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HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS: NEWSLETTER for 1984

OVERNIGHTS RECORDED in 1984:

Howmore, S Uist	367	Rhenigidale, Harris	270
Berneray, N Uist	178	Claddach Baleshare, N Uist	227

Visitors to the four hostels in 1984 varied widely in age and nationality. A newspaper cutting in the Howmore log shows a photograph under the caption "Pensioner Pedallers". The five, all from Bolton in Lancashire were Fred Aldershaw, 78, James Johnson, 77, Len Woolrich, 70, Fred Farnworth, 70, and Albert Winstanley, 68. Mrs MacSween notes that all stayed at Howmore during their cycling tour of the Outer Isles in September 1984. Albert is an old friend of the Trust having once written an article about bicycling in the Hebrides in which the Trust hostels receive honourable mention.

Countries from which visitors came included Ireland, Wales, Canada, U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, England, Spain, France, the Netherlands and many of course from Scotland. All visitors were generous in their praise of the hostels and in particular, warm mention was frequently made of all the wardens. Entries in the logbooks, as always, were interesting, sometimes humorous and frequently informative. In the Howmore book there was much discussion about birds and the merits or otherwise of birdwatching. The Steller's Eider was much in evidence and is illustrated by Andrew Benson from London.

Some local events were recorded. For example, Thorsken Oestrich and Babett Pierer from Germany wrote on 8th September 1984 at Berneray: "It was very sad to see the School burning down. The first fire since 20 years (said the man in the shop). But it was nice to see how everybody tried to help - as good as possible".

On a happier note, Annie Milbourne from Tasmania describes a ceilidh and dance in Berneray at the end of July. "Little did we know what lay ahead of us that night. A concert like we had never seen before. Grown men and women singing unaccompanied by any music, their gaelic songs. Scottish dancing and a bagpiper. Supper and lucky draw prizes (like a bottle of scotch) and it was the dancing side of the evening. It wasn't long until (thanks to local instruction) that we were tripping the "light fandango" across the floor."

In the Baleshare logbook, apart from expressions of thanks to Mr and Mrs Tosh, the most frequent references were to the rooster who patrolled the hostel, crowing at intervals throughout the night! Alan Parker writes on 9th May 1984 "who needs an alarm clock when that b..... rooster wakes you at 4.30 each morning? Am now trying to devise a peat fired spit roaster for it."

An interesting account by Jim and Freda McKenna of Killearn is to be found in the Howmore log. They write "Back in the Uists after a gap of more than 20 years. Big changes! As a teenager in the Fifties I wandered through these islands working and

living on crofts. In those days the level of housing was poor and this house is typical of many occupied in that period. Most did not have inside water - this was obtained from taps located throughout the townships. However perhaps the biggest change is in agriculture. 25 years ago there was much more arable with cereals and potatoes being grown in abundance. Everything was done by hand - all hay was cut by scythe or sickle and raked with wooden rakes. Even small haystacks were held down with grass ropes. It is amusing to read the notice on the wall lamenting the reduction in corncrakes and blaming cats. It's obvious that if you reduce the amount of cereals grown you'll reduce the corncrakes. Incidentally, the cat population has also reduced. I don't lament the passing of the old ways - as a boy I was surprised to see old women trudging along the road with massive loads on their backs. To see this replaced by good housing and modern amenities can only be beneficial to the islanders who live here all the time."

Probably the most longed for improvement in the four communities in which the hostels are situated is the Rhenigidale road. The logbook there contains frequent references to it. It now can be confirmed that work on the road actually started in January 1985. The road is to be built in three sections. At present, funding is only available for the first section for a metalled road for 1.9 Km from Maaruig and that is what is presently being constructed. It is not known when the second and third stages will be undertaken. Therefore, while a start has been made, it may still be some years before the remaining unmetalled road reaches Rhenigidale itself.

#### HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS GROUP

In 1984 the Trust set up a Hebridean Hostellers Group. To belong to this an annual subscription of £3 is required and thereafter members receive newsletters and information from the Trust. In addition, a meeting, open to the public, will be held in central Scotland on 14th September when it is hoped to have a speaker on vernacular buildings from the Scottish Civic Trust. Anyone interested in joining the Group should contact: Peter Clarke, 264 Alexandra Park Road, London, N22 4BG (Telephone 01-888-2449) or return the enclosed application form.

#### 1985 WORKING PARTIES

The Berneray hostel has for some years been in a poor state of repair. It will be closed throughout 1985 so that renovation can take place. The Trust requires to raise £10,000 to pay for these improvements so any donations would be gratefully received by the Treasurer. It is planned to restore the thatched building to its original simple appearance without the porch.

In addition, volunteers are needed to undertake much of this work as local builders are too busy to do anything but the highly skilled or time critical work. Anyone with carpentry, plumbing or other building trades skills would be particularly welcome. For details concerning working parties contact John Joyce, 91 Knollys Road, Streatham, London, SW16 2JP (Telephone 01-677-3062).

Maintenance is also required at the other 3 hostels and work parties for this purpose are planned. If you are interested in volunteering for any of these, contact John Joyce.

It is hoped that Berneray will reopen in 1986, improved and re-equipped but at the same time retaining its charm as described by Rob Newell from London. "I nearly forgot a special thank you to Annie MacKillop for the first delight that struck me on arriving - the geraniums in old bottles on the window sills. In their own way as much an element of the welcome as the fire."

Isabel Steel, Edinburgh  
February 1985