



NEWSLETTER 18

MAY 1994

HEBRIDEAN HOSTELLERS AND GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST ACTIVITIES 1994

Easter has always been something of a landmark in the year. The passing of Easter indicates that the long dark nights of winter are over. Growth appears all around, be it on the trees, in the garden or on the machair. Warm weather can be anticipated. For the Hebridean Hostels, another season of usage starts. Though the hostels are open all year round and the hostelling year runs October to September, most of the hostel overnights are recorded between May and September. Spring is a time to ensure that the hostels are ready for the coming summer's use. Spring and summer is the time to run workparties, taking advantage of the favourable weather (usually) and long daylight hours (always!). With Howmore renovation project underway and every indication that the forthcoming summer will bring another good hostelling season, 1994 will not be lacking in activities.

Commencing dates for workparties have been set as follows:

16th May; 20th June; 18 July; 22 August; 19 September; 17 October; but, as always, can be subject to slight alteration to meet the needs of the workparty leader and of the volunteer workers. So if you have time available and inclination to help at the hostels, contact Steve Holding for details of Howmore renovation workparties and John Murdo Webb for maintenance workparties at the other hostels.

If reasonably possible please reserve the date and attend. The AGM is your opportunity to hear what the Trust has achieved in 1993 and to influence what the Trust might attempt to achieve in the rest of 1994 & 1995. The Committee works hard to make the AGM short, interesting and worthwhile, and when held on the mainland to provide some form of additional attraction e.g. displays or a talk. Please reward that work by turning up and influencing the future activities of the Trust.

Howmore renovation is proceeding very well. Most of the legal/local authority issues have been dealt with and difficulties over the historically defined and actual access to the hostel have been resolved, giving Deidre Forsyth one last round of legal activity to pursue.

Your committee is very surprised and highly delighted at how the money is coming in. The Scottish Natural Heritage grant has been secured and other public sector funding is fairly certain to be provided. GHHT always has to provide 25% or more of the funds, and the news is good - without all the 'razza-matazz' of a public appeal launch and mass leafleting, money has flowed into the Howmore Renovation fund as a result of mentions in this and the Crofters Hostel Newsletters and from 'background' work by Peter Clarke and Pam Moncur in contacting supporters of previous GHHT appeals. Depending on how the final costings emerge, it may not be necessary to have an appeal on the scale that was necessary for Berneray and Rhenigidale. Our thanks go to those who have already contributed to the Howmore project - any members with suggestions as to other sources of funds should contact Pam Moncur.

Physical work started last Autumn when a team of three cleared the site and built up crumbling stonework on 'the bigger building' - the one that is to be part of the new hostel premises, and in March a team of four built up the walls and constructed the roof framework for 'the smaller building', that is the eventual cycle shed/store and in the meantime the store for the project tools and materials. No workparty reports are to hand but I am reliably informed that 'a good time was had by all.' Brian Wilson, a well known specialist in traditional building techniques will be working at Howmore in October both to help the project and to conduct some training in dry-stane walling and dyking.

The Howmore sub-committee met at Ardrishaig in April and the host informs me that the whole sub-committee was fascinated and pleased to hear the progress made on the sanitation problem. The local authority requires a major project like Howmore to include upgrading of the sanitation facilities - increased hostel usage creates the same need. With other residences nearby and adjoining land having SSSI status, the Howmore project always needed a large, expensive and carefully crafted septic tank type of solution - until that is, Arthur Meaby came across *Living Water*, an Edinburgh based organisation to whom the Howmore problem is daily business. Essentially, *Living Water* harness traditional techniques using reed and plant beds and Nature's own micro-organisms to ensure effective treatment of sewerage. *Living Water* can happily describe the biologically complex but mechanically simple nature of the process, but simple minds like mine are probably satisfied with 'A diverse range of water purifying organisms from ponds, streams and wetlands are imported into and live in the reed and plant beds that are created to take the sewerage outflow, thus ensuring the treatment of the sewerage'. One GHHT "expert" on this latter stage described it to me as 'the wee beasties in the reeds and plants treat the sewerage and the plants thrive on the resulting nutrients'. The Trust is sure that this is a



Howmore Hostel by Maggie Ramage
from *A View from the Ridge* with
thanks to Ian Mitchell

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healthy, safe and ecologically sound solution to the Howmore sanitation problem and is hopeful that the scheme being worked up by *Living Water* will satisfy the Local Authority requirements and become a hidden feature of the Howmore project. There is still a lot more to do at Howmore, plenty of opportunity for difficulty and disaster, but at least the Howmore project has had a good start in life.

