



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

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Rhenigidale - on the way to The Shiants
(Photograph by Iain Mackenzie - www.islandsofinspiration.com)

Captured and Captivating

Three photographers who have captured impressions of the captivating land and sea of the Western Isles deserve our attention. One is Iain Mackenzie, from Tong on Lewis. He again provides the cover photograph for *Hebridean Hostellers* and his work on display at www.islandsofinspiration.com attracts many visitors.

One of Iain's specialities is to transform old photographs into modern, restored formats and this service is one that revives memories, preserves past images and creates much pleasure. Please consider using his professional skills and mention this newsletter if you contact him.

Lisa Nelson, a New Englander from Massachusetts, now lives in England. Her website www.ljnelson.com features her work, philosophy and photographs. One, a rainbow on the beach at Seilebost, is a reminder of how close this stunning scenery of South Harris is to Rhenigdale.

The shore a little way to the north at Luskentyre has inspired many, including the award-winning photographer, Richard Cooke. His book, *Coastline UK - Amazing Views from the Air*, was published on 1 June by Thames and Hudson at £24.99.

When Richard Cooke was asked about his favourite places along the Scottish coastline, he responded 'I think Loch Shawbost in Lewis and Luskentyre in Harris were two of the most enchanting places – craggy summits, razor-sharp outcrops, gauzy pools of turquoise.' It is worth noting that Shawbost is only some six miles to the north and east of Garenin. Follow the lead of these photographers and look for yourselves.

Gifts for the Smaller Hostels

Supporters of the GHHT and its work are evident in many forms of contribution. Philip Cotton, the brother and executor of the late Ron Cotton who died in September 2003, has written to us. He refers to Ron's friendship with Herbert Gatliff and Arthur Meaby in the 1950s & '60s as well as to his being Treasurer of the London Region of the YHA. In his later years he became warden of the Earls Court Youth Hostel in Bolton Gardens, where he remained until his retirement in 1987. He used to say that the large city hostels could not help but make money and that they should use part of their profits to keep open networks of simple hostels in the more remote areas. Consequently, he expressed a wish through his executor to donate £500 each to the Small Hostels Fund of the YHA and to the Gatliff Trust hostels.

Dates for Future Meetings

The Executive Committee will be meeting, as at yet undecided venues, on Saturdays 17 July and 11 September. The topics that will be featured in these sessions are 'risk assessments' at the former and 'financial accounts' at the latter. The AGMs of both the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and its parent body, the Gatliff Trust, will be at the Holland Park Youth Hostel in London on Saturday 27 November.

Consider Kershader

Our flyer, *Simple Hostels in the Outer Hebrides*, is available from Tourist Information Centres in the major cities of Scotland as well as at the Cockspur Street office of the Scottish Tourist Board in London. It obviously features our four hostels, but mentions the facilities at the Kershader hostel in the South Lochs area of Lewis.

This hostel, which is owned and operated by the local Community Co-operative, is situated in a fine position, six miles from the Tarbert - Stornoway road, on the south shore of Loch Eireasort, and occupies a modernised former-school. The complex includes a shop and café. This building has a simple, functional style and attractive views. It is also on the road to that mysterious part of the Western Isles, the Park.

Those who are considering studying the features of this depopulated area should find out more about the researches of the late Angus Macleod on the ten villages of the northern part of the peninsula as well as into the uninhabited tracts to the south. He chronicled the late 19th and early 20th century protests and agitation of the Lewis land struggle, and directly observed the resurgence of pride, the social changes and the decline in population numbers in and around the South Lochs.

Plans are underway to preserve and make available to the public the important cultural resource known as the Angus Macleod Archive - the life's work of this remarkable Calbost-born character who lived from 1916 -2002. He was at various times a crofter, seaman, community leader, historian and genealogist as well as the driving force behind the formation of the Scottish Crofters Union in 1985.

For those who want to see quintessential Hebridean landscapes, seascapes and escapes, Kershader makes a fine touring centre. The facilities operated by the co-operative do give it added attractions. It is a gateway to an area with a heritage that is being discovered and which, at sometime in the future, will be displayed.

