

# *Crofters' Newsletter*

## *2017*

*Annual Review of the Crofters' Hostels*  
*in the*  
*Outer Hebrides*

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





## Annual Review of the Crofters' Hostels 2017

This Review of the Hostels 2017, incorporating the Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels is for all who stayed at them in 2016 and all who support the them. The Review takes a look back at the work of the Trust during 2016.

This Newsletter is compiled by Jo Burgess from entries which hostellers made in the log books found at the hostels. It presents a look at how hostellers enjoyed the hostels during 2016. This publication 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 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 2016

<b>Overnights</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Berneray	2698	2039	1864	2146	2120	2438
Howmore	1760	1260	1076	1264	1236	1287
Rhenigidale	994	732	864	885	898	955
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5452</b>	<b>4031</b>	<b>3804</b>	<b>4295</b>	<b>4254</b>	<b>4680</b>

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust's mission is to encourage all, but especially younger people of limited means, to visit the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, to stay a while and to explore the area. We fulfil our mission by providing sound basis self-catering hostels. Hostellers may also camp within the grounds of our hostels. We provide no pitches for camper vans.

## **A look back on 2016**

Jo Burgess writes: for the first time in several years I made it to the islands. Runrig were headlining at the Heb-Celt in July so how could I not be there? Arriving on Lewis the first thing that always hits me is the smell of peat smoke – there is nothing like sitting in front of a peat-fired stove with a dram. Matt Bruce and I headed down to Rhenigidale to catch up with Kenny and Moira before going for a short walk along the path to the bottom of the zigzags, where I admired the incisions in the rocks made by passing glaciers and enjoyed the diving gannets. The hostel was looking fantastic and I wrote in the hostel log book ‘Heb-Celt here I come’.

There was so much music - the Hayseed Dixies were a riot, Fara were fantastic, Miss Irene Rose stunning and it was an honour to get a mention from and then meet Julie Fowlis. I enjoyed Skippinish and Runrig with an old school friend of Bruce Guthros from Nova Scotia and the twins from Ballallan. Runrig were truly fantastic – Hearts of Olden Glory, Every River and Alba and my favourite from the new album – The Place where the Rivers Run, were highlights. Matt and I headed west on the Pentland Road to take in Callanish, Dalmor (before the oil rig got blown onto it), Shawbost Norse Mill and various other places of interest. Before I left, Matt kindly let me take a small block of peat from his stack for me to give to Mum at Christmas! It was dreich as I was leaving - reflecting my mood, but some shopping in Inverness soon put things right.

### **Rhenigidale**

Frances Passey and John Joyce were here doing much needed work in March when they enjoyed sunshine and clear starry nights.

All those who stayed and wrote in the book in March and April praised the hostel and the warden. A Harley rider in May said it was the best-equipped kitchen he'd ever seen. At the end of May the cuckoo was heard.

Till Kopper, from Germany, was back enjoying this place of tranquillity and meeting people in the evening in the living room. Judith and John were inspired by Peter Clarke's description of the walk in his book *The Timeless Way* and were not disappointed. They wrote ‘hope we can make it back up the zigzags!’

It was raining for a walker from the USA at the end of June. In July, John praised the location and the condition of the hostel saying that he would remember his stay for many years – ‘the only problem being pushing my bike out of here and into the sometimes cruel world that lies beyond.’

In July there was a royal visit from the Queen of Dry Island who enjoyed chocolate Baily's by the fire and Prince Finlay (aged 1)! [I wrote in the book on 14 July. Jo]



**A cyclist bids farewell to Rhenigidale**

Linda from Aberfeldy was grateful for shelter from the rain and rest after cycling and camping around Lewis and Harris. Sam from Fife found it a lovely place to relax. Dutch visitors were happy to stay here and Ella from Australia had the place to herself and thought the fire place amazing because they are no longer allowed fireplaces at home. Paul wrote that it was a wonderful place.

A visitor in an Alfa Romeo had stayed in all the 'wonderful' hostels and hoped to be back one day. In August a cyclist was stuck here for two

days due to a storm. Marlowe scrambled up Toddun and was rewarded with a close encounter with a golden eagle at the top. Later in August Brian had the place to himself for five days. Tim Porter, who described himself as an ex-Gatliff protégé, wrote that 'Herbert would be so proud of how you keep on broadening his vision'. At the end of August it was very wet for Cathy who was mountain biking.

September was busy. A hosteller arrived in glorious sunshine, spent the next day covering by the fire and reading as it was a typical wet and blustery Hebridean day. Later in the month Sian and Carl wrote so long and thanks for all the midges, and fun, and weather, and brilliant people – not to mention the sea eagle, golden eagles and a small sea otter. For Frances and Neil from Perth in Canada, the walk on the postman's path was windy so no midges, but wet. They wrote that it was nice to come in to a warm fire and a hot cup of tea. Irene and Deon from Cape Town had a flat tyre, got blown off their bikes and arrived wet and cold but were happy to find a cosy and warm place to stay the night. David from Canberra in Australia on his second visit saw all the waterfalls and creeks along the Postman's path in full flow. He walked to the ruined village (Molinginish) coming back along the loch-side track and found it boggier than the other track. He enjoyed seeing a seal at the bottom of the zigzags. Vivien from Whitby found it a true haven from the gale force winds and rain. The following day was clear so she and her 14-year old dog negotiated the zigzags and met the postman (Kenny).



**The spectacular Postman's Path from Urgha to Rhenigidale (5.25km) with breathtaking views and one or two surprises**

Into October it was quiet but Cathy Holms was here ([cathyholms.co.uk](http://cathyholms.co.uk) for her blog) to celebrate her 50th birthday a year early by doing the Hebridean Way north to south on her mountain bike. She had enjoyed Gearranan Blackhouse village, Carloway Broch, Callanish and was glad to get here, sharing the hostel with a chap from Canada. Megan aged 7 was here too and had seen golden eagles and dolphins. At the end of October the Hamiltons enjoyed mild weather and blue skies and climbed Toddun. Someone – I think called Gill wrote :

*This silence of the stream on stone*

*This silence of the flesh and bone*

*This silence of my hand alone*

*This silence brings me running home.*

In November Andrew walked the path in hail but wrote that the island has a mysterious beauty. He found the hostel charming.

