



GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST  
HOSTELS NEWSLETTER 1995

OVERNIGHTS

	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>
Berneray	1246	1456	1534	2031	2017	1838
Cl. Baleshare	341	425	493	-	-	-
Garenin	-	1550	1551	2094	1937	2028
Howmore	925	633	999	1115	993	1080
Rhenigidale	542	1010	1234	1122	1090	862
TOTAL	3054	5074	5816	6362	6037	5808

Numbers are slightly lower than last year but the enjoyment and pleasure of visitors is as great as ever. It is clear from log book entries that the Western Isles have much to offer even seasoned travellers. In 1995, at least 33 different nationalities visited the four hostels, including people from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Roumania, Finland, Croatia, Russia, Thailand, Malaya and Japan. Many old friends revisited including Dave Turner from Enfield, a regular supporter. I was also pleased to see that more residents of the islands themselves had used the hostels and enjoyed the experience.

For those interested in the history of the Trust and the hostels, a new booklet about Herbert Gatliff by Len Clark is now available. Copies will be placed in the hostels.

The major developments in the coming year will be the completion of the works at Howmore and the opening of the new hostel in Barra. This is a much needed resource and doubtless will be well visited and hopefully will contribute to the local economy.

HOWMORE

Works continued throughout the year at Howmore on the new buildings and improvements. Many of the overnights were recorded by members of work parties. It is hoped that the cosy atmosphere of the old building will be retained and that the hostel will remain as popular as before. Neil Pinkett of Nottingham wrote "I'd like to say don't change a thing here because this place is wonderful, but things are changing and always will. I just hope that those who decide on these matters never take away the essence of this place and replace it with something as

unnecessary as progress". Val Goran writes "The atmosphere is just great, no-one chivvying you into bed, it's so warm, peaceful, free and unhurried, one can talk by candlelight beside the fire 'til 2am if so inclined (and we did!). Happy times to be remembered with nostalgia. Thank you Gatliff Trust for preserving this little gem of a place 'Long may it's lum reek' (but hopefully not too much into the kitchen) well into the next century".

There is a touch of romance recorded in July by Marta who writes "Tomorrow Mark and I are on our way to Lochdar to the Hebridean Jewellery Shop. We are buying our wedding rings there for the big day in August. There's a Hebridean Jewellery in Fort William which we'd been to but they didn't have our sizes so we changed our travel plans to fit in the Hebrides - exactly that is what makes travelling so much fun. How did an American come to marry a German? We met in a youth hostel! - see how travelling can change your life in ways you never forsee?". The unanswered question is, did they meet in a GHHT hostel?

#### BERNERAY

Your newsletter is being written in Berneray, where it is a grey day with a cold wind. A few lambs and calves have arrived on the machair and daffodils are well through in the gardens. Seaweed is being spread on the potato patches but otherwise there is little sign of Spring. It is hard to believe that the bare brown machair will burst into bloom in just a few months time. The main news of the moment is that despite the E.U. having promised money for a causeway, the Scottish Office has refused to allow the Council capital spending consent for the balance. The islanders intend to fight.

Over at the hostel, the log book tells that the weather was rugged in 1995 up until June when a glorious summer began. Michael Kern and others likened June in Berneray to the Antarctic in 1911 as follows, "24.11.95 - 1.30am Base Camp 'We intend to set off for Ben Shtube in the morning. We may be some time'. The log book does not relate whether they survived, but so far a lonely tent has not been found under a snowdrift. Someone else writes of "The wind, the beating incessant wind lifts tired feet and aching backs, a magical world an ideal home".

The weather obviously improved in late June when Andy Knight wrote "Walking on the hills listening to the seals swimming in the clear cold water, getting to know strangers, peace and quiet. In two words 'Heaven on Earth'". This was echoed by Caroline in July who wrote "Be not afraid, the isle is full of noises... and Berneray noises are magical ones; seals crying, mermaids singing in the dark of the night, dolphins jumping. The fire by the shore was my favourite bit with baked potatoes too hot to hold and whisky from the bottle. That is apart from the seal that came so close when I was swimming one day. Of course the company surpasses all - beautiful people in a beautiful place".