Web Watch

Keep your eyes on our website - changes are imminent. Many people from all parts of the world continue to access information and their visits certainly add up. There have been over 1000 visitors during April and May as the holiday-planning season is well underway.

Hugh Lorimer is responsible for the maintenance and the re-design of the site and we are grateful to him for keeping information on our hostels open all hours. In fact, the site is rather like the hostels themselves.

The photograph featured on the home page of the website has a certain significance. It is taken from the ruin of the former Gatliff hostel on Scarp across the sound to the hills of North Harris and is meant to replicate the colours, sea-patterns and land-profiles of these off-shore islands that mean so much to so many.

Get Out, About and Back

The Islands Book Trust is promoting a series of lectures, visits and conferences that will attract and appeal to enthusiasts who want to get out to see things for themselves and get back to discover some roots of civilisation.

On Saturday 10 July Adam Nicholson, the author of *Sea Room*, will be talking about The Shiants, the group of islands that he owns. The lecture will be at 10.30 at Tigh Ceildh in Gravir, followed by a boat trip to the islands themselves. Full details of the proposed events and availability are posted on the website www.theislandsbooktrust.com

Then on Tuesday 17 August at 19.30, Michael Robson will be considering *The Impact of the Outside World on St Kilda* in a presentation at 10 Callicvol at the Port of Ness. Three months later, on Tuesday 16 November, he will be introducing ideas on *The Life and Work of J A Harvie-Brown*. This intrepid Victorian naturalist collected much information on the wildlife of the islands.

The three-day international conference on *The Traditions of Sea-Bird Fowling in the North Atlantic Region* will be held at Ness from Thursday 9 - Saturday 11 September. The international element will include examinations of activities in Ireland, the Faeroes and Iceland, while the local interest will centre on the guga hunters and their annual visit to Sulasgeir. There will be a special opportunity to sample the guga at an evening meal. Again go to the website above for a foretaste of these events.

Membership Matters

The membership of the GHHT has remained stable at around 250 despite the increase in the annual subscription to £10. The need for new members is not primarily financial, it is a matter of injecting additional energy, innovative ideas and different perspectives. The Executive Committee Meetings usually take place on a Saturday afternoon, with the morning given over to a Members' Forum. No one knows how many will turn up and expectations are, of course, relatively low. So it was stimulating when nine members appeared at the February meeting in Manchester. These included Stuart Jones, from Scarborough, who had come by train. When he made a welcome return, to the Stornoway meeting in May, he arrived by bicycle and left by ship.

Overnights

We are back to our high 1996 levels, with 6104 bed-nights recorded at the hostels during 2003. The total for 2002 was 5199, with the individual hostel numbers in brackets:

Berneray	2056 (1858)	Garenin	1529 (1316)
Howmore	1627 (1222)	Rhenigidale	892 (803)

These figures show increases everywhere, including a rise in the number of campers, and indicate that longer stays are evident, particularly by visitors from continental Europe.

Warm and Calm

The weather for the Arthur Meaby Memorial Walk on Sunday 16 May was particularly appropriate, in being both warm and calm. 60 people attended, representing, literally, the many walks of life in which Arthur had been involved. They met at the Exceat Visitors' Centre, went eastwards along the South Downs Way to Beachy Head and then for a fine tea at Alfriston Youth Hostel laid on by the Warden, courtesy of Arthur's family. Here thanks were expressed by Frank Martin, the Chairman of the Gatliff Trust. Tributes were paid by Graham Robinson, who often accompanied Arthur on events organised by the Long Distance Walkers' Association, and by Arthur's sister, Mrs Betty Burtenshaw of Brighton. In fact Arthur had been looking forward to taking part in the Seven Sisters' Walk which occurred shortly after his death. On the occasion of this memorial event, 50 of his relatives, friends and colleagues, passed along the same cliff-top formation.

