

THE GATLIFF TRUST

Trustees:

H.Gatliff (Chairman)

P.Harwood (Hon.Secretary)

B.Selwyn

"Anglebury"

Kingsway Avenue,

Woking, Surrey.

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Dear

RAINIGADALE YOUTH HOSTEL.

You visited this hostel in 1962 and you may like to know how it came about as well as how it fared.

A number of hostellers who knew the North West well had for a long time wanted to see hostels established in the Outer Isles. In the Summer of 1961 one of these, Mac Hoskin, who after six weeks as volunteer warden at Achininver had walked through the mountains from there to Morar, went over to the Outer Isles to see if he could find a hostel. When he got to Tarbert the Chairman of our Trust, who was spending a few days there and had on previous visits twice been over to Rainigadale, suggested that he should go over and see if there was a suitable empty house there. He found one and met Mr.Roderick MacInnes on whose croft it was. Roddy, as we now all know him, came over to Tarbert and Mac and the Chairman made provisional arrangements with him for its use.

The S.Y.H.A. were kept in touch with all this, but in view of the difficulties of keeping an administrative eye on hostels in the Outer Isles felt they could not take the responsibility of "recognising" this one.

They offered, however, to hand over to our Trust the fund which had been given to them to help establish in the Hebrides a hostel in memory of Keith Chambers, a London caver and hosteller who had visited the Hebrides in 1951 and was drowned on a coastal climbing weekend in Cornwall in 1955. While South Uist had been most in mind for this hostel, Harris was not inappropriate as Keith had camped halfway up the Clisham. Our Trust was accordingly glad to accept this fund, providing an income of over £25 a year towards running expenses. Another visitor to the Hebrides who had already offered to help meet the initial costs of a small hostel agreed to provide the equipment for Rainigadale, lending it to us so long as the house is used as a hostel. The decision was then taken to open the hostel ourselves.

Mac was able to take a long enough holiday in 1962 to see the hostel started off in May, and visit it again in July, and two of our trustees were also able to visit it when on holiday in the Outer Isles. As the S.Y.H.A. could not "recognise" it, it could not, of course, be included in their handbook or other official publicity of either the S.Y.H.A. or the Y.H.A.(E.& W.) but we were able to bring it to the knowledge of hostellers visiting Stornoway and also a number of others in England and Scotland who knew the North West Highlands well. Even so, we did not expect to get at so remote and little known a place more than twenty or thirty visitors, perhaps 60 or 70 bednights. The hostel however had 71 visitors with 161 bednights; 45 were English, 17 Scottish and 9 from overseas. This was very cheering but even more significant was the value set on the hostel by those who went there.

The housebook not being of standard pattern had space for remarks and these were such that we had it photographed. Hostellers were moved not only by the beauty of the hills along the track above the sea but even more by the welcome given them by the people. There is not space to quote them all, but "I have been to over 100 hostels and this beats them all for everything... .... the people here are so sincere and hospitable" is typical, and perhaps most moving of all is the entry, written rather haltingly in capitals by a young hosteller from Glasgow who was there over Sunday "ALTHOUGH I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND THE WORDS I WILL REMEMBER THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICES RAISED IN PRAISE OF THE LORD FOR A LONG TIME TO COME".

Rainigadale is probably the remotest settlement in Britain except for a few in smaller islands and it is this that gives the hostel a special place in its life and hostellers a special welcome. We, and those who have helped us, have a very wide knowledge of hostels throughout Britain, but we doubt whether any other has served the objects of the two YHA's in quite the way this one has, encouraging the traveller to far away places to love and understand not only their beauty but their people.

The official report of our Trust includes the accounts of the fund and hostel. Very briefly the income of the fund was over £25. and hostel receipts nearly £30. This was more than enough to pay the rent, insurance and cost of fuel, cleaning materials, etc. We had asked Roddy to take some part of the receipts for all his trouble in acting as warden but he did not wish to take anything over and above the agreed rent of the house. We very much appreciated this; it gave us a surplus from which to pay for installing calor gas and a little further equipment besides 4 additional beds which are being provided on loan as was the original equipment. There will also be a small store for this coming season.

Several people have asked whether there is any prospect of other hostels in the Hebrides. We hope that the S.Y.H.A. may be able to overcome their administrative difficulties of running hostels there when the new car ferries get going and if so we would hope to be able to make a modest contribution from the fund to the loss, if any, on such hostels somewhat on the lines of their Small Hostels Fund; but meantime one or two experienced hostellers are on the look-out for possible buildings, particularly in South Uist, the old thatched cottages of which have unique character and beauty and can be made very comfortable. We should welcome further help in this search.

We hope that a number of those who visited Rainigadale in 1962 will be able to go again and also to encourage others to go there. We would end by saying that Keith Chambers in whose memory this hostel has been established was a fine adventurer who loved not only caves but many wild places and was also a great leader largely because he did not seem to lead; we feel this hostel is a worthy memorial of him and we hope it may encourage others to adventure and lead as he did.

Yours sincerely,

Hon. Secretary.