

# *Crofters' Newsletter*

## *2015*

*Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels in the Outer Hebrides*

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





# Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels 2015

This newsletter is for all who stayed at one of the Crofters' Hostels in 2014 and all who support the hostels. It is compiled from entries which hostellers left in the log books found at the hostel.

The Newsletter presents a look back on how hostellers enjoyed the hostels. This newsletter has appeared, in a variety of formats, every year since 1963, the year after the first hostel opened at Rhenigidale. Electronic copies of all our Crofters' Newsletters since the first in 1963 and all our Hebridean Hostellers newsletters since the first in 1984 can be found on our web site [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

The Crofters' hostels are run by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in partnership with islanders.

## Hostel Results for 2014

Overnights	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Berneray	2226	2147	2752	2562	2698	2039	1864	2146
Garenin	1301	948	1598	1573				
Howmore	1727	1595	2022	1765	1760	1260	1076	1264
Rhenigidale	1035	919	960	983	994	732	864	885
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6289</b>	<b>5609</b>	<b>7332</b>	<b>6883</b>	<b>5452</b>	<b>4031</b>	<b>3804</b>	<b>4295</b>

**Jo Burgess, Editor of the Crofters' Newsletter**, like many, has never forgotten her first visit to the islands and wishes to keep in touch with the hostels. She writes:

In 2014 I had a fantastic journey by train to Oban for a windy week in October. I visited Mull and Coll and enjoyed views of Rum, Eigg and the Treshnish Islands; so I had a brief taste of Cal Mac to keep me going. It was good to be heading north-west on a train and ferry again. The journey is a large part of the enjoyment and the feel of the wind in my face and a close up view of gannets flying past the ferry made me feel alive again (I feel a Runrig song coming to mind). The good folk at Oban Youth Hostel made me feel at home but reading the accounts in the logbooks when I got them back from the wardens, made me look forward to my next trip to the islands.

## Berneray

In April Cedric from France caught two brown trout on his first try thanks to John and Derrick.

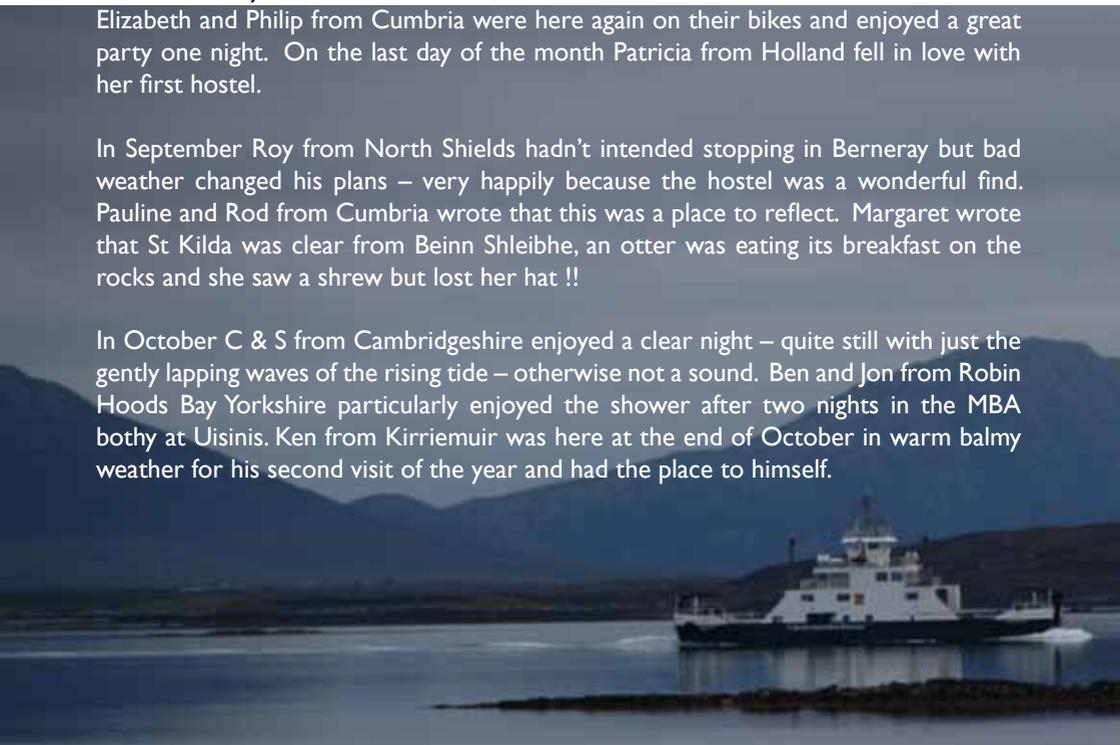
In May Sheina from East Kilbride saw an otter briefly, enjoyed a walk along the beach and praised the great job that Jackie does. In May sometime, Sam and Liam were bagging islands and had done 31 that day and 88 that week!! [www.islandbaggers.blogspot.com](http://www.islandbaggers.blogspot.com). At the end of May the 'idiots following bonkers' enjoyed a night of guitar, midgie repellent and whisky and described it as heaven on earth.

