

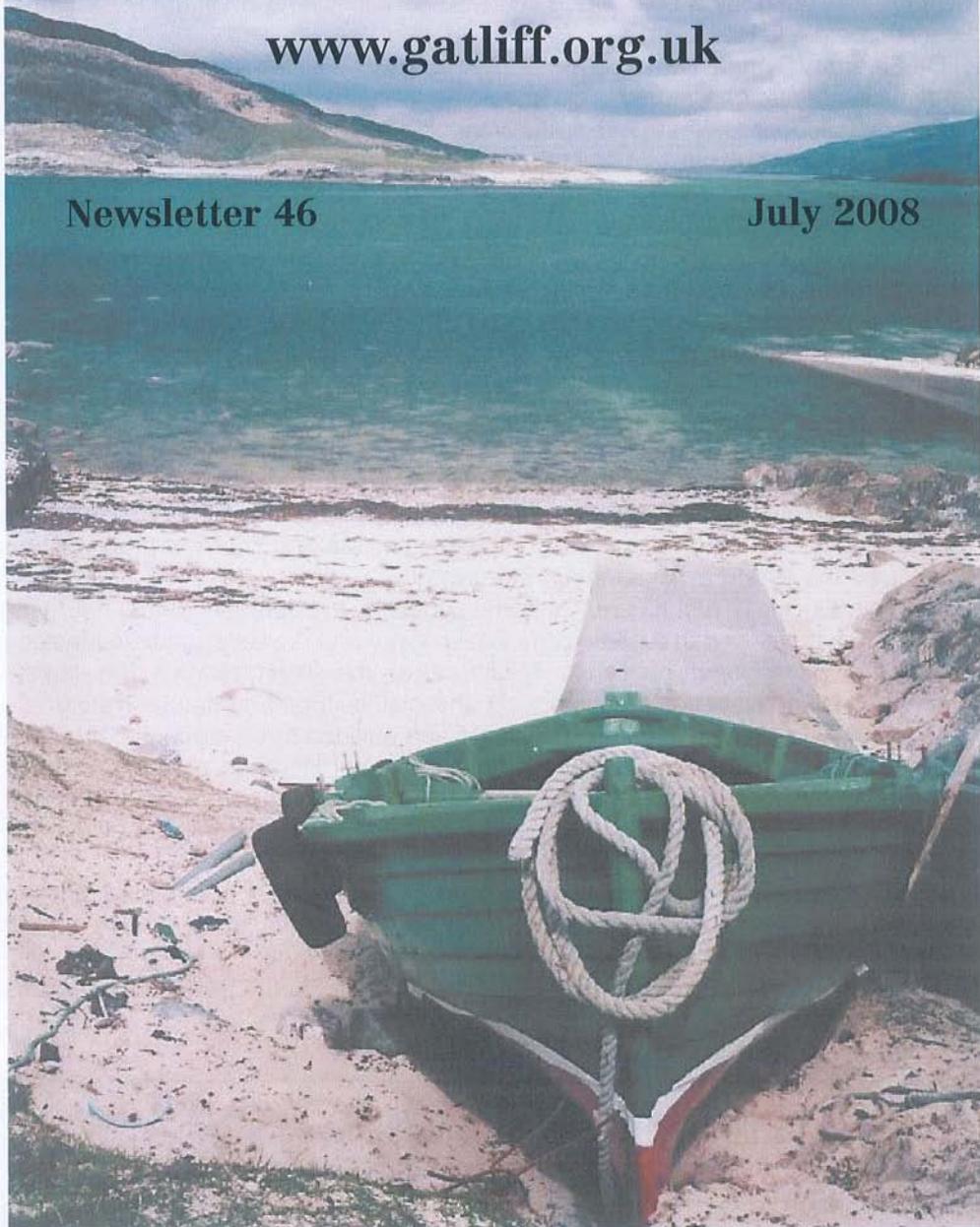
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 46

July 2008



Scarp, the site of a former Gatliff Hostel, viewed from Husinish, North Harris

Island Insights

Take a virtual visit to the islands via www.islandsbooktrust.com or, better still, pursue the IBT programme in person and much will be revealed.

Saturday, 19 July is when Jim Crawford will be speaking on the **Islands of Loch Roag** at the Great Bernera Community Centre at 10.30 am. His talk will be followed, weather permitting, by a boat trip to Little Bernera including a circumnavigation of Bearasay and Old Hill.

