

## THE GATLIFF TRUST

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## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS: NEWSLETTER FOR 1983

### Overnights recorded:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Berneray (N Uist)	360	325	284	242	225	178
Claddach Baleshare (N Uist)	-	-	-	186	156	227
Howmore (S Uist)	382	508	339	410	405	367
Rhenigidale (Harris)	452	391	324	299	266	270
Totals	1194	1224	947	1137	1052	1042

Those of us involved in the youth hostel movement judge results in terms of total overnights and by this measure the 1983 figures are very disappointing. They represent lower income for the wardens and, for hostellers, less chance of meeting fellow travellers at the hostels. The first full year of operation of Lochmaddy SYHA hostel was perhaps an important factor in North Uist. There were increased overnights at Stockinish as well as Lochmaddy and at other Scottish hostels. The Trust could have expected to benefit from the glorious summer, the greater number of travellers and the inclusion of Lochmaddy in YH handbooks and other publicity. The economic situation continues to be very difficult with high travel costs and high youth unemployment; however the lower exchange rate should encourage more visitors from overseas.

To put another perspective on the statistics, the record number of overnights were 680 for Howmore in 1975 and 597 for Rhenigidale in 1978. At that time we were very concerned about overcrowding and decided to reduce publicity, only to be faced with the effects of recession and high exchange rate. We have over the years carried out some improvements and extended the number of hostels and there are prospects of further hostels. It is necessary to step up our expenditure on maintenance, in particular the thatched roofs require attention every two years. If, as seems likely, we are able to open a further hostel in West Lewis, this will increase the amount required for maintenance. A porch is planned in 1984 at Claddach Baleshare and at Berneray we need to restore the porch and replace the roof. As the Trust's resources are very limited and fully committed we are seeking to raise money by forming a Hebridean Hostellers' Group and making grant applications to government agencies for capital work. It is a prerequisite that conditions at the hostels are at an acceptable standard and the Trustees are giving this more attention and a very high priority. A reversal in the overnights trend must take place if these

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hostels are to thrive - please tell your friends about them. A leaflet giving hostel details is available (see please) from John Joyce at the above address.

Behind the statistics we are ever aware that our work does succeed in the aim of introducing young people to the unique landscape, habitat and culture of the Outer Hebrides. Entries in the logbooks show that during 1983 many hostellers had their first experience of the islands. The climate can be very inhospitable and the shelter and companionship in the hostels very welcome. Each hostel has a logbook for travellers to record their comments and extracts from each give a flavour of the atmosphere.

#### Berneray

Sara Brown of Southampton writes:

It was such a welcome surprise to be shown that this wonderful thatched cottage was the hostel. I had a very comfortable and happy time spent here - thank you very much Gatliff Trust and many more thanks for the overwhelming trust and care given by such charming wardens - I can't wait till next year to come back again.

From Aberystwyth Ian Francis and Nicola Penford list the birds (41) and plants (43) including rare ferns and orchids only found on the machair.

Johann Lindsay, Enfield, who was part of the Kingsmead School group writes:

We have all been here for three days and are now just about to be away to catch the ferry over to Harris. I really hate to leave this island; it's the first one of the Outer Hebridean chain of islands that I have felt at home with. It's such a restful place but not just because of the scenery (which is fascinating as it's always changing due to the constant shifts of light) but due also to the friendliness of the community here.

#### Claddach Baleshare

Due to the initiative and hard work of Mr and Mrs Tosh and their family a replacement hostel was available for the 1983 season.

The first entry is by Nick Mould from Esher in Surrey:-

I am privileged to be the first person to stay in this new hostel. I arrived this evening to find Mr Tosh putting the finishing touches to the gas and with a fire burning in the stove. It's a beautiful little croft and my thanks to the Toshs and the Gatliff Trust for restoring it to its present state of simple comfort from an apparently pretty dilapidated condition.

There was no wind this evening. I watched the sun set, its colours reflected in the still waters of the loch.

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Bettina StClaire Selby, a regular visitor, writes:-

It's been two years since I was on the Western Isles. Since then I have spent five months cycling through Pakistan, India, Nepal and Sikkim, in and out and over the Himalayas. It was tremendous seeing such marvellous mountains and meeting such varied peoples and conditions; but strangely I found myself homesick for these islands. It's lovely to be here again and I think this hostel is very fine.

Mike Pelham, at 76, a long serving warden in southern England, visited the hostel in September. Nicola Penfold and Ian Francis have long entries about the possible effects of the IDP on the machair having spent four days of hostile weather sheltering in the hostel, but giving advice to visit the RSPB reserve at Balranald eight miles north.

#### Howmore

Although one would expect it to be the golden eagle, in fact it is stellers eider which is the centre of attraction and, in the logbook, Nicola Penfold tries to put the bird fanatics' comments into proportion. Almost all those who came to South Uist to see this 'megaduck' (Roger Stafford, Richmond, Surrey) were rewarded with a sighting. However some like Jeremy Holding (Newcastle-on-Tyne) were disappointed:

Stellers hasn't been performing for the past two days - it's its last chance tomorrow - apparently evening high tide is best. At least the corncrakes outside have been a bit more obliging.

