

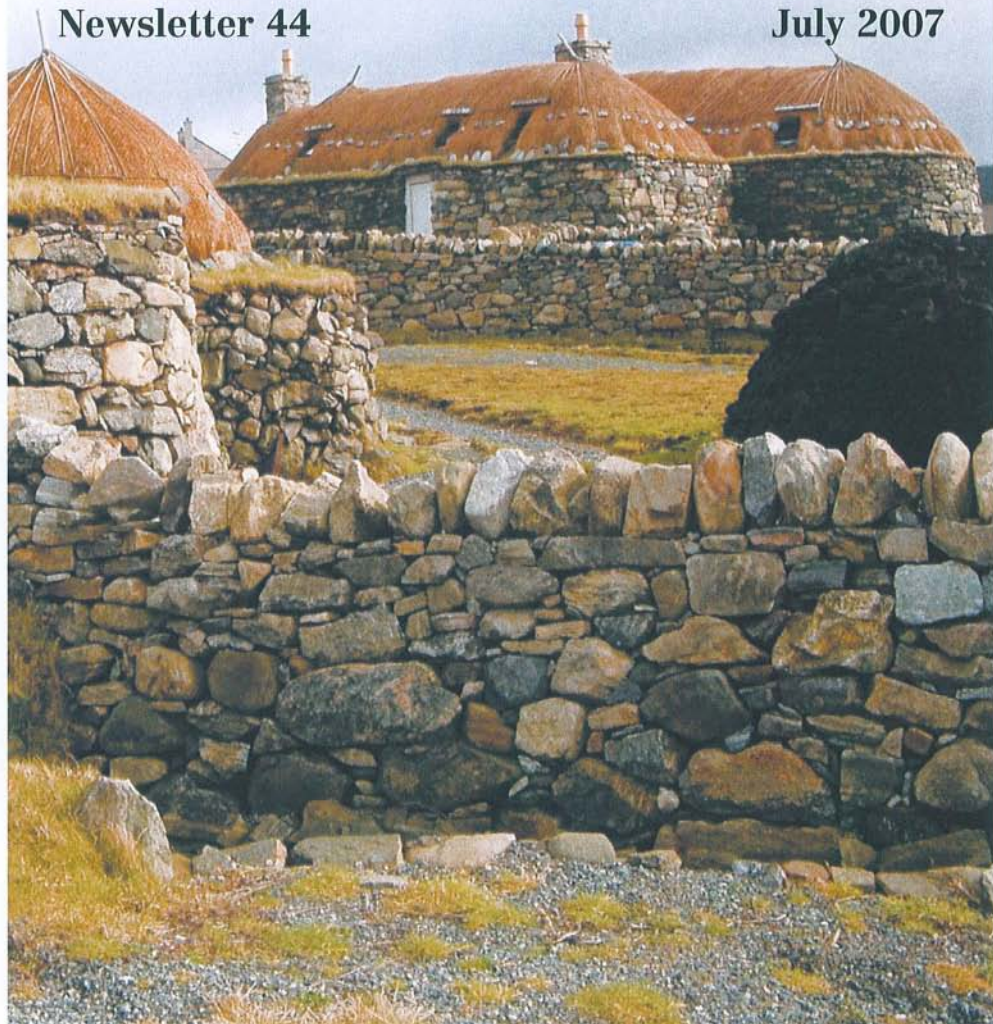
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 44

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The restored Garenin Village is the setting for the most recent of the four Gatliff Hostels.
This photograph by Iain Mackenzie is from his range of Hebridean images on
www.islandsofinspiration.com

Where I'd Rather Be

Robert Carlyle, the actor, contributed this item to the regular column in *The Guardian* of Saturday 13 January 2007: 'There is nothing like the Scottish Highlands in winter. It's isolated – there's just nothing there, and the landscape is spectacular. When I feel like I need to get away, the first thing that comes to mind is spending a few weeks up in the hills. It's perfect for getting away from it all. On the Plockton peninsula you feel like you're on an island. On the Western Isles you've got four seasons in 10 minutes – you simply can't dress for the weather. It'll be a sunny day, and suddenly it will start snowing. On top of the peace and isolation, there's fantastic seafood and game just lining the streets up there.'

Along the Road

People like places and take pleasure in recommending them. The roads and tracks of the Western Isles yield much and this new series in *Hebridean Hostellers* begins with two places of special interest to Peter Clarke, who has, of course, detailed many in his book *The Timeless Way*.

