

Crofters' Newsletter

2018

Annual Review of the Crofters' Hostels

in the

Outer Hebrides

www.gatliff.org.uk





Annual Review of the Crofters' Hostels 2018

This Review of the Hostels and Crofters' Newsletter looks back on the years 2017. It is for all who stayed at the hostels in 2017 and all who support the hostels.

The Newsletter is compiled by Jo Burgess from entries which hostellers made in the hostel log books. The Review is compiled by Peter Clarke.

The Crofters' Newsletter has appeared in a variety of formats every year since 1963. From the first newsletter it has given the results for the previous year. Production difficulties in 1999 meant that we skipped a years with the 2000 edition giving the results for 1998 and 1999. Volunteers are sought to help with the production and distribution of the Newsletters. Please contact Peter Clarke at peter@gatliff.org.uk if you are willing to help.

Hostel Results for 2017

Overnights	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Berneray	1864	2146	2120	2438	2389
Howmore	1076	1264	1236	1287	1544
Rhenigidale	864	885	898	955	887
TOTAL	3804	4295	4254	4680	4820

It is a remarkable fact that since Rhenigidale opened, and including overnights at hostels now closed (Claddach Baleshare, Garenin and Scarp), over 180,000 overnights have been recorded. Equally remarkable the hostels are only overcrowded on the odd night in the summer; rainy and windy nights especially.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust's mission is to encourage all, but especially the younger people of limited means, to visit the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, to stay a while so that they might come to know and love the islands. We fulfil our mission by providing simple self-catering hostels to a sound basic standard.

Hostellers may also camp within the grounds of the hostels. We are not providing a camp site per-se. We provide no pitches for camper vans.

2017 was a happy year in the islands

2017 was a happy year at the hostels even though weather was mixed. Overall numbers continued to grow. An increasing number of cyclists on the Hebridean Way are calling at Howmore. The hostel improvements at Howmore are very well received with both new visitors and regulars. The Hebridean Way is bringing more people to the islands. The hostels figure strongly in the guides to both the cycling and walking route. Our hostel common rooms are certainly the place to exchange Hebridean Way stories.

More cyclists and walkers ought to visit Rhenigidale. Richard Barrett has including Rhenigidale as a 'Variant' to the official Hebridean Way walking route in his Cicerone Guide. The Offcomers (Pete Martin and Janet Moss) have included it as a 'Detour' from the cycling route.

GHHT Thirty Years Old!

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust is 30 years old! The Trust was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 10th June 1988. The first Executive Committee meeting was held on 11th June 1988 and the first AGM on 21st July 1989.

GHHT still the youngster

The GHHT is still young compared to our parent body, the Gatliff Trust which started life in December 1961. Rhenigidale opened in May 1962. The Gatliff Trust was therefore 57 years old in 2017.

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust was started in order to give Trustees responsible for the hostels limited liability. The Gatliff Trust is an unincorporated body. The GHHT's constitution allows more people to become involved with the Trust.

During the summer of 2019 the Trust will be holding an event for members who are interested in getting more involved with the Trust including those willing to take on the key tasks and maybe become a Director. Look out for this! Herbert Gatliff was always of the view that NOW was always the time to give younger members the chance to put their ideas into practice. Anyone with a suggestion was given a budget (in those days £25 was the scale of things) and sent away to implement their idea. They were, of course, expected to report back.



**Cyclists arriving
at Berneray**

Overnight fees

We are holding our fees in 2019 at the level set on 1st April 2018. That is £16 per overnight but £8 for under 18s. The camping fee is £10 per person and £5 for under 18 years old. In other words the fee for the under 18 year olds is half the adult rate both for a hostel bed and for camping.

Hostel Standards

The Trustees record their thanks and appreciation to the Trust's Wardens and their families, Jackie Macleod (Berneray), Betty MacDonald (Howmore) and Kate Langley (Rhenigidale), for their work at the hostels.

