

Crofters' Newsletter

2019

*Annual Review of the Crofters' Hostels
in the
Outer Hebrides*

www.gatliff.org.uk





ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CROFTERS' HOSTELS 2019

This Review of the Hostels and Crofters' Newsletter looks back on the years 2018. It is for all who stayed at the hostels in 2018 and all who support the hostels.

The Newsletter is compiled by Jo Burgess from entries which hostellers made in the hostel log books. The Review is compiled by Peter Clarke.

The Crofters' Newsletter has appeared in a variety of formats every year since 1963. From the first newsletter it has given the results for the previous year. Production difficulties in 1999 meant that we skipped a year with the 2000 edition giving the results for 1998 and 1999.

REVIEW OF 2018

Hostel Results

Overnights	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Berneray	2,146	2,120	2,438	2,389	2,250
Howmore	1,264	1,236	1,287	1,544	1,472
Rhenigidale	885	898	955	887	790
TOTAL	4,295	4,254	4,680	4,820	4,512

It is a remarkable fact that since Rhenigidale opened in May 1962, and including overnights at hostels now closed (Claddach Baleshare, Garenin and Scarp) over 185,000 overnights have been recorded. Equally remarkable the hostels are only full on the odd night in the summer months, rainy and windy nights especially. On these rare occasions hostellers sort things out among themselves and/or with the warden's help.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust mission is to encourage all, but especially the younger people of limited means, to visit the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, to stay a while so that they might come to know and love the islands. We fulfil our mission by providing simple self-catering hostels to a sound basic standard.

Hostellers may also camp within the grounds of the hostels. All our hostels are surrounded by croft land. We cannot give permission to camp on croft land. We are not providing a camp site per-se. We provide no pitches for camper vans. We do not charge for camping. We charge campers for use of facilities, as they are able to use all the facilities inside the hostel on an equal footing to hostellers occupying beds.

During 2018, for example, our bill for electricity (used for heating and light, and producing hot water for showers etc) for all three hostels was £11,835. (2017: £8,069). We are expecting this bill to rise to about £13,500 in 2019. This amounts to about £2.60 per overnight. All profits from hostel operations are used for more and better hostels.

2018 - a year of positive progress

2018 was the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. It was a very busy but worthwhile year. At long last the formal process for purchasing Berneray got under way. Our programme of hostel maintenance and improvement continued.

Berneray hostel is now ours!

In September 2018, at long last, we were informed that the Executors of the late Annie MacKillop were ready to negotiate with us for the purchase of Berneray hostel. I thank John Joyce for undertaking these negotiations on our behalf. Meanwhile, I worked in the back office keeping the funding on track. I am pleased to report that on 22nd May 2019 we were informed by our solicitor that we had succeeded and that the Trust was the owner of Berneray Hostel. We could not have done this without the support and encouragement of our members and donors. Thank you very much.

The Appeal raised £80,937.25 including Gift Aid. There were 152 donations. After paying legal and professional fees of £7,878 there was a surplus of £3,059.25 which will be used for improvements.

Much work needs to be done and we will need your further assistance. Overall we estimate that £80,000 is required to complete all the necessary work. Our first task is to rethatch both roofs. We have been successful in obtaining grants for both roofs from Historic Environment Scotland. Thanks to his help, the surplus on the appeal to purchase the building, the support of the Gatliff Trust, and a legacy from a GHHT



Looking south towards
North Uist from
Borve Standing Stone

member, Gordon Berry, we have sufficient funds to pay for this work (total cost £47,800). We estimate that a further £32,000 is needed over the next two or three years for window replacements, washroom and shower upgrades, a bike shed, strengthened sea defences, ground works and loft work. At the AGM in July 2019 we were able to announce that over £13,700 had been raised

The Appeal for improvements remains open for donations. If you wish to make a donation, please complete the form at the end of this Newsletter.

Medium Scale Project Fund, part fund from legacies

We have created a new Medium Scale Project Fund to provide a permanent endowment for hostel maintenance. The Executive Committee has long wrestled with the issue of how to fund work at the hostels which we have to be carried out on a recurring basis if we are to maintain our hostel standards. This includes thatching roofs, window replacements, the renewal of major fixtures and fittings e.g. toilets and showers, and kitchen equipment and the renewal of furnishings, beds and bedding, chairs and tables. We aim to put £5,000 per annum into the fund from hostel income. We have agreed to pay 25% of all legacies into the Fund. If you are writing your Will, and wish to leave the Trust a legacy, you can be sure that it will be used to create a permanent endowment for hostel maintenance.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust is a charity regulated by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). Our Charity number is SC 013360.

