



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

newsletter 36

June 2003



The End of the Road at Garenin.
(Photo by courtesy of Iain Mackenzie - www.islandsofinspiration.com)

Hostel Overnights 2002

The figures for people staying in the hostels during 2002 were the best since 1999. All hostels increased their overnights year on year and Howmore had its best figures ever.

The total overnights approached the 5000 mark and the increase of almost 10% over the previous year indicated substantial progress following the particularly difficult times when UK tourism was affected generally by the foot and mouth outbreaks.

Hostel	Males	Females	Total	Increase
Berneray	915	697	1612	7.1%
Garenin	694	622	1316	7.4%
Howmore	716	506	1222	18.2%
Rhenigidale	487	316	806	4.7%
Totals	2812	2141	4953	9.3%

What was particularly encouraging was that a significant number of hostellers stayed on or returned. Thanks are due to our Wardens for the welcome and hospitality that they gave.

Guiding Lights

There has been a considerable increase in the number of hostels offering basic accommodation and amenities. A new Scottish Hostel Guide, produced by Highland Hostels, incorporates the facilities offered by the SYHA as well as those of the Gatliff Trust. We shall be continuing the SYHA Reward Card Scheme and offering a free overnight once six hostel stamps have been acquired.

No Advanced Bookings

E-mail enquiries about the possible booking of hostel beds in advance receive a standard reply which indicates that this service is not available. During 2002 there was a follow-up and 58 questionnaires were sent to these enquirers. 45% of them responded. Three of these did not make it to the islands; four did not use the hostels of whom two were in charge of organised groups. Four respondents reported problems finding a bed. All who visited the islands indicated that they would be returning and 95% affirmed that they would consider using the hostels again. The 'no bookings' policy that appears to have worked well for the past 40 years will continue. The prospective hosteller who e-mailed the following message from Oban - 'I am just about to board ferry for Lochboisdale. Please reserve me a bed at Howmore' - had to learn how things work. Fellow-travellers of the future will follow the same trail of experience !

Individual Projects

The Thatch Appeal at Berneray has so far raised £6525 and this has included a donation of £500 by the Croydon YHA Group. The Improvement Appeal at Garenin now stands at £1496 and this was boosted by a donation of £100 from the Royal Lancashire Freemasons' Lodge No 116.

Membership Momentum

The membership of the GHHT in 2002 was 256. Since the dispatch of the delayed Crofters Newsletter there has been an increase in the number joining and this should become evident in the 2003 figures. One aspect of the Rhenigidale 40th Anniversary Walk was a significant increase in the membership of Lewis and Harris residents.

Alan Busson Back

There was particularly good news from a Gatliff Trust Meeting when Alan Busson expressed a willingness to get involved in the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust again. His detailed work in helping to set up the GHHT in 1988, forming Charitable Status for the organisation and being its Secretary until 1996 were much appreciated. His professional workload led to his having to cut back on this commitment, but now he feels able to be back on board as a member of the Executive Committee.

Future Meetings

Attendance at future meetings of the GHHT will certainly take you to different parts of the UK. The Members' Forum will be at the Melrose SYHA on Saturday 2 August at 10.30 am. Then the AGM will be at Howmore on South Uist on Saturday 20 September. The final meeting of the year will be the Holland House GHHT Forum in London on Saturday 29 November at 10.30 am.

Gaelic Actions

The Government has indicated that its election commitment to a Gaelic Act remains at a time when the language faces continual cultural threats. Indeed all minority languages are in danger. Andrew Dalby, author of *A Dictionary of Languages*, forecasts that in 200 years time the 5000 languages that currently exist throughout the world will be reduced to 200.

In an article in *The Times*, the columnist Ben Macintyre considered how *'the essence of language is to frame the world through individual eyes, and local words. Gaelic defined a specific way of looking at the world.'* He quoted his namesake, the 18th Century Gaelic poet Donnchadh Ban MacIntyre, who wrote on this vital cultural perspective: *'chan fhaca tusa i leis na suilean agamsa; you have not seen her with my eyes.'*

Bernard Selwyn, a founder Trustee of the GT and a member of the GHHT, has advised us that there are a number of errors or misleading information in the 2002 hostel leaflet. This is because the Ordnance Survey has Gaelicised many place-names in the revisions of its Landranger Series and larger-scale Road Map of Western Scotland. The Anglicised names are left only for the islands, main lochs, towns or townships. These changes will be incorporated into our publications and should be complete by the 2004 edition of the hostels leaflet.

