



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

# CROFTERS NEWSLETTER 2004

## HOSTEL OVERNIGHT FIGURES

	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>
Berneray	2057	1627	1328	1779	1602	1505	1858	2056
Garenin	2185	1969	1796	1576	1329	1225	1316	1522
Howmore	1182	971	1076	1071	923	1034	1222	1627
<u>Rhenigidale</u>	<u>928</u>	<u>812</u>	<u>787</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>824</u>	<u>767</u>	<u>803</u>	<u>892</u>
TOTALS	6352	5379	4987	5226	4678	4531	5199	6097

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[www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

Once again I have had the great pleasure of reading through the hostel logbooks and the thoughts and comments of those who have been inspired by the islands and the hostels to leave behind their contributions for others to share. The hostel books have made the long journey south to Devon but will soon be heading north again home to the islands. They are kept in perpetuity by Stornoway Library should you ever wish to look at them.

The following excerpts are a personal selection which is probably why Rhenigidale takes up most space. I didn't get there this summer but did stay at Berneray and Howmore – meeting great people and enjoying great scenery. It is clear from the following that many others did the same. Here are some of their entries.

## BERNERAY

Graham from Sheffield walked barefoot most of the way round the island 'on the hard sand with the sea over my toes' and had the company of a Canadian, Scotsman and an Irishman in the hostel.

Sarah from Alabama, USA loved the hostel and wrote 'the character of the place is unmatched. To be treated to such dramatic landscape was a dream – like something I was meant to see'.

Tony from Inverness wrote 'as always the Berneray evening light is unlike that anywhere else I've experienced and the hostel immediately homely and welcoming'.

Aanii from Canada wrote 'the wind, sand and water speak so vividly on this isle. It has been like a dream for me to share this space of land, being able to walk freely in peace and solace with all the sounds around you, whether in the meadow or by the water'.

Eva enjoyed 'sublime company' in July.

David and Suzanne got hooked and stayed 3 days – they thought the 3 mile beach on the west coast was awesome, took a trip with the RSPB to Loch Langass where they saw 3 otters as well as the stone circle and chambered cairn and heard corncrakes at Balranald.

On 23 July an anonymous person wrote :-

And so to sleep, perchance to dream  
Of silver sand, of turquoise gleam  
Of tall black mountains in the mist  
Of Col and Ali getting pissed  
Of Diane's bag with sea shells filled  
Of screaming crabs that Eric killed

Of George the rat and Sean the seal  
Of all the folk who cooked the meals  
Of tides that came and tides that went  
Of glorious machair heaven sent  
And so to sleep, perchance someday  
I'll find my way back to Berneray.

Signe from Denmark thought the kitchen/living room was the favourite part of the house – a really happy room.

Many, including Shona hope to come back soon. Victoria from Yorkshire enjoyed fresh veg and eggs and found the folk very friendly. She could have stayed on the west coast beach all day if it wasn't for the sun being so hot!!

3 days after Victoria's entry in the log book, Jim from Suffolk had a wild evening with white rain and wind beating at the windows but Clare from Tynemouth wrote that Berneray is an awesome setting whatever the weather.

Several folk expressed the sentiment that its not the house that makes the home – it's the people.

Dungal and Glenda from New Zealand were returning to the place their great, great, great, great grandfather had left to go to Australia.

When I stayed in September an American, Australian, Greek, Scot and English people were staying and 'The Mighty Atlantic' was very mighty. Later in the month Daddy Long Legs were a problem but at the beginning of October otters were spotted on the foreshore.

Pat was pleased that the island hadn't lost any of its magic with the coming of the causeway. Wendy from Glasgow had the place to herself – total silence, stars, northern lights, seals and the gentle lapping of the sea.

Paul from Germany had the company of minke whales and porpoises on the ferry. Only the chugging of the Calmac ferry reminded him of the existence of time. Berneray Hostel seemed to capture a lot of the positive things about Scotland in one place. He described the Northern Lights 'like the earth was one big charged sphere with charged particles caught in its magnetic field being forced to dance to a higher order'.