In December John had the place to himself and had a brilliant walk to Molinginish – seeing two red deer stags, seals and a golden eagle. The colours were fantastic, the hostel beautiful, warm and cosy and Kate, the warden, a breath of fresh air, warm and really ready to help.

R Callender from London had the place to him/herself around Christmas – rain and gales outside and the power went off so he had to cook lunch on the stove. Mid-winter felt more special than in the summer.

Daniela loved the place, books and discovering a friend's entry in the book and also got to Molinginish.

On New Years Eve the Stornoway Running Club were here for their annual Flett Run and enjoyed the warmth of the fire, food and shower after powering through the rain and dipping in the sea. The Shaws were also here for their usual New Year stay and met some lovely people and had a great time.

Brian and Rosie were here too and at 4:30am there was an amazing starry sky and on the northern horizon the sky glowed green but there were no curtains of light dancing across the heavens. They headed to the hills of South Harris on the 1st January and enjoyed the snow-capped peaks of North Harris and icy snow flurries. Double rainbows at Callanish and the cliffs of west Lewis followed on the next day. They left a message for John Joyce 'its a long time since we partied with you and Sam making for Gokyo!'

## **Berneray**

In January the hostel was found in pristine condition and in March Sue also thanked Jackie writing 'your hostel does you credit'. The sun shone and showed her the beautiful island.

In March John saw the Northern Lights and a Gyr Falcon. Frances and the work party were here too and enjoyed the Northern Lights too. Visitors from Buckie and Glasgow loved the hostel and had a comfortable stay. Richard also from Glasgow was very happy to see the hostel after a windy rain-soaked cycle from Barra.





In April hostellers were also sheltering from the storms. In May, John from the Netherlands made Eaval (North Uist's highest peak) after four years trying. Louis from New York stopped over and for Jake also from New York enjoyed his first time sleeping under a thatched roof. Alan Sidaway - a former member of the committee - praised the standard of the hostel, but was pleased that the character had not changed. He wrote that it is still a peaceful happy place.

In June the 'hairy wiveys' and Sharon described the hostel as their home from home. Like many others Mary hoped to be back. Visitors from Switzerland thought it beautiful. Joy found the hostel filled with fantastic friendly people. Steve from Dorset enjoyed invigorating swimming. David and Alice were back four years after their first visit and thought it still the most beautiful place in the world. Bob enjoyed seeing an otter and great crab in the tea room.

By July Jacqueline and John from near Glasgow arrived on the most glorious evening and also saw the otter. Dave from Edinburgh described it as a perfect pit stop after a long day in the saddle on his way from Barra. Tom was surprised to see in the 2015 Newsletter that a fellow villager from Fife (Philip Lawson) was Treasurer of 'this worthy cause'. Andrew and Kirsten from Clackmannanshire were on their ninth visit and wrote that it gets more magical on each visit with dolphins on the west beach, seals in the bay and a bonfire and BBQ during Berneray week. David was here for 14 days and met loads of lovely people.

In August Natalie and Ebie were on their first visit and enjoyed amazing views from their tent, seeing otters, seals, owls, lapwings and sandpipers. They had a musical night with other visitors on their last night. Jo from New Zealand enjoyed resting her weary legs after riding from Barra. Joseph aged 9 found a really cool rock with a seaweed tail and patterns. Warren, Jill and their four hypothermic kids arrived to a lovely welcome and had a fantastic time. Scott from Glasgow stayed an extra night because he loved it so much. Tim Porter from Moreton-in-Marsh wrote that Herbert Gatliff liberated his life when he was a youngster. The last time Tim visited was in the year of Herbert's death in 1977. He wrote that Herbert would be pleased to see the gathering of people – Scots, English, Swiss, Dutch, Polish, French sitting round a table in real meeting of minds and a deep yet hilarious conversation! He wrote 'the company has been fantastic, the light unearthly, the hostel homely and practical, the island lively and friendly with a feeling that the community is on the up. Herbert would be gratified to see it now.'

In September Lizzie and Graeme from Lancaster arrived having been recommended by various people they had met on their trip and thought the facilities were great and the crowd happy. The weather was rough for Marc, Ludo and Rory and a visitor from Uruguay wrote that it was a hitchers' paradise. Jean from Dunfermline wrote that she had the best night's sleep she had ever had in a hostel. Jeremy walked to the trig point for amazing views. Margaret was disappointed not to see any otters and only a short time on the island but loved the new common room floor so much that she washed the tiles twice. Neil and Frances enjoyed Charlie's songs.

In October Ben and Jon saw the Northern Lights. John didn't see an otter but said the hostel was as lovely as ever. Katherine enjoyed glorious sunshine and having been many times wrote that it was so much better. Holly enjoyed an exciting storm and the craic with Robbie, Paul and Ian.





In November the brilliant weather was ever changing.

In December it was a really atmospheric. Paul was forced to stay here due to the ferry being cancelled – he was attempting to run from Vatersay to the Butt !! A cyclist heading the same way had quite a battering from the storm but all was forgotten with the coal burner fired up.

Debs had the hostel to herself and the gale force stormy weather forced her to relax. By the time Dorothy got here the gales had subsided. She had enjoyed collecting shells, watching the large flocks of waders, and in the absence of people, saying hello to sheep. She enjoyed the peace and solitude and wrote 'morán taing' (thank you in Gaelic). Doug in contrast a day later had a stormy three days and wondered about the stories that shards of pottery in the sand could tell. He wrote that it was a true pleasure to stop in this wonderful place and that the draught proofing on the front door is amazing.



**Ruins of ancient chapels at Howmore. Experts believe that there has been a religious presence at Howmore since before the 9th Century.**

## **Howmore**

Andrew who had been cycling the world for three years was glad he had come for a week in the islands and found this wonderful charismatic hostel.

