

Crofters' Newsletter

2016

Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels in the Outer Hebrides

www.gatliff.org.uk





Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels 2016

This newsletter is for all who stayed at one of the Crofters' Hostels in 2015 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

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

Hostel Results for 2015

Overnights	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Berneray	2147	2752	2562	2698	2039	1864	2146	2120
Garenin	948	1598	1573					
Howmore	1595	2022	1765	1760	1260	1076	1264	1236
Rhenigidale	919	960	983	994	732	864	885	898
TOTAL	5609	7332	6883	5452	4031	3804	4295	4254

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:

I didn't get to Scotland in 2015, partly because I was looking forward to a long-awaited trip to New Zealand and Australia in March/April 2016. My holiday was amazing, the Scottish highlights being a trip to the Scottish shop and the Otago Settlers museum in Dunedin, my stay at Lanarch Castle, meeting other fans of Outlander and Runrig in various locations, meeting a chap on Doubtful Sound from Edinburgh who had his first climbing experience on Dartmoor, spending time with my friend Julie whose family went to Australia from the Isle of Coll in 1852, a visit with her to the memorial in Portland and a visit with my cousin to the Immigration museum in Melbourne. Neither

were there any Runrig gigs in 2015; but with the release of 'The Story' early in 2016 and gigs in Birmingham and Bristol before I went off on my holiday and the 21st Hebridean Celtic Festival to look forward to on my return I had plenty of music to keep me going. I'll save memories of a fantastic week in the islands for my introduction to the 2017 Newsletter.

Rhenigidale

John Joyce was here in March having arrived in Leverburgh in a blizzard and had a hazardous drive to Rhenigidale. He enjoyed a magical walk along the path the bottom of the zig zags the next day.

Thomas arrived by ferry from Skye and had a restful night in "nice and uncomplicated accommodation". At the end of March Eddie from Kendal arrived in a Gale Force 9 wind. At the start of April Finty aged 13 ran over the postman's path to Tarbert ... and back. Katie from Staffordshire and others wrote that Kate was very welcoming and friendly.

Ros from Wales went on a Ranger leg Eagle Walk - there are Sea Eagles nesting at the bottom of Loch Seaforth. Less pleasant at the end of April was a blockage in the sewage system and as John from Kirkcudbright wrote - never put wet wipes or sanitary products down the toilet - the system cannot cope with them.

In May conditions were perfect for walking - Owen from Staffordshire saw deer, arctic



hares and Golden Eagles on and above Toddun. Jill was on a return trip and pleaded with hostellers to clean up after themselves.

Ramona from Berlin loved the simplicity of the place as did Ruth from London. Andrew walked the coastal path to Mollingeanis and got up Toddun disturbing a mountain hare on the way down and saw an otter on the shore.

Navy pals from Devon, London, the Lakes, Edinburgh and Hull were here in June as well as Halina and Tomek from Poland. A camper from Aberdeenshire/Brussels enjoyed a night and wrote "Moran taing a-huile ann an Rhenigeadal" before heading off to the hills of Harris. Debbie and Simon from Derbyshire enjoyed the scenery and a pair of eagles playing in the wind above the bay in August.

Visitors praised the facilities, the place and Kate throughout the Autumn but no one wrote in the book over Christmas or New Year.



Berneray

In February an unknown hosteller wrote the following – “Some regard the date Friday 13th as one not to look forward to but for me this turned out to be one to remember with immense pleasure! After a few days of typical stormy February weather, the late afternoon and evening saw an immense calm. At last Macleod’s Tables could be viewed clearly across the water from the hostel and the whole was bathed in warm pinks, purples and oranges as the sun sank into the west. I found myself on my own that day so the building and surrounds were exceptionally quiet. After a hard day’s painting starting very early as usual I was getting together my tea – just a simple one of fish, eggs and lentil dahl. After a good day I was enjoying the peace and stillness so pottered about the kitchen area, occasionally enjoying the bonus of a view after a week of mists and drizzle. So.... dahl heated up in the pan and eggs sizzling in the pan, just needed to collect a fork from the cutlery trays in the front of the window. Bottles were ranked several rows deep by the recycling bin, as the usual glass depository was overflowing from the remnants of a previous weekend, so I needed to lean forward quite sharply to select my implement.”

“My face therefore was quite close to the window pane, when an animal jumped up on to the sill and I found myself face to face with a sea otter – my first sighting of one and what a magnificent sight, every hair of its bristly shaggy coat lit up in the evening sun! Our noses must have been just inches apart and I don’t know which was the more startled, the otter or !!!!”

“Seconds later it had turned round and started trotting back down the beach and although I immediately grabbed my camera and dashed for the door I was not able to capture an image apart from a fuzzy black blob which I was only able to make out in a poor photograph because I knew where to look. Maybe a painting one day...?”



In March there was lots of whisky and according to lorek Birnisson from Svalbard he caught an otter and had it with chips – tasty!! Stuart didn't see an otter in April but later in April Rose saw one swim by and the Northern Lights.

