

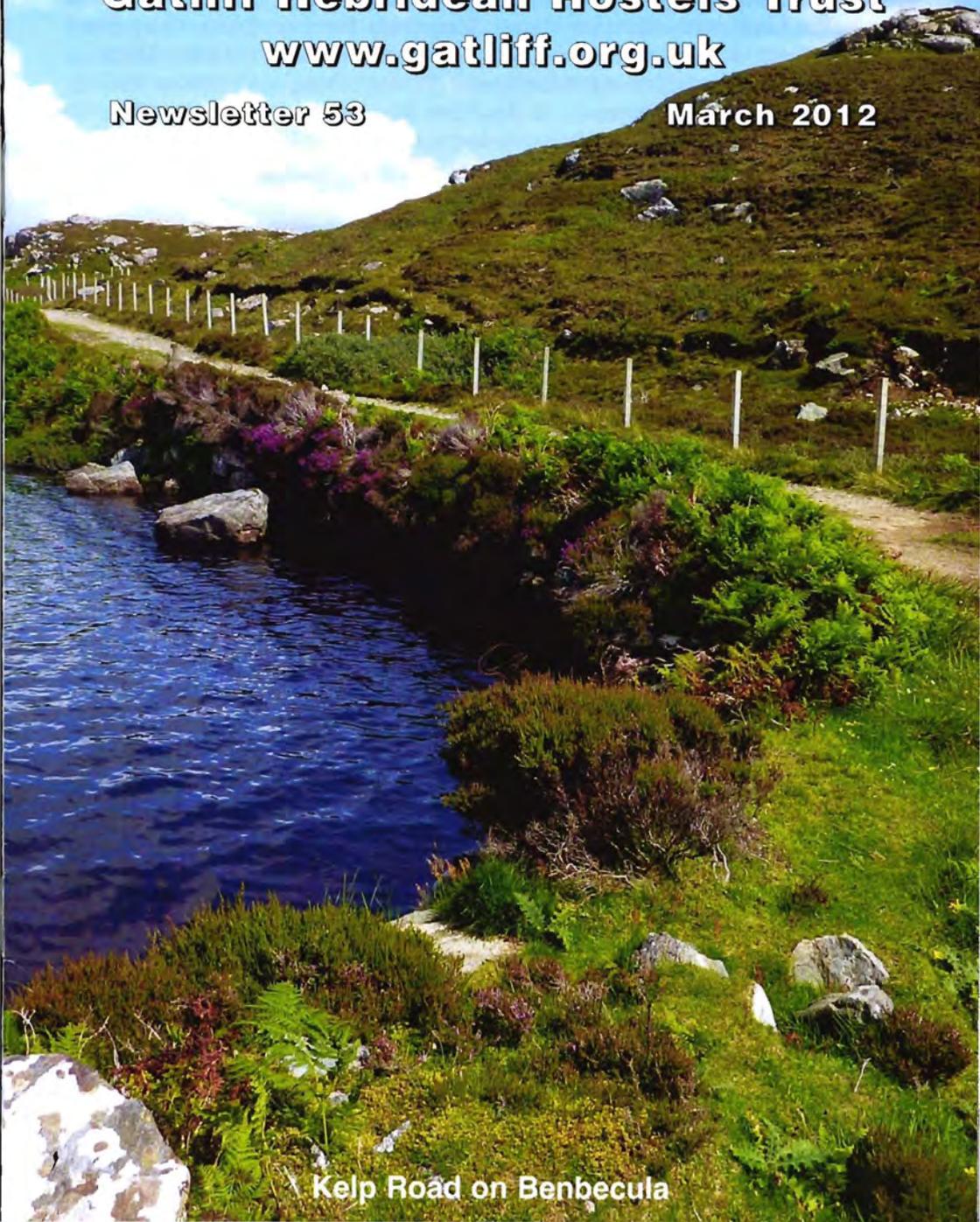
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 53

March 2012



Kelp Road on Benbecula

Trips and Recovery

The 2012 range of trips to islands organised by the **Islands Book Trust** is impressive. Go first to the website www.theislandsbooktrust.com and see what's on offer, with lectures and visits to Wiay (from Petersport, Benbecula), Rodel (on Harris), Canna (from Kallin, North Uist), Sleat (on Skye), Soay (from Elgol on Skye), Scarp (from Husinish, North Harris), the Southern Pairc (from Maraig, North Harris), Mingulay (from Castlebay, Barra), Stroma (off Caithness), the Loch Roag islands (from Miavaig, Lewis) and Ronay (off Grimsay). A Four-Day Conference, *Recovery After the Clearances*, takes place from 5 - 8 September at Ballallan on Lewis.