Just to the south of Berneray, near Newtonferry on North Uist, is Loch an Sticir with a stepping stone causeway to its island Dun. The remains of the fort are 3.6m high and 18m in diameter with the remnants of a medieval house inside. It was where Hugh Macdonald, who failed to overthrow his cousin as clan chief, hid for a year in 1601 before capture. Along the nearby B893 and on the seaward side is the modern Clachan Sands cemetery. Close by is the Clach an t-Sagairt, a Latin cross measuring some 16" x 12" and well-crafted on the face of a large rock. It probably marks one of the boundaries of St Columba's parish of Sand that dates back to 1505.

Evocative places such as these abound in the Islands and your contributions about your personal favourites will be most welcome. Contact the Editor in order to let others know.

Landscape and Happiness

Advertisements for the Gatliff Hostels regularly appear in *The Scottish Mountaineer*, a magazine devoted to walkers and climbers. Bill Wright, who in his working life is the Director of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, recently wrote an article for the publication entitled 'Landscape and Happiness' and in it appeared the following paragraph:

'The distinctive mountainous landscape of Scotland is our inheritance and our stewardship is literally on the world stage. People come from all over the globe to marvel at it. They return home the better for the experience whether climbing or not. Fine landscape makes our being well. Damaged surroundings and depressing aspects do little to lift dark moods.'

Numbers Count

The number of over-night visitors at the four hostels has again increased and in 2006 hit a record of 6746, up from 6508 in the previous year. Full details are to be found in the current Crofters' Newsletter and it would be exciting if 2007 were to see the 7000 barrier broken.

The website www.gatliff.org.uk – now with forum and gallery – hit its highest month with 1196 visitors in May 2007. Monday continues to be the most popular day of the week and 21.00 - 21.59 is the hour of the day for heaviest traffic. Among the new countries to appear in the statistics are Chile, Liechtenstein, the Solomon Islands and Yemen.

Counting for Cash

Google may be the leading search engine for the Internet. However, we have a vested interest in one smaller, and much more generous, organisation. This is Everyclick – www.everyclick.com – which donates to nominated charities whenever it's used. £220k has been raised so far and the weekly tally now exceeds £7.5k. The Gatliff Trust is registered and, although it is currently languishing with only a paltry amount of cash raised by few users, you could make a difference. Take a look at the site, make us your preferred charity and see the pennies become pounds. Every click helps !

Elenydd Wilderness Hostels

Just over a year ago the Elenydd Wilderness Hostels Trust was set up to save three unique and much-loved hostels in mid-Wales. Alas, the Blaencaron hostel has been lost to private ownership, but Ty'n Cornel is now run by the Trust and the appeal for Dolgoch is nearing completion. The Gatliff Trust has donated to the cause and thoroughly recommends the initiatives.

Even a quick glance at www.elenydd-hostels.co.uk gives insights into this remarkable section of the Cambrian Mountains, to the sort of hostels that stirred so many to visit them during the second half of the 20th Century and to the efforts of individuals who are undertaking the type of work in which Herbert Gatliff delighted.

Ravenspoint at Kershader

The discerning traveller to the Western Isles is able to use the four Gatliff hostels on the spinal route from the Butt of Lewis to Eriskay. However, the distance between Garenin and Rhenigidale is somewhat lengthy. It is, therefore, particularly convenient that the Ravenspoint Hostel and Visitor Centre at Kershader in the South Lochs acts as a good stepping stone, stopping off point and a destination for setting out to explore.

Refurbishment of this community centre, which offers budget accommodation that may be booked (01851 880236), a shop, tearoom and the Angus Macleod Archive, is to be undertaken later this year. A donation has been allocated by the Gatliff Trust to promote information and display materials at the hostel which is ideally situated in the scenic South Lochs, with the mysterious Pairc beyond.

Building and Maintenance

Wear and tear is a significant problem for any hostel, even one cherished by its users. When the exposure elements of wind and spray, rain and snow, sand and debris, are added, then the endurance of materials and their maintenance become vital factors in the business of survival. The Executive Committee is aware that capital will have to be spent to fortify roofs and that costs are increasingly incurred for fabric replacements. The larger projects need professional attention, but there is still much that can be undertaken by volunteers. Please contact Peter Clarke, Vice-Chairman and Membership Secretary, by email at members@gatliff.org.uk or telephone on 020 8888 2449, if you feel able to assist. A restorative stay in the Outer Hebrides, part of which involves renovation of facilities, could have personal appeal to the donor and corporate benefits to the recipient.

Now it can be Bed and Breakfast

Last year saw a new venture open and prosper in the Blackhouse Village of Garenin. It's the Blackhouse Café and Restaurant run by Andy Stopforth, a chef of 20 years experience from Lancashire, who is running his own business for the first time. The café, serving from 9.30 - 5.00, will be operating until the end of September. The restaurant, open from 6.30 - 9.30 in the evening, will continue into the Winter months. The quality of the meals served has impressed many, but what is particularly appealing to users of the hostel is that a bed could well be available for £9 and breakfast served just across the road for around £5. This has never happened before so close to any Gatliff hostel.