Alison went away in May replenished, invigorated and inspired – she wrote “food for the soul” (that is always how I feel after time in the islands – Jo). Pam and Frank from Wales arrived to a feeding frenzy of Gannets and at 5.00am enjoyed a seal popping up to have a nosey at the hostel.

In June Andrew described a reunion of various people who had met that week at other hostels – a sharing of food and exploring and an Australian described it as a fabulous place and hostel.

Jemma and Bonnie the dog wrote :-

*Some sun today
Across the Harris bay
All the world is okay
As we say
Thankyou Berneray
All loved our stay*

The Navy lot (who also visited Rhenigidale) enjoyed excellent whisky, otters, seals, birds and a fantastic sea swim on the west beach.

In July Darren from Canada cycled here from Vatersay and in August Elizabeth and Philip from Cumbria were back enjoying the company of a mix of nationalities and some lovely music.

In September Colin from Inverness arrived having had a night and morning of midgy hell camping Loch Skipport and lamented what appears to be a longer season for “these beasties” – wondering whether global warming had anything to do with it.

In October John from Essex wrote that it was a lovely and special place which somehow gets into your bones and your soul.

JP Massingham here in December quoted Gavin Maxwell – “whatever joy nature gives to you, give back to nature.” In December visitors praised the refurbishments and in January Barra from USA enjoyed the views but found the hostel very different to descriptions by her parents when they came 20 years ago.



Howmore

Mike wrote “what a makeover, thought I had gone into an Edinburgh Hostel by mistake”. In March Jonas the German cyclist was on a mega trip in 110 mph winds. Not quite as energetic were Pat and Loki in their Bongo but nonetheless “my night here was bliss with a shower and fire”. Later in March Jo and Finty were here riding out the storm.

Finty (aged 13) wrote –

*Through the wind, rain and hail
Through all the bad weather that did prevail
Us cyclists are tough
But we'd had enough
Yet we persevered, our determined souls
To reach our landmark goals
Slowly yet surely we trundled along
We were at Howmore before very long
So now here I am in the hostel grounds
The furious winds are the only sounds
So now we sit eating porridge at Howmore
As the wind comes rattling through the door
I do wish the wind would stop
And then we can do our island hop!*



More cyclists passed through heading north in April in sun, snow, hail, rain in quick succession including Danielle and Tom from Glasgow. Jenny from Australia enjoyed a three day stay and like others made new friends while at the hostel.

Jane and Martin were back in April and enjoyed a banjo ceilidh. Pam and Frank from Wales set off early in sunshine for Hecla after a very starry night in May. Elaine found it very cosy after 3 very cold nights in her tent and experienced one or two problems with smoke being blown down the chimney in the strong wind. Kate left a lovely drawing and dreamed of a hot tub!! Frank from Germany wrote in German (my failed O level is a long time ago but I do remember “Danke” - Jo).

In June the hostel was busy when the Glasgow Garden Walks (mature group!!) descended and enjoyed scintillating cross-country conversation. Ingrid from Belgium was part of that conversation and wrote that following the advice from Brian of the group, she would be singing to the seals!

Four guys from the Rough Stuff Fellowship were here for refreshment – (my Dad would be pleased as he used to be part of that group – Jo).

Sarah and Dan were back from Llanfarfechan enjoying some kayaking and wild camping and heard the corncrakes and drumming snipe. They were thanked by Margaret who they gave some food but she was most pleased to finally see an otter.

Noel was here after 50 years with memories of Mrs Catherine McSween (Betty's mother) and after so many years was reassured to still find this refuge – one of the finest spots on earth. Charlotte and Hugh also took refuge from the 'summer weather' and enjoyed cake provided by Betty.

In July Laura and Matt were heading north on their tandem – very pleased to be here and very impressed with the renovations since their last visit. Archie (4) and Tansy were also cycling and Archie loved it.

Into August the weather hadn't improved much and Tania and Ollie heading south enjoyed the conversation and walks on the beach and felt cosy as it rained and blew outside. Mick was heading south after the Heb Celt and shared laughs and good times



with fellow travellers and having stayed an extra night got up Bheinn Mhor where it was very windy but with good views.

Elizabeth and Philip were here again at the end of August and praised all the work carried out and met folk from a range of countries. Liam and Dan from Glasgow praised the warm and friendly hostel with great facilities in beautiful surroundings and the kindness and warmth of strangers and Betty's wardenship.

Joyce and Bill enjoyed Rachel's birthday prosecco and Brian and Johanna found the place clean and well cared for.

John the Barman left a poem –

*From this shelter in the storm
You will find your own path
Untrodden but waiting
Into the hills,
Where paths
Are overgrown with poems
And you will be lost
Among strange wild plants
And hear songs.*



He enjoyed the Bettina Selby (which it transpired had been left by Francis Passey who was here in November on a work party doing much needed work).



The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in 2015

Trustees

Peter Clarke (Chairman)
Matthew Bruce (retired 17th February 2015)
Stuart Colley (appointed 24th October 2015)
John Humphries (Editor Hebridean Hostellers)
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.)