Presentation of Accounts

The presentation of the Allocations Fund in the Trust's annual accounts was improved. This has made the accounts much clearer and easier to understand. The Allocations Fund was donated to us by the Gatliff Trust with the instruction to invest the money in Charifund Income Units and apply all the income to community organisations in the Outer Hebrides and Scottish outdoor organisations. We are duty bound to the Gatliff Trust to disperse all the income from the investments in the Allocations Fund. We manage this Fund to ensure that any accrued surpluses are applied in accordance with Gatliff Trust's wishes.

Volunteering to help the Trust

So what about the next thirty years? We are appealing for new recruits to the Executive Committee. We need hostellers who share our love of the hostels, have the dedication to do whatever is necessary to maintain the 'Gatliff difference', are willing to work as a volunteer and share the responsibilities of being a trustee and company director. The EC has defined a new trustee induction policy and approach to trustee training. The process will give prospective trustees the opportunity to learn what will be required of them as trustees and what they can expect of their fellow trustees.

Herbert Gatliff was of the view that NOW was always the time to give younger members the chance to put their ideas into practice. Anyone with a suggestion was given a budget (in those days £25 was the scale of things) and sent away to implement their idea. They were, of course, expected to report back.

Being a Trustee is a highly satisfying task. You get the chance of making a real difference to the experience of our hostellers the Outer Hebrides. The Board level experience which is gained as a Trustee can help with career development. All Trustees are volunteers who are reimbursed for their out of pocket expenses on hostel business.

It is possible for members to volunteer to take on a task on behalf of the Trust without being a Trustee. We understand that some cannot or do not wish to take on the legal responsibilities of being a Trustee. All volunteers are acknowledged in our Annual Report. If you are interested in helping the Trust by being a volunteer please contact the chairman (contact details at the end of the report).

General Data Protection Regulation

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came along. All hostellers, members and supporters who have entrusted us with their contact details got new rights. All were informed of their rights. A new privacy policy was adopted; this can be viewed on our web site. This policy stressed that we take data protection seriously and take all possible steps to ensure member and supporter information is safe and accurate at all times. We share this data with the Gatliff Trust, our parent body, but we will never sell or share it with anyone outside GHHT/GT.

Overnight fees

We are holding our fees in 2019 at the level set on 1st April 2018. That is £16 per overnight but £8 for under 18s. The camping fee is £10 per person and £5 for under 18 years old. In other words the fee for the under 18 year olds is half the adult rate both for a hostel bed and for camping.

Hostel Standards

The Trustees record their thanks and appreciation to the Trust's Wardens and their families, Jackie Macleod (Berneray), Betty MacDonald (Howmore) and Kate Langley (Rhenigidale) for their commitment to the hostels, their hard work and the warm & helpful welcome they extend to all hostellers.

Maintaining Standards

It is the Trust's policy to maintain all the hostels to a sound basic standard. We are not aiming to provide 'hotel' or 'luxury' style hostel accommodation (or levy the higher charges which accompany higher grade facilities). We ensure that our hostels are in compliance with all the relevant health and safety regulations and in conformity with Visit Scotland and SYHA standards. We are proud to be part of the SYHA family.

We have achieved our goal of maintaining our hostels at a standard which achieves at least Visit Scotland one star status. However, all three hostels have two star status.

All equipment in the hostels is in good condition at the beginning of the summer season. It is checked on a regular basis. Anything which is broken or is not working is replaced as quickly as possible. Hostellers are asked to draw the warden's attention to any shortcomings. (Comment cards are provided at all the hostels)

Please do not report emergencies or hostel issues requiring attention on social media, eg on our Facebook page, Twitter or by email as these sites are not monitored every day. Instead please use one of the numbers listed at the hostel as appropriate. Police and emergency services always state this on their social media sites. Trustees responsible are often in the islands where internet access and mobile phone coverage is patchy at best. In such circumstances it may take several days to make a response.

Meg Richards, a former Trustee, is the 'GHHT housekeeper.' New bunk beds, mattresses, new tables and chairs were installed at all our hostels in spring 2015. We will keep our furnishings under constant review.

HOSTELS

Full electrical checks were carried out at all the hostels in 2016 and the system was certified until 2021. Berneray and Howmore, which have gas cookers, are certified Gas Safe every year. PAT tests are carried out on electrical equipment annually, fire equipment is checked and risk assessments updated. There are First Aid boxes at all the hostels; these are regularly checked.