A GAMA Impact

Monique Watt writes: 'My first visit to Lewis came last March for research purposes relating to my undergraduate dissertation. It was a relatively short visit, lasting only a few days, and I spent most of my time in the library. Owing to this, I had little time to explore the island as much as I would have liked to. Unfortunately, I found myself feeling quite lonely during my first visit and I was quite eager to return home to Aberdeen.

My second visit to Lewis, as part of the GAMA Award, lasted longer and was based around Ravenspoint. My opinion of Lewis changed and I became quite attached to the island. This made it difficult for me to leave and I found myself planning my next trip. What made matters more memorable were the people I met, and my interaction with the locals; something I had not experienced during my first visit.

Living in a hostel definitely gave me the opportunity to meet new people and share stories. I certainly would not have had these chances had I been staying in a hotel and I definitely would not have had as many adventures. Initially, I found it difficult not to get attached to the people that I met. This was my first experience in a hostel and it definitely will not be my last.

I had initially come to the island for research purposes, but what made the most impact, and makes me want to return, are the people there. My attitude had quickly changed as the community as a whole was so welcoming and my memories of them will keep me coming back to Lewis.'

Details of Monique's book, ***South Lochs in the Leverhulme Era - A Community in Crisis***, written for the GAMA Award, are available at www.theislandsbooktrust.com



Luskentyre, South Harris, from Craig Aitchison's The Highlands - Land and Light to be published by Frances Lincoln in June 2012.

Work Parties and Improvements in 2012

John Joyce will be in the Western Isles and at the hostels from 3 - 22 April.

His plan is to spend approximately a week at each hostel to make sure they are spring-cleaned and freshened up. Necessary repairs and general maintenance will be carried out so they are ready for use by hostellers in the coming season.

At Howmore, the assignments will include finishing touches to the dormitories, decoration and floor painting; fixing the annexe porch ceiling; fitting equipment; temporary improvements to shower/wc; work on the outbuilding/store; improving the drive and pathways. It is also hoped that an outside picnic table and seating will be set up as a memorial to the first warden, the late Mrs Catherine MacSween, mother of the current warden, Betty.

At Berneray the projects will involve some internal and external decoration, floor painting, general improvements and work on creating a level hard-stone area and pathways in front of the hostel and between the buildings.

At Rhenigidale the tasks will address the further reconfiguration of the kitchen, interior repairs and decoration, the exterior woodwork, renovating and painting of the rear fire escapes and clearing around the hostel to develop and improve drainage as well as the pathways.

Volunteers are always welcome. If you are interested in helping out on a work-party contact John by email or phone. (johnjoyce@hotmail.co.uk or 020 8653 8376).

More major projects will be commenced in the Autumn, particularly at Howmore where further facilities will be developed in the porch of the thatched-building. The common room will be enlarged and the kitchen relocated and improved. The roof and rendering at Rhenigidale will need to be improved before the Winter.

We are always interested to hear from people who may be able to offer specific skills for our projects. At present we are particularly interested in hearing from anybody who has experience of fitting solid fuel stoves and flue systems and/or plumbing work.

Able and Willing

74% of people support charities during their lifetime, but only 7% do so in their wills. The HMRC is attempting to change this imbalance with its **Legacy 10** scheme that reduces Inheritance Tax from 40% to 36% for those who create wills to fund good causes. There should be many wills being written at present by that most prolific of the generations - the so-called 'baby-boomers' - many of whom are now on the verge of the final, third part of their lives.

If you are willing to consider Legacy 10, think of the benefits a legacy would bring to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust as well as to your own Estate. You will be following in a fine tradition - for Herbert Gatliff set up his original Trust in order to benefit causes which he had helped during his life and a significant number of his supporters followed his lead. Their simple acts of writing have enabled successive generations to have the resources to continue giving shelter as well as pleasure to travellers in remote places.

Crashing into Gatliff

Steve Glover writes: 'On my first trip to the Hebrides, by bicycle, I climbed the North Harris and South Uist hills and became hooked. From then on, usually in June (except while working in Arizona) I returned. The efforts of cycling and climbing eventually gave way to cruising on my classic motorcycle, a 1959 Matchless 350 (pictured), and to watching birds.

Last June I returned, this time on my modern Triumph Bonneville, and found myself at



Rhenigidale on a very wet night. Soon the hostel was full of the usual eclectic crowd, the cosy atmosphere enhanced by the coal-burning stove, tales of adventure and the odd nip of whisky. It was like the best days of my climbing club.

Next day I set off on the bike heading for Cliasmol, intending to walk up past the hydro-electric plant, to view the re-entrant cliffs of Sron Ulladail and to return via Gleann Mhiabhaig. Here is stunning scenery, with the wonder of how these cliffs were free-climbed for the first time earlier in the year.

