

# HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS



NEWSLETTER 15

NOVEMBER 1992

## HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLING 1992

1992 has been another good year for the Hebridean Hostels. Although a full set of bednight figures will not be available until the Corters Hostels Newsletter is published early in 1993, we know already from the bednight fees that usage has increased, albeit only slightly we believe. This is in the face of a recession related reduction of tourism in the Outer Hebrides, though the Hebrides appear to have suffered less than has tourism in Scotland and the UK in general. Last years pattern of usage has been repeated with Garenin and Berneray topping the list followed by Rhenigidale, Howmore and Claddach Baleshare.

The openings of Garenin and Rhenigidale hostels in July were very successful as reported later by Pam Moncur. Deldre Forsyth reports later on the Hebridean Hostellers Annual Gathering of Minds (= AGM) at Melrose YH in October. Our commercial ventures - the sale of T-shirts, posters and postcards have been successful with a near sell out of T-shirts - see John Stewart's 'advert' later.

Workparties have been few this year with our activities being in 'maintenance mode' with maintenance work being carried out by our resident Islander, Roy Ashworth and various of our regular island visitors. However *gird your loins and prepare to heed the clarion call*. All being well, work will start in late 1993 on the renovation of Howmore hostel. This is, of course, subject to clearing the legal work before then (see Peter Clark's article later) which is being progressed by Deldre Forsyth and raising of funds - advance notice is given later of the Howmore appeal. Maintenance work will be needed at the four other hostels in '93 and any potential volunteers can help enormously by dropping a note to John Webb. (All addresses are given at the end of this Newsletter).

### The Garenin and Rhenigidale Openings 1992

Pam Moncur

After an unscheduled (thanks, dear Alan Busson) overnight stop (sincere thanks to the Batchelor family; lovely new potatoes and red wine) in Leverburgh we (myself & daughter Joanna, Deldre Forsyth and son Patrick) met up with the coach on the morning of 3rd July. We picked up folk in Tarbert and at Rhenigidale before heading further north to Garenin. It wasn't the brightest of Hebridean days but there was definitely a holiday mood as we spilled out and made our way down to the village.

Various councillors, local dignitaries, members of the local communities, trustees, hostellers and our hostel wardens were there for the hostel opening.

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Magnus Magnusson's words of support and encouragement reached the ears of most of the large crowd gathered outside the hostel and cameras clicked and tummies rumbled!

With the formalities over we fell upon the wonderful spread at the Carlaway Community Centre before hopping back on the coach to ruminate and enjoy the scenery on the way back to Rhenigdale. The hostel was bulging at the seams - as well as the 'big cheeses' and the contents of the coach, there were a few poor hostellers whose quiet evening turned out to be interrupted in a fairly serious way. Magnus Magnusson had been the first to arrive by the simple ploy of slipping away prematurely from the Carlaway feast and had toured Rhenigdale unfettered by the company and explanations of Hebridean Hosteller's 'big-wigs'. I even had to stand outside to catch what was being said through the open windows. Those who laboured long and hard for or at Rhenigdale renovation can only have been heartened to hear Magnus say that the hostel represented the very essence of what Scottish Natural Heritage is about.

On our way back to catch the ferry to Berneray we gave the chap in the chip shop at Tarbet a few anxious moments when the coach stopped outside his small establishment .... but it was only the really greedy people (like Patrick) who had one of his excellent fish suppers.

It was lovely to spend a day in the company of some old friends, islanders and others, and to have made some new friendships.

### AGM Report

Deidre Forsyth

The turnout for this year's AGM was quite small but it was good to meet members from Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Borders. John Wilson attended bringing with him T-shirts in navy and red as well as the dark green which we first saw at the Garenin opening.

The Annual Report and Accounts were approved after questions had been asked and answered. Peter Clarke then gave his Chairman's report in which he particularly emphasised the excellent opening day at Garenin and re-opening at Rhenigdale. Peter also thanked all of our supporters and was delighted to note that 1991 saw a record number of overnights.

