

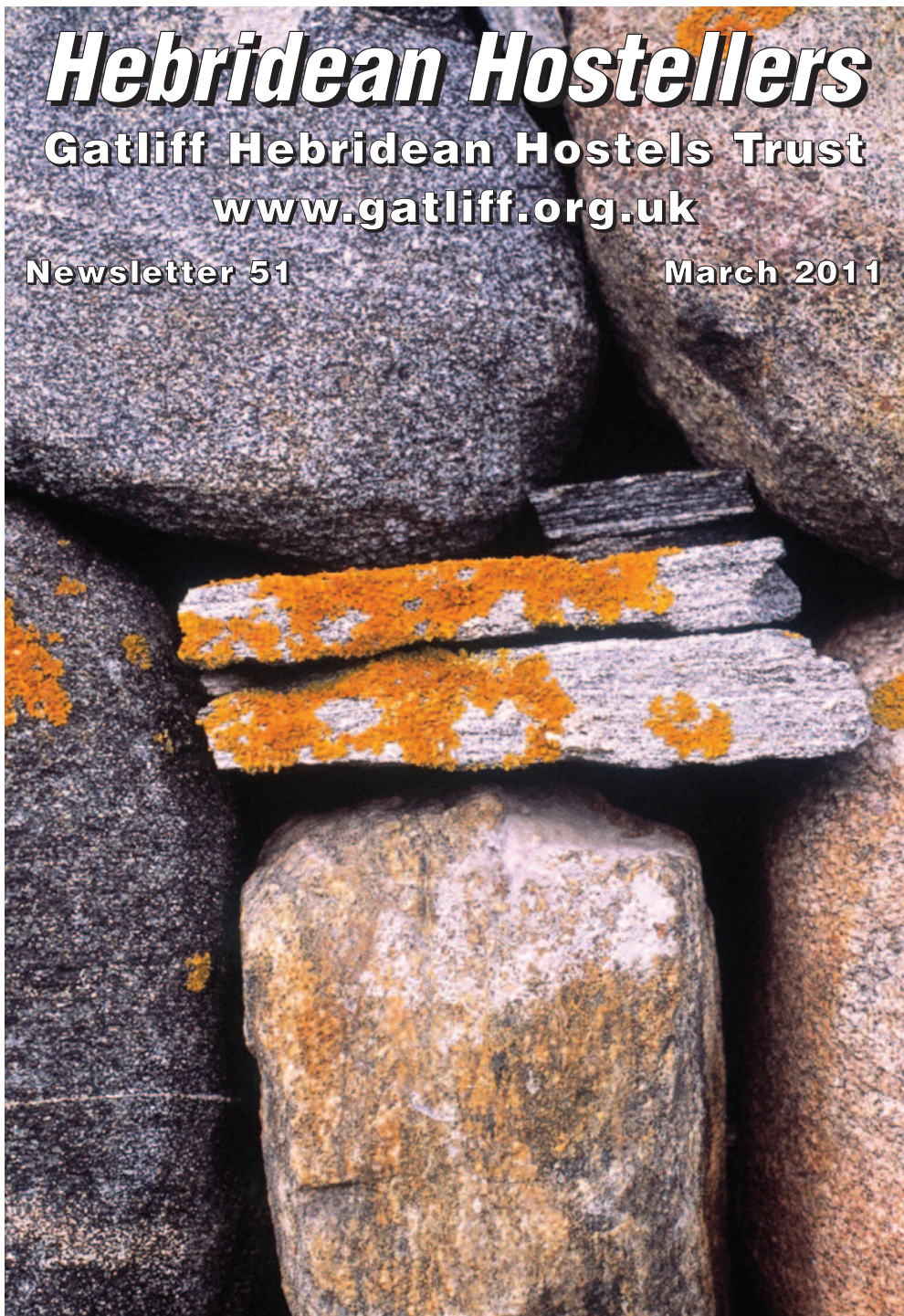
# ***Hebridean Hostellers***

**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**

**[www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)**

**Newsletter 51**

**March 2011**



## Exploring and Discovering

The programmes and publications of the **Islands Book Trust** have become almost legendary - for they enable people to visit parts of the Western Isles that are not normally accessible and to learn about happenings that deserve recording. An attractive way of accessing what is available is to browse the organisation's website - [www.theislandsbooktrust.com](http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com)