In June 'hairy wifies' brought sunshine, comedy and left empty bottles! Someone wrote "Beauty is about how you greet the everyday people that you meet."

In July a hosteller from Wales blew in on a summer hooly and enjoyed great walking and international banter. Astrid from Norway was here again after nineteen years and enjoyed perfect sunny weather and lovely people. Paul and Dawn from Edinburgh appreciated the facilities after camping for a few nights on Harris. The Hamiltons were glad to be back. In August Jack from Kirkby Moorside in Yorkshire and Ashley from Canada arrived after much rain but enjoyed a calm, dry, sunny evening. The Coffey family from Glasgow were here again and saw an otter (at last). Camping was a bit wet and windy but still enjoyable. Duncan and Emma from Port of Ness had a lovely time when they were here for the Two Islands Half Marathon. At the end of the month Elizabeth and Philip from Cumbria were here again on their bikes and enjoyed a great party one night. On the last day of the month Patricia from Holland fell in love with her first hostel.

In September Roy from North Shields hadn't intended stopping in Berneray but bad weather changed his plans – very happily because the hostel was a wonderful find. Pauline and Rod from Cumbria wrote that this was a place to reflect. Margaret wrote that St Kilda was clear from Beinn Shleibhe, an otter was eating its breakfast on the rocks and she saw a shrew but lost her hat !!

In October C & S from Cambridgeshire enjoyed a clear night – quite still with just the gently lapping waves of the rising tide – otherwise not a sound. Ben and Jon from Robin Hoods Bay Yorkshire particularly enjoyed the shower after two nights in the MBA bothy at Uisinis. Ken from Kirriemuir was here at the end of October in warm balmy weather for his second visit of the year and had the place to himself.



In November the stars were very bright and it was very cosy for Rachel from the USA and Rob from Norway. At the end of the month Stewart from East Kilbride enjoyed beautiful sunrises and sunsets and had never seen so many stars. He also enjoyed lots of birds including Turnstone and Redshanks.

Peter Clarke, Chairman of the Trust, recorded the death of former warden Annie Margaret Mackillop on 19th December at the age of 94. [I had the pleasure of meeting Annie and Jessie some years ago and will always remember the twins with fondness - Jo.]

Some gurlies from Yorkshire enjoyed a quiet and reflective New Year here. In January there was no power for a few days but Lorraine was still happy to be here from North Uist on her days off.



## Howmore

Grace from Milton of Campsie did the three mountains in perfect weather with amazing views.

In April Tarren from Australia, like Grace, felt welcome even though no one was around. Janet and David from Wakefield arrived here in April in their MG Midget. They had done 1100 miles from Yorkshire via Torriddon but only had to put the hood up once.

In May Hilary from Glasgow got tempted up the mountains by two Irish and a Finn living in Colchester and had a great day out with good company and views, enjoying Junior Trivial Pursuit and the call of the corncrakes on her return. Those self same Irish folk – Connor and Catriona and Vivi from Finland enjoyed seeing a short eared owl, golden eagle, hen harrier and arctic skua as well as the corncrake. Margaret and Alan from Manchester were here last year and wrote that the hostel was even better offering congrats to the working party. The wind was too strong for cycling but the buses worked well for a visit to Balranald where they saw Glaucous Gulls feeding on a dead minke whale. Visitors from Hebden Bridge/Heptonstall enjoyed a beach walk with three cowrie shells, sand mud pies, eider ducks and a stunning sunset. Olivia wrote that it

was nice, cosy and warm and very pretty. Everyone was very friendly.

In June Lucy, Euan, Alex, Julia and Sarah from Edinburgh camped and had a gourmet meal outside on the picnic bench in the sun. Dave and Nettie from Stockport also wrote how friendly everyone was. Alan from Coventry on a return visit enjoyed the hostel, location and birdlife. Lynn and Paul from Wallsend, Chris and Diane from Barnet, Mary from Bridge of Weir and Roger Clifton, (Treasurer of the Gatliff Trust) all praised the improvements.

