



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

CROFTER'S NEWSLETTER 2003

HOSTEL OVERNIGHT FIGURES

	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>
Berneray	1838	2057	1627	1328	1779	1602	1505	1612
Garenin	2028	2185	1969	1796	1576	1329	1225	1316
Howmore	1080	1182	971	1076	1071	923	1034	1222
<u>Rhenigidale</u>	<u>862</u>	<u>928</u>	<u>812</u>	<u>787</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>824</u>	<u>767</u>	<u>806</u>
TOTALS	5808	6352	5379	4987	5226	4678	4531	4953

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www.gatliff.org.uk

BERNERAY

The Berneray logbook goes back to March 2001.

Visitors came from Coigach (Scotland), Canada, Germany, Wales, Isle of Man, Slovak Republic, New Zealand, Australia, Finland, USA and England.

The hostel was described as homely, cosy and well equipped. Tootsie the cat gets lots of mentions – a charmer, likes titbits and a warm lap.

People lost track of the date – this place is like coming home with every visit and many hostellers were making return visits.

The wildlife spotted included otters, a tern being harried by an arctic skua and lots of seals (which sing).

Visitors enjoyed a mix of weather including amazing thunder. One hosteller from Edinburgh wrote that ‘after trudging across the bogs of West Lewis and North Harris, that after 18 years of travelling Scotland, climbing its hills, camping, bothying and doing everything that Scottish people should do, we thought we had seen the best. Now we know better, now we have stayed at the Berneray Gatliff Hostel and it is a cracker.’

A visitor from Germany wrote that they ‘had never seen the milky way as clearly as last night and I’ve never seen so many shooting stars before’.
Another wrote ‘ the views are breathtaking and the air so clear’.

As well as cyclists, sea kayakers visited in August 2001. A hosteller returning after their first visit last year wrote ‘Berneray does not disappoint – leaving will be hard’. Another visitor from Baile Ailean, Eilean Leodhas was back after 18 years and felt it was as homely as ever.

I’m sure most visitors would agree with the sentiment of another visitor who wrote that this was the place to get in touch with the real you and out of touch with the pressures of the mainland life .. it offers a special friendliness.

Steve from Nottingham went skinny-dipping (in October !). He reckons everyone should ‘get yer kit off and get in the sea!’.

Andrew Lake was treated to 'a spectacular sunset which lighted up the sky with all manners of reds, yellows and the shades in between'. He wrote that 'even with the gales blowing and the rain pouring, the scenery enchants you'. In November Berneray was 'as beautiful and temperamental as ever'.

Emma from Tasmania wrote – Outside the blows and whistles
And taps on the windows
Trying to come in
But inside it is safe and warm
Just the fire and the cat and me
Oh what a very lovely place to be.

Ilkka from Finland met Emma in Stornoway and is now thinking of moving to the Outer Hebrides and skinny-dipping !?

An anonymous visitor in May wrote :-
Vibrant sunset gives the house a rosy glow,
Seal song drifts on wave and gentle blow,
A cat lies dreaming, kettle sings on the stove,
Spirit of peace for the mind, at will, to move,
And when the roar of traffic, radio and TV,
Clamour, surround and try to overwhelm me,
I shall reserve memories of this reality,
Where man can be himself and maintain a soul that is free.

Vicky and Portia recommend the Church of Scotland service for its singing and the gaelic psalms sung with beauty and force not unlike the ebb and flow of the tides.

Ally and Co from Staffordshire thought it a gem of a place but mused that they weren't on Berneray for the weather ! Others had better luck but Morag from Bristol arrived with her Dad, drenched. Nancy saw her first aurora borealis in September.

The Drunken Poets Society (Berneray Branch) wrote at 0.45am on 27th September 2002 –
'What can I write that hasn't already been said ?
What can I write when its time for bed,
I don't know I can't think what to write,
So I'm off to my bed, so night night (and sleep tight).

Lyndsey O'Donovan from Liverpool wrote .
'This beauty is mine to behold
This beauty makes me forget the cold,
The rain, the wait, these things don't matter,
I have this view forever after,
I know I'll never forget my stay,
On the island of Berneray'.

A visitor from South Africa heard about the Hebrides from his mother. Francis has longed to set foot on these magical shores. He wrote that 'it is everything and much, much more than I ever imagined, a place of magnificence and beauty comparable with anything I have set eyes on'.

Visitors in February wrote 'The toilet block offers an excellent opportunity for intimate entomological studies. I'm sure I've discovered a couple of species unknown to science in there'.

Another visitor recommends the views from South Cletraval to St Kilda – but be prepared for the MOD to 'welcome' you if you go right to the top.

