

# ***Hebridean Hostellers***

**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**

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

**Newsletter 56**

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**Supper Time at Berneray - Peter Clarke**

# Summer in the Islands as Observed by Peter Clarke

It was good to see people enjoying the hostels this summer. I visited Berneray and Howmore in August and met a lot of hostellers who were enjoying the islands. When I arrived at Berneray on a still summer's evening, the view over the Sound of Harris was fantastic in the early evening light.

Hostellers were enjoying dinner with wine in the Common Room. In front of the main building a young visitor was watching seals through a telescope. His grandmother, who had brought him, was painting. Another resident was reading a book, another was enjoying a cuppa in the evening sun.

There were only two unoccupied beds! A couple of tents had been pitched outside. Several visitors gathered round for a chat. All praised the improved facilities and thanked the Trustees for maintaining the place so well.

At Howmore hostellers were making supper in the new kitchen. A game of chess was being played. A family (pictured below) arrived and pitched their tent. They had stayed there on their way south and had now returned after a visit to Barra and Eriskay. The two new showers looked inviting. There were plenty of spare beds!

This year we replenished the camp beds, which have always featured to take unexpected overspill. Each hostel now has four new camp beds and, at Berneray at least, they have all been called into service.

Kate Langley, the warden, tells me that Rhenigidale has been busy, but there was no one there a couple of nights ago when we were in touch.



## Works Report - by John Joyce

By April the builders had finished construction of the new shower room and separate wash room in the main building at **Howmore**. These facilities, with all new improved and updated equipment and tiled floors, were fully operational for Easter. We were able to retain some natural stone walls as part of the design in the wash-room. Final finishing touches and decoration will be completed later. The kitchen area was fitted with new stainless steel units and sinks and two sparkling new fridges, but we have temporarily retained the existing hobs until the whole kitchen and common room area can be completed and fully decorated in the autumn. The renovation is going well. Thanks to all who have contributed to the Appeal.

The very wet winter weather caused some dampness in the end walls of the dormitory building, but this was rectified and affected areas redecorated and floors painted. Some new chairs were supplied. Both the external doors and the outside benches were sanded, cleaned and double varnished to protect them.

We were fortunate at **Berneray** to get some good weather in early spring enabling us to prepare and paint the outside of both the buildings so they looked bright and fresh for the summer. The site was cleared up and the winter's seaweed was removed from the 'lawn' outside the hostel - the waves were not far away from the front door! Inside walls and floors that needed attention were decorated too. All the dormitory blinds were renewed, some furniture was replaced and a new fridge and other equipment were supplied. General repairs and maintenance continued outside.

Inside the big difference is that all the old storage radiators, which had suffered abuse over the years, have been removed and replaced with brand new Rointe electric radiators fitted with tamper proof grill covers. We hope these devices will be more efficient, keep the dormitories warm and not be so easily damaged.

Work on improving and upgrading the kitchen/common room area, floor and toilet/shower room facilities is the next priority.

Remedial work to the skews on the gable ends of the roof at **Rhenigidale** was completed in June. Repairs to the outside rendering are planned to complete the 'waterproofing' then it will be possible for other necessary external and internal work to be carried out.

## Feedback Request and Appreciation

If you have visited the hostels recently, then any comments and opinions you may have on the changes and work carried out are welcome. If you want to help with work on the hostels, contact John Joyce. The next work party will be in October/November.

Thanks to Stuart Colley, Eddie Webb, Rob Plaister and Lindsay Shawbost for their contributions to the work-force.

## The Hebridean Way

Work is progressing on the initial stages of the Hebridean Way, a long-distance footpath and cycleway from Vatersay to Stornoway, with a further extension to the Butt of Lewis. The opening should be for the Summer of 2016 and eventually the walking path and cycling route will be embedded in both the landscape and in the intentions of some energetic visitors. The Gatliff Hostels will undoubtedly benefit from increased footfall and pedal-turning – for Howmore is right there on the prospective tracks; Berneray is close to a significant point, the only ferry link between the Uists and Harris; with Rhenigidale providing the only accommodation of its sort for miles around.