In August Tim, the manager of Keswick Youth Hostel, wrote that it was nice to see such a great hostel. Polly, Mikey and Snowdrop from Chichester thanked Betty for another lovely stay and Carol, Jon and Co from Chorley had good weather, excellent company and Daisy wrote that it was a nice place to stay and a big adventure. Tommy MacDonald, our warden Betty's husband, helped Oscar from Newcastle with his bike.

In September Tim from Wilderness Scotland came, ate, relaxed and travelled on. Nathaniel from Leeds, James, Alex and Pete took shelter from the wind and rain and Carol and Terry from Farnborough wrote – "Tis a gift to be simple, Tis a gift to be free."

C & M from Cockermouth Cumbria enjoyed the mountains in good weather despite the boggy heather bash in and out.



## Rhenigidale

Stuck into the log book is a tune called *Rhenigidale Hostel Warmth* by Garrett Cameron from Auchterarder. I have sent it off to Malcolm Jones of Runrig to see if he can put it on a disc for me to listen to.

The first entry in the log book was in May by Richard Arden from Inverness who was back after his first visit in 1964 when he had memories of bringing bikes in and Roddy providing milk in whisky bottles! In 1967 he had been at Rhenigidale, Howmore and on Scarp and had lots of memories.

Mike from Melton in Suffolk was here 43 years after his first visit and very glad to see the hostel is such good shape.

In July Abi from Kent and Adam from Cottenham Cambridge were here having enjoyed seeing an otter at the bottom of the zig zags on a 'stunning day'. Luca from Oakworth and Philippa from Moffat thought the facilities at the hostel first class and a tribute to



the hard work of the wardens past and present, volunteers and all hostel users. Andrew from Cumbria had a mechanical issue with his VW Camper which found him arriving via the path on a very warm evening.

In August the Hamiltons from the Forest of Dean were here in wind and rain and wrote that it was nice to see the hostel kept simple. Charlotte from Bridgend also arrived in the rain on her bike to find the hostel very busy but she wrote that they all squeezed in, drank beer and shared stories of their island adventures. In contrast Katie and Craig from Cambridge had the place to themselves a few days later. By the middle of the month, Ashley from Canada and Jack from Kirkby Moorside in Yorkshire enjoyed a tail wind from Berneray and Italian visitors had their lunch in 'this amazing place'. On the last day of the month, Sarah and Dan from Llanfairfechan enjoyed the wild flower garden on the hills of heather, tormentil and devils bit scabious. It was showery and midgy but they saw a single mountain hare on the ridge to Uiseval.

In September Carol from Farnborough returned to 'the sanctuary of Reinigadal'. Victor and Linda from Rossendale in Lancashire went up Toddun in the mist with no view but



enjoyed the good narrow ridge. Also here in September Simon from Dundee loved the remoteness but was not looking forward to cycling back up the hill. Claire from North Cornwall fell in love with the hostel and swam in the sea. Mark – harristweed.Blogs-pot.co.uk, described it as “a rustic superlative in the heart of the Motherland”. Visitors from Yorkshire arrived for the second time this year in pouring rain and strong wind but found the peace and quiet the next day soothing – describing it as possibly the best hostel in the UK. Bill from Australia arrived via Hawaii, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver Island and Nova Scotia – describing the village as a magic place. Steve from Glastonbury thanked Kate for keeping the hostel open for all those who seek places of beauty and peace. In October another hosteller was here for the first time in 47 years and wrote that the hostel was a lot dryer and more comfortable. Calum and Orla from Leurbost on Lewis were here in December and enjoyed the fire.

Visit Rhengidale and enjoy the peace and tranquility of nearby bays overlooking the Minch and the majestic Loch Seaforth, (pictured below), all a short walk from the hostel.



# The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in 2014

## Trustees

Peter Clarke (Chairman)

Matthew Bruce

John Humphries (Editor Hebridean Hostellers)

John Philip Lawson MBE (Treasurer)

John Joyce (Work Party Organiser)

Julian Paren (Company Secretary)

David Edward Matthews (Hostel enquiries)

**The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust** is dedicated to running Berneray (21 beds), Howmore (16 beds) and Rhenigidale (12 beds) hostels, in partnership with islanders, to a sound basic standard. Its goal is to provide hostellers, including young people of limited means, with the opportunity to stay a while to get to know, and maybe come to love, the unique culture and natural environment of the islands. (We are part of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA) family.)

## Berneray

Two work parties led by John Joyce visited the hostel to carry out maintenance work during the year. In April the walls of both annex dormitories were wire brushed and repainted. The external walls of the hostel and annex were completely repainted with masonry paint. As many repairs as possible were carried out. New blinds were installed in all the dormitories. New chairs were provided in the annex dormitory. The shower and wash room were both cleaned and the floors were given two coats of grey floor paint. The end wall of the other room in the annex was also painted. The common room fire-end wall was repainted. Latches on external doors were replaced.

