



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

newsletter 32

June 2001



The original hostel building at Howmore looking splendid with its new heather thatch. May 2001.
(Photo: Lawrence Washington)

The islands have been quiet so far this year, the outbreak of Foot & Mouth Disease clearly affecting our visitor numbers. We thank hostellers for observing the precautionary measures and ask them to continue to do so. However, I still feel we have every reason to be positive about the future of the hostels. We have a very strong foundation from which to take advantage as conditions return to normal. Since joining the Scottish Tourist Board grading scheme we have been enjoying the benefits of additional publicity, and we now have our own website.

As for the hostels, Garenin and Howmore have just been re-thatched, Berneray is soon to be re-thatched, and Rhenigidale will shortly be celebrating its 40th anniversary. So now we must look ahead to maximise our future position in the islands.

GHHT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS REPORT

27/01/01 - Glasgow SYHA

We were pleased to welcome Alan and Susan Sidaway to the meeting and were grateful for the contribution they made. Alan was a member of the Croydon YHA Group of which Herbert Gatliff was a co-founder.

Peter Clarke was re-elected as Chairman. He announced that this would be his last year in the position, in which he will have completed ten years service. Arthur Meaby was re-elected as Secretary and Treasurer.

A discussion was held on the key issues for the Trust in the forthcoming year and it was agreed that the main priorities for completion during 2001 were:

- i) Organising work parties for manual work required at Berneray and elsewhere.
- ii) Finalising the lease on Garenin hostel.
- iii) Finalising the lease on Howmore hostel.
- iv) Re-thatching Berneray hostel.
- v) Refurbishing Howmore hostel.

Peter reported that following the termination of the Brevig project all refunds and interest due had now been paid back to the donors. Several donors had kindly returned their cheques, amounting to £2,891, for which we are very grateful.

The new GHHT book by Neil Pinkett entitled "Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal" had recently been published. The Trust recorded its thanks to Neil for the excellent work.

Alan Sidaway was appointed to the Executive Committee and duly elected as hostel representative for Berneray, this position being vacant after Jim McFarlane stood down. The other hostel representatives remain unchanged: Garenin - Matt Bruce; Howmore - Arthur Meaby; Rhenigidale - Lawrence Washington.

It was agreed that Arthur Meaby should continue to head the Howmore project and be responsible for dealing with the Scottish Tourist Board with regard to hostel standards. Peter Clarke continues as Membership Secretary, and Lawrence Washington as Newsletter Editor.

07/05/01 - Kildonan Museum, South Uist

A warm welcome was extended to Betty MacDonald, our warden at Howmore. Also present were David Morton and Susan Sidaway who had been part of Alan's work party during the previous week. Alan was able to report on the work which had just been carried out at Berneray and Howmore which was very encouraging (see report opposite).

Progress on the key issues for 2001, outlined above, was discussed and Arthur reported that several local tradesmen had been contacted to give quotes for both the Howmore refurbishment and the Berneray re-thatching. We await their reply.

Peter gave an update on the current status of membership of the Hebridean Hostellers. As of the beginning of May there were 239 members, 83 of which had returned Gift Aid forms. This currently brings the Trust an invaluable additional income of £420 recovered from the Inland Revenue.

Future Meetings

• 15th September 2001

The AGM will be held in Stornoway. All members are welcome to attend.

• 17th November 2001

Following the success of last year's AGM in Liverpool, where ten HH members were able to attend, we are holding our Autumn executive meeting at York Youth Hostel. Again, all members are welcome.

• Further details of both meetings can be obtained from Arthur Meaby. See page 6 for contact.

WORK PARTY REPORT

Berneray & Howmore - 30th April to 7th May 2001

We set out in good weather to cross the sea to Berneray. We found the hostel very clean and looking really good where Alison and Jim, the wardens, have done a considerable amount of work over the winter period replacing old worn out equipment. I was very impressed.

The first important job to do was put the septic tank in safe order, because sand had been blown away exposing the neck of the tank. Rocks needed to be placed around the neck to protect it, and in addition to this we needed to place rocks at the bottom of the retaining wall on the sea side, to prevent it from collapsing in the advent of a winter gale. Jim lent us his trailer for us to go and collect rocks from the harbour, which had been left there after the causeway was built. We made many trips but we managed to finish it in two days. It was built in such a way that now the wind will blow sand in between the rocks and make it even more secure. We then finished it all off with turfs.

Also at Berneray we measured out the fencing required to put around the landward end of the annex to stop the sheep from climbing onto the roof, a task for the September work party. Finally we did a "pick up the rubbish" session and generally made the area look more inviting.

