



GATLIFF HEBRIDEAN HOSTELS TRUST

Newsletter 30

June 2000

I would like to introduce Laurence Washington as the new Newsletter Editor for the GHHT as of the next issue. I shall be standing down as Maintenance Officer and Newsletter Editor at the AGM due to other commitments. I would like to thank everyone for their correspondence and feedback and hope that the same is extended to Laurence.

Many apologies for the lateness of this Newsletter, due to personal reasons I was unable to process it in May, but hope that you will forgive me this one last time.

Brevig, Isle of Barra – Proposed Youth Hostel

It is with great regret that the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust (GHHT) announces its withdrawal from the project to create a 20 bed youth hostel at the old school, Brevig, Isle of Barra. The GHHT, a charity with solely voluntary trustees, works in partnership with island communities. There are hostels on the island of Berneray (in the Sound of Harris), Garenin (West Lewis), Howmore (South Uist), and Rhenigidale (Harris).

Peter Clarke, the Chairman, commented, "circumstances have invalidated a 20 bed hostel in this location. We thank all those in the islands, and elsewhere, especially our donors who supported this project".

GHHT retains the hope that a youth hostel will be established on the island of Barra. To this end the GHHT is willing to work in partnership with voluntary bodies who might wish to pursue such a project.

All donations received by the GHHT for the Brevig project will be refunded forthwith, once interest has been calculated.

For further information contact Peter Clarke at address at end of Newsletter.

Recognition for Roy Ashworth

Roy Ashworth was a stalwart supporter of the hostels who lived in the islands for most of the 1980's and 1990's. He did handy work at the hostels during the winter and helped with major

projects such as the renovation of Rhenigidale and Howmore. A diesel engineer by training, Roy hailed from Lancashire. He stayed in a caravan on the island of Grimsay. Roy developed an interest in archaeology. His caravan was full of his finds, which dated back to Iron Age. Now *Taigh Chearsabhaigh News* has recognised his discovery of a First Century Wheelhouse on Grimsay. He discovered pottery, worked stone, bone, antler and whalebone objects and some evidence of metal working. A field survey paper has now been published by the Association of Certified Field Archaeologists (Glasgow University). Soon these finds will be on permanent display at Taigh Chearsabhaigh. Roy left for VSO in Africa in 1997. All the best Roy.

Visitors Book – Toddun

Is there a volunteer who would be prepared to climb Toddun to restore the Visitors Book? Morag Frame and I put the Visitors Book on top of Toddun in 1996. The book was in a tin within a small stone cairn inside the circular enclosure at the summit. Its existence was advertised only at the hostel.

Perhaps the person who took it could be persuaded to send a summary of the entries to the Editor of the Newsletter. They were humorous and wise.

If anyone is interested, get in touch and we will arrange the wherewithall. (Peter Clarke)

Hostel Log Books

All the early hostel log books have now been deposited in the local history section of the Stornoway public library. They contain many historic entries, much original art work and good information about walks and island ways.

The library is in new premises near the Tourist Information Centre at 19 Cromwell Street, Stornoway (01851) 703864. It also has a café and a collection of books on the islands second to none.

Beoshlaintean – the Uist Millennium Exhibition

If you get the chance when you are in the islands this year, go and see the Community exhibition celebrating the Millennium. It is very moving. There is artwork by Uist children illustrating the islands past, contemporary photographs by Gus Wylie (whose 1970's pictures live on in my mind) and an audio visual installation "High Tides" blending past and present with the future.

"...almost gone now the black houses of our ancestors..." the Exhibition expresses the hope that if only the traditional wisdoms can be retained despite the tide of modern tides, the islands will survive.

Taigh Tasgaidh Chill Donnain 4 July to 18th September; Urachadh Uibhist 23rd September to 14th December.

Passing Places

Passing Places is a unique film project celebrating life in the Western Isles to be made through the year 2000 by people in the islands. It will be about the islands, places past, present and future. The ideas will come from the people themselves.

