

THE GATLIFF TRUST

April, 1973.

Trustees: Herbert Gatliff; Bernard Selwyn; Malcolm Campbell;
Robert Wickenden; Frank Martin.

Hon. Secretary:
Malcolm Campbell

Dear Hosteller,

For the eleventh time we write to tell you how the unofficial youth hostels provided with our help by crofters in the Outer Hebrides fared last year and our hopes for the future.

1972 Results

Both Howmore and Rhenigidale were more used than ever before. Bednights at the two hostels were 865 (Howmore 515, Rhenigidale 350) spent by 226 visitors (Howmore 126, Rhenigidale 113, which makes 239, but 13 were at both). Bednights were 104 Scots, 389 English and Welsh, and 372 from fourteen other countries, visitors being 35, 92 and 99 respectively. These figures reflect to some extent the increasing tendency of youth hostellers like others to seek other countries than their own. In fact, perhaps the Outer Hebrides differ more from urban Britain than many of the main holiday areas of the Continent. The drop in Scottish visitors may mean that the special character of the Outer Hebrides is less appreciated in mainland Scotland than in England.

The physical history of both hostels was uneventful, perhaps a little too uneventful; while we had a brief report from one experienced hosteller, we were not able to find anyone who could make an extended visit, giving time not only to deal with minor hostel problems of repairs and equipment but also to look for others. But such comment as has reached us indicates that the two hostels and their surroundings are much the same as they were.

Hostel Logs

But if the hostels were uneventful, the housebooks and logs indicate that the hostellers certainly were not; indeed, owing perhaps to the high proportion of visitors from other countries, they seem to have been more varied than ever before.

The most striking entry in the Howmore log book was by Gibby Jenkyns, which is worth quoting in full -
"You're going up to the hostel? - then take these eggs for your breakfast" and the kindly woman thrust two brown and two white eggs into our hands."

"We found the hostel warm and comfy and friendly, and quite by chance I shall always remember the flowers as I walked south along the machair. In the cornfields strips

Paris (one an American living there) two from German and one from French Switzerland. If, however, they did succeed in writing more, it was too faint to photograph. Early in August there were nine (apparently British, French, German and Swedes) who wrote a joint log in various languages, largely illegible but including references to a kangaroo with two noses (identified later as Penny Clark) and 'Lloyd George knew my father, my father knew Lloyd George' repeated three times. One of the 9 also wrote in the Housebook "are the premises sound", whether physically or mentally is not quite clear.

This was all great fun, but it was mixed with serious reflections, including moving quotations from the Bible and Wordsworth. One writer after an eloquent account of how to keep oneself warm with 10 blankets (forgetting that the best way is to throw off 7 and put loose pullover and other clothes between the rest) became serious "Everything has been so tremendous. The hills, the lochs, the local people, fellow hostellers, late-night conversations, the rain, the sun, oh just everything. Other people have written far better things than I could in the log book."

"Theresa from Canada wrote: 'One almost starts believing in God again'."

"Other people have mentioned 'moods of harmony' 'infinite playgrounds for ones' thoughts' Life and appreciation of the landscape, people, sea-birds, time is so different here. Like John from California all I can really say is 'Thanks Rhenigidale'" Before writing these last words John had written 'In the hills, lochs and sea there are no words, yet they speak '.

Some hostellers remind us that conditions are somewhat primitive. One could not believe that anyone had stayed eleven nights in such a hostel or returned seven times. The next entrant in fact stayed twelve, and the one who had returned seven times was a schoolboy from the Nicolson, who has since told us that he and a friend walked out to Rhenigidale one afternoon and after tea walked back to Tarbert for a dance and then back again to Rhenigidale at 3 a.m.

An even more striking return is mentioned by Nancy Perry from America. "I was lost, alone and close to tears when he found me, shared his food with me, and showed me the way here. His name is John Ireland, 78 years old, and has travelled the world over." This was his fourth visit.

We knew well however the need for some improvement of conditions and equipment. It is difficult from so far away to arrange a working party, but parties from the Nicolson have been most helpful in past years and we hope it will be possible to arrange more.