Arthur Meaby also asked us to go to his hostel, Howmore, and reorganise the rooms to make it more attractive for our guests to stop. We removed all the building material from the original hostel building and placed it all in the store/cycle building, which up until now had been used as the dormitory. We then gave the original building a good clean and moved all the beds into it, which has made it far better for people stopping there. The grounds were cleaned up and three wheely bins of rubbish were moved away. Howmore is now a much better place to stay.

I would like to thank my wife Susan, and David Morton for all the hard work they did and we look forward to our next work party to be held at the beginning of September. Let us know if you have any skills to help us.

Alan Sidaway - Berneray Hostel Representative

HOSTEL NEWS & MAINTENANCE

Berneray - In the last newsletter (HH 31) it was mentioned that we had intended to dig away the sand from the landward end of the annex during the course of this year, in order to help preserve the building. However, on further inspection during Alan's work party visit it was discovered that the sand is not all that deep and in fact there is a substantial amount of solid rock beneath it! It has been decided, therefore, to leave the sand be and that we shall install some fencing around the end of the building to keep the sheep off the roof, as Alan has mentioned above. This will be dealt with during the September work party which Alan is organising.

The re-thatching work will be going ahead as planned this year. We are currently seeking quotes for the work required.

Alison and Jim have done a grand job over the winter, painting the Rayburn boiler, the Rayburn itself, the chairs and benches, and repainting the common room floor. The dormitories now have bookshelves, and the kitchen equipment is better organised, now including a separate set of utensils for vegetarians. The hostel also now has a fridge.

Garenin - With the hostel's new roof completed, and indeed the rest of the village completed, we see the end of a major phase of work at Garenin. However, we must always look forward, and in the near future it is our intention to carry out some small modifications within the hostel. A partition will be fitted to the larger, lower dormitory to enable increased privacy.

The kitchen, which had been getting a little thin on utensils, now has additional pots, pans, and cutlery. The new fridge has also been installed.

Howmore - Having restored the original building externally we are now seeking quotes on fitting it out. In addition some of this work may be carried out by volunteers. As outlined in the work party report the decision was taken in early May to move all the bunks from the cycle shed to the original building as it is now weatherproof, despite having no other facilities. Obviously this is a vast improvement on using the cycle shed as a dormitory, and hostellers now have somewhere to put their bicycles! We look forward to having the building fully functional again in the coming months. Howmore also now has a fridge in the kitchen.

Rhenigidale - Over the winter Alasdair has been busy keeping the hostel in good order. In the kitchen the walls have been repainted and there is now a larger table with new chairs. We are still awaiting a quote on the work to upgrade the shower room.

Arthur Meaby has contacted the Western Isles Council with regard to correcting the distances shown to the hostel on road signs at the Maaruig turn and where the path leaves the road at Urgha. They have informed us that this will be carried out when funds are available.

Next year will be the 40th anniversary of the opening of Rhenigidale hostel, the first of the Gatliff hostels. We intend to mark the occasion with a number of events to be held in and around the village, possibly in early May. Plans are currently being drawn up and further details will be available in the next newsletter.

Newsletter Back Issues

We are currently trying to put together a complete set of Hebridean Hostellers and Crofters newsletters as it appears no one on the committee has all of them! If anyone has the following issues I would be extremely grateful if you could send a good quality copy of them to me. Once we have a full set I will be able to make available any back issues to those who require them. Missing issues are:

Crofters Newsletters - 1969/1970/1971/1979

Hebridean Hostellers Newsletters - No.1 (84) / No.2 (84)

In 1988 I was lucky enough to stay at the beautifully remote Skiddaw House youth hostel in the northern fells of the Lake District, during its first year as a hostel. It was a truly memorable experience and the hostel has remained one of my favourites ever since.

After a brief closure Skiddaw House re-opened in 1991. Now, ten years on, David Fisher, chairman of the Skiddaw House Panel and recent addition to the Hebridean Hostellers, has kindly written about the history of the building and the work involved in maintaining a hostel in such a remote location.

SKIDDAW HOUSE - A LAKELAND WILDERNESS OASIS

Skiddaw House is a remote, simple youth hostel located in the northern fells of the English Lake District. It is the highest hostel in the UK, standing at 1550 feet below the summit of Skiddaw, with wide sweeping views down the lonely Caldew valley and the Back O' Skiddaw. There is no access to Skiddaw House by car; the minimum walk/cycle in is over 3 miles; there is no other habitation in sight. Skiddaw House is undoubtedly one of the most remote buildings in England, and has no mains electricity or telephone.

A Brief History

No one seems sure when the current building at Skiddaw House was constructed, although the census of 1841 records residency at the site. The building was used as a shooting lodge, and more recently as shepherd's cottages. The last shepherd occupied one of the cottages during the weekdays until 1969. It would appear from Wainwright's pictorial guide to the northern fells that the "master fellwalker" spent time here with Pearson Dalton.