## Berneray Historical Society

The Nurse's Cottage, Berneray, is a relatively short walk from the ferry terminal and is the hub of the Historical Society. It is one of several Comunn Eachdraidh which feature throughout the Western Isles and delve into, record and display matters of local, historical significance. The opening hours of the Cottage are in the Summer months from 11.00 - 15.00 on Mondays - Fridays, but access to the Society's website - [www.bernerayhistorical.com](http://www.bernerayhistorical.com) - is always available. Its publications are worth exploring and its presence in an area where the past is close to the surface of island life is worthwhile.

## A Uist Trail

Howmore is well-positioned as a place of accommodation for those seeking to learn more or follow in the steps of Bonnie Prince Charlie. First go to [www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk) and bring up the appropriate information about Prince Charles Edward Stuart and the places associated with him in the locality. He came to Eriskay on 23 July 1745 aiming to regain the throne of Great Britain on behalf of his father. Within a year he was defeated at Culloden, fled back to the Outer Hebrides where he sought refuge during April 1746 before moving on to Skye.

## An Old Green Track

Robert Macfarlane, author of *The Old Ways*, wrote the following: 'Along the south-eastern coast of the Isle of Harris runs one of the most beautiful paths I know: an old green track I spent a week walking across Lewis and North Harris, camping in shielings and fishing in lochs as I went, finally reaching Rhenigidale, where I slept in the little white-walled youth hostel.

The next morning, I followed the green track west to Tarbert, contouring first above steep-sided sea coves and then dropping into a glen called Trollamaraig in which a dwarf forest of willow, aspen, honeysuckle and foxglove flourishes. Then it was up, steeply up, zigzagging the east face of a hill called the Scriob until the path eased and led me between two peaks - Trolamal and Beinn Tharsuinn. On that clear day the landscape to my west was wonderfully visible, laid out like a map: an intricate weave of moor, crag, scarp and shining lochans. A storm blew in and over, and I walked the final miles along shining tracks and under rainbows.'

## Leaving Berneray and Approaching Rhenigidale

Julian Paren a trustee of the GHHT, is a scientist, specialising in glaciology and oceanography, whose work led him to spend up to a hundred days under canvas in remote, polar areas. He undertook most research in the British Antarctic Territory and particularly in the Peninsula. He now lives on the Black Isle, north of Inverness, and is involved in lecture tours as well as with the work of the Trans-Antarctic Association, a charity which provides funding for expeditions in memory of Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary.

Earlier this year, Julian created a vocal guide, a gallery of images with a Gaelic song background relating to Berneray and its hostel. It can be accessed on the drop-down menu of the appropriate section of [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk) Soon a similar feature will appear about Rhenigidale and its surrounds. Some 50 images will take viewers from the first of the Gatliff hostels as far as the difficult-to-reach Mollinginish. However, extreme remoteness, as well as low temperatures, have never fazed this researcher!

## Rhenigidale Hostellers

These images of those staying at the hostel have been supplied by Peter Clarke during a visit he made in August 2013.



## **Howmore Appeal**

The Howmore Appeal stands at £27,207. Subject to HMRC approval, we will be able to claim £2,853 in Gift Aid. This means a grand total of £30,060 stands in the appeal fund. Thank you very much to all our donors.

During the autumn we will renew our efforts to raise the additional £16,940 required to complete the project. Meanwhile if you get the opportunity to visit Howmore, go and enjoy the new facilities. There is still more to do there, but it is looking pretty good and is being enjoyed by hostellers.

## **Gift Aid**

If you have signed a Gift Aid to the Trust, make sure you give your full address and post code. Equally if you have a Gift Aid in place in favour of the Trust, and you move, please make sure you notify us of your change of address. For claims since 2013 we now have to report your address for HMRC verification.

## **Legacies**

GHHT has received a legacy of £20,000 from the late David Seddon of Blackheath. We believe David, who supported the cause for many years, died in 2012.

We have also received a legacy of £421.40 from the late Bernard Selwyn. Bernard, a founding Trustee of the Gatliff Trust, died in 2013 and members of the Committee attended his funeral at Golders Green Crematorium.

## **What Makes the Gatliff Hostels Special?**

Among many factors, here are four of them that make the Gatliff hostels special. They were started with a vision by a man of strong personality and views, Herbert Gatliff, and his wish to see an incredibly attractive area of Britain become more accessible, to young people in particular, has been continued. The inability to book beds at the hostels means that relatively adventurous, sociable and often well-informed, people stay, but not in large groups. The three hostels have distinctive sea-side settings. Howmore borders the machair and sands of South Uist; Berneray the sea of North Uist; Rhenigidale a bay in North Harris. Finally, they all have access to interesting places in the immediate vicinity. The village of Howmore has a significant number of blackhouses; the island of Berneray can be encompassed easily with, on its western shores, an extensive beach that once, inadvertently, was used to promote the shorelines of Thailand; while Rhenigidale has a booklet devoted to promoting its hinterland.

