



**GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST**  
(Urras Osdalean Nan Innse Gall Gatliff)

## **Hostels Newsletter 1994**

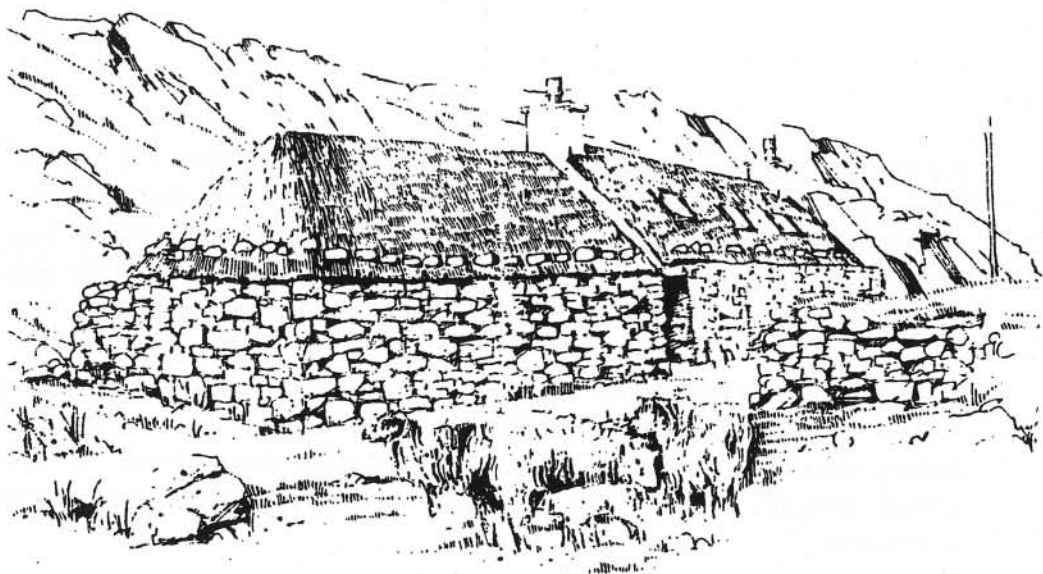
As the overnight figures at the end of this letter show, the hostels were all busy in 1994. Each hostel, of course, has its own characteristics and all four seem to be equally loved. Many new visitors arrive each year and exclaim with delight but old friends also return regularly and initiate the newcomers into the local ways.

All ages are represented, the youngest in 1994 being Calum John Murray Spooner, aged six months, who stayed in Berneray in September. The oldest, however, has not confessed but the age group beyond three score and ten is certainly represented and welcome.

Many nationalities come too. Melissa from the USA perhaps identifies the achievement of the hostels when she writes in the Rhenigidale book, "It's so wonderful to read through these log books and see messages from fellow travellers that you have met along the way. There is something particularly special about the simple hostels that breeds friendships from some of the most unlikely places. Three cheers for the Gatliff Trust and everyone who helps out along the way."

A recurring theme in all the hostel books this year is the Morsø stove. This humble machine variously delights and infuriates and each one, like each hostel, has its own distinctive character. Thus at Rhenigidale it is described as "a very warm and loving friend on cold evenings", at Howmore "... the kettle pipes a self composed hymn while standing on the smokiest individual of the Morsø species", and at Garenin, where there is a "Morsø fan club", the following divine verse was penned:

*Oh Morsø, oh Morsø,  
Your heat warms my torsø.*



Garenin Hostel

## Garenin

In addition to the Morsø fan club a "John MacGregor appreciation society" was founded in 1994! Wardens Pat and John, as can be seen from the figures, had a busy year and visitors appreciate Pat's efficient running of the hostel and John's stories of the past. Pat was in hospital in the autumn but the hostel stayed open. We send her good wishes and are happy that she is home and at the helm again.

Fiona, from Switzerland in June, considered the contradictory views of some hostellers. "Many visitors complain about everything being closed on a Sunday: no ferries, nowhere you can have a cup of tea, no hitch hiking, etc. But on the other hand, they want to know more about the history of the place, they are interested in the black houses, how people used to live and in the stone circles. If you are really interested in the islands you should also respect the traditions. I don't mind that everything is closed on a Sunday. I think it's very respectable that the Islanders try and keep their traditions because it's so difficult to do that in this fast-changing world. I think it's crazy that the supermarkets in England now open on Sundays. When will the people have time to rest? Even if you aren't religious, you need quiet times. I don't think the islanders are backward people. I think they are ahead of us and could teach us a lot, about friendliness, for example."

