

# *Hebridean Hostellers*

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

[www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

Newsletter 42

July 2006



Rhenigidale, opened as the first of the Gatliff Hostels in May 1962 and photographed here by Paula Walker in April 2006, occupies a prominent position in a remote North Harris village.

## Traditions Maintained

The Gatliff Trust has donated a grant of £500 to the Islands Book Trust which continues to uphold the traditions maintained by Herbert Gatliff involving discovery about and commitment to the Islands.

Forthcoming IBT events include a four-day conference [22-25 July] on ***The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael***, the great collector of Gaelic song and folklore in the second half of the 19th Century. This will be held at the Dark Island Hotel, Nunton Steading and Lioncleit School, Benbecula.

There will be an involvement in the new four-day ***Hebridean Book Festival*** [30 August - 2 September] at An Lanntair, Stornoway. This will also be the venue [19 September] for a personal selection by Morag Macleod entitled ***Singers and Tradition Bearers I have known in Lewis and Harris***.

The ***Third Angus Macleod Memorial Lecture*** will be given by Bill Lawson at Pairc School, Gravir [17 October] when his theme will be the clearances and their impact. ***The Guga Hunt – A Living Tradition*** will be Dods Macfarlane's authentic and illustrated account at Lochmaddy [10 November].

## Remembered In Both Hemispheres

Arthur Meaby, probably the most formative member of the GHHT after Herbert Gatliff, was remembered by the Executive Committee and by Tommy and Betty MacDonald at a short ceremony outside the Howmore Hostel on Saturday 27 May. Peter Clarke spoke about Arthur's achievements and then 'unveiled' a seat to commemorate him. The hostellers who witnessed this event were then invited back to the Common Room for tea.

Another seat that bears the same inscription - 'For the Beauty of the Earth' – has been placed on Mount Lofty, which overlooks the city of Adelaide and out to sea. It is near the peak and a café which attract both tourists and fire-watchers. It was the idea of Arthur's brother, Frank, a retired Salvation Army Officer who lives some 20 miles into the Mount Lofty Ranges. When Arthur visited Australia, he went camping with the family. When Frank and Carol visited the UK they would give him a list of friends they wanted to see. He would make up the itinerary for them and they 'never had a dull day'.

## Benefits All Round

A donation of £80.47 to the GHHT was particularly appreciated. It was received from Frances Passey, of Reading, and represented a percentage of the monies that she raised from being sponsored to cycle from Castlebay to the Butt of Lewis. She may have been soaked by the rain twice, but found dry accommodation in all our four hostels and felt that the cause was, indeed, worthy. A part of the incentive in travelling north was to attend the Hebridean Celtic Festival in Stornoway and to see Van Morrison as well as Runrig.



## Common Endeavours

When the Scottish Youth Hostels Association acknowledged the donation of £70 by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, it referred to the 'common endeavours' of the two groups. The SYHA was, in fact, created on 2 May 1931 and so 75th Anniversary events are now happening.

The main project will undoubtedly be the opening in September of the 300-bed, state-of-the-art, international hostel in Edinburgh. It is planned to use this flagship hostel to encourage people to use the full and varied network of hostels around the country.

The first hostel to be opened, Broadmeadows, is still in existence and it displays, in the Borders, the simple values that the Gatliff Hostels retain in the Islands. Thought is being given to the ways and means of persuading people to look further afield than Edinburgh.

## Bracken in Berkhamsted

The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust exists to promote the appreciation and study of the works of Graham Greene and its informative website is to be found at [www.grahamgreenebt.org](http://www.grahamgreenebt.org). Perceptive visitors may notice that the office of the Trust is to be found at a house in Berkhamsted named Rhenigidale.

Investigations revealed that the eminent Greene family was unaware of the obscure settlement in North Harris. It is a private house from which the Trust is administered. Its owners, Ken and Jenny Sherwood, visited Rhenigidale in 1975, a year before moving. They named their new house after a place that appealed, was the Gaelic name for 'Bracken Valley' and which complemented a neighbour's house called 'Brackenhurst'. The connections may be literary, but do not directly involve the novelist.

## Running High

Our website [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk) continues to attract. During the past quarter every one of the 13 weeks has drawn over 200 visitors and four of the first five months of 2006 have had tallies of over 1000. The busiest hours have been 21.00 - 22.00 with 1484 visitors since records began and 13.00 -14.00 with 1406. Even the 3.00 - 4.00 slot has drawn 170, although these may not be UK insomniacs, but overseas watchers from different time-zones. A new country to feature on our lists is Bosnia & Herzegovina. Most referrals come directly from our own sources. The highest number from other sources has been from [www.seakayak.co.uk](http://www.seakayak.co.uk) and [www.bbc.co.uk/nature](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature)

A new feature that is due to be launched soon is a Forum through which observations and opinions can be posted and a thread of responses displayed. The intention is to go live in July to coincide with the publication of this issue of the Newsletter.