Visitors came from France, Canada, USA, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia, Germany and South Africa.

Mark from Los Angeles wrote that Berneray was one of the most beautiful places he'd been to.

In January 2004 a visitor wrote 'thank you for KISS – keeping it simple stupid!

## Garenin

Dave from Northumberland wrote that 'the Gatliff Hostels at Berneray, Rhenigdale and Garenin have given me the opportunity to relax, unwind, reflect and rethink. I have enjoyed the company of some lovely people and have gone through the highs and lows of emotion that remote areas and solitude can help bring out. I leave today for the mainland with feelings of regret but also of optimism'.

Visitors came from Italy, Canada, Basque Country (Gaelic speaking), Sweden, Korea and Germany. Margaret and Paula came less far – from East Kilbride but arriving by bike asked the question 'who said Lewis was flat?'

Anonymous from Wales said 'charming place, lovely people and great food and company. They will always remember it as the place where they heard that their baby sister had given birth to a baby girl'.

Many hostellers wrote about the splendour of the walks along the cliffs.

A visitor from Germany wrote 'It takes a lot to be great, much to do great, less to feel great – for example such places like this'.

Sarah from New Zealand and Canada wrote 'The rugged barren landscape with the breakers makes me feel like I truly am on the edge of the earth'.

A visitor from Switzerland enjoyed the warm fire and astonishing view of the sea.

Becca and Andy from Oregon, USA were nearly blown over on their bikes in September. Also in September the work party included a German who was spending his week's holiday giving something back.

Dutch and Swiss visitors were moved by the beauty of the island. Frederic was 'impressed by the dignity of the hills that surround us, by the might of the sea restlessly slashing against the rocks and of course, I grew fond of the isle's inhabitants who are so courteous and cheery'.

Teresa from Norfolk enjoyed the Northern Lights as did Alan from New Zealand who also enjoyed the black house experience, the special people to share it with and the lovely warm fire.

Cindy and Brent from Michigan had the place to themselves for two nights when on their Scottish honeymoon !

Ruth from Worcester, here in December wrote 'a beautiful place with a lot of sky. Great for playing the fiddle by the fire or watching the moon. The stones on the beach are so smooth. It has an intense sense of contentment'.

Anthony from Zimbabwe wrote 'a beautiful spot for a few moments of serenity - so much time and space.

Richard, Robert, Nick and Klaus from Germany spent New Year here. New Years day was very windy with massive waves. They left behind a picture and framed it in driftwood.

Lastly Anika and Luka from Poland stayed here under a rainbow.

## howmore

The book starts with a piece written in Gaelic by an American – my Gaelic is a bit rusty but Howmore was described as 'alainn' – beautiful I think.

The hostel was described as being cosy in the gales and thunderstorms at the beginning of June.

The corncrake was audible but keeping itself hidden from view.

David and Lisa from Australia found the hostel a welcome relief from cycling in the rain.

Julie and Thomas from Germany praised the welcome of the people, the hills, the ruins and the alpine flowers. The roar of the sea remains in the heart and the angels in the glow of the clouds at sunset beckon a return. They gave thanks for keeping hospitality and trust alive for people whose experience of life is not the generous trusting Hebridean kind.

Sarah and Kevin said they will go home refreshed and ready to tackle anything.

Various visitors said not to change the hostel and that the shower is as much luxury as they need.

Linda from San Francisco had a beautiful beach walk and found the hostel very cosy and had a very entertaining evening.

Marta from Spain saw marvellous beaches to the south and Mel from Australia made scones in the oven.

Sarah and Dom from Wales were back after 14 years having walked from the East Coast with its ruined houses and lazy beds.

Steve from Aberdeenshire enjoyed meeting some 'diverse beautiful people' – it reaffirmed his belief in humanity.