#### RHENIGIDALE

Rhenigidale Hostel attracts the tough and intrepid. The Stornoway Canoe Club visited in February and paddled down to Loch Trollmarig where they disturbed "a dozen seals and half a dozen deer". An

undaunted young person writes "The washing line in the kitchen collapsed and set fire to some clothes and it hasn't stopped raining all day. I'm really pleased to read that so many travellers have enjoyed their stay in the islands and I hope to travel like they have some day and see life".

Cyclists and walkers record rough journeys to the village but in the summer of 1995 heat was often the problem. On 25/6/95 an entry says "At the moment we are hoping it cools down a bit. Here in the front of the hostel it's at least 30deg C". On 13th July a visitor reports they had to go into the sea to cool!

Some hostellers find the distance to the shops a problem but not Gaba Soos from Budapest who on 9th June wrote "I cooked some whelks for the first time in my life and ate them. Still alive after having two meals of them. If you run out of food too just walk along the path to Tarbert until the second waterfall and you can collect them on the shore with handfulls. You need a lot of them. Boil them for 5-10 minutes and get them out of the shell (needs patience and time). Then fry them in butter with garlic and any other spices you have. Good with pasta and cheese. Enjoy your meal".

The GHHT hostelling experience is summarised by Tim Barnard of Somerset in September who says " I came down here before the road when the hostel was very basic with no electricity and little furniture. I've greeted Jehovah's Witnesses at the door and I have sat and sung with a group of girl guides accompanied by two German girls, one one a violin and one on a flute. I've shared whisky with strangers, played cards and talked endlessly with people from all over the world. Where else but in Gatliff Trust hostels could you do these things?".

#### GARENIN

Garenin was the busiest of all the hostels in 1995, attracting particularly high numbers of visitors from Germany. Your newsletter editor will have to learn German, because numerous log book entries are in that language and who knows what profundities you are missing because of her lack of linguistic attainments!

Fortunately, Arlette from Modena in Italy writes in English as follows "Can you believe that we are the only Italians who ended up in heavenly Garenin since August '93? Where do Mediterraneans go? To Rimini and boring Lloret de Mar (terrible place) perhaps? Aren't we able to get away from the crowd and gather our thoughts from time to time? This is the most fascinating and inspiring landscape I've seen for years. And now a woman is playing the harp and the stones at Callanish are facing the moonlight".

Throughout all the hostel log books there are records of sightings of various birds, sea mammals and otters. On 30/7/95, Laurence Washington writes "Two days ago we were greeted in the morning by a young basking shark who had come to look at some humans standing on rocks staring into the water. After circling around for some time it seemed most confused and back it went out to sea".

Finally, a cautionary piece from Jens Beckman of Stuttgart on 27/8/95 "Sitting in this old house, the stone walls around me and the wind

howling outside and reading the story of Christy, Annie and Peggy MacLeod (the ladies who last lived in the thatched houses) I strongly felt the strange beauty of this place and of people's life here. It is a descending (sic) world at a remote corner of the earth, quiet, close to nature, full of hard work, but also of kindness, hospitality, beauty. We can - and that's really a wonderful opportunity - become part of this world for a short time. We can keep something of it in our hearts and take it with us into our noisy and dirty cities. But we can also be part of it's destruction. So please be careful in everything you do here. Try to respect and understand what is around you and you will feel the beauty of this place and it's people without doing any harm. (written on a Sunday morning after a night full of whisky and beer but nevertheless to be taken seriously!)"

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As always, warm thanks must be conveyed to the hardworking wardens of the four hostels who make all this possible in the individual and unique ways. Thank you Betty MacDonald (Howmore), Annie MacKillop and Jessie MacLeod (Berneray), Alisdair Mackay (Rhenigidale) and Pat and John MacGregor (Garenin). It is not that the hostels would be poorer without you, but they wouldn't exist at all. Keep up the great work.

Isabel Steel  
Ferry, Berneray  
March 1996

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#### NOTE

Our apologies to all the hostellers who visited Garenin between June and December last year. It was during my annual inspection of the hostel, that I and the warden became aware of the condition of the stove. It was beyond repair and since it was only 3 or 4 years old we decided to consider other types of stove. We began a search to find a hosteller-proof stove, we believe we have found such a stove (please do not try to prove us wrong!). It was installed during December and appears to be working well.

Jim McFarlane  
Maintenance Officer G H H T