## Lift Up Your Eyes ... and Wonder

If you want to be introduced to a new world of classification and collecting, go to Google and type in 'Relative-Hills'. The first entry will direct you to Alan Dawson's book, *The Relative Hills of Britain*, and it will either appeal or repel. The mountains and hills of this land are tabulated. They may be Scottish only as with Sir Hugh Munro's list of those with summits over 3000' or J Rooke Corbett's that are over 2500' or Eric Yeaman's with a drop of 300' on all sides. Percy Donald's lists of those over 2000' are limited to southern Scotland, but George Bridge and John & Anne Nuttall refer to England & Wales.

Alan Dawson has looked up to the hills of Britain and enabled us to look them up in his own comprehensive list of 1542 summits. They are hills that are relatively high compared to the surrounding area rather than compared to sea-level. So they can be between 500' - 4500', but must have a 150 metre (492') drop on all sides. He termed them the 'Marilyns' in order, perhaps, to pun on the Monro(e) connection and to indicate something of the profile of the film-star.

A group of 'Marilyn-Baggers' impressed their fellow-residents at our hostels in May. They were led by GHHT member, Brent Lynam, and included the redoubtable Andrew Tibbetts, who looks forward to setting a new record in 2006 by 'bagging' between 430 - 440 peaks during the year. This will overshadow last year's highest total of 405. Those readers wanting details of which Marilyn's nestle next to the Gatliffs should get onto Google now !

## Record Overnights

2005 was a very good year for visitors to the four hostels with record numbers achieved. Berneray had its best-ever season with 2201. Garenin was affected by closure for the installation of thermal power in the early part of the year and yet had a total of 1577. Howmore was just below its best with 1552, but Rhenigidale comfortably passed the 'grand' for the first time with a tally of 1178. So 6508 was the final figure, exceeding the 6044 of the year 2004 and 6097 in 2003. The sights are now on something in excess of 7000. Stock-market watchers hope for parallels with the Footsie Index !

## The Great North AGM

This year's AGM of the GHHT will be held on Saturday 21 October at the Newcastle-on-Tyne YHA Hostel. There will be a Members' Forum in the morning and the annual meeting in the afternoon. Newcastle is easily accessible from all parts of the country, particularly by train on the East Coast Line. The hostel is within walking distance of the rail and coach stations and a warm welcome is assured from the Warden, Lawrence Heslop, a long-term supporter and member of the Trust. If you wish to stay overnight on the Friday or Saturday, please contact the hostel on 0870 770 5972 or [newcastle@yha.org.uk](mailto:newcastle@yha.org.uk) by 31 August. Payment will not be required until arrival.



## The Outer Hebrides Way - 'Create by '08 !'

Peter Clarke's recently-published *The Outer Hebrides: The Timeless Way* is informative, readable and crusading. It considers the route that traverses the stunning landscapes from the Temple at Europie, across the Lewis Moors, through Kinlochresort, down the Golden Road, criss-crossing Benbecula, along the old machair tracks of South Uist, over Eriskay, around Barra to its destination on Vatersay.

He makes matters readable that relate to the live Gaelic culture, to both the surviving and thriving economies, to the Celtic heritage and the parts of the natural environment untouched by humans. However, it's the crusading aspect that needs our considered involvement. There are people who maintain that this area should be the preserve of the adventurous few. Peter Clarke believes that the best way to preserve the islands is to provide access.

He sees the creation of a designated Statutory Long Distance Route, following negotiation with all interested parties, as being in the spirit of James Boswell who declared that here is an opportunity 'to contemplate a system of life almost totally different from what we had been accustomed to see; and to find simplicity and wildness and all the circumstances of remote time or place ... within reach of reasonable curiosity.'

If you feel that there should more commitment to this project by, say, setting a timetable and a 2008 deadline, please write to the Convenor of Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, Alex Macdonald, at Sandwick Road, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS1 2BW. Two websites for fuller details are [www.outerhebridesway.org](http://www.outerhebridesway.org) and [www.snh.gov.uk/about/initiatives/ab-init03.asp](http://www.snh.gov.uk/about/initiatives/ab-init03.asp) Your first steps may create pressure that will eventually enable others to take many steps.

### *The Outer Hebrides The Timeless Way*

by Peter Clarke

£9.99 (plus £1.00 postage per copy) direct from the Publishers

Cheques payable to Northampton Square Ltd 26 Lewis Street  
Stornoway Isle of Lewis HS1 2JF

Via booksellers at £9.99 - ISBN 0-9550696-0-2

## **Members' Forum in London**

There will be a GHHT Members' Forum at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday 25 November at the Rotherhithe Youth Hostel in south London. After lunch the Gatliff Trust will be holding its AGM. Unfortunately, ill-health has led to the resignation of its Chairman, Frank Martin, and this meeting will be conducted by Diane Nightingale, the Vice-Chairman. We wish Frank, whose interests in and writings about the Gatliff hostels started in the early days, every success, thank him for his enormous contributions to both Trusts and look forward to seeing him at Rotherhithe.

## **Angus MacAskill – Fisherman of Berneray**

Peter Clarke writes: 'One of the great men of Berneray and supporter of the hostel, Angus MacAskill (78) died in September 2005. The elder of two brothers and one of six children, he was a man of great integrity and industry. After his father died, he had to start work as a fisherman at an early age to support the family.

