



GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

Newsletter 29

November 1999

Welcome to the last newsletter of 1999. If you are wondering how we will be affected by the Millennium bug at our hostels, ponder a moment if you will, and remember we have had every other bug and have managed to deal with them so I do not see this bug being any different!!!

Honestly I can assure all our members that if you wish to spend the time at our hostels, then I have it on good authority that the matches will strike and the candles will light.

What a conversation topic! Where were you at the Millennium? I was up in the Western Isles how much did that cost you? - £5 per night (is this the cheapest accommodation).

Sleeping under a simple roof

By Richard Genner

Many simple hostels and bothies, including the GHHT hostels, were, 100 years ago, the home and very being of a family. In another time and country, they would now be derelict and ruined but the second half of the twentieth century has, peculiarly, given them a new lease of life. Simple accommodation is the name of the game. In November/December of this year, I propose to publish a book '*Sleeping under a simple roof*' to celebrate this peculiarly British new lease of life, to record some of the effort that has gone into simple hostels and bothies.

The book will draw on material from past Hebridean Hostellers Newsletters and historical material from my own archive and the records of the Mountain Bothies Association. Many excellent pieces of artwork will be given a second airing, some original material will be included. I am taking orders now to determine the size of the print run, please send your order, £3.50 per book including postage and packing, to Richard Genner, 45 Godwinsway, Stamford Bridge, York YO41 1DA. Cash is sent at your own risk, cheques (payable to Richard Genner) are preferred and will not be cashed until shortly after publication. Cash will be returned and cheques destroyed if insufficient orders are received to make publication worthwhile.

Any profit will be donated to charitable bodies whose aims are similar to those of GHHT. Over £250 was donated from the profits from another book I published 10 years ago, including donations to GHHT and the SYHA small hostels fund. Remember, order '*Sleeping under a simple roof*' now to find

out about a man in a gas cape, how a silver tongue prevented a Hebridean Hostellers workparty from starving, why the man from the Prudential asked "Is South Uist part of the United Kingdom", and to read about life in these simple homes, now hostels and bothies, words from a diminishing generation that was born to a lifestyle that few can now remember.

Millennium Thank You

GHHT will be saying "Thank You" to its members who covenant their donations during the year 2000. Anyone who covenants their donation during the year, including those whose existing covenants are valid during the year, will receive a voucher giving them one free night at any of the four Crofter's Hostels during 2000 or 2001.

Peter Clarke GHHT Chairman said, "We have a large number of staunch supporters. This is our way of saying 'thank you'. We really appreciate their support and hope that this encourages them to visit the islands during 2000 or 2001. They will be able to see, at first hand, the progress we have achieved at the hostels, with their support."

All members will be offered the chance to covenant their donations when the membership renewal letters go out in the New Year. As a charity GHHT can recover the income tax on all donations, (currently at 20%), at no cost to the donor. Another way of thinking about it is that the donor is redirecting their income tax to the GHHT, for more and better hostels.

"I am always pleased to covenant my donations to charity because I like the idea of directing the income tax to a purpose which I support" commented Peter.

Where are You?

The Crofter's Commission is to continue its purge of absentee crofters, having found offenders living as far away as Surrey, and even Australia and Canada, for several generations.

There are 17,700 registered crofts and 11,000 crofters of whom about 2300 were thought to be absentee, living more than 10 miles away. The Commission have set a target for next year of investigating the 700 crofters who are thought to be the last outstanding absentee landlords – although there are always new cases appearing! Since April 1998 the Commission has completed surveys in Skye, Harris and Lewis. As a result, 635 absentees have been investigated and 125 crofts released, 91 to new entrants. Twenty of the absentees actually returned to live on their crofts.

In proposals going to the Scottish Parliament, the Commission has already given notice to those who do live on their croft but make no proper use of their land and they could lose it if their approach does not change. Mr Macaskill, Chairman of the Commission, said that crofting faced new responsibilities in the millennium "our rural and urban populations are interdependent and ultimately we are all influenced by the same policies wherever we live. The romantic notion of crofting has little place in today's modern world, it is time to move forward".

Air We Go!

A new service linking Stornoway, Inverness and Edinburgh has been announced by British Regional Airways and Loganair. This improvement to services to the islands follows discussion between the Western Isles Council and B.R.A over the service provided by the company since British Airways withdrew from the islands in August 1996.

