

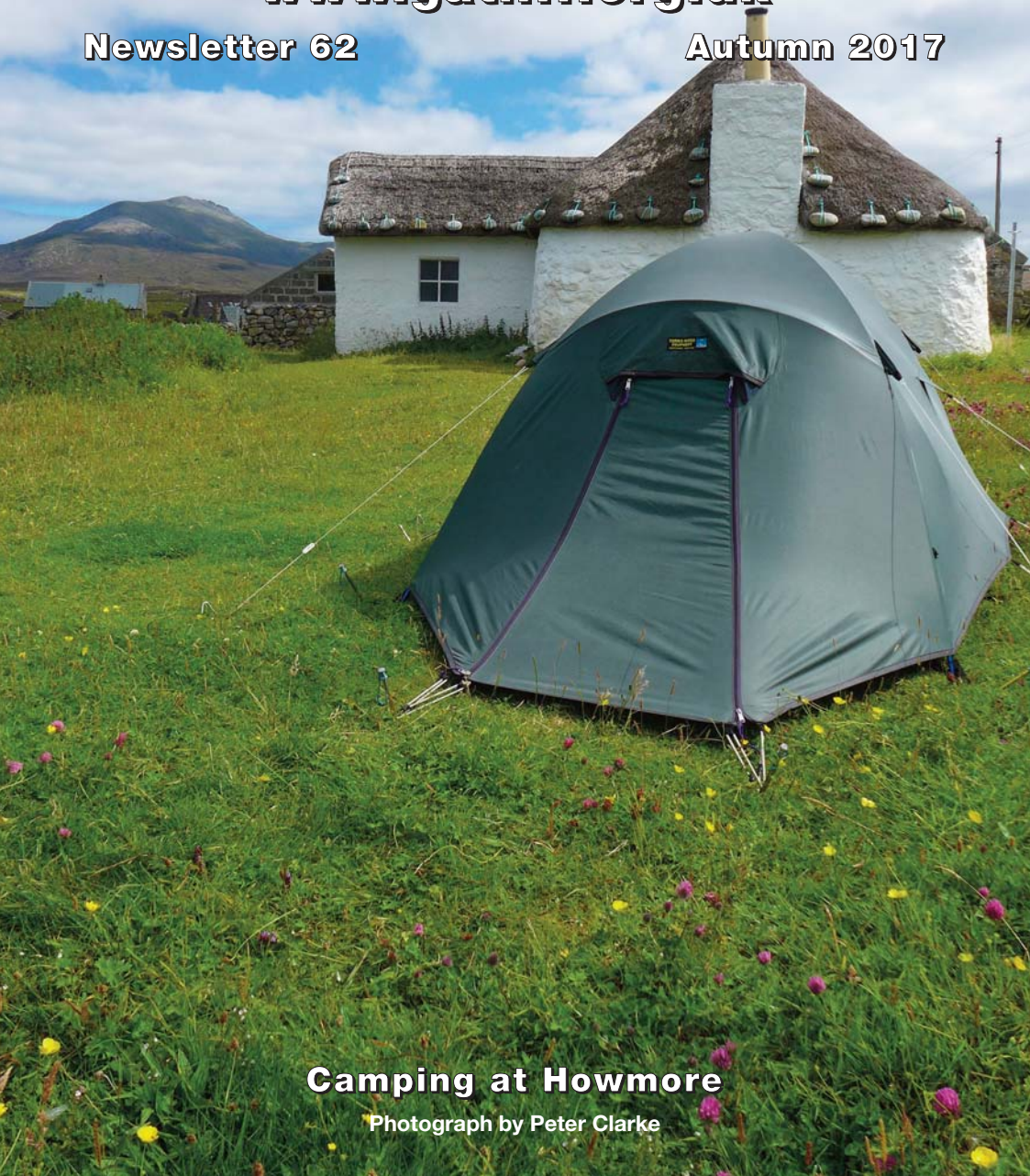
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 62

Autumn 2017



Camping at Howmore

Photograph by Peter Clarke

From the Chairman

Peter Clarke, Chairman, writes - 'AGM: We had a very successful Annual General Meeting in Glasgow. Thank you to all who attended. Zoë Herbert gave an inspirational talk on her research on Thatched Buildings in Scotland. We are grateful to her for allowing us to publish her presentation on our web site. This was our first AGM in Glasgow for some time, but we received such a warm welcome and a large attendance that we will be back!

