

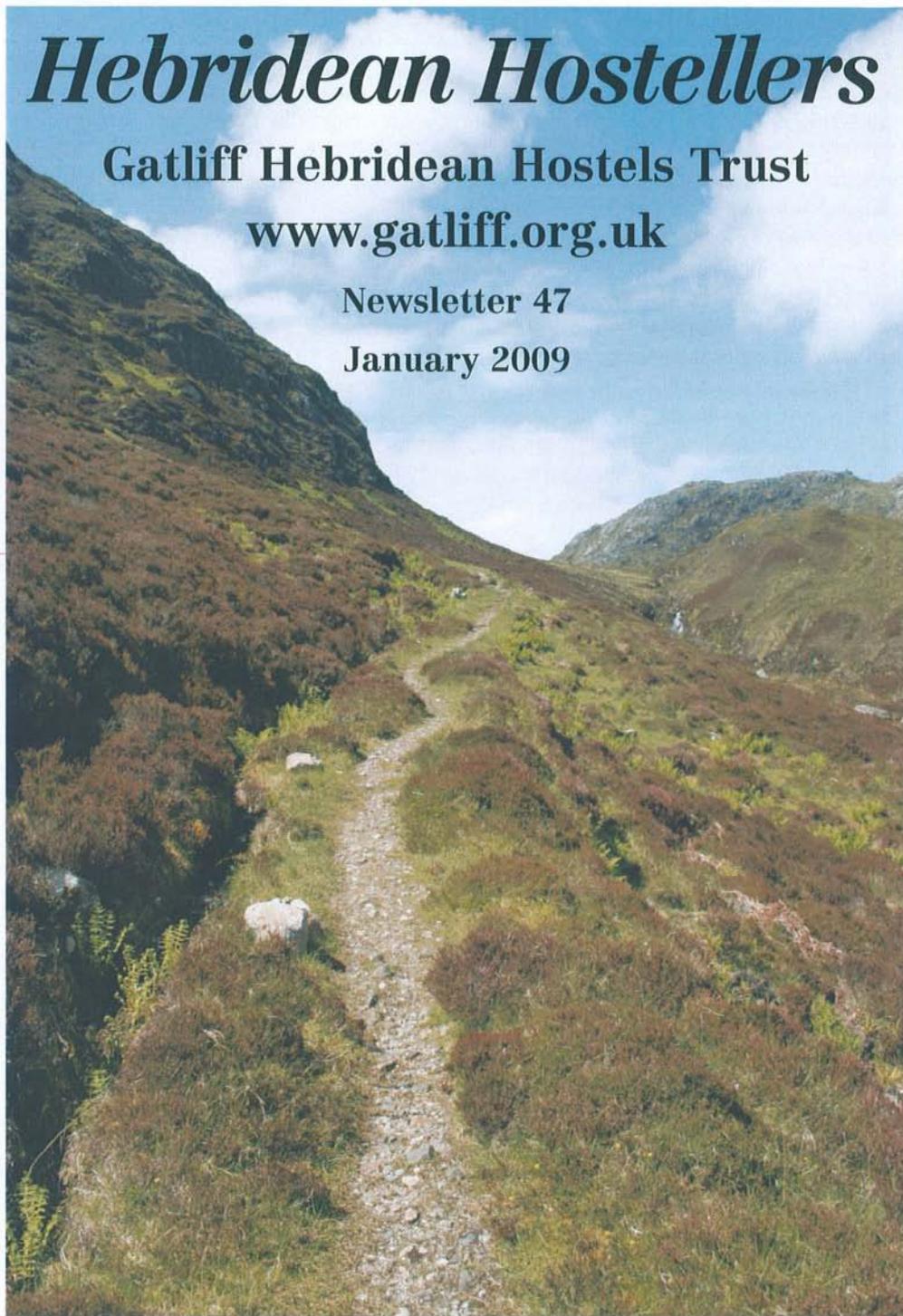
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 47

January 2009



A North Harris footpath that leads, eventually, to Rhenigidale

People and Books Come and Go

The **Islands Book Trust** is based in the Outer Hebrides, but attracts interested parties from throughout the world. It is responsible for a stimulating range of publications (as well as talks and visits) which highlight island connections and culture, industries and insights. These are featured on its website www.theislandsbooktrust.com and its recent productions have particular appeal to those Gatliff hostellers who appreciate these distinctive ways of life.

Whaling and the Hebrides (£12) is the history of this forgotten industry. Visitors to Rhenigidale will have passed the junction to Huishinish on their way to and from Tarbert. Close to this is the old whaling station at Bunavoneader where catches from northern waters were landed. The ruins of this processing plant set within an area of outstanding natural beauty are now barely visible.

