

Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 50

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The Artists' Workshop at Garyvard, South Lochs, Isle of Lewis

Publications with a Wide Appeal

As the present-buying season approaches, consider what the **Islands Book Trust** has to offer by way of new publications that give pleasure to many people. A visit to www.theislandsbooktrust.com or a telephone call to Margaret Macdonald on 01851 880737 will secure something different.

Island Heroes; The Military History of the Hebrides (£15) concerns those who fought in the American, Napoleonic, First and Second World Wars. **From Hirta to Port Phillip; the story of the ill-fated emigration from St Kilda to Australia in 1852** by Eric Richards (£7.50) looks at a venture from an off-shore island in the northern hemisphere to an attempted settlement in the southern.

Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles; some personal reflections on comparative island life by Colin Scott Mackenzie (£7.50) compares and contrasts groups and cultures. **The French Macdonald; Journey of a Marshal of Napoleon in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland** by Jean-Didier Hache (£12) gives an intimate of a vanished society.

Paper Cairns; Poetry and Prose based on the work of Angus 'Ease' Macleod by Laura Helyer (£5) is the first GAMA Award winner. **Greenland; The Rediscovered Island** by Iain Brownlie Roy (£7.50) traces the interaction of Greenland with Europe and America from the late 10th Century to the present day by an author who has explored remote corners of that land.

Destination St Kilda; From Oban to Skye and the Outer Hebrides edited by Mark Butterworth (£19.99) is based on the images and text of the double set of lantern slides that had popular appeal from the late 1880s. **From Cleits to Castles; A St Kildan Looks Back** by Calum Macdonald (£9.99) is a rare book, by a native of the island.

Fifty Not Out

The first issue of **Hebridean Hostellers** appeared in April 1984 and consisted of one double-sided sheet. The editor is not mentioned by name, but the address indicates the home of **Peter Clarke**. An appeal for a work party is accompanied by the name of its leader, John Joyce.

An appeal in the 4th issue for a group of enthusiasts to take on the editorial matters resulted in **Francesca Fraser Darling** being named as Editor in the next edition of a publication with up to 12 pages. By the 7th issue **Richard Genner** had taken over and, subsequently, brought out a further 11 issues.

Editions 19 - 29 were the responsibility of **Jim MacFarlane** who, at the end of the Millennium, handed over to **Lawrence Washington**. He brought out newsletters including the one marking the Special 40th Anniversary of the Opening of the Rhenigidale Hostel, celebrated in June 2002.

The current editor, **John Humphries**, took over in December 2002 and introduced colour printing in January 2005 with the 39th issue. So a dozen print-runs later we are on 50 not out and look forward to a centenary number appearing in the Spring of 2035.

Under New Management

The launch-edition of Scottish Islands Explorer magazine appeared in January 2000 from a house on Fair Isle where Linda Grieve lived. She created a publication from a concept and within two years had taken in from a black-and-white to a full-colour format.

Early in 2007 she sold the magazine to Jeremy Smith, an editor with a London-based publisher, and moved to Lowestoft in Suffolk where she now runs a restaurant with her partner, Philip. Jeremy ran the magazine from his home in Sussex and brought professional design-skills to its new format.

In February of this year Jeremy Smith died, aged only 35, of bronchial pneumonia. The title is now published by the editor of this publication, John Humphries, who lives in Suffolk. However, he has established a back office at Kershader in the South Lochs of Lewis, next door to the Ravenspoint Hostel.

So the magazine has returned to its roots and continues to focus on the many Scottish islands worth considering and visiting. Please make contact if you are interested in writing for or supporting a small venture in the vast publishing world. A way to take the first steps is via www.scottishislandsexplorer.com

GAMA in its Second Year

The 'Gatliff / Angus Macleod Archive' [GAMA] Award was set up by the Gatliff Trust and support by the Islands Book Trust in 2009 to celebrate the achievements of these two individuals and to **encourage** young people to show similar interests in the Western Isles.

Laura Helyer's booklet *Paper Cairns* was published last February as a result of this funding. It has helped her secure further financial assistance and has been short-listed for a literary award to be announced in 2011.

Robert Lenfert, an American archaeologist, reading for a Ph.D at Nottingham is the 2010 GAMA Award recipient. He used his funding to research some of the duns - fortified island dwellings - on North Uist and used the hostel facilities at Berneray for his work. This will be published early next year.

Hebridean Havens

Work has been carried out at Rhenigidale where maintenance and decorating have been undertaken and a new fridge put into operation. Berneray has seen decorating as well as thatch repairs completed. Howmore has benefited by electrical work as well as the dormitory block having roof repairs, interior decorating, exterior painting and thatching. John Joyce has supervised these operations and will be leading a work-party in October. Please contact him on 0208 653 8376 if you are interested in helping to keep our hostels as safe and attractive havens.