The election then took place and Alan Busson, John Duyck, Richard Genner, Arthur Meaby, Pam Moncur, Jim Souness, John Webb and myself were elected as Directors. Peter Clarke, John Joyce and Philip Lawson are also Directors, having been nominated by the Gatliff Trust. The meeting then agreed to authorise the overnight fee to be fixed by the Executive and the minimum Hebridean Hostellers membership subscription to be £3-00.

After the close of formal business, Mark Chamberlain, a Hebridean Hosteller, gave a slide show presentation on walks in the area around Garenin. Mark's talk on the background and history of blackhouses and of the wildlife and scenery of the area was most interesting and was appreciated by the members present.

All in all, the Annual General Meeting was one of the most enjoyable I have attended with its concentration on the benefits and rewards of being a Hebridean Hosteller and in the efficient and quick way in which the formal business was dealt with.

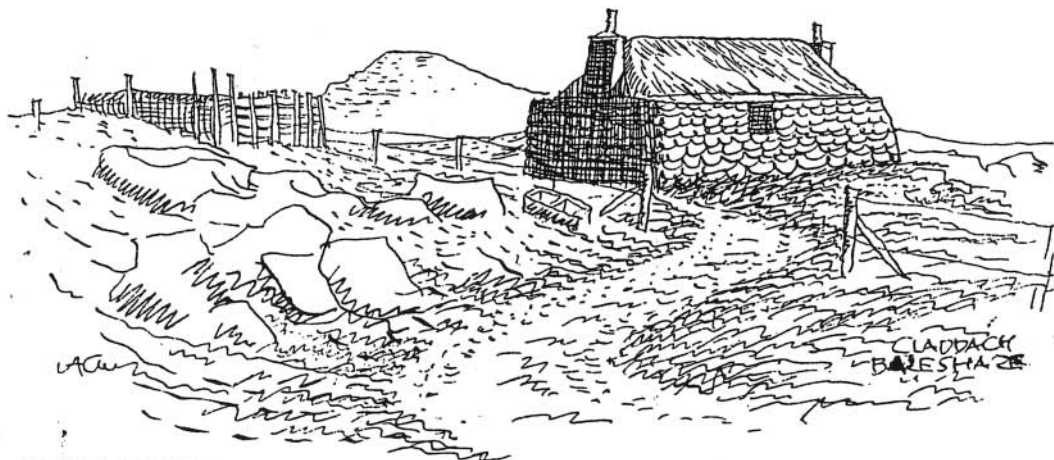
Howmore Appeal Subject to satisfactory progress on the legal aspects, which to date have been going quite well, it is our intention to launch a Howmore Appeal in early 1993 to raise funds for the major renovation of Howmore Hostel. Howmore has been a loyal servant of the hostel chain, giving many hostel overnights for a modest amount of maintenance effort. Howmore's gently aging fabric is now to

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be rewarded with a major refurbishment and to answer complaints of overcrowding, additional dormitory space is to be provided in adjacent buildings. Pam Moncur is organising the appeal and help will be welcome in three areas:

- 1) Assistance with correspondence, envelope stuffing, artwork, etc.
- 2) Suggestions as to whom/which charities/trusts/companies can be approached for financial assistance
- 3) Donations to get the appeal underway.

Anyone able to assist with any of these 3 aspects of the Howmore Appeal should contact Pam Moncur.



Claddach Baleshare  
by Crispin Worthington

"Why can't the Trust open a hostel on ...."

Peter Clarke

Hostellers often ask "Why can't the Trust open a hostel on ....?" Our Chairman spells out the opportunities and the challenges.

This question is often asked by hostellers and usually Barra is top of the "wish list". No doubt Trustees's replies sound like Old Sage; in our hearts we agree but in our heads, we know what is involved. We also know that there are other priorities: improving Howmore is our top priority for the coming year. Having faced this question recently, I set to thinking. Well, it would do no harm to spell out the opportunities. Maybe someone would pick the challenge. As the old saying goes, you have to speculate to accumulate. Hostellers can help a great deal. In fact, if hostellers have a will and are prepared to put in the effort there could be many more Crofters Hostels on the Hebridean islands, Outer and Inner.