In March Frances and John were here on the final stop of their work party week doing a recce for the April work party. They were heading back to civilisation! Later Michael who had been wild camping was tempted by the thought of a shower and warm meal and enjoyed a perfect shelter in which to read a book and drink tea. Cyclists found the islands peaceful and the hostel really lovely.

In April Fiona and family from Edinburgh arrived in wonderful sunshine on their tandem with their six-year old daughter. She hoped that the wind was blowing north. Colin, Duncan and Kate made the most of a lull in the driving rain to walk to the beach and enjoyed the games especially 'Trivial Pursuits'. Birders came and enjoyed seeing a Great Skua, shorebirds, gulls, ducks, geese, swans and a group of three otters. They found the hostel very clean, comfortable and welcoming. Harry was here enjoying cycling the highways and byways, having been on Barra in good sunny weather. He got up Beinn Mhor and the mist cleared to give views out to St Kilda, cycled up to Berneray and to Eriskay where he got to its highest point and enjoyed the café. Harry wrote that the old chapels near the hostel give a tangible spiritual peacefulness to the place which was a real joy. Last time he had been here in 1974 he was on his way to do survey work in the puffin colonies and the hostel had a peat fire and camp beds. He wrote that it was as warm and welcoming then as it is today!

Alasdair and Peter on a cycle trip from Thurso back to Edinburgh via Berneray found the hostel a welcome refuge. Sango and Bill were cycling the other way into a monumental headwind. They were impressed with the facilities especially the Morsø fire which was still burning in the morning having been turned down low. Another cyclist heading the other way had the wind at their back. Alice from London enjoyed the peace as did an anonymous visitor from Glasgow. Lucie had the wind against her and was glad people had shared their knowledge of this gem, otherwise she would not have known. Darren and Imogen wrote 'thank you for a lovely traditional hostel to stay in.' Peter found the hostel a sanctuary after struggling against the wind for four days in snow, sleet and hail.

In May Olivia was also here on a mammoth cycle ride via Lismore and Barra and found it a beautiful, breathtaking, peaceful island and enjoyed sleeping in the dunes. Four lads from Dundee were on the road to Lochmaddy. It was a while since Martainn had been on the island but he wrote in Gaelic. [My Gaelic is very rusty. I must renew my efforts in that direction. I do try and do my bit with my Runrig lyrics in the log books Jo]. I could manage 'Abair aite breagha' – this place is beautiful and 'Cum Gaighlig beo' – keep Gaelic alive.

Jerry and Paul completed their north to south tour of the hostels and although the cycling was hard they noted excellent improvements at Berneray and Howmore since they were last here and thanked the volunteers and the always-friendly wardens. Linda from Perth was in the land of her youth – 'Tir nan Og'. Nicole from Hamburg had spent three days walking along the east coast in unbelievably marvellous weather and found the hostel quite changed (for the better) since her last visit. She was very happy to see Betty. She was pleased to see a cuckoo close up but it did keep her awake.

Into June, Hilary and Paul from Norfolk found it difficult to leave. Jane C was back and made new friends, saw new birds including a short-eared owl and enjoyed Ian's

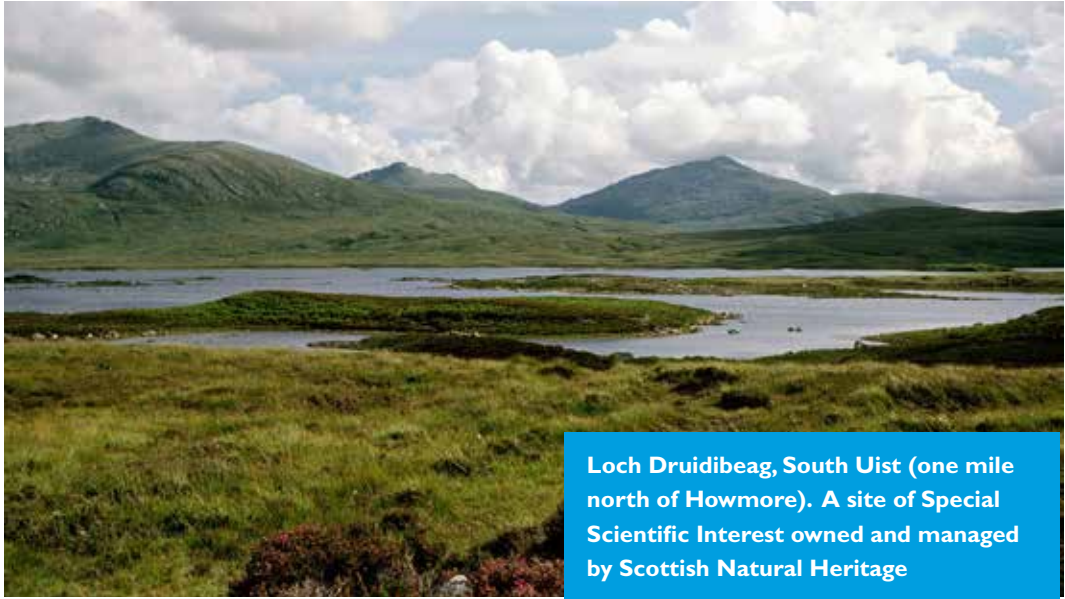
banjo and bagpipe chanter and the schools mod. Steve from Dorset was camping and enjoyed the company, the sound of the corncrakes, seeing Golden Eagles and Betty's cakes and scones. Emma found it lovely and cosy with the fire on, listening to the wind and sheltering from the rain outside.

In July it was still wet and windy for Jacqueline and John so they were glad to find a warm place to shower, eat, chat and reflect on the day having cycled from Barra. Anna and Phil stayed a night longer than planned and enjoyed a brilliant night at the Ceolas fiddle and dance night. Valerie and Linda who described themselves as two old arthritic grannies who had their lives saved after their tent disintegrated in a rain storm and they had to spend one night in their car. Rosie found the hostel every bit as peaceful as she remembered with the warmest people gathered into its heart to share the space. She saw a big owl hunting and was awestruck at the beauty.