The **March** events in the Outer Hebrides involve Alasdair MacEachen speaking about St Kilda, the Faeroes and Jan Mayen and Tristan ap Rheinallt on Alexander Carmichael and Gaelic Birdnames. In April, Alasdair will repeat his talk on the History of Wiay and be leading a walk on the island.

In June there will be a two-day session in Ness, at the north end of Lewis, which will feature talks and a trip to **North Rona** and **Sula Sgeir**. The former is the most remote UK island ever to have been settled and the latter is the preserve of the guga hunters.

Later in June and in July, John Love will be talking at different venues on **Lighthouses and Scottish Islands** before boat trips are made to Barra Head, the Monachs and to Usinish, South Uist. A talk at Orinsay and a boat trip to Steimreway, Eishken and Loch Shell, in the remote Pairc, are planned.

**August** events include a boat trip to Kinlochresort, while September offers a talk and trip to Ronay, North Uist, and a walk and talk at Abhainnsuidhe Castle. Survey the detailed lists on the website, noting the 'weather-permitting' proviso for boat trips and the Gaelic medium for some talks.

Islanders' contributions to pioneering in distant countries appear in ***Return to Patagonia*** by Greta MacKenzie (£14.99) and ***Island Emigrants*** (£9.99). A new publication, ***Mhòr and More*** (£11.99 plus p&p), encourages visitors to the islands by featuring attractive walks in the Uists, some in the vicinity of the Howmore hostel.

Just as Neil Pinkett's ***Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal*** (published by the GHHT and available at £3 post free from the Editor) gives hostel visitors specialist advice about what's on their doorstep, ***Mhòr and More*** will have the same impact on visitors to Howmore.

Beinn Mhòr - translated as the 'Big Mountain' - dominates South Uist with its 2034'. Its classification as a Graham and as a Marilyn is readily understood by those keen on climbing. Most members of the **GHHT** and the **IBT** are content to be wild about Britain, especially its remoter parts.

## Rhenigidale Recalled

For a series of descriptions about the settlements and features in and around Rhenigidale, the illustrated article by Sergio Burns for the current issue of ***Scottish Islands Explorer*** magazine provides interest. It includes a photograph of that unusual feature, the 'roller coastal' pulley system that enabled supplies to be lifted from vessels on Loch Seaforth to the hilltop on the far side of the village.

## On-going Renovations

House maintenance is an area that needs constant **vigilance**, although the amount of wear and tear varies according to the number of residents involved. Hostel maintenance is an aspect of business that requires constant application because the patterns of use do not vary. People just come and go all the time.

The interior surfaces of hostels have to put up with the numerous actions of a mass of people. The exteriors of the Gatliff hostels have also to withstand the pressures of wind and rain, at speeds and quantities that are **excessive** by British standards.

Please consider how you can **support** and maintain the fabric of our hostels by offering time and skills. John Joyce, the Project Manager, plans and organises work to keep the hostels in a good state of repair. He can be contacted easily - his details are in the Addresses section - and looks forward to hearing from you.

## Garenin's Prospective Opening

In earlier times, in Las Vegas, there was a casino that proudly **proclaimed** its then novel 24-hour opening with an illuminated sign stating 'We Never Close'. Unfortunately for this organisation, the letter that failed to operate on one occasion was the 'C'. The truth about the certainty of its being financially successful was out!

The Gatliff Hostels made a similar claim about its all-year round, 24/7 opening policy until late last year when the failure of the heating system at Garenin led to that hostel's closure. The intention is for **re-opening** to take place at the beginning of April, if assurances are received. Watch for details appearing on the website.

