



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

newsletter 33

December 2001



Rhenigidale hostel on a hot summer's day in September.

(Photo: Lawrence Washington)



**Wishing all our members a happy Christmas
and a prosperous New Year!**



NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

After a few years on the periphery of the GHHT, I was "volunteered" to join the Executive Committee a couple of years ago, and found myself elected to the position of Chairman at the last AGM. This is a bit of a daunting prospect, for two reasons - Peter Clarke has been very active in promoting the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and has spent a huge amount of time doing this. He has also been the Chairman for 10 years. I hope that I can cover as much ground as Peter has done, and also hope that I can retire without having to do such a long time as Chairman!

A lot of the Committee's work goes on in the background, quite rightly, but a lot of thanks to Peter for all his hard work. He is staying on the Executive, and continues as the Membership Secretary.

Arthur Meaby, our Secretary, has also flagged up that he intends to retire from that position at the next AGM, so we will be seeing some more changes over the next year.

The work of the Committee will, I hope, carry on in similar fashion as before. Since I live on the Isle of Lewis I am a bit closer to the hostels than most members, and hope that I can promote the hostels in the future.

Matt Bruce - Chairman
15th December 2001

NEWS FROM THE ISLANDS

Eriskay Causeway Completed

This summer saw the completion of one of the last major transport links in the Western Isles with the opening of the new 1.6 km causeway from South Uist to Eriskay. On 12th July the ferry took officials and islanders on the final sailing, before a procession of over 50 cars made their way across the causeway.

The project was jointly funded by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (£2 million), the Scottish Executive (£4.1 million), European Objective 1 funding (£2.8 million), and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (£0.5 million).

The Eriskay causeway is part of the Sound of Barra Integrated Transport Project, whose plans also include provision for a new vehicle ferry for the Sound of Barra. Major construction work on the new terminal at Aird Mhor, Barra, began in the Autumn.

In October Transport Minister Sarah Boyack announced that a new, larger ferry is to be constructed for the Sound of Harris service, following its outstanding success. This will allow Caledonian MacBrayne to transfer the Loch Bhrusda to the new Sound of Barra service when it comes into operation in 2003.

New Airlink for the Western Isles

September saw the introduction of a new air service for the Western Isles, provided by Highland Airways. A morning and afternoon flight, Monday to Friday, links Inverness, Stornoway, and Benbecula at competitive prices. In addition a special sightseeing ticket is available for £40 which allows a round trip from Stornoway to Benbecula and back in a morning or afternoon. Contact Highland Airways on 01851 701282, www.highlandairways.co.uk for details.

Wind Farm planned for Lewis

The Western Isles Alternative and Renewable Energy Partnership (WIAREP), formed on 25th June 2001, has drawn up plans for the world's largest wind farm which, if granted planning permission, will be located over thousands of acres of land near Stornoway. Employing 250 of the world's largest wind turbines, stage one of the project would be capable of supplying as much "clean" electricity as a medium sized nuclear power station and would more than double Britain's renewable energy capacity.

The project, whose second stage could involve offshore wind farms, together with wave and tidal power, will cost an estimated £500m and is to be financed by an international consortium including British Energy and Amec.

GHHT Executive Committee Meetings Report

04/08/01 - Executive Committee - Glasgow SYHA

Two estimates for the re-thatching of the annex at Berneray had been received although it was unclear precisely what level of work these would cover. Further confirmation was awaited. It was agreed to make an application to Historic Scotland for a grant towards the cost of the re-thatching. At this stage the Appeal fund stood at £1,442 with a further £123.20 of recoverable tax from gift aids. In addition £1,200 had been donated by the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust.

Arthur Meaby reported that temporary lighting had been installed in the original hostel building at Howmore and that three night storage heaters were soon to be fitted.

An estimate was still awaited for the work on the shower room in Rhenigidale hostel. The Secretary agreed to contact the builders about it - again!