Thatched Buildings in the Western Isles: Historic Environment Scotland is following up Zoë's report work. An event will be held in Uist in early October to promote its thatched buildings project in the Western Isles. People are encouraged to attend and 'Tell us stories about thatched buildings, the people that lived in them and their history. Bring in your photos'. Which thatched cottage was used in their promotional poster? - Berneray Youth Hostel.

Howmore as a destination for pilgrims? During the summer I was asked to meet representatives of Howmore Church to discuss their plans. They have applied for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to make the church accessible to more people. In particular they want to explore the religion, history and archaeology of Howmore with a view to turning the area into a place of pilgrimage. Of course pilgrims need shelter and hospitality, which the hostel is able to provide.

To the east of the hostel are the ruins of one or more ancient churches and monks' cells. They may date back to the 13th Century or earlier. Their history and archaeology have never been fully explored. The contemporary Church of Scotland kirk is of architectural and spiritual interest as one of only three churches in Scotland with a central communion table.

I am sure that there is plenty for amateur and professional archaeologists and historians to explore in Howmore, together with plenty of opportunity for pilgrims, religious and non-religious, to find solace and inspiration there. It just needs time. Go further. Visit us again. Stay longer. Surprise yourself by finding out what a week's Hebridean solitude and Gatliff Hostel hospitality can do for the soul!



Play at the end of a pilgrimage route? Photograph of Howmore by Peter Clarke.

Around the Hostels

The elements make quite an impact on our hostels. The roof stones and rope ties on Berneray are in good condition, but the thatch continues to deteriorate. Hostellers need to keep clean and so there is both pressure and continual use on the water-heaters which have required replacing at both Berneray and Howmore. It is not straightforward acquiring and fitting the right equipment when in remote areas.

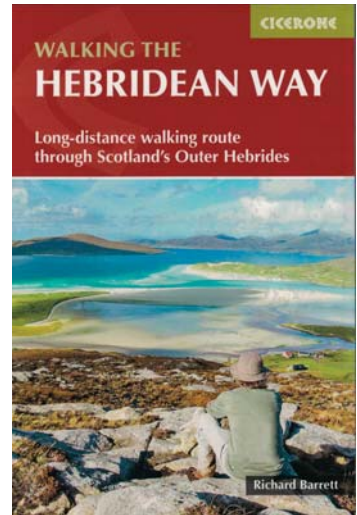
The alignment of the windows at Rhenigidale means that the view from the kitchen of the road meandering in from 'rest of the world' is rather splendid. The layout of furniture has been changed with the purchase and construction of Ikea items - two Danhult tables and six Jokkmokk chairs. There is now more table space and increased seating.

John Joyce, our Project Manager, and his team are keen to complete the provision for storing cycles at Rhenigidale. The Hebridean Way is some 185 miles long and the detour to the hostel is relatively short, though steep. There has been an increase in the number of cyclists and the GHHT looks forward to catering for more of their needs.

Richard Barrett and Cicerone

Richard Barrett, now based in Chester, lived on the road to Maaruig just below the Rhenigidale junction. He has been instrumental in encouraging many people to visit the islands with his books published by Cicerone, *Cycling in the Hebrides*, *Walking on Harris and Lewis* and, most recently, *Walking The Hebridean Way*. Come to meet him at the Gatliff Trust event referred to on the back cover.

If you cannot be there, why not enter a competition to win one of three copies of *Walking The Hebridean Way*? In 50 words - to be emailed by Saturday 21 October to editor@gatliff.org.uk - indicate which ten-mile stretch of the Way appeals to you most and why. Please give your name and address so that, if you are a winner, you will have a book directly delivered.



Day of Glory

A Day of Glory Given - a Winter Day's Walk from Rhenigidale is one chapter in the recently published book by Hamish Brown, *Walking the Song*. Its publisher, Sandstone Press, has given permission for the section to appear on the GHHT website. Take advantage and go to www.gatliff.org.uk using the dropdown menus to access it under 'Rhenigidale' and then 'Walks from Rhenigidale'.

Hooked on the Hebrides

Stuart Colley, GHHT Treasurer, writes: ‘My first experience of the Hebrides came while I was at University. Every Easter, the Mountaineering Club would run a week-long trip to Skye. We would pay the bridge toll with as many 1p and 2p coins as we could muster, and were legal tender, as a protest. The Glen Brittle Memorial Hut was our destination and base.

Although I have visited the Alps and Sierra Nevada, the Cuillins still remain my favourite range with its peaks, hidden lochs and vistas to both the Mainland and Outer Hebrides. Ten years later, having just returned from a two-year stint with the British Antarctic Survey, I was back, but this time on a cycling tour and the ferry from Uig in Skye to Tarbert in Harris.