A Year of Consolidation

2015 was a year of consolidation, with hostel numbers steady and the Howmore Appeal moving towards its target. This allowed work to continue at Howmore while the make-over of the Berneray Common Room greatly improved facilities available to hostellers. The replacement of all the beds and bedding during the year also delivered better comfort to hostellers, although one or two have said that they liked the old beds better! Rhenigidale was not forgotten, although we have found it harder to get contractors to do work at the hostel. However, a new local resident in the village has promised to give help when his own work permits.

On the administrative side we made steady progress towards drawing up the first draft of a five year rolling business plan. This was an engaging experience since it brought a review of aspects of our operation. As part of this process Trustees made a tour of the hostels in September. This was a new venture for us but was so successful that it will be repeated. Trustees were able to meet wardens formally and informally, talk to hostellers and experience all of the hostels, including the new beds.

More cyclists continued to be in evidence at the hostels, thanks to the publicity being generated by the new Hebridean Way cycle route. I was pleased to hear from cyclists that as long as they avoid the morning and evening 'rush hours' when islanders make their way to and from work, they found cycling conditions good. We encourage all cyclists to use our hostels and, as one of our medium term objectives, we plan to improve facilities for cyclists. The Hebridean islands need to be savoured rather than rushed so we hope cyclists, and indeed all our hostellers, will linger a while.

Berneray

In the autumn the Common Room was given a make-over and a new floor was installed. The kitchen now has a new 11-hob gas cooker and stainless steel surfaces similar to that installed at Howmore. We improved road signage to the hostel to help people find the hostel especially if they arrive late.

Howmore

The kitchen area at Howmore was totally upgraded and other improvements made.

In the Spring the outside of the thatched building was bleached and one coat of paint applied to the kitchen but still other bits needed doing. Since the weather was good, painting took priority. There were still snagging to be sorted in the common room and kitchen. A breakfast bar was now in place. The crockery was now on stainless steel shelves and all was more hygienic and very practical.

We closed the Howmore Appeal

We were able to close the Howmore Appeal early in 2016 because it had reached its target. By the end of 2015 the appeal had attracted £42,008.30 and we had spent £33,706.11. Going into 2016 this left an unspent balance in the Howmore Fund of £8,792.96.

The corrugated roof of the common room block began to show its age, springing a number of leaks. It was decided to replace it with a new, lighter, material. We also needed to replace the five roof lights with new units. Because this work was urgent we did not have time to refresh the appeal we met the shortfall from the Trust's general fund. We are grateful to Andy Clark, of Sheffield, who donated £1000 to the Howmore Appeal in the spring of 2016 in memory of his late father, Ronald.

The Trust thank all its members, donors and supporters for their generosity.

Rhenigidale

The skews installed in 2014 improved conditions in the kitchen. A local resident, new to the village, was helping Kate with odd jobs. He also given us some fence posts to keep our footpath secure.

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 all entail doing 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; joining the Trust; getting involved, joining a work party or taking 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.

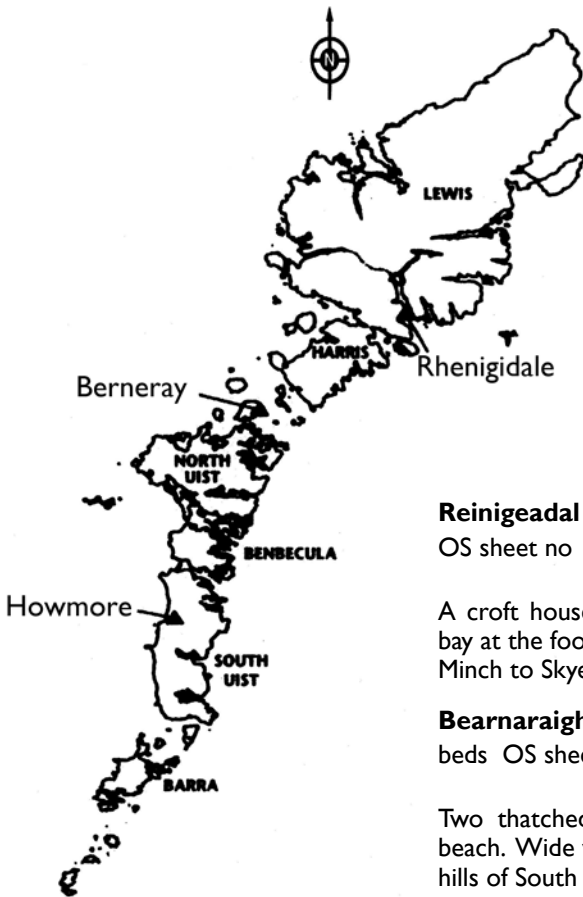
If you think you can help us at Trust level, it is always possible to come along to a meeting, to have a taste of the 'behind the scenes' work the Trustees carry out.

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.)



A good day for big thoughts?
A view over Benbecula & SouthUist



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.