Interests Continued

Herbert Gatliff was an enthusiast for the Outdoor Movement that had its heyday in the 1920s & '30s, but which has left many legacies that are enjoyed by millions of people. The GHHT continues to make contributions to some of the organisations that he supported. One of them, for example, is ScotWays, the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society, which has endeavoured to safeguard public access since 1845. The short cut to their activities is via www.scotways.com. Some of their work is assisted by interested parties sending in 'Pathcards' which give details of the essential rights of way. Over 9000 have been analysed so far. There is a competition running at present involving the submission of these vital cards. The prize is for two nights dinner, bed and breakfast for two people sharing at the renowned Burts Hotel in Melrose.

Take the P-Road

The journey from Stornoway to Carloway, and onto Garenin, can be undertaken on the fast A858, with a distant glimpse of the countryside around the Stones of Callanish. However, the more exciting route is to take the Pentland Road and travel over terrain without a house in sight. The peat bogs, once extensively worked by local residents, and the ruins testify to former settlements. Even the access to Carloway itself is by a road-system based on the old workings of a mineral railway. The Pentland route itself may look formidable from the map, but it is a metalled road with plenty of passing places. The main difficulty is finding the right turning on the way out of Stornoway on the A859. Take the Marybank road, but avoid the way to the refuse tip.

An Outpost from Fair Isle

One of the most compelling publications available to those who enjoy tramping around remote parts is a bi-monthly publication, *Scottish Islands Explorer*. Its home is Fair Isle, famed for its bird-watching and being cut off during the Winter, between the Shetlands and Orkneys. Its scope is to consider those parts of Scotland that are insular and distinctive.

Some readers of this publication will be aware that the GHHT has featured in the two recent issues. A profile of the late Herbert Gatliff appeared in March/ April and the former hostel on Scarp appeared in the May / June issue.

The former edition has sold out, but the latter is still available. This may be purchased and subscriptions placed direct from Auld Haa, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU. Alternatively phone 01595 693380 or access www.scottishislandsexplorer.com

Values of Traditional Hostelling

In the last issue of *Hebridean Hostellers*, mention was made of the May 1993 closure of the Gatliff hostel at Claddach Baleshare and an appeal made for accounts of memorable stays and encounters. Susan Morrison, from Glasgow, may not have read this item, but happened to make contact via the website to enquire about the state of the hostel. When informed that it had become a ruin, she was ready to recall an overnight spent there when it was vibrant place for people to stay.



Tommy and Catrina Tosh, former wardens of Claddach Baleshare, pictured in September 2003

'I was just wondering what happened to the above hostel. I have stayed in hostels all over the globe but my night spent here back in 1989 still remains the best ever. I have fond memories of the warden [Catrina Tosh] who enlightened us to the fact that she had been born in the hostel and that it had been built by one of her ancestors. My friend, Eileen McGuinness, and I stayed there and met two older Irishmen on a cycling holiday, Jack Walsh (of the Climbers Inn, Glencar, County Kerry) and Daithi Scolard, who delighted us with climbing tales from around the world. There was also an Englishwoman, Anne, a German couple and the hostel cat and kitten. We had a proper ceilidh with tales, songs, jokes from everyone's different cultures. We shared a dram and made the adventurous trip to the loo in the hen house by torchlight.

Catrina Tosh spoke English with a Glasgow accent and Gaelic as the native of North Uist that she is. She and the Irishmen were able to communicate in their mother tongues.

I have done a search on the Internet and note that the Climbers Inn in Glencar now has a website and is run by Jack's son. I don't suppose he will remember us, but the following year, Eileen and I decided to go to Ireland with another friend and trek all the way from Donegal to Kerry to stay at this renowned Inn. We were warmly welcomed, had a lovely dinner and enjoyed more tales.

