

Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 59

Spring 2016



Howmore in the Spring Sunshine

Photograph by Peter Clarke

The Howmore Appeal

Peter Clarke, the Chairman writes: The Howmore appeal is complete. We have raised the whole of the £47,000 required to help fund the improvements at the hostel. Thank you to all our donors and members for their generous gifts.

Owing to the flow of funds over the past three years we have been able to maintain a steady pace of work at the hostel. The latest task has seen the Common Room roof renewed.



The New Roof at Howmore by Peter Clarke

Howmore More Accessible

Details of CalMac's Summer sailings from Mallaig to Lochboisdale, South Uist have been published. This improved service, the upgraded road from Fort William and the rail link from Glasgow make Howmore more accessible.

The introduction of the 2016 Summer timetable means that Lochboisdale will no longer be served from Oban. Instead there will be a seven-day service to and from Mallaig. On Monday to Saturday the boat departs at 17:30 from Mallaig (arrival 21.00); on Sundays at 15:00 (arrival 18.50). The departure time from Lochboisdale is 07.00. South Uist bus services do not currently connect with these sailings.

Rail connections from Glasgow Queen Street are possible, except on Sundays, with the 08:21 train reaching Mallaig at 13:34, although timetable changes will be in place after 8 August. Magnificent scenery is a feature of this route.

Work Party

At the heart of all hostels there are always maintenance issues and plans for improvements. John Joyce, GHHT Project Manager is adept at coming up with solutions. His unstinting efforts have brought many improvements to our hostels, both those seen and those unseen (e.g. improved electrical wiring). He leads a Work Party beginning on Monday 25 April for two weeks. If you feel able to assist in any way - with basic labour or trade skills - please contact him.

When the road came to Rhenigidale, we were required to fence off the grounds around the hostel. Before that most of the immediate land was open and subject to casual grazing. Since then a more varied plant life has evolved, but it is now threatening to become unruly. Knowledge of local plant species or the enthusiasm to survey the site and have ideas about managing the grounds are needed.

Five-Year Business Plan

Abraham Lincoln's remark - 'The best way to predict your future is to create it' - is easier said than done. The trustees of the GHHT have considered a detailed business plan compiled by John Joyce. It incorporates the fundamentals of running an organisation in a way that promotes safety, financial stability, investment of resources, employment of human skills and innovations as well as the appeal to existing and prospective hostellers. We look ahead to the beginning of 2020.

Postcards

On the day in 1870 when postcards were first issued by the Post Office, some half-a-million people apparently went to St Martin's-le-Grand, Trafalgar Square, to send them. Julian Paren has just prepared a set of postcards that will be available free-of-charge at the hostels. The numbers involved will be small by comparison, but the project will be another way of putting us on the map.

Legacies and Bequests

Many people have given much time, effort and donations during their lifetimes to support the hostels. Legacies and bequests follow this pattern of donating - either unrestricted gifts to help in the general sense or for specific ways of recalling a person's enthusiasms. Do consider these opportunities.

As the GHHT is a registered charity, legacies left in a will are a tax-effective way of enabling future generations to enjoy some of the assets created within present and past eras. We remember all our members who have given legacies by recording them in our annual reports.

The Rhenigidale Hub

Readers of this newsletter probably need no introduction to either North Harris or one of its extremities, Rhenigidale. However, recommendations are needed to attract more people to a place with an exciting recent history and enticing scenery. It's where the challenge of going the distance should be rewarded by a sense of achievement and good company.

There has been a settlement here for generations, but the changes which started in the second half of the 20th Century have been remarkable. Few outsiders ever visited; the postman made deliveries and collections by walking a distance, in all weathers, on a zig-zag path; a metalled road was constructed in the 1980s; a telephone connection by radio came some years before broadband arrived.

The approach to Rhenigidale is dramatic whether on that Postman's Path or from the junction high on the Tarbert - Stornoway road or, indeed, from the traditional route by sea through Loch Trollamarig. It is interesting to speculate how Herbert Gatliff, who first visited the Outer Hebrides in 1947, originally saw this remote outpost. What matters is that it made an impact upon him.



A Rhenigidale Perspective by Julian Paren

The volcanic activities that forged this area of mountain and valley were evident in the crucible of landscape. Comparable human forces - of concept, passion and commitment - led Gatliff to take opportunities and found his first hostel here in 1962. He worked with residents and engaged the skills of his friends to re-model the crofthouse that remains the hostel to this day.

Now hostel-users have opportunities to experience staying in a very different part of Britain and of exploring the area around. Well-marked tracks can be taken to Tarbert and Mollinginish; trackless routes are evident along the edge of Loch Seaforth to Maraig; the ascent of Todun is a matter of following in the steps of others.

This is a place for encounters with the residents of the village and with fellow-travellers at the hostel. There was an occasion when a number of members of the committee were staying and three 'twitchers' arrived, having spotted their quarry some miles to the north. After supper, their telescopes were brought into use on the hostel terrace and the rings of Saturn were made visible. That was a new dimension.

The Berneray Circuit

Berneray is an island of 2500 acres that is home to a community of 138 residents. The land rises to 305 feet, but is associated with a coastline that forms something of a circle. Occupation has been continuous since the Bronze Age, although the most significant event in its history was probably the opening of the Causeway in 1999.

The windblown sand has been bound by the natural fertilisers from grazing cattle. Ploughing has created a patchwork of fields - some with crops, others fallow. So central to the traditions is the husbandry of crofting customs. In 1987, Prince Charles took time out to live with and learn about the practices. It was appropriate that he formally opened the Causeway.’