Is it all worth it? - We think so, as this letter (received with a renewal) illustrates:

"I was urged to visit Berneray and I can tell you I was lucky enough to set off from Lochboisdale with the wind at my back (I am a cyclist) and the sun in my face on 20th May and reached Lochmaddy that evening with time and energy to spare. I really cannot imagine anything on earth I could enjoy more than cycling in that place under those conditions. Of course, on Friday morning I set off for Berneray and in what seemed a short time indeed, I was admiring the unique situation of the Berneray hostel. Inside were two Germans, a young-ish lad and his female companion, neither of whom seemed too pleased to have their peace disturbed by an English O.A.P. However as soon as they discovered that I spoke their language, their attitude changed completely and the rest of the day was sheer pleasure.

It might interest you to know what the Germans were doing at Berneray and why they lingered on some time after I left. They were involved in a project, financed by the German Evangelical Church, to take two teenage German boys on a tour of Britain, Iceland and Spain. The boys had, I believe, been on the fringe of crime if not actually involved in it. The journey was intended to get them away from the urban environment of German consumerism and provide an educational and therapeutic experience. This lad had English lessons in the afternoon and I was invited to join in. I had the impression that the "therapy" was working. For "therapy" read "Berneray". They intended to stay longer because they enjoyed the peace so much.

You and your fellow members of Hebridean Hostellers may wonder, at times, how important is the contribution you make to the enterprise. How valuable is the enterprise itself, anyway? Surely there can be no doubt about that. Countless people of all age groups are benefitting from the "therapy" of the Islands, and Berneray in particular. I suppose the consumerism of the English YHA is a matter of economic necessity but we must be grateful that there is an alternative.

Thank you and good luck!" J. L. Westerdale

Firsts from the Royal Bank (from the Royal Bank of Scotland's Customer Newsletter, Jan '94). 'Even before the days of direct payment into bank accounts, the mechanics of paying employees was simply - Just fill up the pay packets and hand them out! For the people who sold Harris Tweed, however there was a snag. The tweed had to be produced on the cottager's hand looms rather than in a factory, so the weavers were scattered around the islands of Harris and Lewis.

The National Bank of Scotland, now part of the Royal Bank, came up with the ideal solution: it took the bank to the weavers. A commodious Studebaker van left by our American allies was bought and converted into a bank-on-wheels. On Tuesday 5 November 1946, the mobile bank had barely left Stornoway when it encountered its very first customers. It was a success from then on.

Today the Royal Bank of Scotland operates fourteen converted Ford Transit vans as mobile banks, which offer all the facilities of a normal bank.'

The Bank of Scotland also operates mobile banks in the Hebrides. GHHT operates accounts at both banks so that the hostel wardens (and others conducting the Trust's business in the Hebrides) can use whichever mobile bank is the more convenient.

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New Blood. The first Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter that I (Richard Genner) edited and distributed was No. 7, a belated Autumn 1988 issue. After 12 editions and 5 years, I feel it will do you, the reader, good to have a change of editor and editorial style. A volunteer is therefore required to occupy the editorial chair which I will vacate once this Newsletter is in the post. Producing the Newsletter has been interesting, fun and most satisfying. I have enjoyed friendships and acquaintances that have been maintained or made as a result of being Editor - this privilege could be yours. Interested Hebridean Hostellers should contact me to find out about what is involved.

I thank all those who have provided articles and contributions for the past 12 Newsletters and particularly my contributing artists - Eric Duggan, Bill Johnson, Angus Kirk and Crispin Worthington - whose artistic skills are far beyond anything I have, and who have readily responded to my cries for help. Contributions will, of course, be needed by the new editor.

I shall also be stepping down as a Trustee at the AGM, so there will be at least one Committee vacancy for you, willing reader, to volunteer for. So if this interesting, rewarding (and not too hard) work appeals to you, contact Deidre Forsyth or Alan Busson to find out more about being a GHHT Trustee

Thanks to all those Hebridean Hostellers who have renewed their subscriptions during the past 4 months. Extra thanks to those members who sent a donation (some quite sizeable) with their subscription, or who took out a Covenant on the subscription. Thanks also to those members who pay by Bankers Order - you are a source of generous donations and despite errors by the banks (not infrequent!) payment by Bankers Order does save us work and correspondence.

It's also pleasing to receive the various notes and comments that are enclosed with renewals. This 'feedback' is always positive and encouraging.



The m.s. 'Loch Arkaig' flying
between Moidart and the Small Isles
Canna, Rhu, Cig and Muic

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