It is the Trust's policy to maintain all the hostels to a sound basic standard. We are not aiming to provide 'hotel' or 'luxury' style hostel accommodation (or levy the higher charges which accompany higher grade facilities). We do ensure that our hostels are in compliance with all the relevant health and safety regulations and in conformity with Visit Scotland and SYHA standards. We are proud to be part of the SYHA family.

We have achieved our goal of maintaining our hostels at a standard which achieves at least Visit Scotland one star status. Following the Visit Scotland accreditation visits during 2017 all three hostels now have two star status.

All equipment in the hostels is in good condition at the beginning of the summer season. It is checked on a regular basis. Anything which is broken or is not working is replaced as quickly as possible. Hostellers are asked to draw the warden's attention to any shortcomings. (Comment cards are provided at all the hostels)

Meg Richards, a former Trustee, is the 'GHHT housekeeper.' New bunk beds, mattresses, new tables and chairs were installed at all our hostels in spring 2015. We will keep our furnishings under constant review.

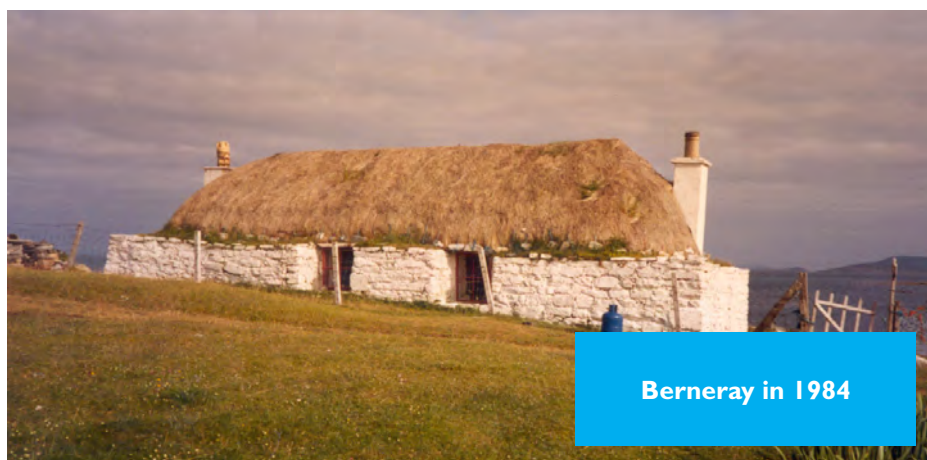
HOSTELS

Full electrical checks were carried out at all the hostels in 2016 and the system was certified until 2021. Berneray and Howmore, which have gas cookers, are certified Gas Safe every year. PAT tests are carried out on electrical equipment annually, fire equipment is checked and risk assessments updated. There are First Aid boxes at all the hostels; these are regularly checked.

We ask hostellers to note that dogs are not permitted in any of our hostel buildings, except for assistance dogs.

Berneray

The interior of the main building was repainted and all external woodwork was repainted. Window frames were repaired as required. One dormitory was completely repainted. The common room/kitchen and shower room were refreshed. A new toilet was fitted and the room was repainted. The floors of both the toilet and shower room were tiled.



Camper vans are continuing to be an issue at Berneray. Constant vehicular access is chewing up the access track and during the summer there are often vans and large tents in the field behind the hostel. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust makes clear that it is not encouraging this traffic; indeed those who enquire in advance are told that we cannot give permission to camp on this land as it does not belong to the Trust. We only authorise camping on the land around the hostel, within our fenced plot.

In the autumn we managed to persuade Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the local council, to give us more waste bins and to reinstate the large green bin by the bus stop. This is to provide waste disposal facilities for camper vans. There are full waste and rubbish

disposal facilities at both the harbour and the ferry terminal.

The water main to the hostel was replaced by Scottish Water in the autumn. This has improved the water supply to the hostel.