The SYHA map included the affiliated hostels and so Rhenigidale, Berneray and Howmore were experienced. One reached by taking in sea-level to hill-heights; then the circuitous route of the Sound of Harris ferry that threads its way from Leverburgh; followed by the low-lying parts of the Uists across causeways, lochans and islets with always something to catch the eye and provide an excuse to stop.

Each Gatliff hostel has its own character and I am attracted to them, partly because they are small in size, such as the Elenydd Wilderness hostels in mid-Wales. Among other features, they draw people together, encouraging conversation and meal-sharing. The Hebridean hostels often capture the mystery and anticipation of sunsets and sunrises. The wind brings the scent of salt and seaweed.

I have returned many times, always cycling south to north and managing to find new side roads to explore, and have come to appreciate the Gatliff Hostels and their philosophy. Volunteering on some of the work-parties led, ultimately, to my becoming a trustee and treasurer. It’s pleasing to give something back, hopefully to look after the hostels for the next generation as well as to be hooked on the Hebrides.’



Stuart Colley did not visit Scarp on his first visit to the Hebrides, but Colin Stuart did. Here is his photograph of the former hostel there and part of his account is on Page 5. It’s quite a coincidence that two people, noted in the same context, have almost comparable ‘reversible names’.

The Need to Record

The passage of time is relentless, but we can certainly make temporary 'stoppages' by recalling and recording. This gives future generations insights into how life and organisations evolve. In the September 2010 edition of *Hebridean Hostellers*, some memories of Colin Stuart were featured and an era of venturing in the Outer Hebrides was brought to life.

His trip was in June / July 1968 - almost 50 years ago - and it took in a visit to Scarp where Herbert Gatliff, assisted by Frank Martin, had set up a hostel in June 1965. It was primitive, more like a bothy, and yet its ruin is still visible and occasional accounts of staying there survive. This is what Colin had to say in an extract that has not appeared previously.

'Waiting at the landing (at Huisinis) was Francis Mordaunt, who had spent an uncomfortable, gale-swept night in a wooden quayside hut rather than pay £5. We crossed together (by an unscheduled crossing) and found the extra-ordinary Gatliff hostel on the Isle of Scarp. It was one of three or four really primitive turf-roofed houses, some of them maybe actual 'black houses', though the hostel itself did have a chimney.

The interior was astonishing: low, rough, dark and almost windowless, dimly lit by lamps; it was like stepping back into an almost medieval life-style. How wonderful to have had the experience before it was gone for good! The island's only inhabitants by this time were the family of the postman/ferryman, who kept the virtually disused post office and almost empty shop, and one single old lady.

I bought a stamp and posted a card (for the postmark) and as change received several ancient, mildewed pennies that had not seen the light for months or years! The postman said he was in the process of building a new house on the mainland, along the Tarbert road, and as soon as it was finished he and all other inhabitants would be off and the island abandoned.'

Abandoned it was - in 1971 - and, although there remain house-owners on Scarp, their use of the properties does not cover the winter months. These are essentially holiday-homes. They act, however, as a reminder of a settlement which once flourished and about which books are published. What is needed are further insights into the hostel here - for within 25 years, in 2042, a span of time will be over.

Say an 18-year-old had stayed in the Scarp hostel in 1970, that person would have been born in 1952 and needs to commit memories to paper or computer before reaching the age of 90! So if you can look back on experiences at any of the Gatliff hostels, do write about them and send them in - for social historians need to have direct access to material that is relevant and authentic.



Photograph of the hostel from a different angle by Colin Stuart.

John and Jean Corlett

The deaths have occurred of two committed hostellers and long-standing members of the GHHT. John Corlett died on 21st April 2015, aged 95, and his widow, Jean, on 6th November 2015, aged 90. They were, in their final years, residents in an Isle of Man nursing home, having moved to Ramsey in 1991.

John was a marine biologist who worked at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and then took up an appointment with the Water Resources Board. In that capacity he carried out studies of the ecological impacts of such projects as the Wash Barrier and the Morecombe Bay Barrier.

Jean Campbell McCormick trained as an Agricultural Scientist and worked as a biologist at the Freshwater Biological Association site on Lake Windermere. She settled in the Lake District where she met John and they married in December 1970. She was a member of the Lake District Planning Board and for a time was Chairman of the Lakeland Region of YHA.