Loch Druidibeg is good for eagles - I watched one mobbed by a buzzard for about 30 minutes yesterday; also a male hen harrier flew over.

I've been here two days and haven't needed my waterproof trousers - perhaps I've come to the wrong South Uist!

In April members of the executive committee of An Oige (the Irish Youth Hostels Association) felt obliged to contribute 'something poetic'. John Bourke (National Secretary) and John Caulfield (National Treasurer) assigned the task to Olive Caulfield assisted by Dave Fadden, who came up trumps:

What a paradise at 6.30 am on a sunny pristine morning. The hung-over feeling of a long ferry boat journey is swept away by the salted air which is loaded with the song and cry of the seemingly countless bird-life on this little slice of heaven.

The fears of being closed in with fellow executive members (fanatics) of An Oige in rain swept bog never crystallised. Time to stroll on empty beaches with the muffled roar of surging surf ....

After a rest we ventured into the bogland wilderness of the nearby

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mountains, lazing by shimmering lakes, drinking in the sunshine. Up to snow covered Hecla - deceptively gentle from a distance. Onto the craggy summit knolls to one of the most magnificent mountain views we ever experienced - the pointed cluster of brilliantly white Cuillin of Skye suspended above an azure ocean; beneath us a gentle rippling lake sparkling in the light back-dropped by mountains more formidable than their size suggests. That lovely stroll out the valley peppered with the sound of gurgling waters. Back to this lovely base - all four of us imbued with the tranquil peace of nature - the feeling of oneness that manifests itself in our goodwill to each other ....

Now we have missed the ferry to Barra (by 10 minutes) and we are bending backwards casting the evil eye of blame on four hitherto benign people for being too slow to leave this little heaven.

It is difficult to follow such Irish eloquence, but I must mention thanks to Edna Spratley (from Patterdale Hall, Cumbria) for painting the men's dorm.

#### Rhenigidale

Helga Hertkorn, who with her friend Gabi Greisohn from Turbingen, Germany, travelled 2000 Kms, writes:

Now it is the fifth day I am staying here with my friend and I did not regret one single moment I am here. Even the weather was sometimes very bad and last night we went back over the hills in a storm and never could believe that we once will do something like that. I thank Jim for keeping us on the right way and spending some time with us.

And Phil Harris of Ellon, Aberdeenshire:

The very day I was here last September an article appeared in the 'Press & Journal' in which someone had suggested that 'the inhabitants of Rhenigidale be evacuated by helicopter and put in a more civilised location.' This was because the EEC were unwilling to fund the road.

Thankfully Rhenigidale is still very much alive and will at least be getting its road next year, after a long battle. However I'm sure most of the people who come to stay here will still walk in!

This is the last stop after a week of staying at all the Gatliff hostels and as usual the time has gone all too quickly. Thanks to Roddy and Jim for the company. Back next year hopefully.

#### Use of houses

The continued use of these houses relies on the goodwill of the owners and travellers must endeavour to leave the hostels clean and tidy and a fire set for the next visitor - the alternative may be no hostel at all. We must emphasise that the houses are not suitable for long term stay.

### Thanks

The logbooks are full of praise for the wardens - Annie MacKillop and her twin sister at Berneray, Mr and Mrs Tosh at Claddach Baleshare, Mrs MacSween at Howmore and Roddy MacInnes at Rhenigidale. All have taken a real interest in the visitors and the Trust are very grateful indeed for the use of their houses and for their work during the year.

For the past few years this newsletter has been written by Isabel Steel of Edinburgh and this has been a very useful contribution to our work.

### Future

The future looks bright for our work in the Outer Hebrides. Times change but we are confident our work will continue and develop. We must adapt our organisation to changing times and circumstances in order to seize new opportunities.

Firstly, we have launched the Hebridean Hostellers. We invite you to join by filling in the form on the enclosed leaflet and returning it to Peter Clarke. The Trust has always depended upon the support and efforts of its wardens, hostellers and supporters. Already (February 1984) over 40 people have joined the Hebridean Hostellers and more than £225 has been donated.

Secondly, preliminary discussions with various grant making authorities have met with a positive response. Public grants will allow us to maintain and expand our work more rapidly than we could from our own resources but we must match these public grants with our own income. This places added importance on new donations. Roughly, every pound donated to the Hebridean Hostellers can earn a pound of public grant.

You can help us increase our own income even faster not only by joining the Hebridean Hostellers and sending a generous donation, but also, if you pay income tax, by covenanting the donation to us for four years. The Gatliff Trust is a registered charity and can recover from the Inland Revenue the income tax you have paid on the donation. This costs you nothing - you pay the tax all the same - but a covenant increases the value of your donation by more than a third.

For the Trustees



Frank Martin  
Chairman

February 1984