Howmore

A new water heater was installed in the kitchen and the access track was repaired. It had become deeply rutted by vehicular access over the winter. A sign was put up on the building now available as a bike shed. A dehumidifier was supplied for the dormitories. We share the aim of our neighbour, Howmore Church of Scotland, to get archaeological work carried out on the ancient ecclesiastical ruins with a view to make the area a place of pilgrimage.

If these plans come to fruition pilgrims may require accommodation. Naturally, we believe that our hostel is well placed to provide this accommodation, especially in the Old Croft House when improved.



Rhenigidale

The walls and ceilings of the dormitories, internal stairway, hallway/porch area and the shower room were all repainted. A bike shed was constructed on a concrete base. Drainage was improved with land drains installed alongside the steps, under the bike shed and around the camping pitch at the bottom of the steps. A new shed for the dust bins is to be built. The dehumidifier in the kitchen seems to have helped get on top of the damp problem. New tables and chairs were installed in the kitchen. The outside toilet/wash room was cleared with a view to using this as a drying room.



A look back on 2017

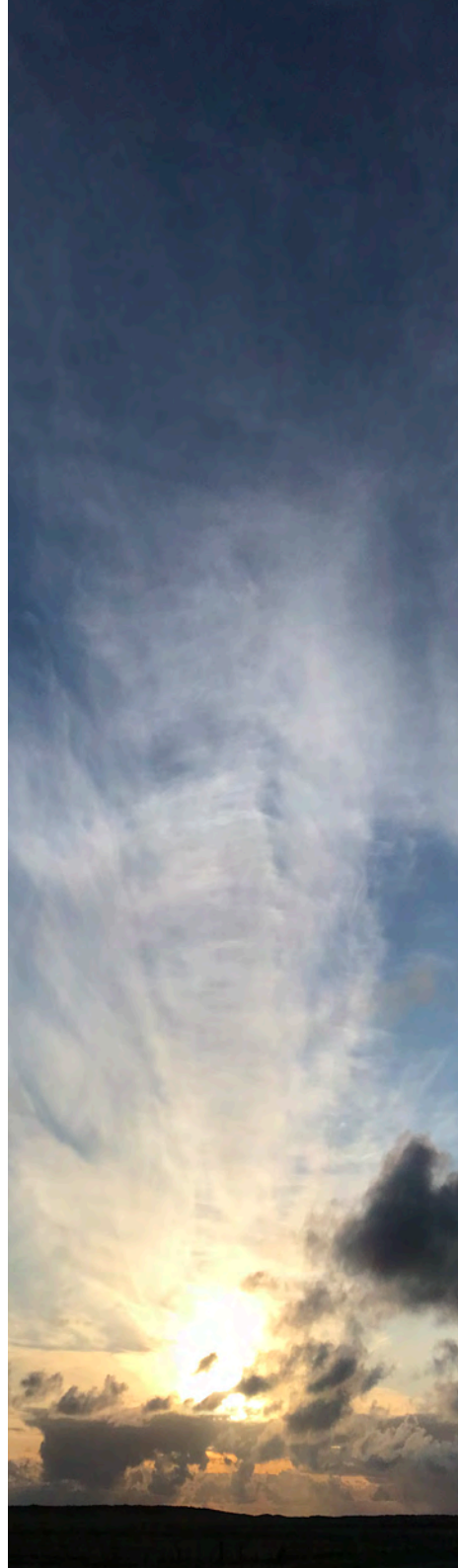
Jo Burgess writes:

I was not in the islands in 2017. Neither did I see Runrig but while I was on Orkney for the first time in September it was announced that Runrig will be performing their final concert in August 2018 in Stirling. Luckily I had my laptop with me so was able to book tickets and accommodation but I am not sure how I will manage with no Runrig concerts to look forward to.

We stayed in self-catering accommodation at Dounby on Orkney and had an amazing time visiting the main archaeological sites and Hoy. We also enjoyed music, dancing and story-telling. It was tremendous and I very much want to go back and explore the islands.