The peace of Garenin is often mentioned. On 17 August Michael from Germany writes, "In this hostel, where people from all of the world are talking to each other and having fun together, it is hard to believe that elsewhere people are fighting against each other and making war. May everyone take a little bit of the peace of this place and take it to his home town."

James from Edinburgh writes, "There is something very special about this place – a sort of welcoming built into its very structure. Sadly though, it is time to go, but everyone who leaves takes with them a small piece of the peace of Garenin."

## **Rhenigidale**

Alisdair Mackay, the newest recruit among the wardens, has already impressed hostellers with his friendliness and helpfulness. The hostel's comforts and beautiful situation are much praised: "What to say? Complete silence outside, no sodium glow. It's idyllic."

On 1 July, Leslie Baum and Portia Hein describe an evening arrival. "We were hoping and praying that the hostel would be full of simple and genuine charm. And we were fully prepared to continue on back to Garenin if Rhenigidale did not charm us inside. But after crossing the mountains all in their purple glow and arriving at the sea, we were more than charmed, we were stunned and enchanted to find the hostel cosy and warm with fresh flowers. Our flight was rewarded and we were pleased as a peach to be here."

The poor weather and difficulties of the journey are often a topic. Rebecca White and Geoff Harris wrote in April, "Landscape is formed partly by the weather and so the driving rain and gale force winds are part of what makes this part of Scotland so beautiful – beautiful in a wild, remote, bleak sort of way."

In June, a group who were circumnavigating the Isles arrived by sea kayak. Fran Potheary and Dougie MacDonald from Edinburgh and Pete Watkin from Coatbridge wrote, "The advantage of a sea kayak is there's no muddy paths, no steep hills and no cars to push you off the road."

Climbs of Toddun and Clisham, the walk on the cliff path and sightings of eagles, seals and otters are all described. On 3 April Gordon Patterson, Colin Wishart and Alan Williamson, all of Edinburgh, write of these experiences. "Great variety of wind, snow, sleet, hail, rain, sun and light on the sea with creamy surf and patches of glassy blues and aquamarine and grey. The combination of huge beach, distant hills and island chains in the sea to the south was different from anything else we have seen in Scotland. Came back glowing more strongly than a visitor to Windscale!"

## Berneray

All regular visitors to this hostel will be sad to learn that Roy, the wardens' dog, died in July. Roy was a great favourite, being very friendly and playful, and was often mentioned in the log books over the years. He has been succeeded now by another character and without a doubt Rover, a handsome young collie, will soon earn a place in the annals of the hostel. As ever, the book in 1994 is full of grateful appreciation and thanks for the kindness of the wardens, Annie and Jessie.

Berneray more than any other hostel attracts people back year after year. The island, though, still holds surprises for some. Louise Roy writes in August, "Discovered some new things on this visit, thanks to Maggie – a rock on the southern end of the island with three cup marks. The middle one is always full of water and the other two empty. Maggie even tried emptying water from one to another but returned in a day to find them the same as usual. She also showed me a fulmar's nest and a Viking footprint. This island is full of secrets."

In September someone describes "going out to sit and watch the moon on the water, full and so bright you can barely see the stars. Not a breath of wind. Rush of water through the channel where the two green lights, such comforters in the silvery darkness, blink slowly and rhythmically. Climbed the hill overlooking the machair track and watched the sun, sunk behind cloud, colouring the sky pale orange and the cirrus clouds pink. Low milky mist across the machair, the sea like cold blue milk with St Kilda and Boreray soft grey on the far horizon. Moon rising in intense blue twilight behind us."

Berneray is summed up in a poem quoted by Kerstin:

*An island  
a place in the sea  
pale green in deep blue  
somewhere contained.*

## Howmore

1994 was the last season of Howmore in its traditional and well-loved state. Over the years, despite the care of Mrs MacSween and now her daughter, Betty MacDonald, the fabric has deteriorated and full-scale renovations of it and neighbouring buildings are planned for the coming year. Once these are complete all four hostels will be fully modernised. Betty is to be warmly thanked for her work in the past and in anticipation of a busy year ahead! A German visitor wrote, "I hope that the atmosphere will be the same after the renovation." Others echo that sentiment too.

Apart from the pleasures of the hostel itself, visitors here tend to write about walks in the nearby hills. Thus Ian Mitchell and Erchie Boomer on 3 April: "We were on Hecla yesterday in a near hurricane, crawling on our bellies through the snow to the summit. Today, simply enjoying the peace inside while the gales rage outside." The weather was better in July when Harry from Lincolnshire wrote, "... the long walk in over the famous Hebridean bogs, by lochans full of water lilies to the top of Hecla. The clouds billowing over Corodale caught in the sunshine on the way up. There seems to be more water than land as seen from up there and it is a wonderful reward for the effort."