Rosie and Nic were delighted to get a great night sleep after being woken the night before by a massive thunderstorm while camping on the beach in Barra. Kathe, Chris, Emily and Chloe were at the start of their adventure on the western isles and enjoyed the cultural convergence almost as much as the warm shower and the wood stove. By the end of July it was sunny when visitors from York arrived to complete their tally of hostels.

**Highland Cow by Eilidh Evans (aged 8)**





**Loch Druidibeach, South Uist (one mile north of Howmore). A site of Special Scientific Interest owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage**

In August Kate and Chris were glad to hide from the summer rain on their way towards Barra. The weather was described as terrible a week later. French visitors were here having, if I understand their French correctly, stayed in all three hostels. They described the hostels as 'les trois adorables refuges très bien équipés'. Eilidh and her brother Finlay stayed and loved it – Eilidh left a lovely drawing of a Scottish Highland Cow.

Paul, back after 20 years, wrote that the sights, sounds and smells don't change but there is a lack of people (I think he means in the hostel and travelling - Jo). Roger from Oldham wrote that the hostel had changed (improved) a lot since he was last here but the atmosphere is, thankfully, still the same and for him the weather was beautiful.

Tim Porter, whose entries I have quoted at Rhenigidale and Berneray, had vivid memories of the hostels and its views inland to where the land dips and rises towards those strange and beautiful mountains. The simplicity of the hostels hasn't changed either and he wrote that the company has been marvellous: there's a certain sort of person (adventurous, tolerant, individual) that goes for places like this. He was glad to see that Herbert Gatliff's vision was coming to fruition. Jan from Bristol admired the beautifully crafted honesty boxes in all the hostels. Someone else wrote that they love the idea that you can just turn up without booking – ideal for people who hate planning!

By the very end of August it was terrible weather for visitors from Kenya and Galloway but lighting up the fire warmed everything up and they thanked Betty for her hospitality. Lorraine and David from Skye wrote that the accommodation and company was great and the location stunning. Jeremy took the opportunity to swim in the sea before cycling on.

In October because the ferry was cancelled due to the windy weather, Brian and Johanna were here for one day less than planned but wrote that Howmore is their favourite hostel. Having had the place to themselves last year they enjoyed a lovely and changing crowd of mixed nationalities (Catalonia, Canada, USA, France and Germany) with chats and a tune or two. They thanked Betty for her hard work keeping the hostel welcoming and clean. John from Bury enjoyed two nights on his own in perfect weather.

In November, Holly Cross from Pembrokeshire was here and enjoyed three nights in gorgeous sunny weather. The low light on the landscape made everything glow and shimmer. The work party was here for part of the time so she got to appreciate the generosity of the volunteers with an abundance of food, good humour and hard work as well as a bonfire night party with locals as well as visitors. Holly enjoyed some good walking and the hostel provided a haven from the cold and dark, plus inspiration for a seedling idea of a community run bunkhouse back home. The Frost family were here again enjoying Betty's cakes and ducks eggs. The moon was super but no Northern Lights.

In December the wind delayed the ferry to prevent one hosteller enjoying Christmas here paid top tribute to Betty, our warden, the volunteers and all the helpers. They wrote 'in my world you would all be knighted and sit in the House of Lords where you could command all law-makers to come to the islands and learn what life is about.'



# The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust in 2016

## Trustees

Peter Clarke (Chairman)  
Stuart Colley (Treasurer)  
John Humphries (Editor Hebridean Hostellers)  
Philip Lawson MBE  
John Joyce (Project Manager)  
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.)

## Howmore Appeal completed

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 and we met the shortfall from the Trust's general fund. We are grateful to Andy Clark, of Sheffield, who donated £1,000 to the Howmore Appeal in the spring of 2016 in memory of his late father, Ronald.

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

## Maintenance & Improvements

Howmore was accredited as a two star hostel by Visit Scotland.

A new roof with five new roof lights was fitted on the common room annex in the spring. The old bunk beds were finally removed from the hostel site.

In the spring a work party improved the displays of hostel information, left more knives for food preparation and a recycling bin for paper and card. New plastic storage boxes were introduced for bed linen and tea towels. Minor repairs were carried out but bad weather prevented the transfer of the storage cupboard from the bedroom to Berneray.

The work party consisted of John Joyce, leader, and Eddie Webb, tradesperson.

The ceiling timbers in the porch of the thatched building were reconfigured along with electrical wiring for light, smoke alarm and emergency light. Rigid insulation was fitted with additional insulation placed along the wall heads and overlaid with plywood as a finished ceiling.

Improvements were made to the annexe toilet, including new taps fitted on the handbasin. The shelf over the mirror was fixed and shelves put onto the back wall. A full electrical check was carried out and, with improvements where required, were given a full electrical certificate which is valid for five years.

The work party was John Joyce, leader, Stuart Colley, Andrew and Penny Childs, Meg Richards, Brant Rhoden with, tradespersons, Rob Plaister and Eddie Webb.

### **Howmore Open Day - September 2016**

We celebrated the 50th birthday of Howmore hostel with a community open day on Saturday 10th September. The day was bright, but windy. There had been a gale the previous day! Thirty five guests, hostellers and Trustees, joined together to celebrate the anniversary. The Trust gave a very big thank you to our donors and supporters who had made the improvements to Howmore possible. The Appeal had raised £47,000 and the work on the main hostel building and common room block is complete.

Back in the 1960s, Herbert Gatliff, our founder, stayed at Ben More House, Howmore, when he visited South Uist. At that time the hostel was a thatched house on the



**Howmore Open Day. The Chairman of the Trust, Peter Clarke, introduces local historian Tommy MacDonald. Tommy gave a well researched talk about the history of the hostel building.**

common grazings occupied by an elderly lady. This was, in fact, Marie Ann MacDonald, described by Tommy MacDonald, local historian and Gaelic scholar (and husband of our warden, Betty), as 'a great Gaelic writer'. After Mrs MacDonald died, Herbert enquired of Mrs Catherine MacSween if it was possible for the empty building to become a hostel. This was ruled out as the house had been promised to another lady who, though living in Glasgow, was expected to return to South Uist.