I have re-joined the Hostels Trust as a Director so have attended various meetings in Stirling, Glasgow and Edinburgh and it has been good to have an excuse to be north of the border again. I have visited a few locations from the wonderful Outlander TV series and during future visits hope to visit more. I am especially looking forward to visiting the hostels and the islands again.

I have recently found all my paperwork from my Schools Hebridean Society expedition to Rhenigidale in 1985. I had forgotten how much work and preparation I put into that trip with a walk into the village at Easter and in the days before email, I sent and received a lot of letters including one from the Tarbert postmaster written on the back of an old telegram form. It is amazing how things have changed in 30 odd years. Now I can enjoy photos of the village almost immediately, taken by Fiona (who has a house in the village) and posted on the internet. I still wonder about the young people who were there with me and hope that one day I will see a familiar name in the hostel log book. Maybe next year, but to Rhenigidale we go first.



Rhenigidale

The Laxdale Scouts walked to Rhenigidale along the Postman's path in March. After happy adventures along with way one of the party, at least, said they "couldn't wait to lie in bed." In April Patrick Bechler from France met Kenny MacKay (author of Rhenigidale. A community's Fight for Survival) on his walk whilst enjoying "this beautiful and peaceful place." Sue Ward and Mags Bluer from Saddleworth, Lancashire, loved the coal fire. Joanne and Martin Moessuilde from Maine walked the path on a sunny warm day in May and found the hostel cosy and comfortable.

Robert Fay from Dublin cycled here from Berneray and had to contend with the "savage haul up from Tarbert, two monster hills with the wind screaming in his face then after beautiful views to be kicked in the teeth once again with a demon hill and the downhill with white knuckle stuff and eyes popping out of his head". He too found the hostel cosy and snug.

Doraine Precausta and Mathias Chicaud from Annecy cooked a cake and cookies while they were here and found the maps and information helpful to plan their trip. Like others they mentioned the number of rabbits to be seen in the area. Alan Puckrin from Gourock found the hostel welcoming after being pummelled by the wind. He loved the football playing pet black lamb!! Gill and Graham Sackett from Mitcheldean, Gloucestershire spent five days at the hostel and "now it feels like home."

Into June Roddy Cunningham from Helensburgh and Leyre Flores from Pamplona, Spain enjoyed the Postman's path and a walk up An Clisheam (the highest hill in the islands.) An anonymous note saying "we love it here thanks" was stuck into the log book. Vicki Elcoate, Virginia Kerridge and Tricia Perrin from the South East of England



Rhenigidale - A hosteller camps whilst her horse grazes in a nearby field

were exploring the hostels by public transport and found it a magical spot. They were reluctant to tear themselves away having explored the area around Rhengidale and ascended Toddun where they had a close encounter with a golden eagle. Carol Walthew from Fife camped and used the hostel as a base to cycle around the 'golden loop' of South Harris. She found it a superb day's ride but it was very tough due to high winds. "The hostel had everything I needed."

In July Wes Dunn and Dana Warner from Winooski, Vermont, USA, weren't planning to visit the Outer Hebrides, but thought, "oh let's take the ferry to Tarbert and check it out." Having worked in Waternish, Skye, a few years ago Wes had always wondered about the islands to the west over which the sun set. They had explored north Harris by foot and bike and were "awed and enamoured." "This is a very special place." Dana added, "Though we'd planned to stay a few nights before heading back to the mainland, we fell in love with the area!" After five nights they were tore themselves away "our trip entirely rearranged, to explore more of these beautiful western isles" leaving warm thanks to Kate, for her kind hospitality and travel tips.

Ysé, Frédérique and Cous Cousse from France all thanked the Trust for running "this lovely hostel." AM and J Waters enjoyed the peace, walking and sunsets after a "wild Heb Celt Festival". Pete Martin from Cumbria camped here at the end of July (one of the Offcomers, the authors of the cycling guide to the Hebridean Way.) The wind and rain forced him into the hostel which was cosy and warm. He also met up with Kenny MacKay and bought his book.