## Surging Numbers .... Virtually

The number of visitors to the Gatliff **website** has increased somewhat dramatically this year. In the first two months of 2011 the average daily rate of visits was over 100. Out of 6132 visits, 4122 were by unique visitors.

This is, of course, the season of **planning holidays**, but it does suggest healthy numbers in the hostels during the forthcoming year. It also may justify our decision not to continue the publication of the flyer giving hostel details. The new technology has saved printing expenses and the consumption of paper.

## Hostel Overnight Figures

	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>
Berneray	2056	1896	2201	2311	2226	2147	2752	2562
Garenin	1522	1631	1577	1620	1301	948	1598	1573
Howmore	1627	1561	1552	1805	1727	1595	2022	1765
Rhenigidale	892	956	1178	1010	1035	919	960	983
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6097</b>	<b>6044</b>	<b>6508</b>	<b>6746</b>	<b>6289</b>	<b>5609</b>	<b>7332</b>	<b>6883</b>

## 50 Years On

It was in December 1961 that the **Gatliff Trust** was founded in order to underpin and promote the outdoor and youth hostel causes supported by Herbert Gatliff. He had retired from the Civil Service in 1955 and was able to devote time and efforts to the projects that had absorbed him during his full and active life as a leading member of the youth hostels movement.

Herbert had been a **pioneering** spirit of the youth hostelling movement in England and Wales and had developed a particular affection for the small hostels. He felt that many individuals had been inspired by the remote places which they had visited thanks to youth hostels. He encouraged hostellers to record their experiences in logs, photographs, poetry and song.

One of his **delights** was to involve others, particularly young people, in looking beyond the horizons to which they were accustomed. He encouraged others to become inquisitive about specific topics, suggest subjects for research and to make small grants to allow them to travel to far away places in the British Isles to undertake the work.

For years he had wanted the SYHA to establish hostels in the Outer Hebrides so that young people could visit Britain's last wilderness. He used the Gatliff Trust to fund the setting up of the first hostel at Rhenigidale in 1962. Scarp followed in 1965 and then Howmore in 1966. These **simple hostels** became a magnet to travellers as they explored the moors, hills, machairs and beaches of the islands.

The **vision** of Herbert Gatliff and his Trust stretched from the attainable to the fanciful. A somewhat outlandish notion was to create a hostel beyond Tamanavay, so that there would be a shelter for those wanting to trek from the west coast of Lewis to Kinlochresort and have access to North Harris.

Some of Herbert's ideas remained dreams, but how much better that a man like Herbert Gatliff **dreamed the impossible**, rather than sat at home finding reasons why things couldn't or shouldn't be done!

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust owes everything to Herbert's **inspiration**. Though he died in 1977 his work lives on in both the Gatliff Trust and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. The Gatliff Trust still makes modest but meaningful grant funds to small youth hostels and encourages young people, of limited means, to get to know and love the British countryside.

If you would like to find out more about the Gatliff Trust, or **get involved** with its work or that of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, please turn to the Address section and contact Peter Clarke.

## Recommend Membership

The GHHT depends on people participating at all levels, including the taking out of membership. There are effective ways of **recruiting** members, but none is more successful than recommendation. A form accompanies this newsletter and your willingness to pass it on to an interested party would be much appreciated. This is a charity which strives to help others enjoy appealing areas.

## The GAMA Award

It is mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter that Herbert Gatliff encouraged young people to journey to distant parts of the country to discover and write about matters of interest. There has been a **revival** of this tendency with the Gatliff Trust and the Islands Book Trust promoting and financially underwriting the so-called GAMA Award.