Some time elapsed and Herbert received another letter from Mrs MacSween saying the house was available for use as a hostel on an informal and unofficial basis. Nothing could be put into writing because of the then strictures of crofting law. Consequently Herbert asked one of his protégés, Frank Martin (who at the time was 24 years of age), to write to Mrs MacSween to make all the practical arrangements.

Frank was already of renown within Hebridean hostelling circles as the man responsible for establishing the hostel on Scarp which opened in 1965. (It closed in 1971 when the island was depopulated.) He wrote on 17 January 1966 indicating, 'We intend to equip the house at Easter, and hope you will be able to help in several ways. The camp beds, blankets and the rest of the equipment will be sent to Howmore.' He then, in his thorough manner, went on to give a detailed inventory. The hostel opened as planned at Easter 1966, with Easter Sunday being on 10 April.

Since the hostel opened, it has recorded 45,713 overnights to the end of 2016 (26% of the total overnights at all hostels including those which have closed).





## **The Old Croft House**

The acquisition of the old croft house was announced at the Howmore Open Day. Trustees are asking hostellers and the community for their views about how the building can be used. Meanwhile John Joyce and his work party have stripped out all the rotten timbers exposing the bare stone walls.

## **Berneray**

A work party visited the hostel in the spring. The kitchen floor was tiled and stainless steel units and shelves were installed. The main building and all external window frames in both buildings were repainted. The floors and walls in the Penthouse suite were painted. Both benches outside the hostel were sanded down and revarnished. A level recycling area was created. An area in front of the hostel was cleared and paving stones laid from the front door to the end of the front wall to create a level gravel free area.

Improvements were made to external doors and all were painted. All external door frames were painted. All thatched roofs were checked and all thatch stones were secured. Grass was removed where it was growing through the thatch from buried walls. The floors of both shower/washrooms were repainted. Improvements were made to the common room linen storage system and notice boards. The stove was checked and repaired where necessary.

The work party consisted of John Joyce with, tradesperson, Eddie Webb. Special thanks to volunteers Shelia Windmill, Brenda Armstrong, Brant Rhoden and Geoff Hewlett.

A work party visited Berneray in the autumn. The focus was on improving the electrical installation and plumbing. Improvements were made to the foul water drainage from the toilets and showers. A full electrical check was carried out and the system was certified for the coming five years. A broken kitchen mixer tap was replaced. A dehumidifier was supplied and fitted.

A shower curtain was fitted. Three new rugs were left at the hostel.

The work party consisted of John Joyce, leader, Rob Plaister and Eddie Webb, tradespersons.

It remains our policy to seek Visit Scotland Grading for the hostel. A grading visit is expected to take place during 2017.

We were all delighted to learn in spring 2017 that the hostel had gained Two Star status.

## Rhenigidale

Rhenigidale retained its accreditation as a Visit Scotland Two Star hostel.

In the spring the rendering on the external walls of the hostel was improved and repainted by Pete Edwards, a local resident and decorator. All external woodwork was also repainted. The guttering and rainwater drainage was improved. The old electrical cooker was replaced. Lighting on the steps up from the road was improved.

The glass in a Velux window at the rear of the hostel was replaced and all roof lights were fitted with blackout blinds. New recycling bins were provided in the kitchen. The outside toilet was refurbished and improved.

The work party consisted of John Joyce, leader, with tradespersons Eddie Webb and Pete Edwards, and volunteer Geoff Hewlett.

A work party visited in the autumn. The old Morsø stove was removed as it was worn out. A new Morsø Swift was installed together with new flue pipes and connectors.

A full electrical check was carried out and, after improvements where required, the system was certified for the coming five years. The water heater in the toilet was replaced .

A dehumidifier was installed in the kitchen, funded by Energy Isles. The dehumidifier can be used in the outbuilding for drying clothes and equipment. The back toilet wall was bleached and painted. The shower room paintwork was cleaned up. All dormitory windows were given a coat of varnish.

The door frame was replaced and a new door fitted with integral sill, funded by Energy Isles. Pete Edwards painted the new woodwork.

The gables were cleaned and repaired. Extensive vegetation was cleared from the back of the hostel and the drainage channel dug out. Existing fire exit pathways were cleared. Drainage alongside the steps up from the road was improved. Bad weather prevented further outside work.

The kitchen was cleared out and all the walls were bleached, cleaned and painted. All the timber shelving was sugar soaped and given a coat of varnish.

## Flora in the grounds of Rhenigidale hostel

When the road came to Rhenigidale in 1990 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. The Editor of the Hebridean Hosteller newsletter included the following comment in the October 2015 edition (Newsletter 58) 'Advice and action from a volunteer with specific knowledge of land management and the control of plants would be much appreciated.'

Ros Evans and Pat Jacobs, of Edinburgh, responded by conducting a survey on 1 August 2016. Here is a summary of their findings:

The hostel is delightfully situated on a sunny slope in the small Rhenigidale community. Since grazing animals no longer keep the vegetation down, some of the plants will need to be checked.

The main problem is the *Montbretia* growing beside the steps up to the hostel. In Craigston valley in Barra it is beginning to take over now that the sheep can no longer graze it. It is a weed and the short flowering period in late summer does not justify it in any garden! I am trying to keep it under control in my garden but it is a battle but more of a contest than it is in Rhenigidale where it is still relatively well contained. I think digging it out (together with all the millions of small corms that form the rooting stock) would be the best start, then keeping it cut back when new plants appear, and/or using 'Round up' until it dies out.



Rhenigidale hostel's luxuriant vegetation

The lowest part of the garden beside the road is covered with reeds (Phragmites) and sedges (Juncas) which won't do any harm. There is a young willow tree there, and the tree directly outside the front door is an Elderflower. To the left of the hostel, the septic tank has a healthy growth of nettles which could be cut back. However they attract caterpillars and other insect life so are OK. The Phragmites encroaching up the slope should be kept cut back each year (a good pair of shears should deal with this). The iris, ferns, fuchsia and pine are no problem. The nettles immediately below the railing outside the front door are not very attractive and would be better cut back each year. The ferns and cotoneaster around the back are in order but might need cutting back when they get too big.