We ask hostellers to note that dogs are not permitted in any of our hostel buildings, except for assistance dogs.

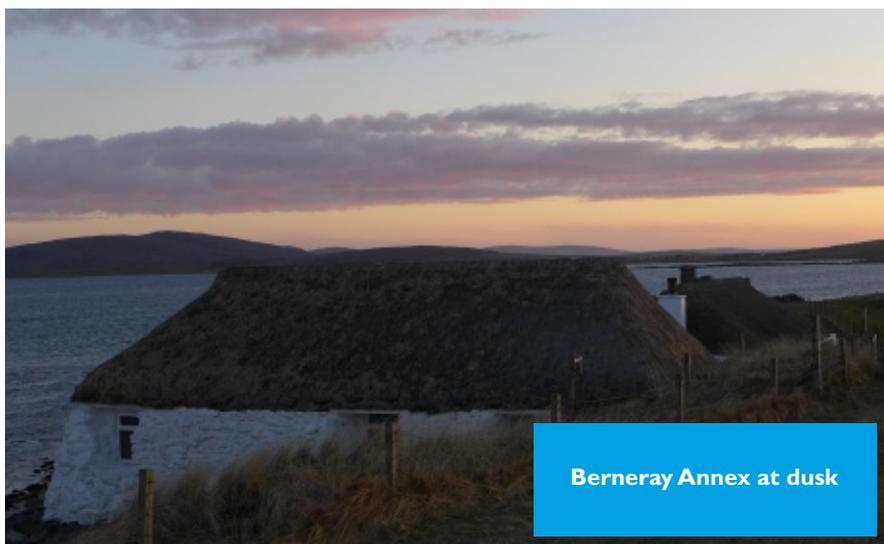
Berneray

The main building and all external woodwork was repainted. Window frames were repaired as required. One dormitory was completely repainted. Internal wood work was painted. All stones on the roofs were checked and secured as necessary.



**L-R Hostel Annex, Hostel;
and Ruin
(not owned by the Trust)**

Camper vans are continuing to be an issue at Berneray. Constant vehicular access is chewing up the access track and during the summer there are often vans and large tents in the field behind the hostel. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust makes clear that it is not encouraging this traffic. We provide no pitches for camper vans. We are not operating a camp site. Hostellers who prefer to camp may do so but only within the boundaries of the hostel grounds. We cannot give permission to camp on surrounding croft land as it does not belong to the Trust. We only authorise camping on the land around the hostel, within our fenced plot. All campers have to pay the Trust's fees for use of the hostel facilities.



Howmore

All stones on the thatched roof were checked and found to be safe and secure.

There has been no progress on the bike shed.



Rhenigidale

The walls and ceilings of the dormitories, internal stairway, hallway/porch area and the shower room were all repainted. A bike shed was constructed on a concrete base. A new shed for dust bins was built. Drainage was improved with land drains installed alongside the steps, under the bike shed and around the camping pitch at the bottom of the steps.

The walkways of both metal fire escapes at the rear of the building have been renewed.



Ruin at Gearraidh Lotaigear
(on the Postmans' Path)

The roof has been cleaned and painted in black pitch to prolong the life of the tiles.

Improvements were carried out to the common room and new mats were supplied in the dormitory.

A small team carried out some gardening in August, mainly cutting back stinging nettles which were encroaching onto the terrace in front of the hostel, and the aubrietia adjacent to the steps up to the hostel.

Volunteers and Trades people

We use a combination of trades people and volunteers; sometimes work parties consist of tradespeople and volunteers.

We thank our Project Manager John Joyce for all his hard work and organisation. We thank Sheila Hamilton, Chloe Harbour, Hersilia Leoca and Meg Richards for joining one or more work parties and/or assisting at one or more of our hostels.

We also thank tradespeople Andy Carr, Peter Edwards and Eddie Webb who worked at the hostels during the year

If you are interested in volunteering for a work party please contact ghht@gatliff.org.uk



Loch Seaforth
(a short walk from the hostel)

Crofters Newsletter 2019

It is raining outside as I write this but the sun shone on me in 2018. Although I did not get to the islands, I was in Stirling and the surrounding area twice, firstly for a Gatliff meeting in March when I got out on the bus to Castle Doune following in the footsteps of the cast and crew of Outlander and also in August for 'The Last Dance' – the final concerts by Runrig. The concerts were very emotional and I was lucky to be at the City Park on both nights – the first sitting with the full view including a skein of geese flying across and on the last night my determined queuing and running got me right to the front; which was very much where I wanted to be. The band and their music has always taken me to the islands – certain songs such as Big Sky take me to Berneray and North Uist, Abhainn An-T'Sluaigh (The Crowded River) takes me on the postman's path to Rhenigidale and Tir A'Mhurain to Howmore and South Uist. I am really looking forward to visiting the islands and the hostels in April and the music of Runrig will be with me.