The Membership Secretary was pleased to report a further increase in membership of the Hebridean Hostellers. As of 3rd August this stood at 245. He also informed the committee that after a great deal of work he was now happy that all the records were up to date, there having been four different systems used prior to him taking over as membership secretary.

15/09/01 - AGM & Executive Committee - Voluntary Action Lewis, Stornoway

We were pleased to welcome Alasdair and Cathy MacKay from Rhenigidale to the AGM, along with David Morton, Dan Sailor, and Susan Sidaway who had been on Alan's work party at Berneray during the previous week.

As previously announced Peter Clarke was to stand down as Chairman at this year's AGM. The Committee expressed their appreciation for the tremendous support and work that Peter has achieved for the Trust over the last 10 years. Matt Bruce was duly elected as the new Chairman. Peter Clarke stays on the committee as Membership Secretary and Arthur Meaby also agreed to continue as both Secretary and Treasurer, but advised that he would like to stand down from these positions next year.

Having already led two successful working parties it was proposed that Alan Sidaway be appointed as Working Party Organiser. He advised that he was more than happy to take this on and was duly elected. All other posts on the committee remain unchanged.

It was brought to the attention of the committee that part of the fencing around Rhenigidale hostel is incorrectly positioned according to the feu plan. It was agreed to look into this and rectify the situation as soon as possible.

17/11/01 - Members Forum & Executive Committee - York YHA

A warm welcome was extended to the ten members of Hebridean Hostellers who were able to attend. Matt Bruce then led a lively and varied discussion relating to the hostels' current position and their future, with some encouraging feedback from the members. Some useful ideas were put forward of particular groups, relevant to the Outer Hebrides, who could be targeted for future publicity.

It was good to see Hugh Lorimer, who manages our website, and to hear first hand from him about the fantastic work he has put into this project.

Following the invaluable experience of involving our members in such discussions it was decided to hold Members Forums more frequently in connection with our normal schedule of Executive Committee meetings, and to vary their locations in order to enable different groups to attend. See below.

Future Meetings

- 19th January 2002 - Members Forum to be held at Stirling SYHA. An invitation will be circulated to members in Central Scotland in the new year, detailing topics for discussion. All members welcome.
- Further details can be obtained from the Secretary. See page 8 for contact.

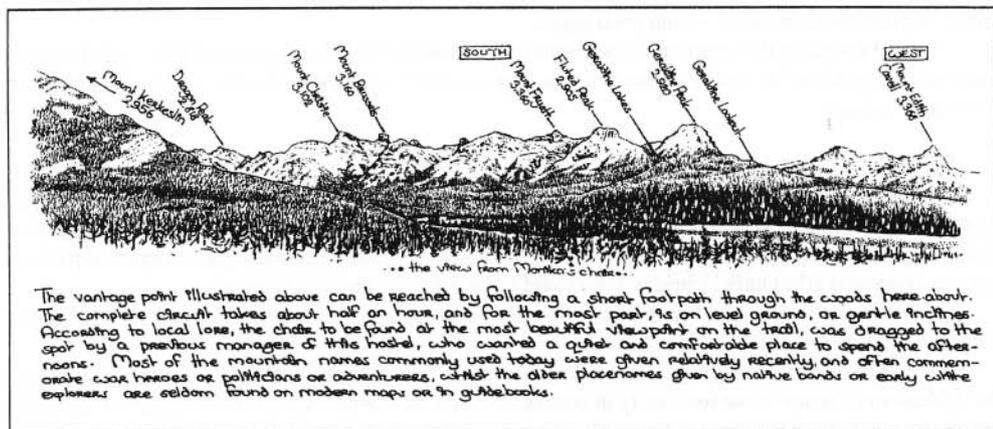
Hostel Management in the Canadian Rockies

by Neil Pinkett

The GHHT recently published a book of walks around Rhenigidale, written and illustrated by Neil Pinkett. Originally from Nottingham, Neil spent much of the 1990's exploring the Outer Hebrides, staying in or near to the Gatliff hostels. A few years ago he moved to British Columbia with his Canadian wife Krista, and then to Alberta where since April 2000 he has been managing a small hostel at Athabasca Falls, in the Jasper National Park. With over a year's experience behind him and the onset of his second winter at the hostel fast approaching, Neil gives us an insight into the reality and rewards of working in the Canadian Rockies.