Ten years ago we used to say that the only thing restraining the growth of the chain was lack of funds. Now we recognise another factor. Today we emphasise that "Further expansion of the chain is restrained by the slow growth in the Trust's annual income and the number of active members we can recruit." A new hostel project takes the concerted effort of at least five people, Trustees and

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others close to the Trust, over a three year period (not including the time taken to find a suitable house). Many more hostellers and supporters will be involved in work-parties, helping with the appeal and opening the hostel.

The project starts with a building that looks OK and an owner who is willing to talk. But don't be misled, this is like looking for diamonds on a Uist beach. The next stage is that you have to find an islander who is willing, able and lives close enough to be the warden. The warden is the lynch pin in the whole operation.

Then you are ready to start the lengthy and painstaking work sorting out the legal side. Nowadays, we can't get funding for any project until the paper work is all in order. Along the way the Trust has learned a lot about the Crofters Act 1886 and the Crofters (Reform) Act 1976. A lecture on either is guaranteed to clear any hostel common room in two minutes flat. But someone has to wade their way through the contemporary consequences of the legislation. Both have a direct bearing on the willingness of crofters to talk about empty houses.

Meanwhile, a small army of officials have to be consulted, Planners, Environmental Health Officers, potential funding bodies, public and charitable.

An appeal has to be organised, with much liaison with bodies prepared to help distribute the appeal leaflet. Meanwhile, artwork has to be prepared, friendly graphic designers approached and printers asked for quotes, proofs checked, print runs ordered. Next hundreds of envelopes have to be stuffed, address labels run off (thank heavens for computer data bases) and hundreds of stamps stuck. I can assure you that after the first 50 stamps you never want to lick another. Here an army of small children come in handy. (I rationalise that we are doing it for them anyway, as they are the next generation of hostellers.) After this effort you might think it is all over. Sorry, it is only just beginning. The donations have to be banked, and acknowledged, usually with individual letters.

Meanwhile the purchase/renting has to be concluded and the renovation project got under way. It has to be planned to please the Council officials. Teams of volunteers have to be organised. Contractors have to be used; no easy matter in the islands, since skills are in short supply and demand is heavy. Isolation and distance starts to count with long waits for supplies, especially unusual items.

The painting and decorating is the easy bit. Finally, the furniture and bedding arrives, though someone has had to devise an inventory and purchase the stuff.

Then the big day arrives. The doors are open! But don't relax yet, someone on the Committee is bound to suggest an official opening. "It will please the islanders, and we can thank our donors." We always tell our donors that the project has been completed, so another mailing is needed.

I will spare you the joys of organising the opening. In the islands it is usually all right on the day.

After this exhaustive and exhausting process, you might understand why it is that Trustees currently mutter "Howmore" in response to requests for new hostels. Our next major project is to be the renovation of Howmore. It will take all the devoted effort described above, so we are careful in accepting other major commitments.

If you have been enthused by the hostels, or inspired by the Hebrides, and want to see new hostels in islands that no other hosteller has reached, please make contact. We have only got where we are by volunteer effort - we have no paid staff - and we are always glad to welcome the contributions of others. And

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finally, remember, you are never too young to start. Indeed Herbert Gatliff was an ardent supporter of the view that teenagers and those in their twenties had better ideas than the "older" generation.

Add Value to your Hebridean Hostelling by wearing one of our high quality, 100% cotton, one size (Large) T-shirts, NOW AVAILABLE in bottle green, bright red or navy blue with a Hebridean Hostelling logo emblazoned across the chest. Add value to our funds by placing your order with John Stewart (Flat 6, 5 Ettrickdale Place, Edinburgh, EH3 5JN) price £7-50 each incl. P&P.

Or purchase from John Stewart the Hebridean Hostelling poster, 7 excellent drawings of the Hebridean Hostel, £2-00 incl. P&P.

Or purchase picture postcards of Howmore, Berneray, Claddach and Rhenigidale (the Garenin Trust sells its own pictures of Garenin), 20p each (1-3 cards) plus 18p SAE; £1-00 incl P&P for all 4 cards; £2-00 for 2 sets, £3-00 for 3 sets. Above this and for bulk quantities of one card, phone John Stewart to agree a price.