Take to the Hills

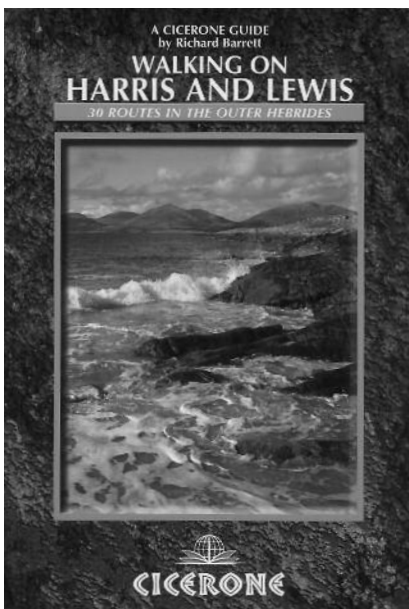
Although Richard Bennett saw the hills of Harris from Berneray in the early 1970s, he did not set foot on them until 2007. These were significant steps – for he loved exploring the highways and byways, noting what he saw and compiling his findings into the guidebook - **Walking on Harris and Lewis** - that was published by Cicerone earlier this year.

In his working life Richard was a professional marketer with a number of multi-national companies in the UK and abroad. He was accustomed to showing **information within its context** and this soon becomes evident in the book where the many factors that contribute to the landscape, conditions and cultures of his chosen areas are assessed.

The Introduction encapsulates the geography and history of the two islands; delves into the geology; presents the flowers, vegetation and wildlife; assists in such matters as getting around, finding accommodation, deciphering place-names and dealing with midges. In short, it **guides and encourages** the reader to move from the general to the particular, from the passive to the active.

The particular walks - and there are 30 of them - are set in that all-important context of past influences on the places visited and present requirements to see them effectively. The photographs used are quite compelling; the map extracts are certainly reassuring in that they are all **Ordnance Survey** in origin. You feel that you can't go wrong.

Walk 7 is one for the Rhenigidale visitor in which the circuit from Urgha takes in the Postman's Path, the settlement at Molliginish, the high point of Todun and the return via Glen Lacasdale. Within this section there is a feature on **Herbert Gatliff** and an analysis of his legacies to the understanding and enjoyment of this remote region.



Walks 23 and 24 take routes linking the **Garenin Blackhouses** with Carloway as well as with the West Side Coastal Path. Walk 29 shows how Steimreway can be accessed from Oronsay, on a 2.5 mile journey, and Walk 30 ventures into the vast Pairc with a 12.5 mile trek. Walkers on these latter routes could well use the community hostel facilities at **Ravenspoint** in the South Lochs.

The overview, specific pieces of advice, details of a range of walks, photographs and map extracts fill this book that fits neatly into the pocket at a price of £12.95 which does not damage the wallet. More information is available from the publisher, **Cicerone**, on www.cicerone.co.uk or by giving the ISBN of 978-1-85284-567-4 to any bookseller. Take to the hills.

Over Forty Years On

Colin Stuart recently came across some photographs of **Scarp** and its ruined blackhouse hostel. Memories were stirred of his solo trip through the Western Isles in the Summer of '68, research was undertaken, and he is delighted to learn that the Gatliff hostels continue from those days when travel was difficult and touring was undertaken by the hardy few.



It was a chance encounter in Tarbert with a friend of Herbert Gatliff, **Francis Mordaunt**, who told him about the then three hostels on Harris. There was the SYHA at Stockinish, the original Gatliff hostel at Rhenigidale and what was to be the relatively short-lived one on Scarp. Colin first made his way to Rhenigidale along the coast from Maaruig.

One very old man, crippled with arthritis, lived in the isolated cottage at Noster. At the hostel were two 15-year-old boys from Stornoway, who had surprisingly ventured 'into the wilds' with the intention of helping the local shepherd. With the weather turning foul, the three hostel visitors were particularly appreciative of the **Gatliff refuge**.

Colin then headed west, taking the mini-bus to Hushinish from Tarbert. It ran only on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The Scarp ferryman operated only on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and charged £5 for the hire of the boat. There on the quayside was Francis and they were able to take an unscheduled crossing in order to reach an **extraordinary hostel**.

It was one of three or four really primitive turf-roofed houses, with an astonishing interior that was low, rough, dark and almost windowless. It was like stepping back into an **almost medieval** life-style. The island's only inhabitants were the postman / ferryman / shopkeeper, his family and one single old lady.

When Colin and Francis returned to the mainland they discovered it was a non-bus day and had a 16-mile walk back to Tarbert. Here there was **theatrical relief** - for a touring group of student actors was performing. Their brilliant stage comedy attracted just 12 people. However, that was double the number of their audience in Stornoway.

Then it was on to the Howmore hostel en route for Barra, before returning to London after a series of **remarkable**, off-the-beaten-track experiences. Colin had travelled far in infrequently-visited areas, had walked over 200 miles and appreciated those three existing Gatliff hostels. He now marvels at his freedom, energy and **carefree**, liberating attitudes towards risk and safety.