Eileen and I also camped outside Howmore. It was here we met David Mathers, born in Glasgow, but now resident in Australia. We eventually met David again at Lochmaddy Youth Hostel, along with a Finish chap, Jari, and a Glaswegian doctor, Marion. We all took the ferry to Uig, stayed at the hostel there before returning to Glasgow. We arranged to see David the following week before he went to London and took him on a pub tour of the city. We still keep in touch and I was lucky enough to be at his wedding in Sydney back in 1996. He and his wife, Jenny, now run a fine bed & breakfast establishment in Queensland and it can be viewed at www.cudgerie.com

This may be just another tale among many, but it demonstrates how wonderful friends may be made through traditional hostelling.'

The State We Are In

The hostels are generally in a good state of repair and those small jobs that have to be done are receiving attention. Alan Sidaway, our Maintenance Officer, has dispatched updated supplies of equipment to the hostels and these are in place for the season. His postcard system will soon be fully operational and this will identify tasks to be undertaken by the October work-party. If you want to become involved with this group of practical enthusiasts, please contact Alan via wpo@gatliff.org.uk and he will send you a Profile Volunteer Form.

Focus on Energy Equipment

As part of a UK-wide programme, Lews Castle College in Stornoway has received funding from the Community Energy Unit at HIE and Western Isles Enterprise to launch a new course in the installation of renewable energy technologies. The college hopes to offer training in the installation of photo-voltaic systems, solar water heating, wind power and heat pump technology so that local individuals can learn the necessary skills. There will be no need to bring in people from beyond the islands to undertake installation work in the future.

Small-scale community renewable energy developments throughout the Western Highlands & Islands are currently being hampered by a lack of the local expertise needed to install equipment. Feasibility studies are certainly in mind for the Gatliff hostels.

Pulling Strings and Striking Chords

All organisations depend on those people who are either 'fixers', 'movers' or 'connectors'. Within any group of enthusiasts there is a rich diversity of skills and interests. So among the Hebridean Hostellers there is a range of accomplished individuals who are ready to share or sell what they produce. Robert Deegan, for example, is a harpsichord maker and can be found at Tonnage Warehouse, St George's Quay, Lancaster. So here is an obvious start to a process where mention is made in these columns of those members who can pull strings and strike chords either metaphorically or, in this case, literally !

Code for Cash

The Self Assessment Tax Return has, as indicated in the last issue, a feature that could benefit the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust with your help. It is the means of nominating a charity for part or all of any overpaid tax. So please, if you are considering this way of painless giving, note the GHHT's unique Inland Revenue code - XAA70JG – instruct the Inland Revenue accordingly, and then inform Peter Clarke, the Treasurer and Membership Secretary. He will then know what to look out for when the donation appears on the GHHT bank statement.

Sounds Good from CalMac

Caledonian MacBrayne has introduced two new discounted tickets for frequent users of the ferries across the Sounds of Harris and Barra. The new tickets offer discounts of over 40% for cars and can be purchased only at ports relating to the two routes concerned: Castlebay / Lochboisdale for the Sound of Barra and Tarbert / Lochmaddy for the Sound of Harris.

From the Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Ten Years Ago

J L (Len) Westerdale wrote of a visit to Berneray: 'Inside were two Germans, a young-ish lad and his female companion, neither of whom seemed too pleased to have their peace disturbed by an English OAP. However as soon as they discovered that I spoke their language, their attitudes changed completely and the rest of the day was sheer pleasure.

It might interest you to know what the Germans were doing at Berneray and why they lingered on some time after I left. They were involved in a project financed by the German Evangelical Church, to take two teenage German boys on tours of Britain, Iceland and Spain. The boys had, I believe, been on the fringe of crime if not actually involved in it. The journey was intended to get them away from the urban environment of German consumerism and provide an educational and therapeutic experience. This lad had English lessons in the afternoon and I was invited to join in. I had the impression that the 'therapy' was working. For 'therapy' read 'Berneray'. They had intended to stay longer because they enjoyed the peace so much.'

[When Len died in 2000 his family and friends made donations towards the re-thatching of Berneray in his memory.]

..... and of Fifteen Years Ago

Peter Clarke writes: 'A new body, the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, is now in existence and managing the crofters' hostels. Is this just the onward march of bureaucracy or is it a step in the direction of more and better hostels in the Outer Hebrides?'

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