Another year passes. Yes, within a few weeks, presents will be wrapped and opened, turkeys stuffed, cooked and eaten and finally a toast to the New Year drunk. Long winter nights are with us to remind us that the year draws to a close. Just to assure you that it is indeed approaching the year end, a Hebridean Hostellers subscription renewal is enclosed to those that pay by cash, cheque or postal order. Please help Lynn by returning the form promptly - now, before Christmas overwhelms you! (For those who pay by Bankers Order or Deposit Covenant a renewal form is superfluous, and we simply thank you for continuing to support Hebridean Hostellers).

The next issue of this Newsletter will be published in April '93 (with the Crofters Hostels Newsletter being distributed in January or February). I need contributions, travelogue, and articles of general Hebridean interest. Also black and white drawings will be welcome, again of general Hebridean interest as over the past four years I've pretty well exhausted the possible options on the five hostels. All contributions to me, Richard Genner, by 19th March please.

**We wish you a Joyous Christmas and All the Best for 1993 and hope that you will be able to support our activities during the coming year.**



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### Hebridean Thatched Houses

Martin Hadlington

North and South Uist together with Berneray are virtually the only places in Scotland where thatched houses survive in any number. There are the odd survivors scattered around the mainland but they tend to have been restored to the point of becoming museum pieces.

The remaining thatched houses of the Uists are very important not just for their rarity value but for their completeness. Many of the surviving structures contain their original box beds, earth floors, furniture (some of it made in the house and too large to remove), crockery, stoves and so on. They are intact because they continue to bear a stigma about "the bad old days" or are seen to sub-standard in modern terms. They are also often left as a mark of respect for the last owner who may have died five or six years ago, the building and its contents left to gently decay.

The contrast with the new vernacular of the "kit house", especially given the particular qualities of the Uist landscape couldn't be greater. Features of the landscape are large flat areas of water, sculpted hills, vast skies and crisp sunlight. Sea of cobalt blue laps the edges of vast expanses of white sand. The new buildings with their sharp angles and bright white paint are obtrusive. By contrast the roofs and wall coverings of the thatched houses match the landscape, their curved thick walls and thatched roof mimicking the hill shapes. The walls are pierced by perfectly proportioned windows and rounded rocks from the nearby beach or river appear like a necklace around the fringe of the thatch. These simple buildings have protected many generations from a hard climate and way of life that few of us could even contemplate today.

*From an article in SPAB News, Nov. 1991.*

The Countryside Commission for Scotland is no more, merged in April '92 with the Nature Conservancy for Scotland into Scottish Natural Heritage. The GHHT is grateful to those CCS officers who supported with advice our works at Berneray and Rhenigdale, and who subsequently arranged CCS grant aid, without which it is doubtful whether either project would have gone ahead. GHHT also is grateful to Gerald McGuire, Frank Martin and John Joyce who represented the Trust in discussion and negotiations with CCS and who have now established a similar relationship with Scottish Natural Heritage.

### Addresses - Hebridean Hostellers/Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

Chairman - Peter Clarke, 264 Alexandra Park Road, London, N22 4BG,

(081 888 2449).

Vice-Chairwoman - Deidre Forsyth, The Shieling, Glenburn Road, Ardrishaig,

Argyll, PA30 8EU (0546 603575).

Secretary - Alan Busson, 4 Sambre Road, Ridgeway View, Chisledon, Swindon,

SN4 0JB, (0793 740124).

Treasurer - John Duyck, 1b Worley Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire.

Workparties - John Webb, 6 Tyndalls Park Mews, St Michael's Hill, Bristol, Avon,

BS2 8DN, (0272 466198).

Newsletter Editor - Richard Genner, ) 45 Godwinsway, Moor Park, Stamford Bridge,

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3639).

Howmore Appeal - Pam Moncur, 28 Rosetta Road, Peebles, EH45 8HJ, (0721 20683).

### - Gatliff Trust

Chairman - Frank Martin, 20 Cornwallis Avenue, Bristol, BS8 4PP, (0272 292350).