Outlander has also bought me fitness and weight loss through the lead actor Sam Heughan's 'My Peak Challenge'. Once again I can contemplate walking distance and hope to walk both in and out of Rhenigidale. I can't wait to have my own moments on the path far from 'The Crowded River'.

I have recently got into contact with some of the young people who were with me at Rhenigidale and it seems like that experience was one they all treasure. It was formative for me so as always to Harris we go first.

Rhenigadale

The first entry in the book was from Niall from Fife who was at the hostel glad to do some walking, writing and to experience the Hebrides in winter. He had the hostel to himself and had variable weather. The highlight was seeing a young sea eagle being mobbed by a couple of hooded crows on the walk out to Molineganais.



In March it was freezing outside but warm inside for Keith and Ellis from North Uist.

In April, Kath from Glasgow lamented not having been here before the road came in. Stefan and Catriona from Edinburgh met John and Edie from the work party, having stayed at all the hostels on their cycling trip from Barra to Stornoway, enjoying all three and grateful for the work done by the Trust and the Wardens. Lindsey from Fife walked in the postman's path and although she found it not quite the same as when they were here in 1987, wrote that it was 'as wonderful and the hostel as great as ever'. John and Jane from Darwen stayed on their last night on the islands after completing the Hebridean Way by tandem and wrote 'Paradise Found'.

Into May Ashleen from Sheffield was here for the second time but due to the rain decided to stay in the hostel rather than camp as planned. She wrote that it was a stunning place and the sun even came out so she could see the tops of the hills. Janet

from Radnage in Buckinghamshire detoured from the Hebridean Way walk heading north having stayed in all the hostels. She and others commented on the clean, welcoming and well equipped hostels, thanking Kate for her work.

Robin from Alyth in Perthshire stayed for his first night in the hostel in 36 years and noticed a few changes but was pleased to see the tribute to Roddy McInnes, having fond and vivid memories of time here with him. (No-one who ever met him could ever forget him and with light coming from Tilley Lamps in those days, the atmosphere at the time – Jo). Robin also saw a golden eagle being mobbed and cuckoos, greenshank and wrens. English Stu was experiencing very windy conditions on his Hebridean Way walk heading north. Hana from Michigan wrote that 'it was a shame that we didn't find this haven sooner in their journey', describing it as 'quiet and a little slice of heaven with no industrial city sounds, great company and a warming stove'. A cyclist sheltered from the wind and rain, having been blown off their bike on the way here. He advised 'enjoy your stay here, if it is your first be warned it may not be your last, this place seems to draw some of us back again and again, but that's not a bad thing'. (I wholeheartedly agree – Jo).

Talia from Australia found it a wonderfully peaceful place to recharge and a lovely spot. At the end of May Lawrence, Zach and Robert from Huddersfield wrote that it was beautifully tranquil with stunning weather and great company. There was only one entry in June from Jenny an Australian who walked in the path and spent three days here.

In July, Paul from Edinburgh enjoyed sitting on the promontory watching several dolphins leaping and Sian from Bristol was at her third hostel on her little Brompton bike, it having been her hardest day from Luskentyre to get here, writing 'what a beautiful hostel rich in history and tranquillity'. She was sad to be leaving.

In August it was very wet so a cyclist planning to camp was glad to find space here and the stove on. More cyclists from Switzerland were expecting the rain but not the hostels and having camped at Howmore and visited Berneray in sunshine, arrived in heavy rain and wind, and appreciated the dry bike store. Paul, a motorcyclist from Essex had enjoyed all the hostels and was 'impelled to declare that they are all second to none in their charm, environment, being highly professionally run and maintained and stocked – an inspiration to any traveller after an often long and arduous journey – a beacon of light and a place of refuge and recuperation, and a stepping stone to exploration and adventure'. Malcolm and Margaret from

Hawkhurst in Kent were here on their cycle ride south and felt it was worth the cycle over the hill.