Loganair was also involved in these talks and now will begin operating the service early next year, with the Stornoway/Inverness leg starting on January 3rd and the Edinburgh leg being launched on Feb 15th. The service will use the Saab 340 a 34 seater aircraft. Loganair has devised a timetable which will enable islanders to travel to Inverness in the morning and return the same evening, a schedule which is not currently possible. For your information: Depart Inverness 07.40 Arrive

Stornoway 08.20

Depart Stornoway 08.45 Arrive Inverness 09.25

Depart Inverness 16.10 Arrive Stornoway 16.50

Depart Stornoway 17.20 Arrive Inverness 18.00

But when the Edinburgh leg is added passengers leaving Stornoway at 08.45 will stay on the plane at Inverness for the onward trip to Edinburgh where it will land at 10.45 – it will leave again at 15.00 for Inverness.

As a result of the changes to the Stornoway/Inverness route it will also be necessary to change the Stornoway/Glasgow service which will continue to be operated by B.R.A with the 64 seater Advanced Turbo Prop flights leaving Stornoway for Glasgow at 10.35 and returning at 15.30. A B.R.A flight will depart Glasgow at 09.00 with a flight back to Glasgow at 17.05, this will allow people to spend a day in Stornoway and return to Glasgow the same day.

I do not have any prices for the flights, so for further information please telephone Loganair on 0141 848 7594 or Fax 0141 887 6020

Uig or Loch Dunvegan?

There is serious debate taking place at the moment to change the Skye port for the Uig/Tarbert/Lochmaddy ferry service to Loch Dunvegan. The port of Uig has been used for 35 years and has brought a lot of commercial industry to the area. The problem is that CalMac have a new ferry being built, which is near completion and much larger than the present one and in order for it to be able to use the Uig terminal there will need to be major reconstruction work amounting to £4m for it to be able to dock there. The proposal to move the terminal to Loch Dunvegan has been put by MacLeod Estates who state that the waters are more sheltered, and the crossing to N Uist would be shorter, with the service to Harris remaining the same. The service originally used the Dunvegan Loch as its terminal, but was moved to Uig in 1964. CalMac and the Scottish Office will announce their decision shortly.

Highlands Bug

More young backpacker could be beating a path to the Highlands under a tourism initiative set up to attract them. The Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board have joined forces with the European Union in a £100,000 campaign which will use the Internet and magazines to try to entice young travellers to visit the Highlands from the US, Australia, South Africa and Europe. Despite visitors in the 16 to 35 age group already making up 31% of all annual visitors, HOST wants to ensure that they will be bitten by the Highlands Bug and make return visits.

Tribute to Graham McDonald

The family of Graham McDonald purchased two wooden benches which were engraved with his name and have been placed in front of the hostel at Berneray, his favourite hostel. His family visited the

hostel in the summer this year to see for themselves the beauty of the island that so enraptured their son and to see the benches in situ.

Engaging Warden

Allison Gibbs the warden at Berneray hostel is pleased to announce her engagement to Jim Smithdale, our congratulations go to the happy couple. The island appears to be making a habit of uniting people, since our admin assistant Hilary Wardrope met her husband to be on Berneray also.

Berneray

During the summer this year new windows were fitted in the hostel and in November a new shower tray was fitted. The It's a Knockout competition, which the hostel takes part in each year, was held on a very wintry day in July – unfortunately the hostel team was just beaten into second place by a team from Lochmaddy.

Change of Office Bearers

At the AGM this year Deidre Forsyth, Pam Moncur and Brian Harwood stepped down as office bearers for the GHHT. Thanks go to the three for the work they have contributed to the GHHT. Deidre had been a committee member for a number of years and her hard work and dedication, especially in legal issues, will be missed. There are now vacancies on the committee for a Vice-Chairperson and Membership Secretary.

We're a Star!

Three of the hostels have now been visited by the STB's grading officer. The hostels have been passed with one star grading for the simple hostel accommodation. The location of these hostels was a major factor in us obtaining this commendation and it will result in us being mentioned in STB literature and their nationwide offices. The hostels now proudly bear the plaques on the outer doors

Website for GHHT

Discussions are being held about having our own website on the Internet. At present it is possible to access information about the GHHT hostels through the SYHA website

Skye & Western Isles Public Transport

The Highland Council has published a map and series of Public Transport Travel Guides for 1999. These are available from Highland Council Information Points, Tourist Information Centres in the Highlands or through the SYHA National Office. There are also maps and guides on South Highland; North Highland & Orkney and Inverness and Inner Moray Firth. A useful addition to your backpack!

Useful Names and Addresses

Chairperson: Peter Clarke, 264 Alexandra Park Rd, London N22 4BG

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