The return was marked by the frustration of navigating that heavy bike around dozy sheep on the potholed, gravelly, single track road. The shopping done I headed north and turned off for Rhenigidale. Then a dip in the road. Sheep lying. Ewe runs away. Lamb turns back under my wheel.

Suddenly the bike is sliding, its crash-bars like a bob-sleigh, with the road eroding my windscreen. Two ladies appear from a red car. "Lie down ... 999 ... Ambulance!" Then the journey to Stornoway on a spinal board. Banter with the radiographer who is a fellow-biker and have thoughts of my daughter who is also a radiographer.

Next morning, on crutches, I made it down to the Bus Station, phoned Alasdair who kindly picked me up off the bus at the road end, bringing my helmet and jacket. On reaching the bike I gave it a good inspection and, as I had hoped, the damage was superficial, just like mine.

I found all of my belongings neatly placed on the hostel table, with groceries labelled in the fridge. The care, kindness, generosity, interests and motives shown by these Rhenigidale visitors and the warden, made me want to become involved. Now I have attended my first GHHT Executive Committee meeting as an observer. I went by car.'

Spinal Research

The Western Isles stretch quite a way, but do have spinal routes. Peter Clarke has outlined the footpaths that link the Butt of Lewis with Vatersay in his book, *The Timeless Way*. These, of course, involve time, long-distance walking and, perhaps, complicated transport arrangements. This, essentially, is a fine expedition. What is suggested below includes venturing, in the sense of negotiating the requirements of public transport, available Monday - Saturday, but never on a Sunday.

Buses regularly ply the spinal roads of the islands, run to time, integrate with the ferries and, above all, can be relied upon. They offer more than transport, for they allow the visitor to experience directly the local features of people and places, language and exchange. The three Gatliff Hostels and the Ravenspoint Community Hostel at Kershader provide useful overnight stays that are all close to routes, albeit with varying density of services.

Two things are needed to start or end the spinal journeys. One is a readiness to research a sheaf of timetables relevant to the season; the other is suitable accommodation for one night in Stornoway. Once these matters are in hand, access becomes straightforward. The timetable numbers need to be put into context. The W1 takes you straight from Stornoway to the Port of Ness, with walking required to reach the Butt of Lewis.

The W2 gives the circular trip involving the Callanish Stones while the W9 takes in Kershader and the South Lochs. The 'highway' on to Tarbert and Leverburgh is served by the W10, while the 'Golden Road' to Leverburgh via Stockinish and Finsbay is on the W13 service. However, the Tarbert - Rhenigidale (Monday - Friday) bus is different, for travelling on the W11 requires booking by 20.00 the previous evening.

It is always reassuring to see the 'Berneray YH' sign on the W17 which goes to and from Eriskay, passing the junction for the Howmore Hostel. The ferries cross from



The W3 service on the Great Bernera Bridge

Eriskay to Barra, where the W32 whisks passengers to Castlebay and the W33 crosses the causeway to Vatersay. Timetables are available on-line (through the links on www.gatliff.org.uk) and advice is provided by helpful staff on the vehicles, in the Stornoway Bus Station, at the tourist offices and, above all, by informed fellow-travellers. Come on board to see the scenery and be driven in style.

Centenarian

The Gatliff Trust may be 50 years old, but it is young compared with one of its devotees from the earliest days. **Robert Wickenden**, who will be 100 years old on 4 April 2012, had first met Herbert Gatliff in the 1930s when the YHA (England & Wales) held meetings at Toynbee Hall in London. He and his late wife, Ruth, were keen hostellers and shared Herbert's enthusiasms. Soon they found themselves helping to build and promote his hostels in the Western Isles, especially from the time when Robert (pictured here at Rhenigidale) became a trustee in 1964.

He was an electrical engineer and brought his skills to construction work, in general, and to the installation of the hostels' electric circuitry, in particular. This was in the early years at Rhenigidale and Howmore and, some 20 years later, at Berneray. Robert's birthday celebrations will involve family and friends at his home in Brill, in the Aylesbury Vale district of Buckinghamshire. The GHHT will certainly be represented. There has been a request for no personal birthday presents, but for donations to be made to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. These donations have quickly reached three figures, like Robert himself!



Fifty Years On

Herbert Gatliff retired from the Civil Service in 1955, at the age of 58. In many ways his life's work was about to begin. Within six years he had set up the **Gatliff Trust** intended to fund relatively small donations to two churches, at which his father had been vicar, and to a few specific groups. These charitable endeavours were somewhat overshadowed by the creation of the first hostel at Rhenigidale in 1962.