The autobiography of the late **Murdo Ewen Macdonald** of Harris has been re-issued in a new illustrated and enhanced edition. ***Padre Mac*** (£12) has a Forward by the Prime Minister, **Gordon Brown**, and is an uplifting account of the life of a charismatic Church of Scotland minister who succeeded in ecclesiastical, academic and military life. He took part, as a prisoner-of-war, in the events of the book and film, ***The Great Escape***.

The booklet ***Iceland and the Hebrides*** (£5) was written by **Sally Magnusson** based on a talk she gave to the Book Trust and traces her own family connections as well as the strong, if neglected, historical links between these two island communities. Here she reveals similarities of culture, of place-names, of old storytelling traditions and of that new science where DNA coding shows the ancestral and genetic roots shared by people.

The influence of the Church remains strong on Lewis. Its presence has been evident for years and **Ian Stewart-Hargreaves** in his ***Early Christianity in Lewis - The Ness Connection*** (£6) argues that this northerly settlement on the island was influenced by the Pictish Church as early as the Third Century, three centuries before St Columba reached Iona. His views are complemented by those of the archaeologist, **Rachel Barrowman**.

The IBT's programme of events for 2009 is featured on its website. It is packed with talks and visits, covering Lewis and Harris, Uist and Barra, and now Skye too. However, just as books come, when published, and go, when sold, so people exchange places for a variety of motives. The Trust's promotion of a **Conference on Emigration from the Outer Hebrides** will be held on South Harris from Thursday 10 - Saturday 12 September 2009. This reflects the interest in Scotland's Year of Homecoming when the islands will exert that ancestral appeal.

The Islands Book Trust

For Further Details

www.theislandsbooktrust.com 01851 820946

The GAMA Award

Herbert Gatliff was an enthusiast, particularly keen that young people should be introduced to the landscapes and life of the Outer Hebrides. He encouraged, and financially assisted, them to make an informed study of aspects of the local cultures and environment. Angus Macleod was equally enthusiastic about preserving records of his locality, the South Lochs area of Lewis. His archive of material at the Ravenspoint Centre at Kershader has enormous resource value.

These legacies will be brought together in 2009 with the launch of the so-called **GAMA Award**, in which the achievements of Herbert Gatliff and the facilities of the Angus Macleod Archive are harnessed. Students and researchers at UK universities and colleges will be offered the chance of funding of over £2000 to include travel expenses, accommodation fees and publication costs of their written work. Full details are to be found at www.gama.gatliff.co.uk and readers of this newsletter are invited to spread the news of this initiative.

Varieties of Work and Visitors

Sue Boyd is Garenin's new warden and has taken over from Rachel Rossall. We appreciate Rachel's work during the Summer months and Colin Macleod's assistance during the interim. Sue and her husband, Leigh, moved to the area from Leicester some 18 months ago, and she was certainly pleased to be back in her native land. Her family had originated from the East Coast and she grew up close to Glasgow.

Although Sue has not undertaken hostel work before, she has been previously employed in a variety of work-places, including restaurants, an ambulance emergency call centre and a forensic science unit. It is the human element that she particularly enjoys and it was reassuring to her that the Garenin hostel had, in her first week, visitors from Poland, Australia and America.

Sue and Leigh have five children, ranging in age from 4 - 18. The youngest two will soon find themselves together in the same Gaelic-medium school and will, undoubtedly, be able to teach their Mother, who has been to an adult Gaelic language learning class, a thing or two. Leigh, who is self-employed, looks forward to completing the installation of a new cupboard and work surfaces at the hostel. The Boyds, indeed, present a case of new management.

Still Going ... Strong

One of Herbert Gatliff's interests was to encourage support groups for the YHA and he helped form the Croydon Group, known as **COPSE**, 75 years ago. In this their anniversary year, the members have planned a ten-day trip in May that will take in the four surviving Gatliff hostels, Kershader, Glen Nevis and Loch Lomond. They will be taking the train to Oban, hiring a vehicle, visiting Stornoway, climbing Clisham and Ben Nevis, and returning by train from Glasgow.

Fee Increase

There will be, for the first time since 2005, an increase in fees for use of the hostels. **Major improvement work** has been, and is being undertaken, and the 11% increase compares favourably with the January 2006 - September 2008 increase in the Retail Prices Index of 12.9%. The overnight charge will be £10, with £6 for Under 18s. Campers of all ages pay £6 per person per night. A day charge (not available at Berneray) of £2 applies, but is not applicable if the overnight fee is paid. Sheet sleeping bags are available at £2 and Membership of the GHHT, which is not a condition of using the hostels, is a minimum of £10 per year. These new charges come into effect after the Scottish Bank Holiday Weekend on Monday 5 January 2009.