Athabasca Falls Hostel is a 44 bed rustic Hostelling International hostel in a fairly remote location by the Icefields Parkway, a highway that links Jasper and Lake Louise, passing through some intensely beautiful wilderness on its way: majestic mountains; glaciers; fast flowing rivers; forests of lodgepole pine and aspen; and the odd aquamarine lakes. The hostel is comprised of 5 wooden cabins - a cookhouse, 3 dormitories and the manager's cabin. Water is drawn from an underground stream by a handpump and hauled in buckets to the cookhouse. heating is provided by wood stove and propane heaters, and the recent arrival of electricity gives us lighting, telephones and internet access. There is a Park-Warden station a few minutes walk away, but aside from that we are pretty much by ourselves, the little town of Jasper is 20 miles away and is the only significant settlement in Jasper National Park.

Two 'seasons' dominate the year at the hostel; the summer is by far the busiest time, most of our guests from May to mid October are international travellers; and in the winter, subject to snow conditions, the hostel gets busy on the weekends, predominantly with Canadians, out to ski, snow shoe or ice-climb. There is a lull of one to two months between these two seasons, when everything gets very quiet.



By October this year the snow was established on the surrounding mountains and temperatures were usually dropping to about -5°C at night. Last year it was colder, and that, combined with no snowfall in the valleys until late December, created dream conditions for ice-skating on the lakes. The lowest temperature we recorded last winter was -34°C which, though quite something to us, was nothing special out here. Deep cold can make things tricky, for instance metal door handles can become brittle, and propane turns to jelly at -43°C .

On rare occasions during wintertime we've seen the aurora borealis lighting up the sky, which is really special, as is watching clouds crashing over snow covered mountains by moonlight when its -20°C out and everything glitters with frost. Sometimes the wolves howl in the forest, a sound that really brings home the wildness of the place. The Athabasca Falls are a fine sight by late winter with all the accumulated ice formations.

By April the ice on the river is breaking up, and slowly expanding patches of forest floor appear as the snow recedes. After months of snow and ice, it is a novel experience to walk on pine needles again. In May the hummingbirds return from Central America, and calypso orchids are among the first spring flowers to appear. We can also expect to see the large male black bear that owns this bit of forest, who, being very hungry after hibernating, is more concerned with finding food than encounters with humans, and hence is more likely to bump into us at this time of year. On one occasion he threw the barbeque over, and another time he was on the back porch of our cabin, evidently about to eat our pet cat, when I disturbed him, but he's not too much bother.

Spring is also a good time to see moose, tempted closer than usual by the new leaves on deciduous trees and bushes. There is a lone female elk who sometimes hangs around the hostel too, my opinion is that she was rejected by the herd, and stays close to humans as she knows that wolves and big cats won't hunt her there. She also rather likes the rhubarb and raspberry leaves in our garden.

There are several rustic hostels in the Canadian Rockies that are more basic than Athabasca Falls, and are very similar in spirit to the Gatliff hostels, though they are only 'off the beaten track' in the colder months. One of these is Mount Edith Cavell Hostel, a lovely little place with gas lamps and only woodstoves for heat, which has to be reached under one's own steam in the winter, along a switch-backing lane that climbs for 8 miles to the hostel, and its stunning location. In the summer the road is open to traffic and much of the magic is lost until the gate at the roadhead closes again for the next winter.

Anyone who loves the Gatliff hostels should consider dropping by these rustic hostels if travelling in this neck of the woods - the landscapes are quite different, but the hostels themselves are not too distant from each other, in essence.

