

GATLIFF TRUST

THE GATLIFF TRUST

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HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS - NEWSLETTER FOR 1988

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Berneray	178	200	561	657	1173
Claddach Baleshare	227	471	313	349	435
Howmore	367	523	516	389	615
Rhenigidale	270	414	364	532	384
	1042	1608	1754	1927	2607

Numbers kept up well, on the whole, this year. The exceptionally high number of visitors at Berneray can probably be explained by the presence of work parties who were helping build the new ablutions block. In the course of the year considerable progress was made on this project, which should be completed in 1989. An official opening will take place on 20th July 1989.

Howmore also has had some improvements and appreciative comments are made about the new stove and fresh appearance of the exterior.

Repairs and improvements will commence at Rhenigidale in 1989. In the hostel log book there are many pleas to keep the hostel simple and not overdo the modernisation.

Volunteers and supervisors are required for these projects. If you are interested, contact John Joyce, 2 Beaumont Road, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 3QZ

The work of the Gatliff Trust is praised by Richard Mabelis at Howmore who writes "Driving widely around the Uists as we did we came to realise that the Gatliff Trust is doing more than merely providing extremely pleasant hostels for a variety of interesting visitors. The amount of dereliction amongst houses of this type brings home the great importance of bringing as many as possible into sympathetic and protective ownership."

Visitors to the hostels are all warm in recording their appreciation and thanks to the wardens of all four hostels for their kindness and hospitality. For many people this contact is one of the most important events of their visits to the Hebrides, so all praise is due to the wardens for their interest in and time spent with their visitors.

Each hostel, of course, has its own character and the entries in the log books reflect this.

The main topic at Rhenigidale in 1988 was the near completion of the road to the township. Fred Conacher of Dundee records on the 27th July: "The road approaches, its' only half a kilometer away. Is this good or bad? I hope to return next year to see."

Some hostellers lament the arrival of the road but many are more perceptive. Mark Little of London says: "Shame about the road but if the villagers want it who am I to stand in the way of mighty progress?"

Bill Currie of Glasgow: "The new road might not suit the romantics but it may preserve Rhenigidale as a living community."

Fenete Ell of Bayreuth: "We have to think of the locals - they don't live in a museum, it's their daily life."

Joe Hutton: "There can be few greater contrasts than Hong Kong where I have spent the past two years and Rhenigidale. I have little fear that the arrival of the road will change the place much, provided that Yuppy holiday homes do not suddenly appear."

But surprisingly, there is an entry written in October by the Works Engineer & Technical Assistant of the road who says: "Just popped in to have our lunch and to get out of the wind and rain for half an hour. Hope this road doesn't spoil it for the villagers and the many patrons of this hostel. I fear it will."

At Howmore the principal topic, as always, is birds. Rarities observed in 1988 include in April a Peregrine Falcon and an Osprey. Whimbrels and Black Throated divers are also mentioned. Flowers and plants are also described, and in mid June someone claims that the rare Scottish primrose can be seen in the area.

Hostellers describe climbing Beann Mor and Hecla, walks over to the remote east coast of South Uist and on the great beaches of the west. On the 26th June 1988 some hardy souls bathed in Loch Hellisdale, the loch described by Neil Munro in 'Children of Tempest' as being 'blue as an angel's eye.' David Roberts writes: "The delight of a swim in Loch Hellisdale needs a week back packing (with no baths) rounded off by a sprint up Beann Mor, to be truly appreciated."

On the 27th July another visitor describes a few days on the east coast thus: "Back from Usinish after three nights sitting out the storm. Wonderful little bothy, very cosy when you get the fire going. The souterrains are well worth exploring - as is the Princes Cave (at Corodale). Lots of interesting things underground on the other side of the island. For a dramatic change from the machair, the other side of the island is a must."

The delights of South Uist are summed up by Melanie O'Flynn: "This isn't an island - it's a therapy" and even more succinctly by S. Jacques: "Enchanting,"

From Claddach Baleshare, hostellers range around North Uist. On the 2nd August Heather Brown writes: "The walk south down the estuary to Teampull na Trionaid (at Carinish) is possible along the sands when the tide is well on the way out. The sands are firm for about two thirds of the way till the channel sweeps to the east bank. The going is slow but walking on the sands is interesting and seems quite safe. Unfortunately, the enjoyment was tempered by steady rain. It was lovely to return to a warm hostel with the rayburn gently heating the place."