On Saturday 9 August at 10.30 am Bill Lawson will be giving a talk at the Berneray Community Centre on **Pabbay**. This should be followed by a trip to the island.

The Old School at Shawbost is the venue for a three-day conference on **The Hebridean Contribution to UK Military History**. This is a three-day event from Monday 11 – Wednesday 13 August. The IBT will be part of **Faclan - The Third Hebridean Book Festival** in Stornoway from Monday 25 – Saturday 30 August.

Then on Saturday 20 September a one-day symposium, **Perceptions of Early Christianity in Lewis**, will be hosted at the Ness Heritage Centre from 10.30 am. Ian Stewart-Hargreaves and Rachel Barrowman will explain the different approaches to interpreting the evidence. This will be followed by visits to Teampull Mholuag at Europe and other sites.

Sally Magnusson will present **Roots - A Daughter of Iceland and Mull** at An Lanntair, Stornoway on Tuesday 9 September at 7.30 pm. Thursday 23 October at 7.30 pm is set for the **5th Angus Macleod Memorial Lecture** to take place at the Paicr School, Gravir. The speaker will be announced later, but on Tuesday 11 November at 7.30 pm Fred Silver will be speaking on **Making Oil from Peat – When Lewis Led the World** at An Lanntair, Stornoway.

The Islands Book Trust has, as its name suggests, encouraged literary interests. In fact, it has developed in a particularly exciting way and recently acquired Maclean Press, the Skye-based publisher. Members of the Trust receive the highly-informative Island Notes on many aspects of social, cultural and natural history.

John Love has written Island Notes No.31 and outlined three centuries of natural history in the Highlands and Islands. Scottish Natural Heritage mounted a major exhibition in the foyer of their new headquarters overlooking Inverness. It was part of the Highland Year of Culture 2007 and John undertook most of the background research on behalf of SNH.

In his Notes he places in context those individuals who have contributed much to the region as natural historians and who have become iconic figures. These include Martin Martin, John Harvie-Brown, Seton Gordon, Frank Fraser Darling, Jim MacGeoch and Morton Boyd. For fuller details acquire the Notes and access www.highlandnaturalists.com

The Islands Book Trust

For Further Details

www.theislandsbookstrust.com 01851 820946

AGM – A Good Meeting-Place

The GHHT AGM is to be held at the Holland Park Youth Hostel in Kensington, west London on Saturday 13 September at 10.00 am. This is an attractive venue and there is usually a good attendance by members wanting to learn about the progress and needs of the Trust. Why not make it part of a day-out or a weekend-away in the capital?

Revolving Renovations

The outside forces – driving wind and rain, different health-and-safety regulations, departmental conservation standards – mean that there is a constant need for maintenance and replacements at the hostels. It is with relief that the new thatch at Garenin is noted; and the fitting of an extractor fan, the installation of a new drain and the delivery of new furniture at Rhenigidale are reported. However, the thatching problems at Berneray are ongoing, with personnel and raw material problems. At least the new stove is operational there. Access to Howmore will become easier, but the roofing there will soon need full attention and a fund-raising scheme for the project may have to be initiated.

Changing Guard, But Not at the Palace

Further changes in the wardens at Garenin have meant that regular visitors have had to become accustomed to new ways of fees being collected and the accommodation managed. Andy Stopforth's food at the Blackhouse Café and Restaurant was acclaimed and, of course, his reputation was acknowledged. So when he was approached to become chef at the Bonadventure, Gallan Head, he felt, understandably, that he should take the opportunity. His place as hostel warden has been taken by his partner, Rachel Rossall, and we wish her every success in carrying on Andy's good hostel-keeping.

Alison Gibbs has been associated with the Berneray Hostel for a long time and has integrated the responsibilities with her many commitments to activities and roles on the island. Her place has been taken by Jackie West, who is known to hostellers as she has assisted Alison, to whom we express gratitude for her involvement in what is the most popular of the hostels, at least in terms of numbers of visitors.

Bunk-bed or Ground-sheet ?