Further information on Athabasca Falls and neighbouring hostels can be found at www.hihostels.ca/alberta



The cookhouse at Athabasca Falls hostel after this winter's first heavy snowfall, in early November.

WORK PARTY REPORT

Berneray - 10th to 16th September 2001

On 9th September four keen work party members left New Galloway for a week's work on Berneray. The party consisted of my wife Susan, David Morton, newcomer Dan Sailor, and myself. We travelled up to Skye, staying the night in a hostel, then caught the early boat from Uig across to Lochmaddy, ready to start work on the Monday. We had a good crossing and arrived at Berneray in the afternoon in good weather. The rest of the afternoon was spent planning the work programme for the week.

We had lots of work to do, the main job involving replacing the fence in front of the hostel and erecting a small fence around the end of the annex to protect the roof from the sheep. It was decided that Dan and I would tackle this while Dave and Susan varnished the doors and window frames, along with a lot of other odds and ends, time permitting. We enquired with the fence suppliers who told us that it would all arrive next day at 12 noon, so we were happy that all was well.

Next day Susan and Dave started sanding the doors and window frames while Dan and I started by putting lines down so we could get the fence straight. We then began making holes in the ground and were blessed with no rocks, just firm sand, so pole hole making was quite easy. The main problem was the heavy rain showers that kept hitting us, maybe not so much for us but a nuisance for the two doing the painting.

The fencing took four days to complete and because of the sand we managed to get it straight and level. We found some old wire pullers on the old fencing so with a "bit of bodging" we made them work and we pulled the fence taught. Susan and Dave got all the windows and doors varnished in five days so we had time for other odd jobs such as returning the front "lawn", clearing away rubbish from around the hostel, and generally making the hostel clean and tidy.

At the end of the week we set off to Garenin for a series of meetings, including the AGM in Stornoway on the Saturday morning. At the AGM I was elected as the Work Party Organiser, so if you would like your name added to the list for future work parties please contact me. (details on back page)

After the AGM we headed home, staying at Glencoe hostel on the way. I would like to record my very special thanks to Susan, Dave and Dan for all they did to make Berneray so neat and tidy and also for all their hard work during the week. I look forward to the next work party in 2002.

Alan Sidaway - Work Party Organiser &
Berneray Hostel Representative

HOSTEL NEWS & MAINTENANCE

Berneray - With the new fencing having been completed in the September work party the biggest task still outstanding at Berneray is the re-thatching of the annex. It had been hoped to see this carried out before the winter in order to prevent any further damage to the inner roof structure. However, things are never quite as simple as one would hope, and as time has now moved on it would be unwise to tackle such a task until the spring. In addition, we are awaiting a reply from Historic Scotland on the possibility of a grant towards the cost of the work which, if we were successful, would not be put through until the next financial year, April 2002, and we would not be able to begin the work until then.

In the mean time the Berneray Re-thatching Appeal has been very successful. As of 16th December the fund stands at £3,337 with an additional £546 of reclaimable tax from gift aids. With £1,200 donated by the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust the overall total is now £5,083. Our sincere thanks go to all those who have already contributed to this worthy cause.

Garenin - The Garenin Black House Village restoration project was completed during the summer and was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal in June. Peter Clarke represented the GHHT at the ceremony, on a particularly cold and windy day.

Howmore - David & Jane Shields from Living Water visited Howmore during the summer to check on the condition of the reed bed septic tank system. They advised us that they were happy with the state of the water discharging from the system but could take no further action with sorting the plants as a corncrake was found to have taken up residence in the reed beds! This was, of course, good news for the local RSPB representative who came to see the bird and its nest.

Rhenigidale - Estimates for the work to be carried out inside the hostel have now been received and this is due to go ahead early in the new year during the quieter time, so as not to inconvenience hostellers. As well as the refurbishment of the shower room, the downstairs flooring is to receive a fresh, and hopefully smooth, top surface. The Gatliff Trust has kindly given £1500 towards the cost of this work, along with a donation of £50 from the family of Graham MacDonald, former treasurer of the GHHT.