Records and Requests

This is the 36th Newsletter in the Hebridean Hostellers' series and, soon after publication, a copy will be sent to the British Library. Here it will join the previous 35 issues that were, earlier this year, deposited in the Library's archives. The complete set of back-numbers came from Alan Sidaway, our Working Party Organiser, who is now seeking to acquire a full-set of the Crofters Newsletters. The four missing editions are numbers 7, 8, 9 and 17 and once they have been found they too will be 'laid down' at the British Library as a permanent record of this aspect of the Trust's work.

Alan has recently become the new Records Secretary of the Mountain Bothies Association and looks forward to acquiring and accessing the information of that organisation devoted to accommodation in remote places.

Getting Known

Our web-site www.gatliff.org.uk has a constant stream of visitors, well over one thousand so far this year. The counter, that can be accessed from the foot of the home-page, was fitted in January 2003 and the first full month recorded 276 visitors in February. This increased to 301 in March, fell back to 218 in April, but then recorded its monthly highest number with 369 in May. The highest number of visitors in any one day was 20 on Tuesday 27 May. That was the day after the UK Spring Bank Holiday when, perhaps, a number of people regretted not having been in 'Gatliff country' !

The busiest day for visitors during the working week is Monday, with Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday being virtually identical for those looking around the site. Friday's tally is the lowest of the working days, while Saturday and Sunday are lower again but almost equal in terms of visitors. The most popular hour to log in is between 4.00 - 5.00 pm and this could, perhaps, tell us something about people at a loose end in offices ? Most people come directly to the site, but the search engine, Google, is the main access point for those that use this means of enquiry.

The main countries of origin are the UK and the USA. However, there are indications that people have explored the site from Japan, the United Arab Emirates and the Slovak Republic. Thanks are due to Hugh Lorrimer for maintaining the site in his role as webmaster and for making the places, appreciated by the hostel-users, accessible to those who have yet to visit in person. An advantage to all readers of this newsletter is that the contents are available on-line, with the photographs in colour.

Revival of Memories

Those who regularly travel through the Highlands and Islands probably accumulate a vivid stock of memories. Light and landscape linger in the mind. A stimulating way of reviving them is to look at the web-sites of those photographers who capture the essential patterns and who often convey elements that are 'visionary.' Two producers of calendars and cards are the Orkney-based Charles Tait at www.charles-tait.co.uk and the Oban-based Sue Anderson on www.islandfocus.co.uk Her claim of 'Photography with Passion' is evident. The distinctive colours of Hebridean waters are a speciality of James Smith whose work is displayed at the Oiseval Gallery on Lewis. He plays a 'long waiting-game' on occasions to seize the moment and his work is there to be seen on www.oiseval.co.uk Scenes depicted by Iain Mackenzie, from Tong, Lewis, have a particularly inspirational appeal and are profusely featured on www.islandsofinspiration.com This site will soon be re-launched with an even more expansive effect. Consider all these sites that use a technology that is timely to access sights that are timeless.



Loch Seaforth to the north of Rhenigidale
(Photo by courtesy of Iain Mackenzie - www.islandsofinspiration.com)

Scarp Sequel

Two prominent members of the Gatliff Trust responded to the article on Scarp and its hostel in the last newsletter. Frank Martin recalled camping close to the hostel, a thatched and vulnerable crofters' house, which 'survived' from 1965 until 1970. Although services were limited on the island, the unsolicited milk and eggs left outside his tent were much appreciated.