Bob from Alston in Cumbria climbed Toddun while he was here and enjoyed the sight of a golden eagle hunting from the higher ridges and enjoyed walking the postman's Path. He shared dinner with other hostellers he'd previously met, enjoying the warmth of the cosy living room. Two of those other hostellers were Elizabeth on her first visit and Adrian on a return visit from Dundee, Adrian having been here on a work party in 1990. They enjoyed watching the gannets at their fishing and the sight of an otter swimming and then on the beach. The other hosteller who joined them for dinner was Wilbert from the Netherlands who had walked in on the postman's path and particularly wanted to thank Kate.

Michael from Blackhill Co Durham felt that after 9 hours in the saddle he had bitten off more than he could chew, had 2 cups of tea and went straight to bed. He got up at midnight to eat and by morning was well rested. He enjoyed bread rolls provided by Wilbert, magnificent views and a wonderful experience. Anna from Belfast cycled here in the rain and was glad to find it warm with a lovely feeling of connectedness to others on their own journeys. For the Hamilton wanderers the hostel was looking good and well cared for and provided a welcome shelter from the rain and wind. It was 'heavenly' to three more cyclists a day later who described it as 'a perfect chill out zone'. Stuart from New Zealand thought it too special a place for anything he might say! (Having been to his country that is praise indeed Jo). Emma and Jamie from Glasgow wrote 'sitting in silence and the smell of our socks -drinking tea' ! Sheila from Sheffield arrived after a long day trip to St Kilda the previous day and was pleased to find somewhere simple, open, welcoming and a place to lay her weary head.

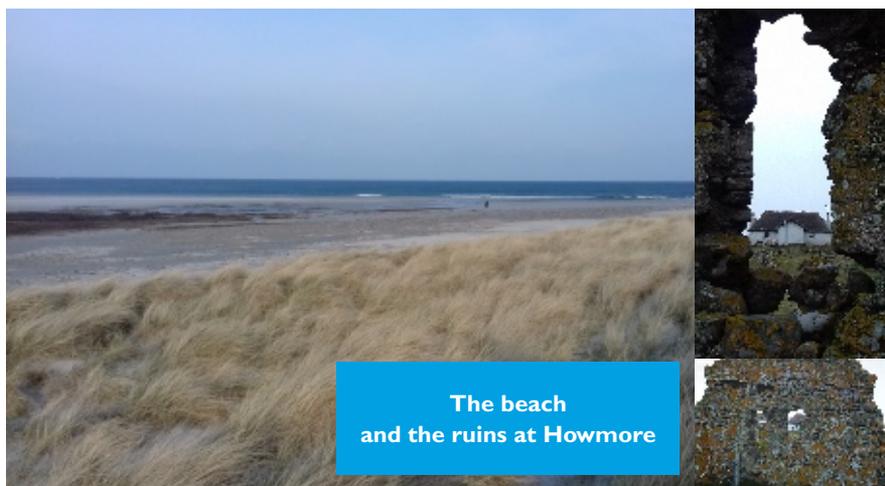
Into September the heaters were hot for Tony and for Donna originally from Portland Oregon, the hostels were the highlight of her trip, because unlike other hostels she didn't have to book just like it used to be 21 years ago when she lived in Scotland. She found each of the hostels unique and other hostellers like-minded and adventurous. She found Kate welcoming and helpful and it to be reassuring that she's nearby. Harris is her favourite place in Scotland – she had been in 1975, never forgotten it and dreamed of coming back. Bill from Massachusetts thought that the winds' lullaby may have been something to do with his excellent sleep. Into November Esther and Emily from Loughborough had a blustery walk along the path and felt a sense of place in the 'warm, cosy and comfortable hostel'. It was windy but

once the fire got going Kiera and Julie from Fife thought it was lovely. Later Ken enjoyed warm sunshine and discovered that Tesco will deliver here !

On New Year's Eve the Stornoway Running Club were here once more.

Howmore

The London Lads had a brilliant time in January but the next time anyone wrote in the book was in April when on Easter Sunday (April 1st), a school of killer whales was seen on the beach, along with 10 golden eagles and a pair of elephants on Benbecula!. Richard and Anna from London had a brilliant stay, the hostel was warm, cosy and clean. Stef from Cumbria thought it a beautiful place and loved the authenticity of the thatched buildings, the ancient chapels and views to the beach and hills. They enjoyed the company of two other cyclists. Ian from Elderslie also appreciated the facilities and the company.