Within ten years two more hostels had been created, but Scarp closed in 1971 when the island became depopulated. The list of organisations receiving assistance had grown to 60. Some grants were made to two of Herbert's particular enthusiasms: researches by the young into topics that he considered to embody the 'adventure of hostelling' - and the requirements of small hostels founded by the SYHA and the YHA (England & Wales).

The success of the Gatliff hostels in terms of trading led to their business arrangements being separated and administered under the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust from 1988 onwards. In December 2011, at Arundel, a group of the trustees, members and friends of the two Trusts commemorated 50 years of the initial setting up of the organisation. They recalled, thanks to Peter Clarke's fine arrangement of the weekend's events, the history and places, the achievements and people who had, and who continue, to make these the two charitable trusts work.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago*

'The Autumn conditions in the south of the UK in 2006 were memorably benign. The **weather** in the north-west was remarkably persistent, for it included over 40 consecutive days during which heavy rain and strong winds were evident.' (Editor: John Humphries) *[There certainly can be something of the wilderness, with 40 days of endurance needed.]*

and of Ten Years Ago

'Advance Bookings: Those present (at the Members' Forum and Executive Committee at the Stirling SYHA) were pretty evenly split on whether **bookings** should or should not be accepted. (Editor: Lawrence Washington) *[It's the first night that cannot be booked. Once 'a-bed-is-bagged' it becomes reserved.]*

and Fifteen

'Neil Pinkett, one of our regular hostellers, has been commissioned by the Chairman to write a **booklet** of walks around and from the Rhenigidale hostel.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) *[The book is still in print with copies at £3 post free (payable to the GHHT) from the Editor.]*

and Twenty

'The Trust is obviously delighted that Magnus Magnusson is able to accept our **invitation** to perform the opening ceremony at the renovated Rhenigidale and the new Garenin hostels.' (Editor: Richard Genner) *[Would a specialist knowledge of the Gatliff hostels be a suitable subject for Mastermind?]*

and now Twenty-five

'To hold Rhenigidale as a Trust property is an exciting **challenge**. Money will have to be raised for the purchase and some repairs, but it will be a wonderful thing to ensure that there will always be somewhere to stay on this most lovely stretch of coastline.' (Editor: Francesca Fraser Darling) *[Here we are, now 50 years on.]*

Addresses

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust: 30 Francis Street Stornoway Isle of Lewis
Western Isles HS1 2ND ghht@gatliff.org.uk

Chairman and Membership Secretary: Peter Clarke 264 Alexandra Park Road
London N22 7BG 020 8888 2449 / 0790 999 3863 peter@peterclarke.com
Twitter: @PeterClarkeGHHT

Treasurer: Philip Lawson Ledmore Carnbee Anstruther Fife KY10 2RU

Project Manager: John Joyce 2 Beaumont Road Upper Norwood London
SE19 3QZ 0208 653 8376 johnejoyce@hotmail.co.uk

Newsletter Editor: John Humphries Elm Lodge Garden House Lane Rickinghall
Diss IP22 1EA 01379 890270 / 0751 012 7014 editor@gatliff.org.uk

Rhenigidale – North Harris

Berneray – North Uist

Howmore – South Uist



Twitter and Tweet

The number of visits to the Gatliff website grew in 2011 to 31,587 from 27,493 recorded in 2010. The number of unique visitors increased from 18,727 to 20,876. This was partly due to the additional feature of the **virtual tours** that may be taken, showing both the outside and interiors of the three hostels.

For those wanting to be kept informed on a daily basis about the interests of Chairman and Membership Secretary, Peter Clarke, there is his twitter account @PeterClarkeGHHT.

If you want a daily briefing about the Scottish islands in general, then there is john-humphries.blogspot.com and its twitter link that can be seen, or even followed, at @ScottishIslands

A London Weekend, Again?

The AGM of the GHHT will be at the Holland Park Youth Hostel, London, on Saturday 20 October. Coffee will be served from 10.00 and the morning session will include a Members' Forum. The invitation made in these columns last year is repeated: 'Here is an **opportunity** to come to the capital, to use the YHA facilities, to meet old friends or to make new ones, and to share your interests in the Gatliff hostels that are located at the other end of the nation.'

Cycle, Don't Recycle

Recycling may be almost obligatory these days, but please refrain from putting this newsletter in your bin. Leave it on the bus, train, library, doctors' waiting room, local youth hostel or even at a friend's house. You never know who will be **attracted!**

Hostel Overnight Figures

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Berneray	1896	2201	2311	2226	2147	2752	2562	2698
Garenin	1631	1577	1620	1301	948	1598	1573	—
Howmore	1561	1552	1805	1727	1595	2022	1765	1760
Rhenigidale	956	1178	1010	1035	919	960	983	994
TOTALS	6044	6508	6746	6289	5609	7332	6883	5452