Please let the Editor know if you consider other features to be special; and do inform the Chairman if you are thinking of donating or are planning to bequeath in your will to the GHHT. Suggestions and donations will be appreciated and help maintain those elements of 'speciality'.

## **Meet in London**

There is an interesting opportunity to combine a visit to London, with a Discussion on the Future of Small Hostels and attendance at the autumn meeting of the Gatliff Trust. It's on Saturday 25 October at the Holland Park Youth Hostel, with coffee available from 10.00. Contributing to the topic under review will be Marilyn Barrack (Chair of Elenydd Hostels Trust), Chris Meek (Project Oasis North Downs and Puttenham Eco-Camping Barn, West Surrey) and Bill Sellers (Skiddaw House Foundation, Lake District). This session will last for the morning and it's always a pleasure to have lunch at this hostel where the chef's skills are much appreciated.

The Holland Park building has significance. It was created in 1605 for Sir Walter Cope and was known as Cope Castle, a fine example of the Jacobean-style of architecture. Much of it was destroyed in September 1940 during the London Blitz. The east wing remains and is part of the accommodation available. However, the leasing arrangements are under review and the hostel's future is not certain. Come and stay before it's too late and do let Peter Clarke know if you intend being at the meeting and staying for lunch.

## **Something in Return**

All organisations need to recruit people to bring in new skills and different perspectives. As life-expectancy, and the time available after retirement or redundancy, increases, so does the available pool of human talent. There are many individuals with the interests at heart of hostelling, in general, and of the Gatliff brand, in particular. They are capable of helping the GHHT move forward. The problems centre on locating and focusing people on the tasks that are needed - manual dexterity, specialist construction and maintenance work, clerical abilities and professional management. If you have a sense of mission to return something to the activities that stimulated you when or since being young, then do get in touch. There is a wide range of names and addresses below.

## **Become an Ambassador for the Hostels**

Peter Clarke writes: Everyone has great stories to tell about the hostels. Could you become a hostel ambassador? Please tell your friends about these distinctive and stimulating places. Plenty of people write positive pieces in the hostel house-books and a good number put up stuff on their Facebook pages. If you do, why not link your personal page with ours at the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust website? Also why not tell Trip Advisor how you enjoyed the hostels?

If you belong to a walking, cycling, hostelling or outdoor group, could you supply your fellow-members with some of our literature? This can be supplied to you on request. If you know of places where posters could be attractively displayed, please tell us about them.

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

### **Ago ....**

'To be part of the Twins Gathering when she (Jessie Macleod (1924 - 2009) and Annie were the oldest surviving twins in the Western Isles.' (Ed: John Humphries) [*From the obituary of Jessie.*]

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

Susan Morrison writes: 'I was just wondering what happened to Claddach Baleshare. I have stayed in hostels all over the globe, but my night spent there in 1989 still remains the best ever. I have fond memories of the warden, Catriona Tosh, who enlightened us to the fact that she had been born in the hostel and that it had been built by one of her ancestors.' (Ed: John Humphries) [*What fine connections.*]

### **and Fifteen ....**

'Discussions are being held about having our own website on the internet.' (Ed: Jim McFarlane) [*An electronic revolution later.*]

### **and Twenty ...**

'Main topics during the meeting were the refurbishment of Howmore hostel and possible acquisition of a building in Barra for a new hostel.' (Ed: Jim McFarlane) [*Materials for, and concepts of, buildings come and go.*]

### **Twenty-five ...**

'£28,825 is needed to fund the major renovation of Rhenigidale Youth Hostel.' (Ed: Richard Genner) [*The sum was raised.*]

### **... and now Thirty**

'Some time ago a cast iron stove was taken to Rhenigidale, but it has proved unsuitable. It needs to be shifted, possibly to Berneray or Howmore. Any volunteers at Easter - with transport ideally?' (Ed: Peter Clarke) [*Sounds like a task for a pilgrimage.*]