Seaplane Suitability

Loch Lomond Seaplanes operate services from a Glasgow city terminal on the River Clyde to many parts of Scotland for regular excursions and charter flights. They have a six-seater Cessna Turbo Stationair and an eight-seater de Havilland Beaver. North Uist is just an hour away and Sollas Beach is the specific destination. Our hostels would be up to 75 minutes away with each providing sheltered waters of varying depths, but that is, perhaps, wishful thinking. Full details and an on-line brochure are available on www.lochlomondseaplanes.com Linking the Gatliff hostels by seaplane services would be a matter of saving substantially on accommodation, while spending significantly on access !

The Shape of Things to Come

Last September consultants for the Western Isles Council indicated that a five-kilometre 'green' causeway, linking North Uist and Harris, could be built to complete the spinal route between Eriskay and the Butt of Lewis. It would include tidal generators and be flanked by wind turbines. Part of it could be raised to allow vessels to sail through the Sound of Harris. The Berneray hostel's role as a staging-post on the inter-island journey would either be enhanced or by-passed.

One Foot After Another

Walking is the most natural form of transport and the pace of a walk is something to savour. Striding is sometimes essential; sauntering is occasionally vital. The pleasures of recreational walking incorporate decision-making about how we want to proceed and at what speed.

Some people like going fast, with an element of endurance. The Long Distance Walkers Association was founded in January 1982 and attracts people from all walks of life to the many footpaths and routes that traverse and link the country.

The late Arthur Meaby, a most influential member of the GHHT, took part in the type of pursuit featured in the organisation's magazine, *Strider*, and on its website www.ldwa.org.uk. Its activities do not stretch far beyond Lothian and the Borders, but if a Western Isles Statutory Long Distance Route became a reality, then that could change.

A publication in which the GHHT hostels are advertised is *Walk In Scotland*. It has been produced for Visit Scotland by Pro-Sports Promotions, the company that brings out *The Scottish Hosteller* and *The Scottish Mountaineer*, publications that also carry our advertisements.

The strapline used to present this 2007 guide that is available in Tourist Information Centres is simply 'Scotland. Created for Walking.' 20 Long Distance Routes are referenced and 32 Walking Events & Festivals are featured.

Only two routes in the Outer Hebrides are outlined in this publication. They are Traigh An Iar to Macleod's Stone on Harris and Tolsta to Ness via the 'Bridge to Nowhere' on Lewis. However, if you need details of numerous walks that comprise one long one, then just look below ... on this page.

The Outer Hebrides The Timeless Way

by Peter Clarke

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

Cheques to Northampton Square Ltd 26 Lewis Street

Stornoway HS1 2JF

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

'Taking this walk with Peter Clarke is both refreshing and revealing. Its Outer Hebridean setting provides a small world – a real microcosm – as well as a larger landscape against which man has striven to survive and succeed. It also tells the story of how one man has tracked his experiences of a place of destiny through four decades, in three dimensions, on two feet and with a singular sense of purpose.' [From the review in *Scottish Islands Explorer*]

Dr Petra Clarke (1938 - 2007)

Petronella Cornelia Leighton was born in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, to a Dutch mother and English father. She was moved to Surrey during the Blitz and despite being discouraged, while at school, from pursuing a career in medicine, trained to become a doctor and qualified as an obstetrician and gynaecologist. Her work at Mulago Hospital in Uganda coincided with the seizure of power by Idi Amin.

In 1976 she married Peter Clarke and subsequently gave birth to Julia and Thomas. As a Senior Medical Officer at the Department of Health from 1979 to 1998, she helped introduce many innovations in public health as well as in nutrition for infants and the elderly. During her time at the Medical Foundation from 1998 until she suffered a stroke in late 2005, her commitment was to the victims of torture and atrocity, in general, and of rape, in particular.

Her interests were wide and championing of causes effective. She was a co-ordinator for Christian Aid; an elected member of the General Synod of the Church of England, vigorously supporting the ordination of women priests; and, from 2001, a Mennonite. The Gatliff Trust is particularly grateful for her cheerful and caring ways. It was obvious at her funeral at Holy Trinity Church, Tottenham, that many other people owed her debts of gratitude.

