

THE GATLIFF TRUST

Trustees: Herbert Gatliff  
Bernard Selwyn  
Malcolm Campbell  
Robert Wickenden  
Frank Martin  
Roger Clifton

Hon Secretary: Malcolm Campbell  
98 Agar Grove,  
Camden Square,  
London,  
NW1 9TC

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Dear Hosteller,

Crofters' Youth Hostels

This is the thirteenth annual review of the youth hostels provided with financial assistance from the Gatliff Trust in the Outer Hebrides.

Both Howmore, South Uist and Rhenigidale, North Harris had a reduction in the numbers staying; the overnights were 508 and 214 respectively. The total of 722 compared with 1,151 overnights in 1973 (Howmore 665, Rhenigidale 486). The number of visitors was 181 (220 in 1973) - 38 from Scotland, 74 from England and the remainder from 16 other countries. Howmore's regular visitors again made return trips: Donald Davidson from Hamilton, Archie McCallum from Glasgow, Werner Geiger from Stuttgart, Virginia Blaukenhorn from Harvard University with a group from the USA, and Peter Clarke from London. Those who visited both hostels included Peter Clarke, Eileen Elliott from Northumberland, Denise Hill from New Zealand and Jennie Spence from Australia. Tony Hammock travelled to Rhenigidale by canoe. Several people made return trips during the summer: Ginny Williams from New Zealand to Howmore and Meg Burrow and Mick Lee from Dalbeg, Lewis to Rhenigidale - who ended as Meg Lee and Mick Lee, Carloway, Lewis - congratulations!

During the year Roderick MacInnes at Rhenigidale has done a considerable amount of work at the hostel. John Joyce led a working party which carried out internal painting. The hostel should be much improved for the coming year with piped water and WC. There is no further progress on the proposal for a land rover track from Maarug. The faulty wiring at Howmore was rectified - so the girls' dormitory now has electric light. The Trustees are very concerned about the risk of fire at both hostels. Fire extinguishers were replaced at both and some building work may be necessary; painting with fire retardant paint and plenty of fire notices are planned. But the essential fire precaution is the sensible behaviour of visitors - ensuring there is never any risk, checking before lights out, turning off the calor at the cylinder when not in use and positively no smoking in the dormitories.

The SYHA youth hostel at Stockinish, South Harris was reopened in

May 1974, and this has undoubtedly led to the considerable drop in overnights at Rhenigidale, which is now a real adventure hostel. After the reopening we were very pleased to welcome a party led by Len and Isobel Clark of SYHA officials - Jack Frame, Vice President and Bob Crawford, National Secretary. Unfortunately the weather was most unkind and the Chairman of the SYHA, Walter Ballantyne, Jean Crawford and James Martin, a member of the Executive Committee, just failed to reach the crofting hamlet. The Gatliff Trust were very pleased to make two separate donations towards the cost of the improvements at Stockinish.

The housebooks and logbooks were full of interest with comments of appreciation - on the people, the landscape and even the weather. Howmore's logbook continues the debate between 'romantics' who regard it as a paradise and 'sceptics' who see a poor, bleak and hard way of life in unrelenting wind and rain. No doubt the debate will go on in 1975 and after. This is the contribution from Eileen Elliott:-

'This is a harsh land, and like the tundra, its summer splendour is a brief smile to lighten the grief. The friendliness and community spirit are the fruit of adversity like the comradeship of a pit-village in County Durham in the drab days of the Depression, not the evidence of utopian bliss.

'There is ugliness here, too. Though trees were never plentiful and were in decline before the spread of peat after the Bronze Age, their almost total disappearance is the work of the inhabitants and their grazing animals; they have caused the barrenness, not Nature. The incredible network of poles and lines round Daliburgh may be the work of outsiders, but what of the old cars pushed into Loch Druibeg and the ubiquitous empty cans of McEwan's Export bobbing among the water lilies?

'For us the 'simple life' is fun. For others it is grim reality. You carry a rucksack because you want to; they carry heavier loads of peat because they cannot live without it. The slow tempo of life here is the tempo of manual labour, not the ease of relaxation. They work their guts out and thank God for National Assistance as the only way for most of them to stave off starvation.

'It is because there still is beauty and peace; in spite of all, and because the land and people are one, that the rhapsodists call out their range of superlatives. But why don't they wear rose coloured spectacles? - they are not needed to discern the ringed plover or the orchids or the thatched cottage so fitly and snugly bound to its soil.'

Although the numbers of people who use them in any one year are comparatively few these hostels provide a much valued resting place among

the crofts and crofters. The future for these hostels seems more uncertain now than at any time in the past years. Rising costs, falling overnights, fire precautions all make forecasting the future very difficult. The Trustees have agreed to do some advertising and the response so far has been encouraging but the most effective publicity is by word of mouth, so please tell your friends of these very small and friendly hostels. We are exploring ways of ensuring their continuing future - if you have suggestions, comments or offers of help the Trustees would like to hear from you. Their Annual Report and Accounts are available on request; please send a stamped addressed foolscap envelope.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Malcolm Campbell', written in dark ink.

Malcolm Campbell  
Honorary Secretary