In November the work party took action to deter rodents and repair damage that they had caused. Hostellers were asked not to leave out food on the kitchen work surfaces and clear away all waste promptly to the council rubbish bins at the north end of the hostel.

Annie MacKillop died on 19th December aged 94. Annie was warden of the hostel for many years with her twin sister Jessie (who passed away in 2009). The hostel had meant a great deal to both twins.

## Howmore

The Howmore Appeal which was launched in June 2013 continued to attract donations during the year. By the end of 2014 the Howmore Fund had topped £32,000 thanks to a steady flow of donations. Vanessa Johnson ran the 2014 Great Scottish Run 10K in Glasgow in October for the Howmore Appeal. Her sponsorship raised £367! A fantastic effort. Thank you to Vanessa and all donors.

### Details of the work at Howmore

The main thrust during 2014 was to keep up a steady flow of work whilst leaving the hostel fully operational for hostellers.

Prior to the launch of the appeal we had already re-constructed and re-rethatched the roof of the old hostel building and installed high grade insulation and modern heating. The porch in the building was completely remodelled to include a new toilet /washroom and shower/washroom. The floor was tiled and the building has been given a new door.

The new shower and toilet in the old hostel building look splendid and have greatly increased the comfort and amenity of the shared sleeping accommodation.



Campers arriving at Howmore 15th  
August 2014

Work was started on the common room building. The new kitchen was constructed and largely fitted out but some work was carried over into the new year. The kitchen was, however, left perfectly safe and serviceable. The bigger kitchen has two cookers and a much larger work space which should make it easier for several hostellers to use the kitchen at once. Two stainless steel shelves were fitted on the central wall kitchen equipment. The work was completed in 2015 in time for the Easter Holidays.

A new washroom/ toilet was completed during the year. This has a shared central stud wall with new shower room which is covered with 12mm moisture proof plaster board. It contains a wash hand basin with hot and cold water, mirror and shaver light fitted on this central wall. (Hot water supplied from in line water heater in kitchen.) Two other walls have been cleared back to original stone work for a natural effect. A new toilet was installed and the floor of the washroom and toilet were newly tiled.

Outside a new hard standing for waste bins was created to improve the hostel environs, protect the bins from the wind and give an uninterrupted view from the hostel to the ruined church. A permanent washing line was created using two galvanised posts. The outbuilding was cleared and organised. This is kept locked because it is being used as temporary storage for materials and tools.

Disappointingly the shower area in the annex was found to be badly stained. This was caused by the failure of hostellers to clean the shower after use. Hostellers are respectfully reminded that our hostels are not 'duty free'. Please use the cleaning materials provided to clean the shower after use.

## **Howmore Appeal**

The Howmore Appeal was closed in March 2016. The full £47,000 was raised. Many, many thanks to everyone who contributed.



## Rhenigidale

The roof of the hostel was, at long last, fixed by locally based contractors. We hope this will solve the recurrent damp problem in the hostel kitchen. However, the rendering on the building needs attention. At the turn of the year we were close to finding someone locally who might be able to help.

Tim Langley, Kate's husband, repaired the front guttering damaged in the 2013 winter storms.

A new electric cooker and fridge were fitted in kitchen. Also the kitchen fluorescent light was replaced.

The plinth on which the stove sits in the common room was repaired. It appears to have been damaged by a hosteller chopping wood. We appeal to hostellers to chop wood outside the hostel.

The whole shower room was deep cleaned and refreshed.

In November outside sensor lights were fitted to improve illumination on the steps from the road. One light is angled down from the top. The other is fitted on a newly erected post to illuminate from the bottom.

Improvements were also made to the outhouse toilet/washroom.



Rhenigidale in 2002, picture by John Sharkey

## Volunteers

The Trustees are very grateful to the many volunteers who give their time to help with the administration and operation of the charity and/or the maintenance of the properties. All Trustees are volunteers who offer their time, talents and skills to the organisation freely. There is plenty to do, so if you would like to help, please get in touch.

The volunteer effort is a vital ingredient in maintaining the unique atmosphere (the 'Gatliff difference') at our hostels. It keeps our overheads and overnight charges down. We are looking for volunteers with drive, time and skills to take ownership of specific projects.

The volunteering opportunities we offer do not only entail physical labour at the hostels. There is plenty to do behind the scenes which can be done from member's own homes.