This husband and wife team undertook inspections of youth hostels around the country, enjoyed holidaying in the Outer Hebrides and, while pursuing an active life on the Isle of Man, were members of the Manx Wildlife Trust. The GHHT received a bequest from them of £27,636.12, announced at the AGM where gratitude was expressed for their commitment to hostelling causes and the generosity of their gift.

Dynamic Coast

Julian Paren, the GHHT Secretary, is currently researching coastline change in the Outer Hebrides, in general, and on Berneray, in particular. The digitisation of maps for a Scottish Government funded project, Dynamic Coast, has created an enormous dataset that is both user-friendly and publicly-accessible. Targeted aerial photography of current coastlines is linked to evidence from maps of the sensitivity of seaside locations to strong, shaping natural forces.

ScotWays

Last year saw the retirement of Philip Lawson, the former Treasurer and a continuing Trustee of the GHHT, as Vice-President of ScotWays, the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society. He had been a Director since 1979 and V-P since 2010, providing the organisation with astute field-knowledge gleaned from his commitment to the countryside movement, the SYHA of which he was Chairman for over 20 years as well as his full interest in the legacies of Herbert Gatliff.

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

'It is always reassuring to see the **Berneray YH** sign on the W17 which goes to and from Eriskay, passing the junction for the Howmore Hostel.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Here's the bus nearing Berneray*]



and of Ten Years Ago ...

'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.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*They fell back to 6286 – so no records created*]

and Fifteen ...

'An occasional problem was raised [at a discussion at the Holland Park Youth Hostel] involving relatively large numbers who turn up as a party. A mini-bus delivering a group of hostellers who already know one another can undermine the spirit of friendship that should be forged by individuals. Someone suggested that elements of the **Garenin** set-up resemble a miniature Disneyland' (Editor: John Humphries) [*No longer our problem at Garenin*]

and Twenty ...

'The £7 million **Scalpay Bridge** linking the island to Harris mainland will be opened to the public on 9th December, although the official opening takes place in February. It is hoped that 102-year-old Mrs Morrison of Scalpay will travel in a vintage car on the last ferry and then return over the 300-metre bridge at the head of a convoy of vehicles. (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*The Scalpay shop closed last month*]

Twenty-five ...

'The turnout for this year's AGM was quite small, but it was good to meet members from Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Borders. **John Stewart** attended bringing with him T-shirts in navy and red as well as the dark green we first saw at the Garenin opening.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*A T-shirt uniform and colour for each hostel?*]

... and Thirty

'Jon Cross wrote: Though it took me three hours to walk to Rhenigidale, (too heavy a pack, 45lbs) I would say this village, for village it surely is, must be regarded as a reminder to us all not to lose hope. I learned today that **Roddy MacInnes** died. I can only say with gratitude and respect, thank you, for it is the generosity of people as you must have been, that enables those of us from the hustle and bustle, a little peace and solitude.' (Editor: Francesca Fraser Darling) [*A fitting tribute*]

Rhenigidale – North Harris

Berneray – North Uist

Howmore – South Uist



Levels of Involvement

Some people just come and go, without even staying overnight. Others stay for one night, while a significant number change their plans and linger. Such is the appeal of the Gatliff hostels that are known to lead to itinerary amendments. Then there are those hostellers who talk to others about their experiences and start word-of-mouth, conversational links. A minority, and a precious group, put hands in pockets and donate, perhaps as one-off gifts or maybe as part of membership arrangements. The urge to go a little further catches up with those who volunteer for work-parties. If interested, do check out the details of the Project Manager to be found below. Some individuals have time for minutes and meetings and there are often vacancies on the executives committees of the Gatliff Trust and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. So consider your personal level of involvement. As the present-giving season draws near, think about gifting a year's membership to a family member and friend. The Membership Secretary would much appreciate hearing from you.

Go to Town and Find the Way

There is something about a trip to London in November. The shops are preparing for the festive season, the bright lights penetrate and lift both mists and fog, while there is a certain excitement in the air. The Gatliff Trust will be holding a meeting from 11.00 on Saturday 4th November at YHA London which is to be found at 36 Carter Lane EC4V 5AB, with coffee to be served from 10.30. The speaker will be Richard Barrett, author and North Harris resident, and aspects of his work are featured on Page 3 of this edition. There is something special about going to town and coming back, knowing much more about the Hebridean Way. There will be fireworks evident that weekend and the atmosphere of the Gatliff Trust's meeting room, at what was the Choir School of St Paul's Cathedral, will be lively and informative.