Finally Andrew wrote – ' Mar sin leat a Bhearnaigh – bhi mi air ais cho luath 's as urrainn dhomh'.

GARENIN

Visitors to Garenin included several whose languages I could not decipher, so I apologise for not including your comments. Those I could read were from Germany, Israel, New Zealand, France, Canada, Spain, Ireland, Australia, Greece, Austria, Norway, Poland, Quebec, USA, Netherlands and Belgium.

Visitors stayed during the Hebridean Celtic Festival and had their own ceilidh.

In August the northern lights were seen. A visitor from Canada found the island awe-inspiring.

For visitors including one from Hamburg, the people around the table were what matters – laughing, talking, swapping stories - ... it's been the best fun for ages.

Silvia from Vienna, Austria was at the hostel on 11th September and remembered the events of 2001, all the people who died and the families they left behind. She was very thankful to be on such a peaceful and wonderful place and alive.

Ruth from Leeds enjoyed salted herring and boiled potatoes, courtesy of the Warden. Yvonne and Tinka from Germany would 'like to come here again and stay forever...and this, although we got to know bad weather and got completely wet. But if the sun comes out, all is forgotten'.

The black house was 'surprisingly cosy' for visitors from New Zealand, Australia and Wales.

Morag arrived after a journey of two ferries, a very long car journey, two buses, a long walk and a hitchhike. She wrote 'I am now torn between two conflicting feelings, 1) to tell my friends about this place and urge them to go or 2) keep it to myself so it stays unspoiled'.

The hostel was full in October when Krista from Vermont arrived. She wrote that 'the folk of the islands are warm and welcoming indeed. I wish I knew how to repay it'. She also wrote that the wind on the cliff was strong enough to lean on.

A visitor on their third visit 'fell in love with this place all over again'.

Several visitors including Josh and Jenny (and Bob) came to stay for one day and ended up staying for three. They and others recommended the walk to Dal Mor beach.

A visitor from France felt that you can switch off your mind, be peaceful and be in communication with yourself.

Don from Preston wrote that he 'will be seen staring dreamingly out of the window onto an urban courtyard, thinking not of the bricks and mortar of Preston but the hills, seas and skies of the Hebrides'. You are not alone – I have a series of photos and a postcard of Rhenigidale hostel on the partition in front of my desk at work in Devon, as a constant reminder that work is very much a means to an end - the end being visits to the Hebrides as often as possible.

Thomas and Julie described Garenin as 'a wonderful place – the sunset, the rock arches, the gliding gulls and so much open sky'.

Lastly various visitors from as far apart as the Netherlands and Tasmania felt at home here and didn't want to leave.

howmore

Visitors came from Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, USA, Italy and Scotland. Some were first timers, some on return trips, some arrived by bike in moon and starlight, others arrived in the dark (in December).

Many sung the praises of the coal fire and according to a Geordie called John, this place defines the ethos of hostels – peaceful, fun and full of great people.

Recommended walks include Hecla – on a clear day visibility affords good views of St Kilda and Skye – but also allow plenty of time and keep a lookout for a variety of birds including Hen Harriers and Manx Shearwaters.

Tina MacIntyre from Prince Edward Island, Canada (any MacIntyres with info contact her on tinamacintyre@hotmail.com) came to say she'd been, because her family originated from South Uist, leaving in 1795. She wrote that 'setting foot in the hostel changed all that – I felt at home and had the best sleep of my life and the minute I opened my eyes and went out to see the beauty of the land through the mist I had a huge smile on my face and a relief in myself that I'd come here'

Morag from Bristol felt fresh and revived after her stay.

The beaches are recommended including the walk from Dalabrog (catch the post bus there) although Morag noted the strange sulphur smell of the seaweed. Kildonan Museum is also recommended and the road to the nature reserve has great views.

Del from Hawick described the sea as dysentery beige !

An Italian wrote 'the mountains and the ocean make me feel the beautiful energy/power of the mother earth'

Kirsty wrote that it was a great place to be for the new year and in February the hostel was a great refuge from the elements for Rolf, who wrote that his concept of wind had been redefined !

Debbie recommended Eriskay, Nick recommends the walk up Beinn Mhor.

Natalie wrote 'a truly special place, particularly the irrepressible bird sounds which accompanied our dreams and mornings'.

The Ruxtons came for one night and stayed for three and in May the corncrakes were seen and heard in the beds of flag iris north of the hostel.

RHENIGDALE

Visitors came from as far away as Colorado USA, France, Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, England, The Czech Republic, South Africa, Quebec, Belgium, Basque Country, Australia, Holland, Oregon USA and of course Alba (Scotland) – including some Gaelic speaking exiles.

