

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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Dear Hosteller,

This is our usual letter to tell those who have visited the unofficial Youth Hostels provided with our help by crofters in the Outer Hebrides how they fared in 1968 and future prospects.

Last Year.

There were again three hostels open all the year round, and they had about 625 bednights (Howmore 313 Scarp 80 and Rhenigidale 232) and about 186 visitors (Howmore 93, Scarp 23 and Rhenigidale 84 which adds up to 200, but five were at all three and four more at two). Some were campers and exact statistics cannot be guaranteed. Bednights were England and Wales 315, Scots 237, others 73, and visitors 85, 79 and 22, the higher proportion of Scots visitors being due to the short stay Nicolson parties. ("Eskimo", "Eybrid" and "Barbarian from Edinburgh" are assumed to be Scots).

A number were back again - Keith Holmes (who no doubt found Scarp and Kinlochresort easier reaching even at Christmas than Eternity Range in the Antarctic) Margaret Duke, Francis Mordaunt (after 5 years), Peter Hallowell, Barry Smith, (Schools Hebridean Society) Fiona Cormach, Ernie Ives (who again did great work on repairs at Howmore) and of course Robert Scott and Ian Millar from Stornoway coming both with school parties and on their own.

But for the great majority the hostels and for many the Hebrides, were a new experience, What is uneventful and no news for those who've known the hostels since they began is new and an event for most, though those who met a mouse for the first time should be reminded that this is not news; many years ago a lone hosteller dreaming by the fireside at Opinan hostel became suddenly conscious of a companion at the other side who later ate part of his chocolate on the lower bunk.

Howmore.

South Uist is now easily reached by the motorist using the car ferries, and also by bus from the Oban boat, and the hostel being not far off the main road gets more of those travelling round than Scarp or Rhenigidale. Several however, coming for only a day or two, remained a fortnight or more, and one, Archie McCallum, wrote specially to say how much he'd appreciated his stay. Instead of being casual outsiders, part of the Tourist Trade, we are living in a community which had a life of its own, and so

could treat us as friends instead of "visitors". It's a good thing in itself as well as getting the hostel more used that some should stay for some time, but we'd ask them to remember that the primary purpose of a youth hostel is to provide for those on the move (who should feel that for the night the hostel is their home as much as the residents') and be ready if it gets nearly full to make room for them somehow, for example by camping (midges permitting).

#### Scarp.

Angus and Joan McLennan had retired to the mainland, and, sad as it is to see old people leave their island homes, no doubt its best they should go where life is easier. Norman McInnes who took over is still there and we're glad to hear will be for another summer at least.

Fewer hostellers reach Scarp than Howmore or Rhenigidale, but those that do find it very rewarding. "Top of the three" wrote a Dutch hosteller. (it's not clear what the third was; he doesn't seem to have been at Howmore). Another wrote "To stay in Scarp hostel is a great privilege; the house is a living page from the folk history of Scotland". It's strangely moving to find this written of the most primitive hostel in Britain.

#### Rhenigidale.

The Rhenigidale Housebook is large and stimulates self expression, both verbal and pictorial. Last year was a record. It cost £7.10.10d. to photograph, and this time was worth every penny of it, though we won't let it escalate into that amount of New Pence. (If any retired or even unretired hostellers with good eyesight would like to 'edit' the housebooks of the three hostels we'd be glad to lend them a complete set of photographs and circulate the result).

The statistics are a bit disorganised by a great expedition from the Nicolson Institute. This appears to have numbered 29, 20 children and 9 staff; 17F slept (or did not) in the house, and 12M camped. We've often observed sadly that these who run large bodies and parties are on the other side of the river from the young. Its a joy to find that this does not apply to the Nicolson partly perhaps because Rhenigidale hostel is not big enough to have another side but thanks mainly no doubt to Robert Scott and Ian Millar, its also good to see that several of the party came back again on their own later on.

There's no room in this letter even to summarise the variety of comments in the Housebook. The peaceful "After just four days I feel I might have been here all my life." The less peaceful "My hand trembles as I record the agonies and ecstasies of our stay." The adventurer "Get out into those rugged mountains and try to find out who you are and why you are here". Most fascinating of all perhaps the

sketch of herself by the hosteller who took the zig-zag in sandals with apparently two carrier bags as a short cut to Stockinish. And the final tribute. "To the glory of God and Macbraynes".

#### The Future.

Our 1967 letter to hostellers and report dealt with various general problems at length. This year's letter and report must be shorter; we have spares of last year's for any who have not seen them and would like to, (foolscap s.a.e. to the Secretary of the Trust).

We still have hopes that not only the house we use but the whole of Howmore Village may be given the new dress it deserves as the best living specimen of the beautiful traditional thatched houses of the Uists, but we can do no more than suggest this and give modest help if it's undertaken. Meantime the hostel is very happy as it is and in good heart, and we feel sure Mrs MacSween will keep it going.

Scarp from all we hear will be lived-all-the-year-round-in for a little while yet, but as those who live there get older it may not be possible or indeed right that they should remain much longer. If not it may still be possible for some of them, and some of you who love the island, and such bodies as the Schools Hebridean Society to keep it lived in in summer, a live sheiling, including the hostel.

There is we feel good hope of Rhenigidale going on both as a hostel and a community, now that the Nicolson is so much in touch with it.

We could provide say £20 a year grant and the necessary equipment for more crofter's hostels on similar lines in West Lewis (anywhere between Uig and Ness) and Barra if any of you or your friends could find them. Those of us who found Rhenigidale and Howmore are no longer available for the job but Frank Martin who found Scarp is taking over much of this part of our Trust's work, and hopes to be over himself for ten days in May; though his main concern must be the existing hostels. If you feel you can give a hand whether out there or in London write to him direct (6, Alexandra Road, Wimbledon, London.S.W.19).

We have some contact with Foula and Fair Isle in the Shetlands and there may be a chance of at least campers' shelter being available there in 1970 if not 1969.

Last, but not least, we feel that the S.Y.H.A. and the Y.H.A. (E.& W.) for similar interests down here, have an increasing sense that there are marginal forms of adventure, such as these hostels, bothies and adventure camping which they cannot take on themselves but should look kindly on. Much adventure is of its nature independent and should be left to individuals or small independent groups. But there is great need of liaison of some sort, what may be called a well-manured grapevine that can speak or write for their values if needed. What do you think of this idea? Meanwhile, keep your friends informed of these three hostels.

Yours sincerely,

HON. SECRETARY.