Ship-shape

The Gatliff hostels have at least one thing in common, in that they are all close to the sea. This is beneficial in terms of scenic position; detrimental in matters relating to exposure, particularly of roofs. **John Joyce** visited all the hostels during late October and November. His report shows the requirement for outside maintenance to provide weatherproofed conditions so that internal work can be completed without further problems being created.

The priority is to keep the hostels up to standard, for safe use. This ship-shape requirement needs to be with a schedule of works within a given time-frame and a rolling programme of maintenance. Some work has to be undertaken by contractors, much by skilled people, while there is a variety of opportunity for unskilled workers. A 'bank' of people is required upon whom the Trust can draw for individual assignments or work parties.

A reporting back system is vital for major and minor projects. It may be helpful to use these columns to report back on the completion of the thatch at Garenin; the securing of a thatcher's services for Berneray this Spring; the effectiveness of the solid fuel stove at this hostel; the temporary closure of Howmore until improvements were completed in time for the recent festive season. Work goes on continually; the destructive forces attack continuously.

Future Directions

The parent body of the GHHT is the Gatliff Trust, which held its AGM at Holland Park, London, on Saturday 29 November 2008. At a subsequent session trustees and visitors were asked to consider its role and future directions. This was last undertaken at a meeting in Kendal during the Summer of '94 of which a Seminar Report was published. There was again, some 14 years later, a consensus about the endeavours of the Trust to further the long-held interests of its late founder and to promote the **quality of personal experiences**, especially of young people, of the countryside in the British Isles, in general, and in the Outer Hebrides, in particular.

Ten Walkers Who Were Followed

Bill Laws, the author of *Byways, Boots and Blisters – A History of Walkers and Walking* (Sutton Publishing) compiled a fascinating article for the Autumn 2008 issue of *Walk*, the magazine of the Ramblers' Association. In it he listed the ten people he considered to be the most influential and pioneering British walkers from the last few centuries.

Ellen Weeton may have died in obscurity in 1849, but she was a woman who rambled 'without restraint' and was once caught in a snowstorm on Snaefell. Most readers will have heard of the ventures of **Alfred Wainwright** in the Cumbrian Mountains and beyond as well as the inspirational walks of **John Hillaby** through Britain and Europe.

Tom Stephenson devised both the phrase 'right to roam' and the Pennine Way, while **Hilaire Belloc** wrote *The Path to Rome* and helped establish the Pilgrims' Way through Kent. **Edward Thomas** hiked the Icknield Way in 1912 and **Dorothy Wordsworth** pursued the ways of Coleridge in North Somerset over a hundred years previously.

The walks and writings of **George Borrow** put Snowdonia on the map, so to speak, and **Frank Noble** made it his mission, in the 1960s, to transform Offa's Dyke from a 'farce of a path' to the route it is today. **Herbert Gatliff**, pictured here addressing a Southern Area meeting of the YHA, drew the following description from Bill Laws.

'Gatliff, a founder member of Croydon's Pathfinders walking club, was an eccentric civil servant. Substituting canvas rucksack for briefcase and walking shorts for pinstripe suit, he would depart Whitehall on a Friday evening and head for the hills and hostels. He even established his own chain of independent hostels in the Outer Hebrides.'



Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal

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

Test and Matches

Many organisations depend on **volunteers** and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostellers Trust is no exception. However, people often feel reticent about offering their services in case serious levels of involvement are expected. If you appreciate the GHHT cause and consider volunteering, please think, initially, in terms of giving it a 'test drive', not of full commitment. Tasks range from those where qualifications are needed to those where novices can excel. You never know, what we need may match your enthusiasms exactly. If you are interested, please contact John Joyce by email on johnejoyce@hotmail.co.uk

Tides Make News

There is an interesting Berlin-based e-magazine - www.hiddeneurope.co.uk – which looks at those parts of Europe that other publications do not reach. Its editors often feature happenings in the Outer Hebrides. A recent item drew attention to the abnormally low-tides that sometimes affect the ferry movements between Leverburgh and Berneray.

Destination and Integration

In the early days of the Gatliff hostels there were often several obstacles to getting to destinations efficiently. Transport services on land, water and air were sometimes infrequent and occasionally sporadic. Travellers were aware that integration was not a recognised feature. This has changed radically and can be demonstrated by looking at the timetables that are featured on the Links Page of www.gatliff.org.uk The spinal route from the **Butt to Barra** has buses and boats that get-it-together and enable hostellers to get some door-to-door treatment while en route.