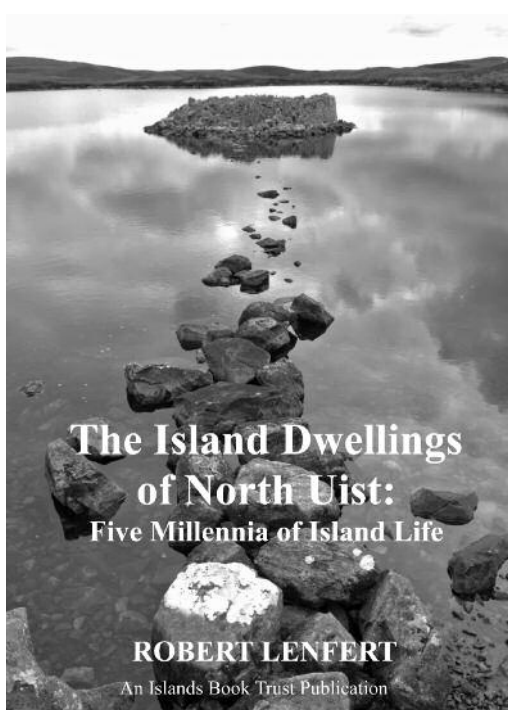
Students, present and past, of British universities and colleges have been invited to apply for **bursaries** to fund research into and publication about aspects of life, past and present, in the Western Isles. In 2009 Laura Hellyer produced *Paper Cairns* – a poetic biography and a series of essays on Angus Macleod, whose archive has been established at Kershader on Lewis.

The 2010 winner was an American, Robert Lenfert, reading for a Ph.D in Archaeology at the University of Nottingham. His book, *The Island Dwellings of North Uist*, was published by the IBT and will be launched at Lochmaddy on North Uist on Saturday 19 March. It is available directly through the website [www.theislandsbooktrust.com](http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com) or by phoning 01851 880737.

Waterfront dwellings have long been in demand and it is not surprising that the word 'river' is associated with the concept of 'rival' – at least in, as they say, real estate terms. From the early Neolithic times of 3500BC until the 17th Century, humans have lived on **small islets on freshwater lochs** of the western seaboard of western Scotland and Ireland.

As there is more freshwater to be found on North Uist than in any comparable area of Britain, then this was a centre for such developments. The **crannogs** or **island duns** have been written about previously, but this book presents a detailed and readable description of the challenges such properties presented to constructors as well as to would-be destructors.

Recruitment for the **2011 GAMA Award** is underway. The sums involved are £1000 for the work; £300 for travel expenses; accommodation at the Gatliff and Ravenspoint Hostels will be met for up to 28 days and nights; costs met for a booklet to be printed, published and promoted. Go to [www.gama.gatliff.co.uk](http://www.gama.gatliff.co.uk) join in or tell others about this opportunity.



## Getting There, Around and Back

'Time spent on **reconnaissance** is never wasted' certainly applies to travelling to and from the Gatliff hostels. They may be in remote places, but in relation to public transport routes they are not isolated. Bus services are to be found on the doorsteps of Berneray, Garenin and Rhenigidale and just down the road from Howmore. Frequency is, of course, another matter.

The timetables for island bus services are to be found on the Links from [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk) It's necessary to differentiate between the weekday and Saturday services as well as school terms and holidays (Sch and NSch). A key letter is the 'r' for request. **Time-keeping** tends to be good because of the low density of traffic.

Garenin - a turning-point of destination rather than a stop of transition - is there on the W2 route - the West Side Circular. The clockwise journey from Stornoway takes in Callanish on the way there and so a bus journey from Garenin to the Stones would involve 'rocking around the clock' - so to speak. Plan ahead, with the **timetable** to hand.



*Barra's Traigh Mhòr is reputed to be the only beach runway in the world to handle scheduled airline services.*

*Photo: James Hendrie.*

Now a **telephone** in hand is necessary for the W11 that runs from Tarbert to Rhenigidale on Monday to Fridays. All journeys are described as a 'bookable request' and the key times are by 20.00 for the following morning services and by 14.00 for the afternoon ones. The phone numbers are there on the appropriate page of the timetable as are the connections with the Stornoway buses.