During the 70s and 80s the building saw use as an outdoor centre, before falling into disrepair, and being used as a howff. In the Spring of 1987, John Bothamley, who had earlier restored the farmhouse which

is now Carrock Fell youth hostel, took over the decaying cottages at Skiddaw House. On 4th July 1987 Skiddaw House opened as a 36 bed hostel.

However, towards the end of the 1988 season, the National Park Planning Authority closed the hostel, as permission to use the building as a youth hostel had not been sought. A low key application was made, and permission for a bothy style hostel was granted.

Work started at Easter 1991, and the hostel re-opened on 24th May 1991. The hostel was wardened by volunteers for the whole of the 1991 season, and from 1992-2000 was wardened by Martin Webster, who became renowned for his hospitality. The hostel was supplemented by volunteer wardens, allowing 7 nights a week opening. YHA decided that from 2001 the hostel would return to wholly volunteer wardening.

The current hostel is very similar in style and comfort to the GHHT hostels. The hostel is known for its "traditional" values of companionship and simplicity; many wonderful nights have been had around the stove!

The Friends of Skiddaw House

When YHA were offered the opportunity to re-open Skiddaw House in 1991, the importance of voluntary support to the hostel led to the formation of the Skiddaw House Panel, comprising 5 enthusiastic and dedicated members from YHA Northern England Regional Council. Both Marjorie Daly and Bill Sellers (who retired last year as Chairman after 10 years) are still active panel members. The panel now consists of 11 members, all very active and offering a wide range of skills. Hostellers are invited to become "Friends" and support the hostel financially; typically there are around 60 enrolments per season; more welcome!

Both the panel and friends are responsible for considerable support to the hostel. There are regular work parties each season. As the building is closed over the winter period, there are usually plenty of odd jobs required to return the hostel to an acceptable standard at the start of each season, as well as the longer term projects and maintenance.

Regular open days are held at the hostel, where the public are invited into the hostel for a look around and are offered a brew; hopefully in return for a donation! A lot of good will is spread in this way.

The copse to the rear of the hostel, obviously planted as a windbreak, was in need of some serious TLC. The collapse of the perimeter wall lead to sheep grazing and preventing any natural re-generation. Following the rebuilding of the perimeter wall/fence, two very active volunteers have been responsible for the re-planting of the copse, with assistance from the national park. In years to come we hope the copse will be restored to its former glory, although with more indigenous species!

Without volunteer support and donations it is unlikely Skiddaw House would remain a hostel. There are many difficulties in maintaining a building in such a remote location with only limited access for 4 wheel drive vehicles.

We hope that supporters of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust will take time to pay a visit; you will not be disappointed! We look forward to welcoming you to our retreat!

For information on hostel availability, please contact Carrock Fell YHA on 01697 478325.

For further information on the Friends of Skiddaw House, please contact:

David Fisher (Chairman, Skiddaw Panel),
15 Main Street,
Elloughton,
East Yorkshire,
HU15 1JN.
Tel: 01482 665241



Skiddaw House hostel in 1988

GHHT Website

Our website is now steadily growing in size and content, thanks to the work of Nigel Easton. He has written enlightening guides on 'Places to Visit' for each hostel and a very useful 'Recommended Reading' list. See for yourself at www.gatliff.org.uk.

Summer Events in the Islands

If you are planning to escape to the Western Isles in the coming months here are some of the events which are going on.

Late June

- Uist to Barra Yacht Race

July

- Ceolas Music School, S.Uist (8th-13th)
- Hebridean Celtic Festival, Stornoway (11th-14th)
- Berneray week (14th-21st)
- Barra Live Music Festival (14th)
- S.Uist Highland Games (18th)
- N.Uist Highland Games (20th)
- Lewis Highland Games (21st)
- Barra Highland Games (23rd)
- Fish Festival, Stornoway (28th)

August

- Twin Peaks Hill Race, N.Uist (3rd)
- Lewis Carnival, Stornoway (4th)
- Uist & Benbecula Heritage Events, Uists
- Harris Arts Festival (7th-12th)
- Brevig Regatta, Back, Lewis (11th)

In addition the popular fèisean (festivals) and Agricultural Shows are held throughout the islands over the summer. Some events may be affected by Foot & Mouth restrictions. Check with WITB for confirmation. Tel: 01851 703088. www.witb.co.uk

Moving House?

If you are moving house or changing address please remember to inform the membership secretary so that we can keep our records up to date and keep you supplied with the latest news from GHHT.

Lawrence Washington - June 2001

walks from the gatliff hostel at reinigeadal - neil pinkett

This beautifully illustrated guide to walking in the Rhenigidale area of North Harris is now 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.

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