Into May it was a wet and windy ride here from Vatersay for Alison from Glenmore. The following day it was dry all day with a blush of sunshine for Dianne, Adrian, Anthony and Steve from Sheffield and Coventry. For Andrew it was 'absolutely lovely, a palace and was appreciated'. For Talia it was a wonderful place to absorb the beauty of the area and Jane could have sat on the beach for ever. Jill from Anstruther thought it a great place with great people and Colin from Ayr appreciated the showers. Bill from Hexham thought it cosy with great facilities and a lovely location. For Wallis from Ballater after a long day walking, it was an oasis of calm in a lovely place. Hana from Michigan wrote that Betty was wonderfully cheery and the neighbourhood one of a kind. Scarlett and Poppy, cyclists from London appreciated being able to dry out

and Jane and Co from Suffolk enjoyed good craic, singing and dancing. They saw a short eared owl hunting, curlew, reed buntings and possibly an arctic skua and heard corncrake and snipe. Victoria from Edinburgh arrived having had a bad experience with a herd of cows but loved the hostel. George from Glenrothes reported 'a fab location, great weather, loads of wildlife and scenery to die for'. Andy and Hilary from Edinburgh were here for the first time in 30 years and sheltered here from heavy rain and gales on their way north. They commented that the hostel was much improved with hot showers but still the same lovely atmosphere'. Also the local corncrake was in full voice in the night.

Into June a hosteller on crutches arrived finding it peaceful but wrote that they hoped to come back and cycle or walk. Ian wrote that it was 'fantastic, well equipped and very clean'. Someone else enjoyed a great jamming session and thanked Betty writing that she was 'a gem'. Steve from Devon wrote that he never knew that such places existed and thought the hostel very special. For Helen and Lesley from Sussex it was an amazing and unexpected base for the final half of their Hebridean adventure. Michael from Largs arrived after an arduous day being pushed around by the wind and 'having oystercatchers trying to peck his eyes out'. Others included Kim from Ceredigion wrote their thanks and the Littlejohns loved it. Kenny from Glasgow had a 'smashin wee stayover'.

Into July John wrote that it was amazing and that he felt a connection with the place and Rosa wrote that it was 'a great wee place'. Dan and Kirsty from Selkirk and Edinburgh thought it was a home from home. Anthony and Caroline from Edinburgh thought it a beautiful spot and very well appointed, thanking Tommy for the bottom bracket advice! For Maisy, Rannoch, Billy and Clare from Hamilton the beds were nice and comfy. For Jenny from Australia, the weather was disappointing but nonetheless she enjoyed the enlarged museum and beachcombing on the beautiful beaches. Charlie's bistro on Benbecula was very nice. Paul from Milnagavie had a run across the boggy, trackless terrain to Hecla. Jim from Edinburgh loved it too, Iona and Katie from London enjoyed the board games and Katrina from Aberdour enjoyed Jenga.

Rosemary from Cambridge thought it a 'home from home in an exotic setting of great beauty'. For Jim and Emma from Glossop it was 'an awesome port in a storm'. Others wrote a fabulous place with friendly people and enjoyed the west coast sunset, short eared owls, friendly guests and blue skies. The following day cyclists were waiting for the rain to subside. Bee was pleased to re-fill with water and a few

days later the hostel was a lovely shelter during the storm which a 12 year old from Leeds described as a hurricane. (having experienced hurricane force winds in a tent on North Uist in 1989, I can sympathise -Jo). Heather and Julie from Pontefract were also embraced in the storm and a hosteller from Germany enjoyed watching the storm through the window.

In August the Hughes family from Nantwich met some very friendly and varied folk. Others arrived in pouring rain with flat tyres. Francesca from Italy particularly enjoyed the mesmerizing walk on the beach and the warm shower. A hosteller from Austria wrote that the people they had met were extremely helpful, warm hearted and open minded. The shower gave them the energy to head south. Elizabeth and Philip were here for 'the umpteenth time' from Cumbria and then back again to dry out after camping in a force 10 gale on Vatersay!. They wrote that the weather was good and the wildflowers wonderful. Kiloran and Suzie from Glasgow thought it a beautiful hostel, wonderfully maintained. Matt and Emma from Cheltenham learned a lot about local history from Tommy and slept well. The Frost family were also retreating from the rain. Hamish from Oxfordshire who had been before was pleased to see the continued investment and improvements in the hostel. Visitors from Barcelona really enjoyed talking to Betty.