All you need is a knowledge of & commitment to the hostels. Whilst it is essential for volunteers to work on their own initiative, it is equally essential that they work within the agreed priorities, policies and budgets set by the Trust. The Trust cannot ask volunteers to carry out electrical, plumbing or gas work at the hostels. These tasks have to be carried out by tradesmen with professional accreditation.

Examples of tasks which volunteers could carry out: making sure posters are up on local notice boards, or in their school, college or workplace; maintaining address lists; running a fund raising appeal; stuffing envelopes; scanning historical material; improving the displays at hostels giving information about local walks, historical sites or scenic views.



These unique hostels with their memorable locations, good facilities and free and easy atmosphere are worth supporting.

Please consider donating to the Trust by annual standing order; join the Trust; get involved, join a work party or take on a task on behalf of the Trust.

## **What is required of Trustees?**

All the Trustees are volunteers. They receive basic travel expenses & receive reimbursement of their hostel overnights, if on Trust business. As we employ no paid staff all the decisions taken by the Trust have to be carried out by the Trustees.

We need new trustees to maintain the continuity of our operations, to run projects at the hostels and seek new opportunities. Full details of the operation of the hostels are provided to Trustees.

Trustees have to visit the islands and stay at the hostels as they are the ultimate guarantors of the quality of hosteller's experiences at the hostels. They must also attend meetings and play an active role in the work of the Trust. This can be time consuming but it is a hugely enjoyable. It is a privilege to be involved with the hostels and to have the opportunity to continue the work of the Trust. It is always a pleasure to meet hostellers and to read, with pride, the many appreciative messages left in the hostel house books.

New Trustees are supported by the existing Trustees to fully understand their role and responsibilities. Being a Trustee is a rewarding experience and can be useful in one's career. Many companies applaud staff who are involved in charitable work, especially with organisations such as the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust which encourages self reliance, initiative and a sense of adventure in young people.

If you think you can help us at Trust level, it is always possible to come along to a meeting, to have a taste of the 'behind the scenes' work the Trustees carry out.

The essence of all we do is to keep things simple. We have two meetings a year and use telephone conference calls if the need arises.

Both Rhenigidale and Howmore have been open for over 50 years. If you love the Gatliff hostels and want to see them continue for another 50 years why not think about becoming a Trustee.

# Simple Hostels in the Outer Hebrides

## Run by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust



**Reinigeadal (Rhenigidale) Isle of Harris** 12 beds  
OS sheet no 14 NB 229018

A croft house in a remote village in a secluded bay at the foot of Loch Seaforth. Views over the Minch to Skye and NW Scotland

**Bearnaraigh (Berneray) Isle of North Uist** 20 beds  
OS sheet no 18 NF 932814

Two thatched cottages on Berneray's eastern beach. Wide views of the Sound of Harris & the hills of South Harris

**Tobha Mor (Howmore) Isle of South Uist** 16 beds  
OS sheet no 24 NF 757365

A thatched house amidst ruins of a 13th century church site between bog & machair. Views over South Uist's three highest peaks. (Plus a separate kitchen/common room building & cycle shed.)



## **Jo Burgess, Editor of the Crofters' Newsletter**

I first came into contact with the Trust when I led the 1985 Schools Hebridean Society (SHS) expedition to Rhenigidale. At the end of the three week camp, bad weather meant that the boat coming to collect us and all our camping gear could not land. In the days before the road there was no option but to wait for the weather to improve. Roddy MacInnes, the warden (and owner of

the building) kindly let us stay in the hostel whilst we waited.

In 1989 I was one of the directors who had to take the difficult decision to close down the SHS (which had been operating for 25 years). When we were deciding how to distribute the financial assets, I asked that a contribution was made to the appeal to improve Rhenigidale. This is commemorated on the plaque in the hostel.

I paid visits to the village over the following years and kept in contact with Kenny MacKay and his wife Moira. In 2002 my husband and I stayed in the old schoolhouse at the time when the Trust was celebrating the 40th anniversary of the hostel and I went on the walk along the postman's path with other Trust members.

I joined the Trust to support its work.

When the GHHT asked if I would become a Director and suffer the hardship of travelling to the islands for a meeting once a year, I jumped at the chance! Although I stood down as a Director some years ago\* I have continued doing the Crofters Newsletter because I find it very enjoyable going through the log books and celebrating the joy and pleasure the hostels bring.

My joy and pleasure when visiting the islands over the years has been heightened by my long standing relationship with the music of Runrig. I have been a fan since 1981 and like to take every opportunity to share my passion with others – hence the lyrics in the front of the logbooks. One day I hope to find that a young person who was with me in 1985 has gone back to the Hostel and written in the log book.

\*Jo served as a Director from February 2003 until May 2008.