He and his wife Mary, who survives him, are known to many hostellers as they kept the shop at Quay, a short distance from the hostel. Though the shop kept 'normal' hours, it was possible to get willingly-given service after arriving on the late ferry. However, the shop remained firmly shut on Sundays.

Though Angus was a dedicated attendee at the Church of Scotland on Berneray, he was never a member. I remember once attending the Gaelic service where Angus and Mary were present. Afterwards I was invited for supper at their home where the table was already set for four, as if I was expected. We were joined by Ian MacAskill, a nephew, then an official with the Highlands and Islands Development Board in Inverness, but later to become the Chairman of the Crofters Commission.

Angus always followed the progress of the hostels. When he asked to visit Garenin, I arranged for him to accompany me to that hostel where we spent the night. Most impressed by the facilities and conviviality, he declared that this was his first night at a youth hostel. On a visit to Berneray, during the 1980s, he pulled my leg about my interest in politics and tongue-in-cheek declared his admiration for Mrs Thatcher. He went on, "And I tell you someone else I admire, that Colonel Gadaffi." Immediately two RAF Tornado jets screamed over the hill so low we could see the pilots. "There you are," I said as the noise of their jet engines receded, "they heard you!"- at which we both curled up laughing.

That was Angus, a wonderful, caring, and good hearted man. I thank God for him. May he rest in peace. Remember Mary in your prayers and do call to say hello the next time you are on Berneray.'

## **Open All Days**

CalMac's new timetables have seen the introduction of Sunday services on the Leverburgh - Berneray ferry. So for the first time ever cars and passengers can access Harris and continue through to Lewis on Sundays.



## From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Ten Years Ago .....

'A new ferry service linking the islands of North Uist and Harris was to be opened early in May, but I haven't had a chance to check this yet. It is a purpose-built ferry of CalMac's, designed to carry 150 passengers and 18 cars between Otternish and Leverburgh. It will also link up with Berneray.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) *[Then part of the ferry service became redundant with the opening of the causeway]*

## and of Fifteen Years Ago .....

'Garenin Hostel will, at long last, open for business on 1 May 1991. Alan Gay, our clerk of works / builder / labourer on site has been working frantically throughout April to fit out the building for hostel use after it was made available for us in early April. Hostellers arriving on the 1st will find basic, but usable facilities, those arriving four weeks later should find the hostel fitted and equipped to our current standard.

It has been a long and sometimes hard struggle to get to this point, the complexities of working through the Garenin Trust to contractors appointed by the Western Isles Council being particularly difficult at times, but now we .... have a project that Herbert Gatliff would have been proud of, and a 'flag-ship building' in the Garenin village for some time to come.' (Editor: Richard Genner) *[This was for a time the only building in the prospective, renovated village]*

## and Twenty

'As part of the Integrated Development Programme for the Western Isles, a Land Rover track was eventually sanctioned and work on the first section leading south from Maaruiig started in 1985. Nevertheless it may still be some while yet before it is complete and the first wheeled vehicle arrives at Rhenigidale itself.' *[There is, as yet, no parking problem!]*

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<b>Garenin</b>	–	<b>Lewis</b>
<b>Rhenigidale</b>	–	<b>North Harris</b>
<b>Berneray</b>	–	<b>North Uist</b>
<b>Howmore</b>	–	<b>South Uist</b>



## A Wedding to Remember

Many Gatliff visitors have special memories of their stay in the Outer Hebrides. A German couple, Olaf and Iris Keck, decided to make the places they cherished become the venue for their wedding, on 14 June 2005. It's a tale of romance to ponder over, delight in and be impressed by.

Iris first visited the hostels in 1997, came back each year and introduced Olaf to the area. In 2004 she read about a wedding that took place on the beach at Dalmore and soon they were planning to hold their ceremony, if possible, on Scarista Beach, with the reception a short distance away at Scarista House.

Marion Morrison, the Registrar for Harris, was most helpful and arrangements were made. A week before the ceremony they came to the island, camped near Tarbert, walked over to Rhenigidale, took the bus to Huishinish where, helpfully, the no camping notice had been removed.

Then came their wedding day which started with sunshine and which they started with ... a swim. It was freezing, as usual, but prepared them well for the 4.00 pm ceremony at which the sun was not present. Rings were exchanged and Marion expressed her best wishes to the couple in Gaelic.



Champagne and a small, delicious buffet were brought to the beach, but soon the wedding group was back at Scarista House, warmed by the peat fire. After drinks, a superb evening meal was enjoyed. The first day of their honeymoon, 15 June, saw Olaf and Iris Keck move north .... to Garenin.

They camped at their favourite spot in order to hear the sound of the sea, the gulls and the sheep. On a subsequent day-trip to the Butt of Lewis, they started writing invitations to their wedding-party to be held in September. The hot weather did not last and the cards were finished in the Garenin Hostel.

If Olaf and Iris have a marriage as innovative and convivial as their wedding, then undoubtedly they will be very happy, with returns on anniversaries to the compelling beaches, camp-sites, hostels and an hotel far from their homeland, but close to their hearts.