September found the team from Breast Cancer Now, thanking Betty for her hospitality, the warm beds, hot showers and ginger cake. Others arrived in the rain and were glad to be able to dry out. French hostellers, in French wrote that were on their way north (I think) but they definitely wrote that they were about to recharge their batteries. David from Vermont commented on the unbelievable people who come to this place. Andy and Anna had got engaged on a windswept Vatersay and appreciated a cosy and relaxed interlude here before the journey onwards – Whisky Galore here and Whisky Galore in Speyside where they were heading. Margaret from Newcastle had been following otter tracks on the beach. Sandy and Annabel from near Glasgow were lucky with the weather and enjoyed a starling doing a great imitation of a buzzards call on the roof in the morning before they left. Brian from Creetown commented that Howmore had changed a fair bit since he first discovered it on a dreich Sunday in 1985 ! He and other hostellers from Kuala Lumpur were impressed by everything including the shooting stars seen on the beach at midnight.

Into October it was cosy for Emely from Holland in front of the fire with the wind howling outside, warm, wonderful and homely for visitors from Findhorn, charming

for Manfred and Ulrike from Germany and someone else wrote in Gaelic – Tillidh mi dhachaidh – I have come home. For Bill from the Wirral it was fantastic and for Matt from Canada a beautiful spot and a wonderful cosy place to stay after experiencing the wild South Uist weather.

In November Guilherme from Portugal wrote that it was 'a magical place, isolated from the world'.

Berneray

The Berneray log book was depleted by paper being removed from it by hostellers for their own use but the first entry reported a Common Crane on the island in February. In March the Batty clan and Martin from Barnsley were here and wrote 'we will be back'. Alex was cycling from top to bottom and on his/her third visit, especially loving the beaches.

In April Christiane and Matthias from Kassel in Germany were here on a return trip having been here in 1984 when they were students. Simon from Yorkshire had 'bimbled' his way back here and wrote that he just can't help coming back. He met and thanked John and the work party. It was wet at the end of April for Klass from Holland walking from Barra to Harris then two days later someone wrote that the weather was superb and Cathy from Ayrshire enjoyed beautiful weather and thought that Berneray was stunning.

Into May someone wrote that it was 'an amazing place – never mind the weather'. Sarah and Dan from North Wales stayed during a force 9 gale waiting for the weather to come good for kayaking. They have been coming for 30 years and wrote 'the hostel remains a favourite and as wonderful as ever'. Hana from Michigan wrote that she definitely wanted to come back in the sunshine. Patrick wrote that it was a stunning place and he loved the peace and quiet and the beautiful views.

In June Erin Ronay from West Sussex (named after a little island near Benbecula) was here doing fieldwork for her University Geography course. She had been before because her mother lived for a while on Benbecula. She hoped that her research would take off and give her an excuse to stay for much longer – maybe forever. The Coffey family from Crawleigh had another fabulous visit and got the weather they ordered and a liberal sprinkling of fantastic wildlife – an otter, lots of Hen Harriers, short eared owls, curlew, lapwings, plover and stunning terns. They left sunburnt having met lots of interesting individuals as per usual after another memorable stay –

thanking the volunteers who have done such a wonderful job upgrading the hostel.

Elizabeth and Philip from Cumbria were here 'for the millionth time – we love it so much that I think we shall still be coming with our zimmer frames'. The usual good company and conversation were expected but what was unusual was the fabulous weather. The highlight was the carpet of yellow pansies everywhere. They also saw arctic terns at Balranald. Another visitor was here for the first time in 20 years writing about 'the magic of gathering, exchanging and drinking tea side by side with perfect strangers 5 minutes before and feeling with them like being with old friends, looking for the ferry passing by, laughing, sharing – quite simple but so different to everyday life'. The west beach, the silence and the seals were enjoyed together with memories.

Visitors from Sweden were first here 30 years ago on their bikes. Over the years they wrote they have seen the hostel develop from one small croft house with a peat fireplace and a few bunks into a modern facility where everybody can find a place but the beautiful view and the atmosphere remains. Dave was here for a customary 'cool few days' writing that it was 'too short but there is always next time'.

Into July Jenny from New South Wales was also on a return visit and enjoyed walking round the island and meeting some of the residents. She noticed the impact of erosion on the beaches and the lack of gannets fishing off the east and west beaches and pondered the reasons why. Jane and Liz from Sheffield came on the recommendation of a friend and the magic of Berneray immediately put them under its spell. Kirsty and Dan from Edinburgh loved the views and the opportunity to escape from the 'buzz' of city life. A returnee Sassenach was here enjoying the visual tonic 'as always it is awesome to be back'. Monika from Switzerland was on a return visit too and wrote that 'it is hard to leave this place', thanking all of the people for the company that makes this so special and unique. Mairi and Jan from Glasgow were on another visit and thanked Davie for playing his accordion.