Clare ended up staying 10 nights and expected to have a solitary 2 weeks – and ended up meeting her soul mate. According to Dave from Gairloch, Clare and Jos (the Dutch chap who was an expert at keeping the stove going) eloped together. Congratulations to you both !!

Steve and Catherine from Australia saw otters and Annelise from South Africa will be back some day.

## Rhenigidale

Visitors came from the Czech Republic, Ireland, Sweden, France, Belgium, Spain, Korea, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Rhenigidale was described as wonderful and the stove was reckoned to make it really cosy. Ant from New Zealand described it as classy – and the views on the walk from Tarbert as indescribable. Amy and Richard from Australia saw otters on their walk in.

Chris from Zimbabwe wrote that the hostel was an awesome refuge for a spot of lunch. Richard hiked to the top of Clisheam from where he reckoned the view was simply stunning.

Frederick from Nashville Tennessee was making his first return visit since 1977 and noticed a few changes, not least of all the road. He remembered sharing whiskey with Roddy (Jo - an experience no-one could forget!). This time he climbed Toddun and saw an eagle.

Graham and Fred from Dundee arrived by open Canadian canoe and Gill and Tim from Skye walked from their moorings in Loch Maraig. Norman from New Zealand wrote in Gaelic that he had arrived from Stornoway. It was no wonder that ML from Manchester found the usual assortment of 'traveller types engaged in the usual prattle'!

Anders and Maria from Stockholm thought Rhenigidale was 'not very easy to get to, nor is it easy to leave – not for the sake of distance and topography, but for the sake of its peacefulness, warmth, beauty and the wonderful people we have met here' They gave it 5 stars.

In July, John from Cambridgeshire, recorded that Swiss, French, Swedes, Kiwis and Germans were sheltering from the elements, finding something the mainland can't offer.

Pauline and Alan from Macclesfield came back after 15 years having made their first visit in 1966, in the days of carrying elans to the sea, tilley lamps and Roddy. Jamie on the other hand had come from Australia following in the footsteps of her ancestors.

Marleen and friends from Holland enjoyed the smell of peat burning in the hostel. Roger Blackmore had visited 10 years ago when there was no hot water and no showers. This time he had a weekend of hills and good company from all over the world, and escaped the midges on Clisham.

The Clements family recommended the snorkelling.

Morag from Inverness and Jan from Edinburgh have been to many places in the world but none like this.

Peter from London has been coming sporadically since the days of Tilley lamps and a Wee dram and blether into the night with Roddy including a fair number of shoulder sagging treks over the cliff path. He never thought he would find himself driving in and felt a little ashamed of having done so ! (me too – Jo)

There was lots of praise for Alisdair's hospitality and eggs and milk.

Julia and Janni (obviously Runrig fans) wrote when we got to Harris we were 'facing the gale' and had a 'raging night on the island' and something tells me that (I've come) home.

Julia from Germany was making her fourth visit and was happy to be here again.

Dominic felt the low tide view to Rhenigidale Island was dreamlike enough to melt away all the cares of the world.

Pasiale from Switzerland had dreamt of a place where the sea and the mountains meet. Harris proved his dreams were a reality. He was on Clisham first in the snow then in the sun. The fire Alisdair provided was the last thing needed to be absolutely happy.

Dave left refreshed and ready to face the outside world again and similarly Ruth was glad to escape from responsibility and time. Maybe this was because as Anthony from Zimbabwe wrote, time spent in an abode like this in scenery as beautiful as this, is rare and precious.

Jacquelyn came to us across the water from Northern California and left her heart behind. She says the welcome is as warm in the hostel in Sacramento. Like many others Annelise from South Africa hopes to be back some day.

## 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 - 2004

The overnight charges at the GHHT hostels in 2004 are as follows:

18 and over - £8.00 / under 18 - £5.50 / camping - £4.50

## 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 £10 (£7.50 for under 18's). For further details please see the enclosed leaflet.

Joanna Burgess - March 2004

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