Roger Clifton wrote the following: *'I was one of the young people - including several of the present trustees - who were encouraged by Herbert to take an active part in the YHA. This soon widened to include the Gatliff Trust, and I made my first visit to Rhenigidale in about 1964. That first walk over to the village on an idyllic summer's day remains a vivid and entrancing memory. Later on, in 1977, with the help of my brother-in-law, Dr John Macleod of Lochmaddy, I found and set up the hostel at Berneray - a very different building in those early days. It has been transformed by many of the volunteers and work parties since then. I led one party myself in 1985, when we re-thatched it and undertook various building works. The team was recruited via the International Volunteer Service and we had a group of people from all over Europe. I think they had to work harder than they expected, but all fell under the spell of an island and we had a great week. Everyone stopped for a swim at tea-time.*

I never visited the hostel on Scarp, but years later - around 1980, I think - the Trust was asked if we would like to use the old schoolhouse on Scarp as a hostel, and I went to look at the possibility. The weather was fantastic again. Harris is the most beautiful of all the islands and the road to Hushinish is one of the loveliest parts. I managed to get a boat over to Scarp and had all too short a day exploring. The school was in quite good condition and it looked as if the children had only just left; their books were in the desks and notes were still chalked up on the blackboard. It was quite poignant, especially in view of the fine educational record mentioned in the article. Unfortunately the difficulties of access would have made both usage and maintenance somewhat problematic. As the sums did not really add up, we did not take it on. For some reason I now forget, I was given a private tour of Amhuinnsuidhe Castle on the way back. Its undoubted splendours did not compete with what I had just left, and I'm sure a little bit of Scarp must remain in the heart of anyone who has been there.

As treasurer of the Gatliff Trust I was also the first treasurer of GHHT for a year or two while it was being 'devolved.' It has been heart-warming to see how things have thrived since then thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of so many people. I'll be back there this Summer.'

Roger's observation that 'Harris is the most beautiful of all the islands' could lead

to discussion. However, the Editor welcomes nominations for the most remarkable places to be found within relatively short distances of the four hostels. Responses, please, by e-mail to editor@gatliff.org.uk

Focus on a Man of Interests and a Book of Insights

The former Chairman and current Membership Secretary of the GHHT is Peter Clarke, a man who has a singular passion for many interests. A glance at his web-site, www.peterclarke.com will reveal how he combines enthusiasm for his professional work while maintaining a wide range of pursuits. One assignment that set him in pursuing a little-used track was to undertake a cross-country journey on foot through the inhabited islands, from the Butt of Lewis to Hellinish Point on the heel of Vatersay.

This distinctive journey that crossed moors and hills, skirted crofting and common land, traversed streams and tidal fords, took him through breath-taking scenery and fascinating settlements. It opened a window in time through which it is possible to see the heritage bequeathed by the Vikings, Celts, Stuarts, Clans as well as the Christian Church and the ways it has become interwoven with ancient and modern Gaelic culture.

A full account of this travel narrative is due to be published in 2004. Interest in Peter Clarke's book *The Timeless Way* will be considerable, both in the islands and wherever they are appreciated. Those who share Peter's enthusiasm for this project should contact him through the address given at the end of this newsletter.

North Harris Partnership

The work of the John Muir Trust is well-known throughout the world and its projects in the West Highlands, on the Knoydart Peninsula and the Sandwood Estate in the far North-west, are within sight of the Hebrides. In 2002 the JMT became prospective partners with the people of North Harris in the community's bid to buy the 56,000-acre North Harris Estate. This includes 104 crofts and 12 townships, including the main population centre of Tarbert. The bid was successful and full details of what has happened is available via www.north-harris.org Our hostel at Rhenigidale is well-positioned for those wanting a base to explore this vast area of outstandingly-interesting and remote land on the west side of the island. A picture of the hostel is due to appear in the Summer edition of the JMT's twice-yearly publication *Journal & News*.

Hostel Charges - 2003

The costs for accommodation have been set for this year and are:

Overnight fee: £7.50 (increase 50p) Overnight fee Under 18: £5.50 (+25p)

Overnight camping fee: £3.75 (+25p) Day charge: 0.90 (no increase)

Hire of sheet sleeping bag: £1.50 for up to 7 nights use (no increase)

An aspect of these charges is that they can be considered to include four features: accommodation, the company of like-minded travellers, a wealth of information about the surrounding area as well as a contribution to preserving a distinctive group of hostels.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Ten Years Ago*

'It is with considerable regret that the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and the wardens Catrina and Tommy Tosh jointly announce that Claddach Baleshare hostel is closed with immediate effect.' [May 1993]

..... and of Fifteen Years Ago

'From 1 April 1988 the day-to-day management of the hostels will devolve to a new charitable organisation, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. This is known as the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, also known by its Gaelic equivalent, Urras Osdailean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff. It will 'trade' as the Hebridean Hostellers.' [March 1988]

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