Elizabeth and Philip were back in August when the botanical highlights were field scabious, heather, dandelion type flowers and a purple thing they didn't know the name of. They enjoyed a concert by a lovely German guitarist. Dougie from Dunbar cycling north absolutely loves the place.

In September for Meg from Ayr, the serenity and peace made it 'the finest place on earth to come to reconnect with yourself and with things you thought you'd lost'.

For Alasdair and David from Edinburgh it provided a brilliant night spent warm and cosy, sheltering from battering winds and pelting rain and they thought it a fantastic spot to reconnect with nature and self. Margaret from Newcastle experienced 'a stunning moonrise with the moonlight grey and the seascapes black'. She also looked down from Sand Hill onto a sea eagle with its white tail. Christine from Doncaster meanwhile wrote that it was 'a joy to hear beautiful sounds reminiscent of pan pipes emanating from the gate post on the approach to the cemetery. I tarried awhile drinking in the tuneful melody'.

In October Sue and Pete from Findhorn were safe and cosy while a storm raged outside. At the end of November Brian from Glasgow reported that the common crane was back, together with barnacle, greylag and white fronted geese, redwing, fieldfare, song thrush, blackbird, twite, starlings, collared dove, red breasted merganser, pintail ducks, long tailed ducks, eider, hen harrier, ringed plover, sanderling, Icelandic gulls, Herring, lesser and greater black backed gulls, sparrow hawk, snipe, reed buntings, snow buntings, sea eagle, curlew, lapwing, sky lark, golden plover, swans, teal and heron. Guilherme from Portugal wrote 'a forgotten piece of paradise suspended in the immense blue'.

In December Madeline and Gorzalo wrote that it feels 'like the wind is huffing and puffing and that the house is going to fly away'. Brian and Rebecca stayed two additional nights because the ferries were cancelled in the storm. They were pleased to be stuck, saw lots of birds but no otter.

Into February 2019 Matt and Barney came to escape the dreary weather on Skye and experienced the ferry in a Force 8, questioning the wisdom of their decision but wrote that it was a delight to arrive. They enjoyed their stay and want to come back to see the otter.

For those of you who stayed in the hostels in 2018 and are seeing the newsletter online; but did not receive one in the post, this is because when I go through the hostel registers to extract emails and addresses to send the newsletter to hostellers, if you have only left a postcode but no house number or name, there is not enough information for the Trust to risk postage on an envelope which the post office will return. For hostellers from abroad an email address is essential, again for reasons of cost and convenience.

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust Membership Application Form

Please detach this page and return it to the Membership Secretary, Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street STORNOWAY Isle of Lewis HSI 2ND

I wish to become a member of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. I enclose herewith a cheque/postal order for £ _____ being my donation for one year. (Please make cheques payable to Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust.) In the event of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust being wound up while I am a member, or in the course of the year following the date of my cessation of membership, I agree to contribute a sum not exceeding £1 should I be requested to do so.

Signature

Name in Full

Address & Postcode

.....

.....

.....

Email address:

Date:

- I wish to help the Trust as a volunteer (tick)
- I prefer to pay by Bankers Order please send me a form (tick)

Gift Aid

If you pay Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax you can increase the value of your donation by 25p in the £ at no cost to you. Just complete and sign the form overleaf and send it to the Trust with your membership application form. (We can reclaim tax on donations in past years. Currently it is four years.)

Gift Aid Declaration

I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in past years to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signed

Date



Simple Hostels in the Outer Hebrides Run by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust



Reinigeadal (Rhenigidale) Isle of Harris 12 beds
OS Landranger sheet no.14 NB 229018

A croft house in a remote village in a secluded bay at the foot of Loch Seaforth. Views over the Minch to Skye and NW Scotland

Bearnaraigh (Berneray) Isle of North Uist 21 beds OS Landranger sheet no.18 NF 932814

Two thatched cottages on Berneray's eastern beach. Wide views of the Sound of Harris & the hills of South Harris

Tobha Mor (Howmore) Isle of South Uist 16 beds OS Landranger sheet no. 22 NF 757365

A thatched house amidst the ruins of an ancient church site between bog & machair. Views over South Uist's three highest peaks.