With the 40th Anniversary celebrations taking place at Rhenigidale at the beginning of June next year we hope to have a good session of generally tidying the hostel and carrying out any small improvements necessary beforehand.

REINIGEADAL 40th ANNIVERSARY

3RD JUNE 2002

Next year marks an important milestone in the history of the Gatliff hostels when we will look back on the 40 years since Herbert Gatliff established the very first hostel at Rhenigidale. In the early 1960's Herbert, who was already heavily involved with the YHA, was keen to see some basic hostels established in the Outer Hebrides. After his negotiations with the SYHA came to nothing he decided to do it himself. A friend of his, Mac Hoskin, was travelling in the islands and happened to meet Roddy MacInnes who owned an empty building in Rhenigidale. Roddy became very interested in the possibility of this being opened as a hostel and by Easter 1962 this came about, with Roddy as warden. Initially the hostel was no more than a simple bothy with camp beds and an open fire, and hostellers would bring their own cooking utensils. The building was later completely refurbished, including the addition of upstairs dormitories, re-opening in July 1992.

The celebrations are due to take place on Bank Holiday Monday 3rd June 2002. Subject to confirmation the plan is for everyone wishing to take part to meet up in Tarbert, probably at the Harris Hotel. We will then walk the 6 miles to Rhenigidale over the old path and continue the celebrations at the hostel. Those unable to join the walk may be able to make arrangements with the operators of the Rhenigidale Taxi Bus, who also do private hire, in order to reach the hostel. They can be contacted on 01859 502221.

We are very keen to hear from any members who stayed at Rhenigidale during its first few years and have any photographs or particular recollections they would like to share. Did you meet Roddy, or even Herbert Gatliff during this time? It would be great to be able to put together some hostellers' stories from these early years of the Gatliff hostels. If you can help in any way please contact the editor at the address on the back page.

All hostellers who have stayed at Rhenigidale over the past 40 years are welcome to join us in celebrating this anniversary. Full details of the programme of events will be available from our Stornoway address and on our website www.gatliff.org.uk in the spring.

In November Hugh Lorimer completed an overhaul of the GHHT website and it is now looking even better. It was brought to our attention that the website contained no history of Herbert Gatliff and how the hostels came about. Len Clark, who wrote a book about Herbert Gatliff, kindly agreed for us to use some of his material for our site.

At the recent Members Forum in York it was suggested that maybe some members would be happy to receive the Hebridean Hostellers newsletter by email instead of printed hard copy. I would be interested to hear people's views on this so that we can give it further consideration. Email the editor at the address below.

Publications

Sleeping Under a Simple Roof - Last few copies remaining, articles and artwork from a variety of sources giving history, story and anecdote on bothies and simple hostels including a fair chunk of information and a fair few pictures of GHHT hostels. Profits have been donated to GHHT, the SYHA Simple Hostels Funds, bothy maintenance and the like. Arthur Meaby was impressed with this book and arranged for copies to be put in a lot of the YHA (E&W)'s simple hostels. Copies available from **Richard Genner, 45 Godwinsway, Stamford Bridge, York, YO41 1DA** at £3.50 each (incl. P&P). (Cheques or PO only please payable to **R Genner**).

Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal - A guide to the many varied walks available in and around Rhenigidale, beautifully written and illustrated by Neil Pinkett. Includes a brief history of the hostel, the village, and the arrival of the road and electricity. Published by GHHT with all profits going back to the hostels. Available from **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Western Isles, HS1 2ND** at £3.50 each (incl. P&P). Cheques payable to **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**. Currently available at Rhenigidale hostel, and from Tarbert & Stornoway Tourist Offices from next season.

Moving House?

If you are moving house or changing address please remember to inform the membership secretary so that we can keep our records up to date and keep you supplied with the latest news from GHHT.

Lawrence Washington - December 2001

ADDRESSES

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