On the 21st August an anonymous writer describes a visit to Barpa Langass, the best preserved chambered cairn in North Uist: "A three mile walk along the road to Lochmaddy however, brought us level with the chambered cairn on Ben Langass, some thoughtful person has placed planks over the deeper bits of peat bog so the walk can be accomplished with dry feet. The cairn bears a look. Take a torch because if you can crawl in through the tunnel the chamber at the end is higher than six feet. It is a gentle climb to the trig point at the top and from there looking south east we could see the distinctive outline of MacLeods Tables on Quirinish, Skye, and behind them the outline of the Cullin and to the left of Blaven."

In May 1988 A.R. Benson writes of Claddach Baleshare hostel: "It was an experience to spend a night in a two hundred year old Hebridean cottage. Such a change, although basic, from the sophisticated times in which we live. It

reminded me of my time in the Land Army when in those days there wasn't electric light or chemical toilets - only oil lamps and! It isn't every day that one can encounter this and see the sun rise en route to the loo!"

Berneray was well visited in 1986 and in July "Rolf" had an interesting outing from here: "We went on a trip to Pabby, the island west of Berneray. Had picnics in the ruins of the old houses. Those were left in 1850 during the Highland Clearances when all the inhabitants of Pabby (3 villages of 1000 people) were forced to leave their homes and their island."

A different type of experience was enjoyed on 1st August by Mary McCormich of Aberdeen who records: "The highlight was the ceillidh on Friday which was an exceptionally good night - according to the locals, who reckoned it was the best night out on the island for ages. The band consisted of an accordion player who switched from old time waltzes to Gay Gordons, to Reels. He was good. Dances were punctuated with singing when an old man would sing in Gaelic and the rest of the locals would join in the chorus. As the whiskey flowed, people loosened up and by the end of the evening everyone was on the floor - I mean dancing! A great night was had by all."

At distant Rhenigidale, Tim Barron had the most bizarre experience. On the 8th September "I was sitting having lunch yesterday when there was a tap at the door - guess who was there. Yes, I'm sure you've guessed. Jehovah Witnesses dressed in ordinary street clothes - tie, light brown gaberdine, black brogues. Now the last visit was 50 years ago. 1938 according to the warden. I feel highly honoured to have been there on such a momentous occasion."

Apart from the dramatic walk from Tarbert to Rhenigidale, visitors most enjoyed visiting the caves, walking by Loch Seaforth and climbing Toddun.

On the 18th July Brigit Hutchinson of Cornwall records "Clouds low this morning so Toddun was out, instead I headed along the headland and around to Loch Seaforth. As I went the clouds lifted affording me a beautiful view up into the heart of North Harris. Toddun emerged too - my first sign of this compactly beautiful mountain. I succumbed and decided to climb him. Inevitably the cloud returned as I got up under the crags but deciding it safer to go on I continued and as I came out of the lee of the hill, the sun came out and the mist blew away leaving a real blue and white Hebridean sky. It was exhilarating!"

All these passages seem to demonstrate that the aims of Herbert Gatliff are being achieved and young people from the cities are experiencing and enjoying a very different landscape and life from that to which they are accustomed.

"Richard" writes on the 24th July: "I must be the only person to be disappointed by Rhenigidale - it really hasn't lived up to my expectations. As a Londoner who is proud to come from London I would however say that coming to the Outer Hebrides has brought me closer to people. If you are out on the hills you may, if lucky, see a couple of people and so you make the most of such meetings, whereas in London you may see thousands of people each day and the uniqueness of the individual is lost in the sea of madness. I would also say that I have met some wonderful people hostelling in Scotland - more people than I met in the whole of last year in London."

And in conclusion, the remark of Paul Belshaw of Sunderland at Howmore in April: "I never realised how beautiful the country I lived in was until I came to the Outer Hebrides."

Isabel Steel, Bridge of Allan 19/2/89.