Dr Roger Clarke (1952 - 2007)

Roger Clarke, a first cousin of Peter Clarke, was born in Bedford, attended Bedford Modern School, qualified as a chartered accountant in 1979 and set up his own practice in 1992. However, he will be especially remembered for his work as a professional ornithologist and a world authority on harriers as well as for bird of prey research and conservation. His skill as an accountant was beneficial to three national wildlife-linked organisations and to the GHHT.

A passion of his youth was playing lead guitar in a rock band until hearing damage ended his musical career. Then his interests turned to angling, particularly in the Fenlands. While fishing, his imagination and analytical skills were increasingly aroused by the hen harriers hunting over the landscape. These encounters led, eventually, to a PhD from the University of Liverpool in biological sciences on bird of prey feeding ecology.

He worked for the University of Aberdeen, on Orkney, around south-west Scotland, in India and, of course, wherever his researches and reputation were to take him. However, his five-year management plan for the restoration of Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve, Norfolk, was a project both close to his heart as well as close to his home. He died of cancer on 28 January is survived by his wife, Janis, and by a son and daughter.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Ten Years Ago

Due to problems encountered with the new CalMac ferry which travelled between Leverburgh, Otternish and Berneray regarding shallow tides, there have been alterations to the arrangements. Now the new ferry only sails between Leverburgh and Otternish carrying vehicles and passengers. The small ferry that used to travel between Otternish and Berneray has been reinstated until the Causeway is built. The only disadvantage is that on some sailings the small ferry departs before the big ferry arrives ! (Editor Jim McFarlane) *[No problem now.]*

and of Fifteen Years Ago

Rural Blues: You can't get much more rural than the Outer Hebridean islands. But rural doesn't necessarily mean green. The major headache at the moment for the Western Isles Council is financial. But it has environmental problems too. The islands are extremely exposed and rubbish left out for collection used to be blown away, creating a serious litter problem. Introducing wheeled bins has improved this. But litter is still a problem in the towns. The Council also has trouble controlling fly-tipping. To dispose of large items, such as tractors, cars or building rubble, some islanders have to travel 40 miles along single-track roads to the nearest community waste disposal site. Consequently, some people end up dumping unwanted junk on more remote parts of their own land. (Editor: Richard Genner) *[Improvements all round ?]*

and Twenty

A 1986 survey of the origins of visitors was published.

	From Scotland	Rest of UK	Abroad	Total
Berneray	56	220	167	443
Claddach Baleshare	52	126	136	314
Howmore	100	243	173	516
Rhenigidale	62	146	156	364

(Editor: Francesca Fraser Darling) *[One hostel change; numbers up.]*

Addresses

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust: 30 Francis Street Stornoway Isle of Lewis
Western Isles HS1 2ND ghht@gatliff.org.uk

Chairman: Matt Bruce Achnaha Upper Garrabost Isle of Lewis Western Isles
HS2 0PN chair@gatliff.org.uk

Secretary: Alan Busson Loanend Kinnoir Huntly Aberdeenshire AB54 7XX
01466 793670 secretary@gatliff.org.uk

Treasurer: Philip Lawson Ledmore Carnbee Anstruther Fife KY10 2RU
tresurer@gatliff.org.uk

Vice-Chairman and Membership Secretary: Peter Clarke 264 Alexandra Park Road
London N22 7BG 020 8888 2449 Mobile: 0790 999 3863
members@gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: John Humphries Elm Lodge Garden House Lane Rickinghall
Diss Norfolk IP22 1EA 01379 890270 editor@gatliff.org.uk

Garenin	–	Lewis
Rhenigidale	–	North Harris
Berneray	–	North Uist
Howmore	–	South Uist



Three Seasons of Special Appeal

It was in the Summer of 2005 that Niamh Hiney and Dot Allan, two friends from primary school days, set off for the Western Isles, in general, and to the Music Festival, in particular. They were attracted to the Gatliff hostels and stayed first at Garenin.

Their proposed two weeks in the islands extended to a three-week visit during which time they took in Barra, Berneray, Howmore and, in the July, they found themselves in Rhenigidale. A fellow-visitor to the hostel was Michael Clarke, a Professor of Classics from Dublin.

Niamh and Michael enjoyed being able to converse in Gaelic, not only together but with Alasdair Mackay, the hostel warden. The Irish and Scots forms of the

language are sufficiently close for ready communication. The rest, as they say, is history, when Niamh and Michael continued their friendship.

Romance flourished and Sean was born to them on 31 May, in the Spring of 2006. Then in the Spring of this year, on 14 April, the couple married in County Clare. They are pictured here by the ancient and impressive High Cross in Kilfenora, known as the 'city of the seven crosses.'

Michael has now taken up an appointment at the University of Galway. He and his family have settled into a new life, many aspects of which started just two years ago, incorporating three seasons of special appeal.