Matching Speeds

The **broadband revolution** has brought our website – www.gatliff.org.uk – to computer screens more speedily. However, this pace of change has not been reflected in the ways in which information on the website is presented. The news-feed on the home-page does keep up with events and soon the other pages will be capable of more efficient amending. The site is migrating to a new content management system. Even during the Winter months the site draws a hundred visitors a week – those dreaming of, and planning for, idyllic times in the islands during the Summer.

Taking Advantage

After the 9/11 atrocities in the United States, American tourists tended to stay at home. The savagery of the current economic downturn may involve many British would-be long-distance travellers looking around for alternative **holiday venues in the UK**. Who knows? – recessionary conditions may lead many to consider what is on offer on their doorstep and visit the Western Isles. The strapline employed by some American tourist boards in that critical time of 2001 is applicable to all of us who are surrounded by remarkable places – 'Discover the State You Are In'.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago*

'The year **Arthur [Meaby]** became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust, 1980, the hostels recorded just over 1100 overnights. The year before his death, 2002, they recorded over 5200 overnights. Significantly many of these visitors are students training for professions or prominent positions in public or business life, thus creating a long 'after-glow' of loyalty and repeat visits to the islands.' (Editor: *John Humphries*) [*Arthur's legacy is undiminished.*]

and of Ten Years Ago

'CalMac had suspicions raised by staff who reported a lot of 'holidaying sheep'. It turns out that crofters had stumbled upon a **loophole** in CalMac's ferry policy whereby if they take sheep to market or to the mainland they could get a discount on the ferry fare. Thus families travelling on their holidays would bring along a sheep with them to get this discounted fare, and on their return, days or weeks later, would say that the price was too low and they had decided not to sell after all. The company had brought in the scheme, charging just £2.35 an animal and no charge for the vehicle as long as the crofter - and at least one animal - were just going to market.' (Editor: *Jim McFarlane*) [*A case of loopholes to slaughter?*]

and Fifteen

Gerry Quinn on the **Sand Dunes Workparty** at Berneray: 'The expedition was firmly split between three omnivores and eight vegetarians, so you can guess what we had for dinner. As a result of our meat cravings we were forced into self-sufficient mode, so we grabbed an old hand-line that was in the hostel and a hook and headed out.' (Editor: *Richard Genner*) [*Catching!*]

and Twenty

'Marvellous progress with **Berneray annex** The roof was put on in September. There was glorious weather in spring, but it was chilly and wet in the summer.' (Editor: *Richard Genner*) [*No signs of global warming then.*]

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



The Road to the Isles, Reduced

A Scottish Government initiative has been to introduce a pilot scheme on certain Caledonian MacBrayne ferries in an attempt to alleviate problems caused by rising fuel costs and financial downturns.

This is Road Equivalent Tariff (**RET**) that endeavours to set fares for sea crossings on the basis of travelling the equivalent distance by road. These came into force in October 2008 and will be piloted for two-and-a-half years. This is an incentive for Gatliff hostellers as journeys to and from the mainland to Stornoway, Tarbert, Lochmaddy and Lochboisdale are now less expensive.



Produce for Prizes

The Gatliff Cookery Competition 2008 drew a number of entries and obviously gave much pleasure. The team of **Daniel Behnke** and **Belinda Allen** stayed in on a wet and windy day at Berneray and prepared a Scottish-Swabian 'fusion dish' based on beef bouillon. While other visitors were in the challenging outdoor conditions, they enjoyed themselves indoors.



Elizabeth Guar presented fine meals at all the hostels, but her Rhenigidale dish (pictured here) of free-range scrambled eggs with locally-caught Salar flaky salmon, home-grown runner beans, tomato and olive salad plus white wine, particularly appealed. The selection of **Dunja Gulin** was impressive, especially his

Garenin mint-tea, Berneray seaweed and Howmore broccoli.

Valerie Hamilton and her three children were travelling around on local buses and their food came from local sources. The broad beans and tomatoes were from a house on Berneray; the beef sausages, potatoes, mushrooms and spring onions purchased from a grocer in Tarbert, shortly before the arrival of the Leverburgh bus.

Andy Clark's meal was offered to the only other visitor at Garenin on a March night. This was accepted and, by coincidence, the recipient was his near namesake, **Peter Clarke**, one of the judges. Here was a winning gesture and Andy joins his fellow-cooks above who each win £25. We hope that the competition, to be repeated in 2009, will be an inspiration to others at Gatliff hostels to throw away their tin openers and to create using local ingredients.