The full compilation of current and the recent-past bednights for the hostels are featured in the Crofters' Newsletter. However, aficionados may be interested to know that the overnights are compiled as a mixture of those taking beds in the hostels and those who are camping in the vicinities. The breakdown of those sleeping soundly in beds as against those enjoying the provision of ground-sheets is as follows for 2007:

Berneray:	1045	in the hostel	+	1181	camping	=	2226
Garenin:	1183	" " "	+	118	"	=	1301
Howmore:	1233	" " "	+	494	"	=	1727
Rhenigidale:	864	" " "	+	171	"	=	1035

Board Changes and Incoming Company Secretary

Alan Busson has resigned as Company Secretary. He and his family have moved from Wiltshire to Aberdeenshire and, unsurprisingly, Alan has found, in the voluntary sector there, new avenues for his executive skills. His genial nature and willingness to become involved have been noted and sought after. We thank him for his stint in the management of Gatliff matters. His first involvement with the hostels relate to cycling holidays in his youth.

Stuart Jones, who has taken on more commitments with his Scarborough-based building company, has decided to cease to be a Director. Meg Richards and Joanna Burgess, who wishes to continue as Editor of the *Crofters' Newsletter*, have also stepped down as Directors. Their interests in and work for the GHHT, while on the Executive Committee, are much appreciated.

The new Company Secretary is Terry Rollinson. He is a Londoner, was the Human Resources Director of the YHA and is now a consultant, working on a part-time basis during what he calls, 'semi-retirement'. He first learnt of the Gatliff Hostels through Arthur Meaby. He and his wife went travelling in Cambodia earlier this year. Now, perhaps, they will be drawn to points north. We wish Terry every success in his appointment and thank him for joining us.

The Gatliff Trust, the parent body of the GHHT, has re-appointed Peter Clarke and Philip Lawson as Directors, appointed Terry Rollinson from 1 May 2008 and will appoint John Joyce for the year following the AGM. They re-appointed Peter Clarke as Chairman of the GHHT.

World Wide Recommendations

Most visitors have heard of the Gatliff Hostels before they leave home. Hence, our advertisements no longer appear on the ferries. The *Simple Hostels in the Outer Hebrides* flyer, with a new issue due for 2009, joins the publications in the racks for that 'lottery of public attention'. The website has attracted over 5500 visitors so far this year. Above all, however, it's personal recommendations that bring us visitors.

Campsites Galore

Getting to the Gatliff Hostels is half the fun. However, with recent increases in fuel and food prices, ways have to be found to keep costs down. One way is to consider the simple pleasures of camping while en route for the islands. A new definitive map of over 500 camping sites and caravan parks throughout Scotland has been produced.

This publication, produced by Nicolson Maps, folds down to a handy travel size and has a protective cover. It is available through www.scottishcamping.com for just £5.00. ScottishCamping are based at Blairs College, Aberdeen, and have been promoting the camping facilities associated with the four Gatliff Hostels since their website was set up.

The Man Behind the Road ... and More

An article appeared in the Daoine Intinneach ('Interesting People') section of the *West Highland Free Press*, featuring Kenny Mackay, a long-standing member of the Rhenigidale community. He was interviewed by Keith Mackenzie who had visited him on a bleak December day and, as many of us know, Rhenigidale can do bleakness very effectively.

Kenny was born in the village, but moved, after attending the local school, to Scalpay where he was employed as a shepherd and on hydro-electric schemes. However, he was always drawn to returning to Rhenigidale, which was one of the UK's most isolated settlements, approached only by the tortuous Postman's Path or by sea.

One of Kenny's uncles was the postman and he had negotiated the path for 22 years, bringing the mail by walking the 12-mile round-trip. His sudden death, on the path, led to a vacancy and Kenny took on the responsibilities for 12 years. The relentless nature of the work made him think, especially about the future of the village.

There were over a hundred people living there at the beginning of the 20th Century. After the First World War, when 22 men returned from active service, many residents were required to leave and settle in Skye. This was dispiriting, but a conviction to restore something of the former liveliness of the community stimulated Kenny.

He became convinced that the solution was the building of a metalled road. A campaign started in the early 1970s. The Inverness County Council certainly needed persuading, but the former regional engineer, John Hutchinson, secured help from the Highlands & Islands Development Board to conduct a survey. This was aided by members of the Schools' Hebridean Society.

16 years later the road was completed and Kenny welcomed more people visiting and staying, both as temporary and permanent residents. It also gave him a taste for seeing how political pressures could help deliver something constructive such as a highway. He became a Tarbert councillor and saw other prospects.

Now he can look back over more recent campaigns. In 2003 he chaired the steering group which laid the foundations for the £4.5 million purchase of the North Harris Estate. That led to his chairing the group that initiated the second local community buy-out, of the Loch Seaforth Estate. He believes that these moves have created bonds that enhance communities.