The basic ground cover of the property is attractive machair and the common flowering plants as seen in late July include: Tormentil, bog asphodel, self-heal, sorrel, silver leaf, knapweed, buttercups, plantains, orchid. It would benefit from being strimmed at least every three to four years, but this is probably not practicable given the nature of the steep slope.

This is a very attractive hostel. The hostel looked in very good condition and we were most impressed. For hostellers who enjoy cooking, sorrel can be found in the grounds and makes a good soup. Elderflower can also be found; the berries can be used for wine.

### **The story of Rhenigidale's survival**

Kenny Mackay: Rhenigidale A Community's Fight for Survival

Acair ISBN: 780861524105 £12.00

Before you make your next visit to Rhenigidale, buy a copy of Kenny MacKay's book. Kenny is familiar to many hostellers who have visited Rhenigidale. He is often around and about the village or dealing with his sheep somewhere on the hills. He also acts as hostel warden when Kate is away. For many years Kenny has worked to chronicle Rhenigidale's story - of a life or death struggle with powers unknown but with a happy ending. The road was opened on 20 February 1990 and the village has survived.

A key piece in the jigsaw was when the Schools Hebridean Society, founded by John Abbot in 1962, chose Rhenigidale because the hostel provided back-up. Needless to say, Herbert via the Gatliff Trust, had helped fund the Society. John Hutchinson, who visited on SHS expeditions in 1967 and 1974, surveyed a route for a possible road or jeep track. This was via the valley to the north of Toddun and across to Maaruiq. SHS received £100 from the Highlands & Islands Development Board to assist with costs.

John Hutchinson, speaking at the launch of the book at the Harris Hotel in August 2016, recalled this work. He said that he was both surprised and pleased that when the road engineers at the local council (Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar) decided to go ahead with the project they not only chose his route, but also were using his map!

## 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 'Gatlift 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.

There is a wide range of volunteering opportunities from physical labour at the hostels to behind the scenes tasks which can be done from members' own homes.

All you need is a knowledge of and commitment to the hostels. While 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. However, there is plenty of painting to do, lifting and shifting, clearing rubbish from hostel sites and gardening.

Examples of tasks which volunteers could carry out from their own homes are: 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 by researching 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 bankers order, joining the Trust, getting involved, joining a work party, taking on a task on behalf the Trust or becoming a Trustee.*

## What is required of Trustees?

All the Trustees are volunteers. They receive basic travel expenses and 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.

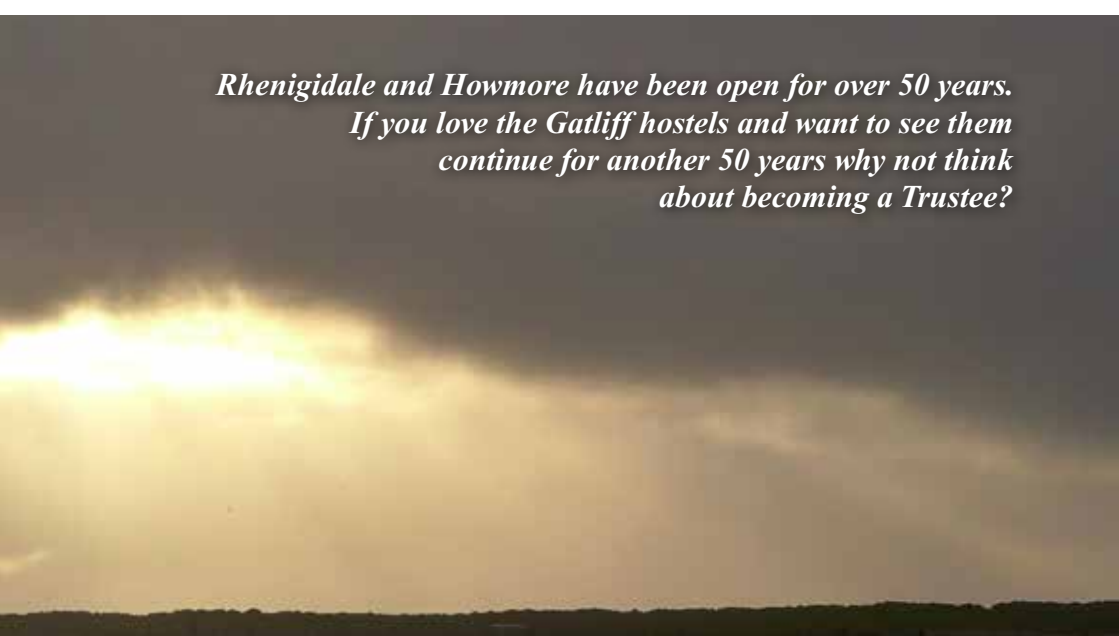
We need new Trustees to maintain the continuity of our operations, to run projects at the hostels and seek new opportunities. Full details of the operation of the hostels are provided to Trustees.

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 get in touch. It is always possible to come to a meeting to get 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 or three meetings a year and use telephone conference calls if the need arises.

*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?*



# **DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

## **SEEKING ELECTION OR RE-ELECTION**

### **Jo Burgess**

Jo has been editing the Newsletter of the Crofters' Hostels since 2003. A Trustee from 2003 to 2008. Jo is seeking re-election as a Trustee.

Jo first came into contact with the Trust when she led the 1985 Schools Hebridean Society (SHS) expedition to Rhenigidale. When the SHS was closed down in 1989 Jo asked for some of the financial assets to be contributed to the appeal to improve Rhenigidale hostel. SHS's help is commemorated on the plaque in the hostel. Jo also joined the Trust at this time.

In 2002 Jo was staying in the old schoolhouse when the Trust was celebrating the 40th anniversary of the hostel and joined the commemorative walk along the postman's path with other Trust members.

She is now in a position to take on the role of a Trustee once more. Jo is a chartered town planner, has been involved with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme for 15 years. She has a little Gaelic and a lot of passion for the Hebridean culture – especially the music. She looks forward to making a more active contribution to the work of the GHHT in the future.

### **Stuart Colley**

A Director since 2015. Treasurer since 2016. Stuart is seeking re-election as a Trustee.

