



THE GATLIFF TRUST

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HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS - NEWSLETTER FOR 1987

	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>
Berneray	242	225	178	200	561	657
Claddach Baleshare	186	156	227	471	313	349
Howmore	410	405	367	523	516	389
Rhenigidale	299	266	270	414	364	532
	<u>1137</u>	<u>1052</u>	<u>1042</u>	<u>1608</u>	<u>1754</u>	<u>1927</u>

The number of visitors using the hostels increased overall in 1987. They came on foot, by bicycle, by bus, and by car. They came singly, in pairs, in families and in groups. All, though, were united in expressing their pleasure in staying in the hostels and in praising the kindness of the wardens and enthusing about the beauty of their surroundings.

As always, the hostel logbooks contained descriptions of the islands, of experiences, of birds and most commonly of the weather!

A visitor to Rhenigidale on 28th March 1987 recorded that he had arrived late at night in a snowstorm. The next day he wrote "beautiful sunny morning; the valley covered in snow, Toddun's white humped back against the sky. Climbed Toddun in the evening - so still and quiet in the snow on the peak. To the east a calm sea; fading sunlight on the Shiant Isles, but westwards dark stormclouds poured over the white peak of Clisham and turned the rough moorland black."

The weather had changed by August when a visitor to Claddach Baleshare wrote "Arrived early from Howmore and the weather fantastically good with blue skies, a warm sun and a drying wind so walked out to the Atlantic beyond the causeway. The beaches were crowded with eight people, and as far as I could see I was the only swimmer. The seas were green and blue and very little breakers. The beaches were showing up clearly on the Monarch Isles and the mountains on South Uist were clear all day."

In early September Mary Wilson wrote in the Berneray log "stepped out at 10.30 p.m. to a most incredible sight, a full moon hung in a cloudless sky the light reflecting a pathway of silver on the running sea and the glistening sand."

At the end of the season on 29th September 1987 a lucky visitor to Claddach Baleshare recorded "I have just seen the Northern Lights. This is exciting and I have vainly, I think, tried to photograph them."

Most other reports of the weather predictably describe the wind and the rain!

For the first time in many years there is very little mention of birds in the logs. If twitchers visited Howmore in 1987, they left no record of their activities. Clare Heardman and Simon Barrow on 29th June 1987 at Howmore describe the sheer pleasure of birdsong: In the morning there were other tracks on the beach and corncrakes calling in the sun. Went to bed to the sounds of snipe drumming and starlings chattering on their roost but woke this morning to the skylarks calling high in the sky."

Music of a different type was inspiring another visitor to Howmore on 21st July 1987 who wrote: "Mandelsohn-Bartholdy was a great composer. He composed a piece for the Hebrides. I hope to be a composer one time and then I'll write a piece for the hostel at Howmore."

The arts were also in the mind of someone who walked to Rhenigidale on 29th June 1987 and wrote that "Walking in here from Tarbert is rather like reading a good book. Enjoyable all the way along and then a really good ending."

Indeed the art of conversation is much practised by hostellers and sometimes interesting conversations are described such as one at Berneray: "Spent the time in the Berneray hostel with a woman who grew up in South Uist at Eochar. Among other things we were talking about 'the second sight' which many people in the islands are gifted with. She was saying that both her father and her uncle had "visions" - her father was a joiner and would know when he was about to be asked to make a coffin. Her uncle saw a funeral wreath outside her house the night her father died."

The most important event in 1987 for the Trust was the purchase of the hostel in Rhenigidale. After the death of Roddy MacInnes the building was put up for sale. The Trust were able, with assistance from the Countryside Commission for Scotland and Comhairle nan Eilean (Western Isles Islands Council), to purchase it and now plan extensive improvements. Further improvements are also planned at Berneray hostel and will commence at Easter 1988.

On 17th August 1987 a notable event took place at Claddach Baleshare, as recorded by Penny and Ian Newman: "Today was a momentous one for the croft. At 9pm "the electricity" went on under the proud auspices of Mr and Mrs Tosh."

As most readers will know, the island of Berneray was featured in the headlines in May 1987 after a visit there by Prince Charles who stayed with Donald Alick and Gloria MacKillop in Borve for a week. This event is not recorded in the hostel logbook so presumably HRH did not drop in there for a ceilidh! The visit may account for the large increase in the number of visitors to the Berneray hostel in 1987.

In conclusion therefore, the Gatliff Trust has plans and high hopes for the Hebridean Hostels in 1988. Thanks are due to the many people who have given generously of their time, labour and money in past years and indeed also to those who came and enjoyed staying in the hostels.

Please continue to support the work of the Gatliff Trust and enable people from the cities to experience a different type of place and a different way of life. As a Scot, exiled to London, wrote in the Berneray log: "In my dreams as I lie in bed in West Kensington I will dream of the white sands of Berneray and the cry of the gull. Thank you to the Gatliff Trust and the kindly ladies who look after the hostel here. I hope to return."

Isabel Steel  
Edinburgh, February 1988.