David Turner (1948 - 2010)



David Turner died 30 on April. He had lung and kidney cancer and was in hospital for three weeks before he died of a stroke. It was a great shock to everybody because he was such a part of the scene; always around. Very few realised how ill he was, but it was not unsurprising that he didn't tell anyone, for he was a very private person who chose to suffer in silence. Indeed he left the stage while nobody was looking.

He was a native of Grimsby, a colourful, eccentric and extraordinary person who had done many things and could vividly recount them. He was very easy to talk to and was somebody people remembered. David seemed to attract unusual events, such as being in the Outer Hebrides when a Coast Guard helicopter landed on the road ahead of his car. His dry comment was that helicopter pilots probably didn't have rear wing-mirrors.

David didn't have a TV, mobile phone or access to the internet, yet he was incredibly well-informed. He was a member of Barnet local YHA group and every year ran a news quiz with questions on the previous week's events. All the information was gathered from newspapers, with not a computer in sight. These quizzes were hilarious and were voted the group's top event of the year.

Dave, as he was often known, had done a lot of work for the YHA over the years, having been on various regional Councils, Chairman of the Epping Forest Committee and a volunteer warden at Bradenham. He would regularly spend his summer holidays touring the Outer Hebrides via various Gatliff hostels and invariably stayed at Berneray for the New Year. He seemed to know everybody on the islands!

Back home, he did much work for Trinity Methodist Church in Enfield

When he was teaching at Wandsworth, he showed a high level of competence. Technical drawing may not be the most riveting of subjects, but he held his pupils' attention and they learned from a man who knew his subject well. His love of the language and its use of words appealed, with *The Times* crosswords and Soduku games bringing out his ingenuity.

His membership of the Executive Committee of the Gatliff Trust was, alas, short-lived. Fellow-hostellers will miss his dry humour, yarns of extraordinary events and, particularly, his gift of good company.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago*

'The life and work of the late **Arthur Meaby** will be commemorated and celebrated in two places later this year. The AGM of the GHHT will be held at the Kildonan Museum on South Uist and attenders will remember Arthur when a seat is positioned at the nearby Howmore Hostel. Its inscription - 'For the Beauty of the Earth' - will recall the work of a person who made it possible for many to experience this feature in distant places.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Arthur continues to be remembered*]

and of Ten Years Ago

'The GHHT **website** is now up and running and can be found at www.gatliff.org.uk initial reaction has been very encouraging. The pages will be continually improved and update over the coming months. Our thanks go to Hugh Lorimer for all the excellent work he is putting into this particular project' (Editor: Lawrence Washington) [*Visitors to the site are now running at 60 -120 visitors per day*]

and Fifteen

'A prehistoric burial chamber has been discovered near the famous Standing Stones at **Callanish**. The chamber pre-dates the Pyramids in age and is actually an integral part of the Callanish site. It was discovered by accident when the bulldozers moved in to lay the foundations for a new road.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*How many Callanish or Egyptian workers were the equivalent of one bulldozer?*]

and Twenty

'Hostel usage was at an all-time high, totalling 3054 **bednights**.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*The 2009 figures show an increase of well over 100%. What's happened?*]

and now Twenty-five

'Andrew Gannon's work-party at Easter took off the Berneray thatch and roof timbers. The ceiling of the sitting room **collapsed**. Later the ceiling of the passage-way was collapsed. All the turfs have been stored. The smaller out-house was cleared and the junk sent to the tip.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Recent Health and Safety directives may, indeed, have some significance*]

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



Hostel Painting

Christine Dodd is an artist based in Orinsay, on Lewis. She trained at the Liverpool College of Art and her work is shown at the Rendezvous Gallery in Aberdeen. Her shop, called Island (open June - September) is in Tarbert, Harris. The Outer Hebridean landscapes that she depicts usually have a textual element and this is evident in her representation of the Rhenigidale Hostel. This 4" x 4" painting in acrylic on 200 lbs-weight water-colour paper is available in an 8" x 8" frame at £60 post free. Please phone on 01851 880xxx for details from the artist herself.



Stirling Calls

Virtually every organisation has, by law, to hold an **Annual General Meeting**. Attendances vary from a token number to a throng of people, according to the attraction of the cause and to the business in hand.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust will be holding its AGM at the **Stirling** Youth Hostel on Saturday 9 October 2010. The relevant paperwork accompanies this newsletter and all members are invited to attend.

This is an appeal to encourage members to come along, learn more about the organisation, discuss the issues of maintaining a chain of hostels, meet both committee as well as fellow-members and, above all, have a **stimulating** time.

The venue lends itself to a **weekend-away** - with hostel accommodation likely to be available, good autumnal offers on transport networks, and plenty of local historic features to visit.

Please consider this AGM as '**A Good Mix**' of somewhere interesting to go, some different people to meet and something supportive to do for an organisation that assisted over 7000 people last year.

For those who would like to consider **meeting in London** later in the year to discuss the hostels' facilities, maintenance and support, please phone John Joyce on 0208 653 8376.