The Berneray Circular Walk enables visitors to look out to sea and inland to countryside. The former involves a sequence of stunning shores including the Western Beach, the images of which were inadvertently used to promote Kae Bae Beach, Thailand. The latter has the extensive Loch Bhrusda with its mute swans together with greylag, barnacle and brent geese.

Strong winds are evident, particularly in Winter, and it is not surprising that the Cladh Maolrithie standing stone has its lower eight feet underground. The Pictish square burial cairn at Ardmaree is described in the Museum of the Historical Society. The Church of Scotland, Post Office, Shop and Café are places where people congregate and gather.



Loch Bhrusda, Berneray by Julian Paren

The ease of getting to and from North Uist means that many residents work off-island. However, there are businesses that are based on Berneray. Do google the Birlinn Yarn Company for details of the products of the Sunhill croft - yarn and sheepskin - from pedigree Hebridean sheep. Alternatively to revive memories of the peaceful sounds and memories, search for ‘Berneray Meditations’.

The hostel opened in 1978, soon after Herbert Gatliff’s death, and has become the hostellers’ favourite. It is not surprising for the seashore setting, lapping waves and convivial common room area fulfils the vision of its founder - to bring people together where they can cater for themselves in reasonable comfort, among good company in a memorable location.

Howmore for Machair and Mountains

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the hostel founded by Herbert Gatliff with crucial help from Frank Martin. Actually Frank's papers show that he did all the work! The Trust has always had the support of the MacSween and MacDonald families, members of which are still involved with its running. It stands close to the Howmore road junction and the South Uist shore of the Atlantic Ocean as well as being on the Hebridean Way walking and cycling routes. More visitors will be stopping ... and staying.

Changes in the hostel have made it increasingly more comfortable and the renovations to the kitchen, dormitories and roof are subjects of appreciative comment. The physical changes to its immediate landscape are watched closely by natural historians keen to observe evolving features of the machair, the low-lying grassland which translated from Gaelic means, 'the fertile plain'.

It has been constructed by shell fragments rolled by waves, further broken up on-shore and then formed into hillocks which become wind-blown. Seaweed has been deposited by crofters, but the soil resists holding fertilisers and so has limited agricultural scope. Annual coastal flowers and marram grasses proliferate. Major threats come from the sea, paradoxically its source.

In January 1993 a fierce storm eroded three metres or ten feet of the machair along much of the South Uist coast. Comparable social upheavals have struck the locality. The Reformation saw the village becoming a Protestant enclave in a Catholic hinterland. The Church of Scotland, built in 1858, may not be in the centre of the village, but has a rare central communion table.



Heights above Howmore by Julian Paren

Visitors to the hostel may well become 'pilgrims' in the immediate locality. Walking to religious sites dating from the 13th Century; venturing seven miles to the south and the birthplace of Flora MacDonald; going two miles north to the Loch Druidibeg Nature Reserve; crossing the island to the summit of Beinn Mhor and Allt Volagir, an unusual area of natural woodland; or taking in the Kildonan Museum for information and refreshment.

Howmore, like its sister-hostels, is secondarily a place to visit while travelling, but primarily it is accommodation of destination. It combines two functions - as a house-by-the-shore for relaxation; and as a focal point for activities giving opportunities for religious, social and natural history, hill-climbing and coastal walking, discoveries of fauna and flora.

From the Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago ...

'The number of visitors to the Gatliff website has increased somewhat dramatically this year. In the first two months of 2011 the average daily rate of visits was over 100. Out of 6132 visits, 4122 were by unique visitors. This is, of course, the season of planning holidays.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Onwards and upwards*]

and of Ten Years Ago ...

'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.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*An example of the relentless travel movement that leads to social changes*]



The Rhenigidale Shore by Julian Paren

and Fifteen ...

'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.' (Editor: Lawrence Washington) [*How that disease affected both business and pleasure*]

and Twenty ...

'Len Clark has written *Herbert Gatliff - An English Eccentric* and it has just been published by the Gatliff Trust. The 27-page booklet contains a brief biography, some examples of his writing and several reminiscences from those who knew him. A copy has been sent to the common rooms of all Youth Hostels in the British Isles.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Our beginnings were well-broadcast*]

Twenty-five ...

'Other volunteers from North Ely Expeditions went to Berneray and carried out maintenance work at the hostel, and at long last, removed the last of the bunk beds from the Common Room to the Dormitory. The hostel is now ready for another season of steady usage.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*Did some hostellers regret not being able to sleep in the hub of activity?*]

... and now Thirty

'John Joyce and Arthur Meaby co-ordinated a work party (at Berneray) at Easter. With Roy Ashworth's help the hostel was commissioned for opening on 1 May. The kitchen work surfaces were completed and the sink installed.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Great service was given by installers and installations*]

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



Note the Dates

Two British cities that have appeal - and are not that far apart with fast intercity rail services and the M4 Motorway - are Bristol and London. The AGM of the Gatliff Trust will be held at the M Shed in Bristol's Industrial Docks on Saturday 23 April 2016; the AGM of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust will be at the St Pancras Youth Hostel in the Euston Road on Saturday 25 June 2016. The GT AGM begins at 11.00 (10.30 for coffee); the GHHT AGM at 10:30 (10.00 for coffee). Consider having weekends away to incorporate your attendance at the meetings.

Hostel Overnights: 2010 - 2015

	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
Berneray	2562	2698	2039	1864	2146	2120
Howmore	1765	1760	1260	1076	1264	1236
Rhenigidale	983	994	732	864	885	898
Garenin	1573	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	6883	5452	4031	3804	4295	4254

GHHT AGM 2016 - St Pancras YHA London - Saturday 25 June