On 7 May, Iain from up the road in Lochcarnon writes, "Little known fact. Ben More was, until fairly recently, ie 19th century, called Geideabhal by local people. This is the same as 'Goat Fell' (goat mountain) in Arran. No more goats, though, just deer. Ben More is, of course, 'Big Mountain'."

Teresa Brazier of Glasgow had a different experience in July when she attended the nearby church. "The (new) church here apparently is the only church of Scotland with a central communion pew still in existence. Well worth a wee look."

Two New Zealanders, Clark McCarthy and Alison Slade, commented, "South and North Uist have that relaxed, laid-back feel

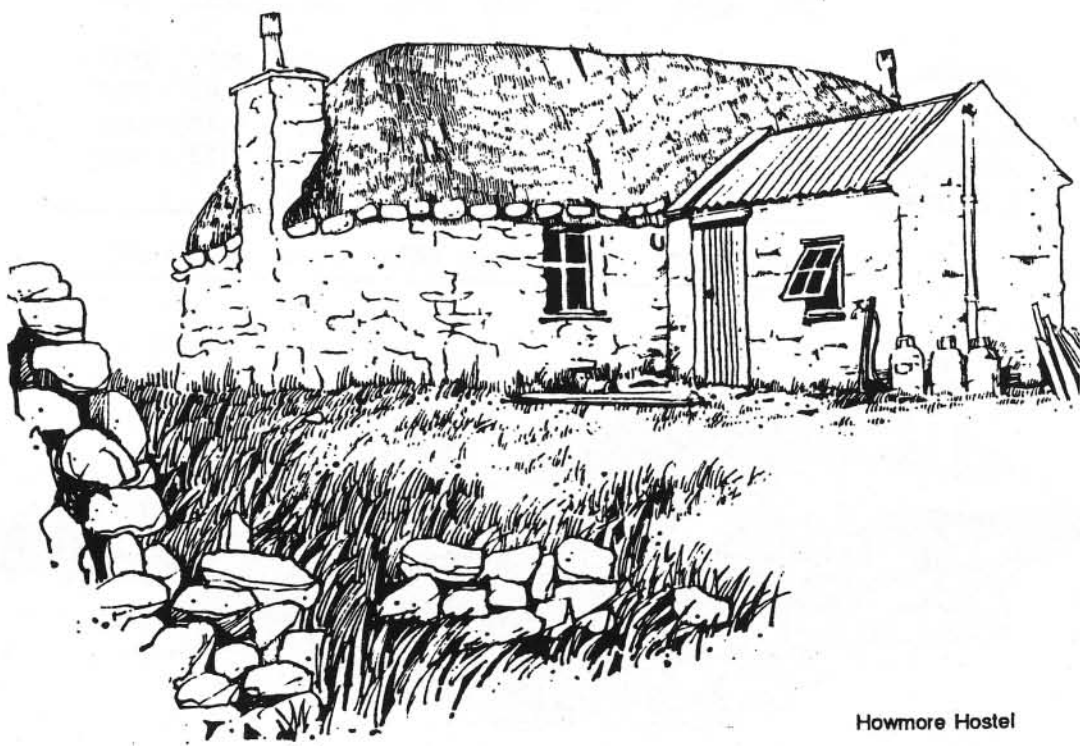


where the watch isn't important and the sunshine beams."

Another New Zealander, Sheryll, writes a passage in the Howmore book which provides a fitting conclusion. "Overlooking the picturesque monastic ruins this hostel is simply great. Thanks Gatliff Trust, all the hostels are magnificent in their position and basic style, and I've enjoyed getting to and staying in each one. All the wardens are easy-going folks with a lot of commitment and enthusiasm for the hostels. These places have really made my two week stay in the Hebrides unforgettable. Don't change a thing!"

March 1995  
Edinburgh

Isabel Steel



Howmore Hostel

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## Hostel Overnights

	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>
Berneray	657	1173	1078	1246	1456	1534	2031	2017
Garenin					1550	1551	2094	1937
Howmore	389	615	848	925	633	999	1115	993
Rhenigidale	532	384	118	542	1010	1234	1122	1090
C Baleshare	349	435	423	341	425	498		
	<u>1927</u>	<u>2607</u>	<u>2467</u>	<u>3054</u>	<u>5074</u>	<u>5816</u>	<u>6362</u>	<u>6037</u>



Berneray Hostel