Stuart has always been an enthusiast for travelling and outdoor activities. Having left school at 16 to do an apprenticeship in electronics he subsequently did a degree in physics, including spending a year at the University of California where he often visited the Sierra Nevada mountains and other national parks on backpacking or climbing trips. After completing a PhD in astronomy he went to work for the British Antarctic Survey as a meteorologist, spending two years at Halley Research Station. Since returning to the UK Stuart has been employed as a scientist in the civil service. Stuart first visited the Outer Hebrides on a cycling holiday in 2005 and has returned regularly since then, more recently volunteering on some of the work parties organised by John Joyce. Stuart became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust in April 2017.

## **Christine Fletcher**

Christine is seeking election as a Trustee.

Christine has now retired from a career in primary education in County Durham. She has always been interested in the outdoors, hillwalking, orienteering, riding, sailing and cycling with many hours spent in the Grampians and Monadhliath mountains with her Inverness-shire family. Walking the Camino de Santiago in 2008 rekindled her interest in hostelling so much so she returned to the Camino and helped out as a volunteer warden in Rabanal hostel. Retirement brought time and a new bike, which is now a favourite mode of transport resulting in trips such as Coast to Coast and the John Muir Way. A cycling holiday in the Outer Hebrides introduced her to Gatliff Hostels in 2013 and she became a member. Since then she has been helping behind the scenes, for example by stuffing envelopes. She is keen to help out in any way she can.

## **Julian Paren**

A Trustee since 2013, Company Secretary since 2016. Julian is seeking re-election as a Trustee.

Julian Paren spent his professional life as a glaciologist working in Greenland, Arctic Canada, and the Antarctic, ultimately becoming Head of Information at the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge. In retirement he chose to live on the Black Isle with its easy access to the west coast and islands of Scotland. After a visit to Kinlochresort in 1964, he met Herbert Gatliff when he was interested in opening a hostel in North Harris. With his wife and family he has visited all the Gatliff Hostels since 1986, the year he became a member of the Hebridean Hostellers. He became a Trustee in 2013.

In retirement Julian has been an Open University tutor in oceanography, an associate lecturer in climate and Antarctic science for the University of Cambridge, and a Trustee of the Trans-Antarctic Association and the British Antarctic Monument Trust. Julian is a Director of Transition Black Isle and Black Isle Bicycles, and is a member of the John Muir Trust, National Trust for Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. He also contributes to the nationwide Geograph project with its role to provide imagery from every square km of the British Isles.



## **APPOINTED BY THE GATLIFF TRUST**

### **Alan Busson**

Alan served as a Trustee and Company Secretary of the GHHT from 1988 to 1995 and from 2003 to 2008. He has been a Gatliff Trust Trustee since 2003. He is a keen cyclist and hill walker. Alan is a supporter of simple hostels and the 'wilderness experience'. Alan Busson is a Chartered Secretary, currently working for Gordon Rural Action.

### **Peter Clarke**

A Trustee since 1988. Most recently Chairman since 2007. Hitherto he was Vice-Chairman from 1988 to 1991, Chairman from 1991 to 2001, Vice Chairman from 2001 to 2007. He has acted as Membership Secretary since 1988 (with a short break in the 1990s.) He has also had spells as Company Secretary and Treasurer.

Peter first visited the Outer Hebrides in 1973 when he discovered Rhenigidale and Howmore. Shortly after his second visit he met Herbert Gatliff in 1975 for the first time to discuss his PhD research on agricultural smallholdings.

He became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust in 1980 and served as Hebrides Secretary of the Gatliff Trust from 1983 to 1988. In that capacity he founded the Hebridean Hostellers in 1984 to create a link between Trust and its supporters. This proved to be the fore-running to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. Peter was Secretary of the Gatliff Trust from 2000 to 2006. He became Chairman in 2006 upon Frank Martin's retirement. He represented the Gatliff Trust on the National Council of the SYHA from 2007 until its abolition in July 2013.

Peter served on the National Executive Committee of the YHA for five years (1994 to 1999) and on its Countryside Committee for six years for the first three years under the chairmanship of Frank Martin.

His book, *The Outer Hebrides - the Timeless Way* was published in January 2006 and is still in print.

### **John Joyce**

A Trustee from 1988 to 1994 and since 2008. John was Chairman from 1988 to 1991. Since 2008 he has been work party organiser. A Gatliff Trustee since 1977, a Trustee of the GHHT from 1988 to 1994 and since 2008.

After leaving school at sixteen John completed nine years work mostly in banking and insurance before going to Aston University where he gained an MSc in Applied Psychology. During this period he developed his interest in cycling, walking in the countryside, exploring the more wild open spaces and mountains, travelling and caving. John started hostelling in the 1960s and was a YHA Regional Committee member where he met Herbert. Herbert encouraged him to get involved with the Gatliff Trust. After

graduating John worked for the Virgin group in record exporting and video retailing before settling down to married and family life in the 1980s.

John organised work parties and renovations at the Hebridean Hostels and served as Chairman of the GHHT at its foundation. After leaving the record business John re-trained as a primary school teacher and has since spent over 20 years in education. He became science co-ordinator at his school and, most recently, a home tutor for the local education authority. In 1994 John and his family spent a year travelling around the world. John's objective is to see that the Trust develops and maintains its hostels in the foreseeable future in a changing environment, whilst maintaining their sociability and simple ethos.

### **John Humphries**

A Trustee since 2003. John has been Editor of the Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter since 2002.

John is a retired schoolteacher turned magazine editor and journalist. John was born in Bristol in 1943, educated at Cotham Grammar School and graduated from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. For most of his working life he taught English at Culford School, Bury St Edmunds, and was a Housemaster there for 21 years. He became the School's Registrar with responsibilities for admissions, marketing and publicity. Following retirement in 2003, he continued writing professionally, producing corporate newsletters, regular columns and editing Scottish Islands Explorer of which he is now proprietor. He joined the GHHT soon after visiting its Hostels in the mid-1980s, feeling that they were delightfully distinctive - remote and remarkable places which attracted responsive visitors. In 2002 he became the Editor of Hebridean Hostellers newsletter.

