now beginning to happen. I am, however, not going to be rash enough to make any predictions (I learned my lesson in 1996) but the Committee has begun to plan the appeal.

We must raise between #40,000 and #80,000, depending on the final amount of grant we receive from Western Isles Enterprise and Scottish National Heritage. This is the largest amount we have ever had to raise. The overall cost of the project will be over #160,000.

So, a big effort must be made to raise this money. We are investigating the lottery, and approaching companies and charities. We hope to launch our appeal later this year. This is where you come in!

Do you know or work for a company which runs a charitable trust? Do you live in a town or City with a charitable trust? It doesn't matter whether they give small grants or large ones, the important thing is that such trusts are more sympathetic to appeals if they come from their own employees or residents.

In short, you can help us by sending our appeal literature to those bodies with a covering letter from yourself. If you are willing and able to help in this way, please contact me. Your assistance will be very gratefully received.

Peter Clarke: 264 Alexandra Park Road, Wood Green, London N22 4BG
e-mail: clarke.264@saqnet.co.uk

OUTER HEBRIDES LONG DISTANCE WALK

The Chairperson, Peter Clarke is researching the possibility of a long distance walking route through the islands. The aim is to establish a route from the Butt of Lewis to Vatersay, taking in all the inhabited islands, using old tracks and quiet roads. Any hostellers interested in this project and who have suggestions about possible routes, or information about published or unpublished maps, leaflets or books regarding walks in the islands, should contact him at the address below.

BOOK APPEAL

Rhenigidale is a very special place for us all. To make it even more special we have started a collection of favourite books at the hostel; novels, sci-fiction, short stories, poetry, guidebooks. Maybe you could donate a book you have WRITTEN! Please inscribe your name in the book and any message to fellow travellers. If you would like to donate a book please send it to: Mr Alasdair Mackay, Warden, Youth Hostel Rhenigidale, Isle of Harris HS3 3DB

HAPPY HOSTELLING

We are making a collection of photographs of happy hostelling moments for display at the hostels. If you would like one of your pictures to be included please send a print (any size) marked with your name and a description of the picture eg. Jim McSmith and Angela Waddenham at the top of Todden, to Hilary Wardrope (see address below). Please state if you wish your picture to be displayed at any particular hostel.

HISTORY OF GHHT

If anyone would like a copy of the history of the Gatliff Trust when it was under Herbert Gatliff's direct influence, please send an A4 SAE (31p of stamps) to Peter Clarke (address below)

THE FRANK TURTON TROPHY

It was a great honour that Arthur Meaby was awarded this trophy in recognition of his work for the YHA. He joined the YHA in 1951 at a hostel in Ireland, and has been Chairman of Southern Region, a member of National Executive since 1970 and Chairman of London Hostels Committee, now the City Hostels, since 1980. When he met Herbert Gatliff in 1957 he became interested in the Hebridean Hostels and has been instrumental in the restoration of Berneray hostel, work at Rhenigidale and Howmore and is now involved in the Barra hostel. A wonderful cake was baked in his honour at the presentation ceremony which featured a relief map of the British Isles including amongst other things a model black house! Congratulations Arthur.

ROYAL GAELIC

Prince Charles wants his sons to learn Gaelic and where else would he go than to his old friend Donald 'Splash' McKillop on the isle of Berneray. Charles visited Splash when he stayed at his croft to plant potatoes in the late 1980's and has remained friendly since then and the crofter is on Prince Charles' personal Christmas card list.

SHINING LIGHTS

The lighthouse on the Butt of Lewis became automated earlier this year and was the last of five remaining manned lighthouses in the British Isles. The lighthouse is a listed building and stands 37 metres high. It was manned by three full-time keepers and two part-timers, who all now are looking for other work but as all lighthouses will be fully automatic by the middle of this year even the remote Fair Isle, there is no hope of staying within the profession. The Gatliff Trust was thinking of approaching the NLB for the site to be a viable place to offer accommodation.