Some were first timers to the Western Isles and hostelling, others were seasoned visitors. For all, hostelling proved to be a great experience, not least of all because of the other folk hostelling brought them into contact with, but also because of the atmosphere, the stove and the setting.

Some came on bikes, some on the bus/taxi and some on foot including Alan Wilkins from Edinburgh who had been wild camping in the North Harris hills and left with regret. Some of those coming by car felt that they were cheating (I felt the same the first time I visited the village by road). As Elaine and Ken Hogg, also from Edinburgh wrote, the place retains its remoteness despite the road and it is a privilege to stay here – 'once bitten, always smitten'!

The hostel is described as an oasis, Shangri-la, unforgettable, special, fantastic, refreshing, peaceful, amazing, silent, wild, wonderful, Nirvana, a great place to chill out, cosy and Alasdair has been thanked by many for his warm welcome and several wished that there were more people like him in the world. Roddy is still remembered by some and thanked.

Several mothers dragged their teenage offspring here – I'm sure they will thank you for the uplifting experience in years to come – I often wonder whether any of the teenagers I brought here in 1985 with the Schools Hebridean Society were uplifted enough to ever return.

Everyone agreed coming down the hill on a bike was better than going up – Andy Wilson from Dalton in Cumbria wrote that his legs have never had such a work out. The path though was also a challenge – in September it resembled a waterfall.

Much wildlife was spotted including seals, golden eagles and ring ouzels. There was concern about the lone sheep on the island. I am fairly sure that this was a banished ram, having a rest after performing his duties.

Sarah from Australia – currently living in Dumfries wrote ‘it doesn’t get much better than this’.

Having read all the comments in the logbook (although my linguistic skills do not stretch to interpreting the entries in Czech and Dutch !), I think every one who wrote in the log book (including the teenagers) would agree with that sentiment.

The Stornoway Running and Athletic Club made their usual trip for Hogmanay. They ‘cleansed themselves of the old year and were rejuvenated for the new year by swimming (-2C) and bathing in mulled wine !?’

In January Colette and Jacque said – ‘Eagles a blowin
Rain a drivin
But nothing beats the scenery,
When the cloud lifts.’

In February, Don from Preston in Lancashire came to Rhenigidale from Berneray – ‘I thought there couldn’t be anywhere as good as that. But bugger me, there is and its here’. The fact that ‘the sun was streaming up the valley and there is not a breath of wind – just like July but without the midges’, may have had something to do with it !

Herdis from Germany wrote ‘the quietness fills you with a sense of belonging’ and Adam Horley wrote ‘when doing a hike just remember to occasionally stop, sit back and enjoy the peacefulness of this unique place’.

Jennifer from London/Kentucky wrote ‘the walk to Rhenigeadal was one of the happiest experiences of my life. The light was magnificent (crested the hill in a rainstorm and came down to the ruined village in a rainbow)’.

Hostellers who wish to make a contribution to the future of the islands may wish to think about making a donation to the North Harris Trust. Following a ballot, the community of the North Harris Estate (which doesn’t include Rhenigidale but does include most of the rest of North Harris), voted overwhelmingly in favour of purchasing the land when it was placed on the market and the North Harris Trust was formed by members of the community with The John Muir Trust as a partner, to prepare a bid for the land. This has been accepted but the trust now needs to raise £100,000 towards purchase and management of the land. The stated aims of the trust are to manage, develop and conserve the assets of North Harris in a sustainable manner for the benefit of the community and the enjoyment of the wider public.

For more details or to make a donation the North Harris Trust can be contacted at The Old Hostel, Tarbert, HS3 3BG or on-line go to www.north-harris.org

walks from the gatliff hostel at reinigeadal - neil pinkett

This beautifully illustrated guide to walking in the Rhenigidale area of North Harris is available from GHHT at just £3.50 including p+p. Orders should be sent to: **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street, STORNOWAY, Isle of Lewis, Western Isles, HS1 2ND.**

Cheques should be made payable to '**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**'.

The book will also be on sale at Tourist Offices in Tarbert and Stornoway, as well as at Rhenigidale Hostel.

HOSTEL PRICES - 2003

The overnight charges at the GHHT hostels in 2003 are as follows:

18 and over - £7.50 / under 18 - £5.50 / camping - £3.75

MEMBERSHIP

If you are not already a member of the Hebridean Hostellers, why not join and help us to support the hostels. Annual membership is currently £5 per year. After 30th September 2003, annual membership will be £10 (£7.50 for under 18's). For further details please see the enclosed leaflet.

Joanna Burgess - June 2003

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