### **Philip Lawson MBE**

A Trustee since 1988. Treasurer from 2006 to 2016.

Philip served on committees of the Scottish Youth Hostels Association at District and National level from 1961 and was National Chairman from 1980 to 2001. He is now Hon President of the SYHA. He was also President of the European Union Federation of YHA's (EUFED) from 1990 to 2001 and a Board member and Vice President of the International Youth Hostel Federation from 1994 to 2002.

He became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust in 2003.

Philip is a retired head teacher and lives in Fife. He has been visiting the Hebrides since 1960. He is a lifelong hillwalker and recently retired from the Board of the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (SCOTWAYS) after many years of service.

## **RETIRING AT THE 2017 AGM**

### **Dave Matthews**

A Trustee since 2013, Dave is retiring at the forthcoming AGM due to pressure of work in his role as Treasurer of the Elenydd Wilderness Hostels Trust.

Dave Matthews is well known in youth hostelling circles, having worked for almost 33 years as a YHA Regional Secretary/Area Manager. He has also served in a voluntary capacity with the YHA for many years both before and after his time as a YHA employee. Dave was made a Vice President of YHA Wales in 1997.

During his time as a member of the YHA National Council in the 1960s Dave met Herbert Gatliff. Herbert was a great inspiration and led Dave to recognise the value of small simple hostels. During his time as Regional Secretary many new hostels were opened. Quite a few were small simple hostels established by volunteers on 'shoe string' budgets. During this time Dave also met and became friends with Frank Martin who was active in helping develop small hostels in Wales and in forestry issues. It was Frank in particular who encouraged Dave to secure Dolgoch from the Forestry Commission as a hostel. (Now run by the Elenydd Wilderness Hostels Trust.)

Dave first visited the Outer Hebrides in 1982 to help look after a fifty strong party of Scouts from Cardiff. He fell in love with the Islands and was back with his wife, son and daughter in 1984 on a cycle tour. In 1991 he joined Frank Martin on a journey there, visiting all three Hostels GHHT hostels.

We thank Dave for his service to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust.

### **Keep in touch. Support the hostels. Join the Trust.**

If you are not a member why not join the Trust? It only costs £10 a year. You will receive this newsletter annually, our Hebridean Hostellers Newsletter which appears twice a year and all other publications including our Annual Report. Above all you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping to keep the hostels going.

# Membership Application Form

Please detach this page and return it to the Membership Secretary, Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street STORNOWAY Isle of Lewis HSI 2ND

I wish to become a member of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. I enclose herewith a cheque/postal order for £\_\_\_\_\_ being my donation for one year. (Please make cheques payable to Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust.) In the event of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust being wound up while I am a member, or in the course of the year following the date of my cessation of membership, I agree to contribute a sum not exceeding £1 should I be requested to do so.

Signature .....

Name in Full .....

Address & Postcode .....

.....

.....

.....

Email address: .....

Date: .....

- I wish to help the Trust as a volunteer (tick)
- I prefer to pay by Bankers Order please send me a form (tick)

## Gift Aid

If you pay Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax you can increase the value of your donation by 25p in the £ at no cost to you. Just complete and sign the form overleaf and send it to the Trust with your membership application form.

(We can reclaim tax on donations in past years. Currently it is four years.)

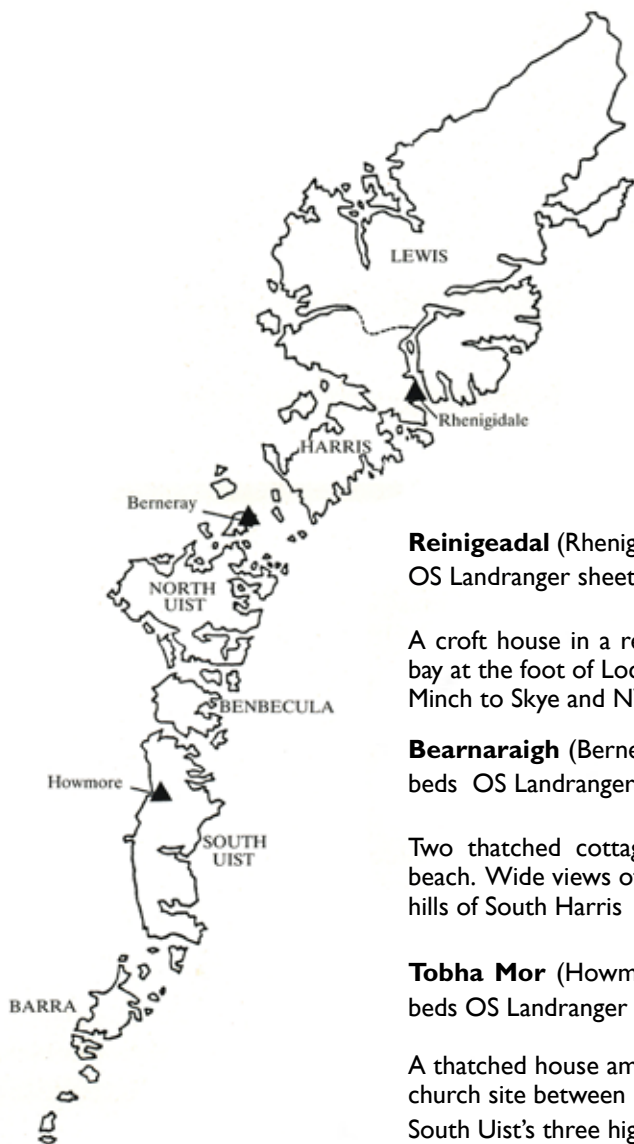
# Gift Aid Declaration

I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in past years to the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signed .....

Date .....

## Simple Hostels in the Outer Hebrides Run by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust



**Reinigeadal** (Rhenigidale) Isle of Harris 12 beds  
OS Landranger 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

**Bearnaragh** (Berneray) Isle of North Uist 21 beds OS Landranger 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 Landranger sheet no. 22 NF 757365

A thatched house amidst the ruins of an ancient church site between bog & machair. Views over South Uist's three highest peaks.