A key spinal route is the W17 and these buses have Berneray YH displayed on their indicator boards as they head north and Eriskay Slipway as they journey south, linking many places, including Benbecula Airport and Howmore. They enable passengers on the ferries from Harris and Barra to make **significant connections**.

Now that it is possible to journey from hostel to hostel with comparative ease and reasonable expense, it is well worth acquiring or **accessing** the timetables of Caledonian MacBrayne; Flybe and Eastern Airways. The immediate entry points for our hostels are at Stornoway, Tarbert, Lochmaddy, Benbecula and Lochboisdale.

Barra is an indirect, though idyllic, entry or departure port by either ship or aircraft for our hostels. The journeys on the ferry to and from Eriskay are, however, short and attractive. The connecting Sound of Harris ferry service sails past the Berneray hostel and acts as a reminder of how well served the islands are now, compared with the tortuous demands on island **travellers** within living memory.

## From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Five Years Ago .....

‘**Matthew Parris**, who writes the *Another Voice* column in *The Spectator*, described at length his mid-November visit to the Western Isles, in general, and to Berneray, in particular - The bus met an efficient little ferry, which took us over the water to the small island of Berneray and a three mile walk to a thatched crofter’s hut converted for hikers to stay, unwardened but cosy within its impossibly thick stone walls, everything laid out to be paid for as used, reliant on honour.’ (Editor: John Humphries) [*Mentioned in dispatches*]

## and of Ten Years Ago .....

‘Peter Clarke reported that following the termination of the **Brevig** project (on Barra) all refunds and interest due had now been paid back to the donors. Several donors had kindly returned their cheques, amounting to £2891, for which we are very grateful.’ (Editor: Lawrence Washington) [*The generosity of Gatliff supporters*]

## and Fifteen ....

‘All mattresses and pillows are new in the **Garenin** hostel as are the chairs around the stove. Pots and pans, glassware and utensils are also new. The new stove was fitted in December which seemed an easy task until I realised that the stove would only fit through the entrance of the hostel if I removed the doors!’ (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Nothing is straightforward when it comes to updating hostels*]

## and Twenty ....

‘The Executive Committee, meeting in Stirling, agreed that we should make **Howmore** our next major project after the dust has settled at Garenin and Rhenigidale.’ (Editor: Richard Genner) [*The renovation cycle of the early ‘90s*]

## and now Twenty-five

‘The road has not reached **Rhenigidale** and looks unlikely to reach it in the near future. It is about half way there. The money has run out and the prospect of further funding looks bleak. The place remains in much the same state as before but Frank Martin will be visiting Rhenigidale as a matter of priority to see if a work party can be organised to take action.’ (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Future funding fears*]

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



## Front Cover Photography

**Peter Leeming**, whose image of a blackhouse wall on Harris features as the front cover, is a professional full-time photographer. He lives near the coast in the North York Moors National Park and his pictures tend towards the evocative with a degree of mystery, rather than the purely representational or descriptive. He is a biologist by training, a mountaineer by way of life, and a photographic artist searching for depth. See more, particularly of Harris, via [www.peterleemingphotography.com](http://www.peterleemingphotography.com)



## Islands Opening

A purpose of this newsletter is to boost the number of people using and talking about the Gatliff hostels as well as raising awareness of **life and livelihoods** in the Western Isles. It was pleasing that the back cover item in the last issue led directly to the sale of the featured acrylic painting of the Rhenigidale Hostel by Christine Dodd. Her shop, called Islands, in Tarbert's main street will open again in June and remain so until September.

## Manchester Meeting

The next meeting of the GHHT Executive Committee will take place on **Saturday 19 March** at the Manchester Youth Hostel. At 11.00 a.m. there will be a Members' Forum and this has traditionally drawn a group of people keen to learn about future projects and to discuss their experiences of hostelling in the Western Isles. Why not consider coming as part of a day or weekend out? The purpose-built hostel is in the Castlefields district and convenient for the thriving city centre with its clubs devoted to a range of interests, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Trafford Centre and the Lowry Gallery in Salford.