When Kenny looks across from his home to renovated houses and to the hostel, he has rightful cause to rejoice. A village that would probably have become derelict and died has, thanks to his efforts, become a place where many more come to enjoy existence, either for a day or two ... or for the rest of their lives.

Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal

For copies of Neil Pinkett's book, contact the Editor

Catherine MacSween (1910 -2008)

When Catherine MacSween, Howmore's first warden, died on 5 April, she left behind not only a lifetime devoted to helping others, but a link with the distant past. When she born in Howmore, the second eldest of ten children, there was no metalled road through the village and the sight of only an occasional vehicle. She attended the local school and left to look after the children of the owners of the Polachar Inn.

On what was her first visit to the mainland, she went to work in a hotel in Glasgow before training as a nurse at the South General Hospital. Later she moved to Dundee where she recalls the war-time blackouts. She returned to Howmore to marry a local man, Donald John MacSween, at the parish church and live in a thatched cottage close by. They had two daughters, but in the mid-60s her life changed radically.

Her husband, whom she had nursed for ten years, died and within a short time, her younger daughter also died. Before these traumatic events occurred, the family had been approached by Herbert Gatliff, who was looking for someone to be warden of his second hostel. She agreed, took up the responsibilities in 1966 and within a year was looking after the croft, single-handed, as well.

However, she found the work as warden conducive and made hostellers very welcome. They had, at least, to acknowledge Mrs MacSween's being a stickler for tidiness and for visitors to clear up after a stay. Many thoroughly enjoyed helping her on the croft with the poultry, cows, crops and, at harvest-time, with the corn-cutting.

Regular visitors continued to call on her when she passed the duties of wardenship to her daughter, Betty, and moved in 1996 to the council house on the same road as the hostel. Her memories of these hostel connections continued to the time of her death in the Uist & Barra Hospital on Benbecula. Her contributions to the Gatliff traditions were considerable and are so much appreciated. They live on, however, through the family connection.

Janet Clifton (1953 - 2008)

Janet, the wife of the Revd Canon Roger Clifton, the Treasurer of the Gatliff Trust, died on 23 May, aged 55. She came from Bristol and is the sister of Lorna Macleod, the wife of Dr John Macleod of Lochmaddy. Janet was an exceptionally gifted modern languages teacher who specialised in Spanish. She married Roger in 1976 and they had three sons. Janet died of an aggressive brain tumour which was diagnosed in February 2006. Her wonderful hosting of meetings, particularly at Roger's first parish, in Brislington, Bristol, is recalled by Gatliff Trust members.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago*

'Frank Martin recalled camping close to the Scarp 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.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Scarp still makes the front cover*]

and of Ten Years Ago

'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.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Some things come to pass*]

and Fifteen

Paul Kew reporting on his trip to the hostels: 'I am waiting for the ferry at Lochmaddy with a couple of hours to spare. I've really had an adventure, one way or another. The majority of the time spent fighting the storm and running from one lift to another, trying to make connections for ferries etc. I've had some quite remarkable lifts when you just wouldn't have thought cars would be around. I walked out of Rhenigidale at 5.45 am and about a mile from the main road a car picked me up. This morning I left Howmore at 6.45 and the first van again took me right to the ferry terminal ! I was here before the place had opened. I am just praying that the ferry will leave today. All quite miraculous for me being at the mercy of the elements. I've never known weather like this. It's been very cold even with the hostel fires burning.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*A case for global warming ?*]

and Twenty

'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 the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Now into our third decade*]

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Garenin – **Lewis**
Rhenigidale – **North Harris**
Berneray – **North Uist**
Howmore – **South Uist**



All Year Around

There are pressures on us, exerted by social and cultural forces, to respond to the rituals of the year in conformist ways. Cleaning in the Spring, holidaying in the Summer, taking up new activities in the Autumn and being at home in the depths of Winter. There are always individuals, however, who will be mavericks by not responding to herd instincts.

Among them is that relatively small group of people who relish spending either Christmas, the New Year or, indeed, both, at a Gatliff hostel. For some the preferred choice is Berneray. From some angles this hostel appears to be a house built on sand, but the photograph below, taken by Paula Walker, gives proof of a solid base. The image above, supplied by David Turner, is evidence of company and conviviality during the festive season, when even a cooking competition is available. Tempted ?