CATWALK TWEED

Harris Tweed is getting an overhaul and dragged into the fashion world of the 20th century as designers are including the cloth in their Spring/Summer Collections. At present the average customer is male, aged over 50 and growing older! Almost 95% of all Harris Tweed goes into making men's jackets. The Harris Tweed Authority, guardians of the famous orb trademark stamped only on cloth woven on the islands of Lewis and Harris, needs to revive female and youth interest in the United States if tweed is to survive. However, with the introduction of double-width looms (Harris Tweed is traditionally an awkwardly narrow cloth) there are a lot of weavers who are out of business because they only have the single looms in their homes or sheds.

OBJECTIVE ONE

Around #250m will have been spent on nearly 500 projects since the inception of Objection One in 1994. However, there seems to be a lot of disagreement as to why the Highlands and Islands are being dropped from this project when other areas of Europe with similar problems of low density population and high unemployment, lack of services etc are still included. It has also been suggested nearer to home that the money didn't go to the areas it should have and that the areas that attracted the Objective One funding gained very little from the enormous cash input. Although, the causeway from N Uist to Berneray was aided by the funding as was the forthcoming bridge between Harris and Scalpay. Large sums were earmarked to support the vehicle carrying ferries to Rum and Eigg and Inverie in Knoydart.

ANYONE FOR TENNIS?

The most isolated tennis court in Britain has opened in Harris, at West Loch Tarbert. The all-weather facility, required 2000 tonnes of rock for construction and has the most beautiful view - across the Atlantic! The campaign was aided by Sir Cliff Richard, Jo Durie, Bill Beaumont and Jonathan Dimbleby. It also had a contribution from the Lottery Fund of #32,260.

HOSTEL UPDATE

Jim McFarlane and Lee Renouf-Miller made their rounds of the hostels early February of this year in the annual maintenance checks and hopefully hostellers will find that all facilities are in good working order and condition. In an effort to ease cleaning of the hostels the floors have now been painted with appropriate paint, to avoid the use of carpets and the inherent problems of dirt and bugs associated with them. Another major improvement was putting an outside light at the Berneray Hostel to enable a safe passage between the main building and the annexe at night time!!!

Brian Wilson the stonemason, has been working on the hostel at Howmore and taken the roof off the original building to see what sort of repairs need to be made to the walls. It is aimed to have a new roof on the building before the winter, to make it watertight and protect from the elements. Work can then proceed on the inside of the hostel.

PROMISES, PROMISES

It seems that once again the idea of a 'superquarry' on Harris is up for dispute. All the promises that were made for better amenities such as a new pier at Leverburgh, the Harris Tween Interpretive Centre, pharmaceutical factory in Harris and the Loch na Ceist road have come to nothing. The economic situation is continuing to decline and therefore a third referendum is being considered to find out the opinions of the people. In 1993 it voted 24 to three to support it, however, in June 1995 it was voted 21 to 8 against! We will see.

FACTS & FIGURES

The true facts of Western Isles life as quoted by Mr Angus Graham, architect:

- + unemployment rate of 10%, almost double the national Scottish figure and three times that of Shetland
- + long-term unemployment at 34.1%, well above national average.
- + Western Isles ranked 31st, in terms of GDP, among 32 Scottish local authorities
- + a 37% decline in population this century (2.4% decline since 1991 census)
- + 42% more deaths than births, compared to 3% in Scotland as a whole

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Useful Names and Addresses

Chairperson: Peter Clarke, 264 Alexandra Park Rd, London N22 4BG
Vice Chair: Deidre Forsyth, The Sheiling, Glenburn Road, Ardrishaig, Argyll PA30 8EU
Secretary: Arthur Meaby, 33 Stratford Close, Colwick, Notts NG4 2DL
Treasurer: Graham MacDonald, 67 Maxwell Drive, East Mains, East Kilbride G74 4HL
Membership Secretary: Fran Paxton, Stonefield, Shore Road, Clynder, Helensburgh G84 0JH
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