If you have an idea to put forward contact Passing Places, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Lochmady, Isle of North Uist HS6 5AA. Abi@aingledew.freeserve.co.uk www.taigh-chearsabhagh.org

Len Westerdale 1927 – 2000

£620 has been donated towards the cost of thatching Berneray hostel by the family and friends of Len Westerdale. Len collapsed and died earlier this year whilst out cycling near his home in Leigh, near Manchester. He loved the hostels and was a firm supporter of GHHT. The family requested no flowers at Len's funeral but asked instead that donations be made to GHHT. A picture of Len, sporting a GHHT sweatshirt now hangs in Berneray hostel. The Chairman has written to each donor to thank them for their donation.

Cheaper petrol in the North

Calum MacDonald MP is backing a scheme which could knock 10p per litre (45p/gallon) off fuel prices in the Highlands and Islands if the Highlands & Islands Transport Board were given powers to sell petrol direct to the motoring public. Already the Highland Council buys marine diesel at lower prices on the open market passing on savings to skippers and owners of local fishing boats using its major harbours.

Orbost For Sale?

If the Highlands and Islands Enterprise cannot provide housing and land to allow people to live on the Orbost Estate in Skye then they may be forced to sell it to the highest bidder. The estate was purchased in 1997 with the idea of providing a dozen croft-style smallholdings in an area where there is a shortage of affordable housing to rent and where demand for crofts exceeds supply. There was also a sizeable area of Forestry Commission woodland passed over. However H&I plans have met with much local opposition and there will be heated debates at local meetings and counter proposals have been posted for a golf course.

Hanging out the washing on a Sunday

In some parts of the islands it is still considered a mortal sin to hang out the washing on a Sunday. There are also strong objections to ferry and air services operating on Sundays to and from the islands by the the Western Isles Council's Transportation Committee which has rejected a proposal to ask CalMac to introduce Sunday ferry services to Lewis and Harris. However, the BBC has conducted a poll with the results that the majority of people in the islands wanted transport facilities both by land and by sea. Some comments by councillors who did not want Sunday transport "I want to keep Sunday safe, not because of any religious convictions but let us dare to be different"; "if there was a Sunday service there would be a demand for facilities to open"; "Sunday sailings would have no economic benefits to the islands".

Treshnish Isles

The Hebridean Trust has purchased these five uninhabited islands to the west of Mull. The price paid was £247,500, made possible by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The original asking price for the islands was £400,000 by Sir Alex Rankin whose family bought the islands in 1938. Named the Treshnish Isles, they support a rich wildlife community, such as shags, guillemots,

razorbills and puffins. They are also recognised as one of the most important locations for breeding of storm petrels and they provide grazing for barnacle geese. There are also ruins of an iron age fort which was occupied until the 1700's.

Buying a Croft

If crofting communities exercise their right to buy their crofts at 15 times their annual rent then compensation may be forthcoming from a new £10.8m Scottish Land Fund to the owners. Crofters can buy their land whether the owner wants to sell or not and the European Convention on Human Rights gives clear guidelines that adequate compensation be paid to the previous owner. The right to buy extends to mineral and sporting rights as well as the land itself. However there are concerns that with agriculture in a poor state, crofting might become primarily a means to get a house site in a remote rural area, particularly for the more affluent – which is not the objective sought.

Eriskay Causeway

Work has started on the £9.4m causeway to the island of Eriskay. It will run from near Ludaig on South Uist to near the church on Eriskay. This will complete all the fixed links to all the populated islands within the Western Isles.

AGM – probably date

This year's Annual General Meeting is hoped to be held in Stornoway on September 16th. Confirmation will be sent to all members shortly.

Howmore

A new shower has been fitted, the sinks in the kitchen have hot water direct from immersion and a spotlight and sensor has been fitted to the cycle shed so that people can find their way to the hostel in the dark.

Brian Wilson the stonemason has informed me that the heather has been delivered to do the roof on the original hostel and hopefully this will be completed by the end of the year. Once the roof has been made good work can then be started on the inside of the building without further delay.

Useful Names and Addresses

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