Ian Watts from Norwich had enjoyed glorious weather at the start of August exploring the coast and hills. "Plenty of wild life too!" He also met Kenny who told him about the history of the area. He will recommend the hostel and the postman's path to others. Mags Hall and Craig Watts from Dunfermline cycled in from the north and appreciated the hot showers and warm food after the epic hills en-route. The hostel brought back memories for Mags of many mainland hostels, now closed, where she had stayed as a child. She was pleased that the Trust was keeping the tradition of the simple hostels alive.

Tom Blackburn from Oxfordshire was on his second visit and described the hostel as "the most special little place in the UK". He hopes to make many more visits. Toby Roberts and Amanda Sowerby from Leeds, who visited a few days after Tom were on their way north having visited Berneray and Howmore. After sunshine at Howmore they were pleased that the sun was shining again on Harris. They walked to Molineganais where they were welcomed by a party of seals.

Becky Holloway, from Devices, with Charlotte Elkington and Kevin Atkinson from York were on a return visit. They found the hostel "just as welcoming and special as before". Steph Wiseman and Dave Boon took one look at the clouds of midges and abandoned plans to camp. They were here to trace some family history and thought they saw a

golden eagle judging by “the way it was hovering and its size.”

Lynn Wilk and Alan Kew from Australia were walking the Hebridean Way and found the hostel a lovely respite from the weather. Lucy Imber and John Gausden from Newcastle enjoyed the scenery and comfort of the hostel as well as the craic.

Roger Clifton, Treasurer to the Gatliff Trust (GHHT's parent body) was here. “A sobering thought that I first came 50 years ago along that wonderful path into a different world.” Despite arriving by driving along the “amazing road” he still feels the village is a unique place. “The hostel is in better shape than it has ever been”. His wife Penny wrote “My first visit. I've heard so much about it from Roger. Nothing I was told prepared me for the awe inspiring beauty of the place” and the warm welcome at the hostel. (Diane Nightingale, Vice Chair of the Gatliff Trust also stayed in July with her husband Chris.)

In September Linda Davis was on her first trip to Rhenigdale although she had been to the other hostels many times. She records that the effort of cycling and pushing against the headwind was worth it. “The hostel is wonderful. Next time I will walk the Postman's path and leave the bike at home!”

Walking hills
and singing song
Earth is talking
Listen...long
Discover the inner peace
Maybe also cry few tears
Wish for magic
May it come
Believe in all
“NOTS” are done
Delete all “NOTS”, start anew
Magic's always within you.
Eva Bolombová, Valašské Meziříčí, Czech Republic

Three Lewis Ladies wrote in Gaelic “We enjoyed our day in Harris very much despite the rain”. (Anne Campbell, Peigi Ann Scott and C M Campbell.)

Alan Sidaway, of New Galloway, didn't get to Scarp but was very impressed by the excellent improvements that have been made to the hostel. James Hutchinson from Dumfries and Galloway was here by chance having been wild camping on Harris and South Lewis. Although he was the only person at the hostel that night he was very happy to be so. He was sad to be saying goodbye to Harris the following day. Will Johnson from Aberystwyth was on a return visit having visited on a cycling tour two years ago, during which time he joined the Trust. He wrote that the charm of the hostels had not diminished and that cycling to Rhenigdale is always well worth the



**Rhenigidale Hostel in
early Spring**

effort. But “as many travellers I meet often comment, it is not just the charm of the hostels but the interesting like-minded people you meet on the way.” He repeats a comment by Wainwright that “you are never likely to meet them again and it’s like ships that pass in the night but we are richer for the experience. Unlike in Wainwrights day, in these days of the internet and smartphones, it is good to communicate the traditional way in beautiful settings. It is the efforts of the Trust which make this possible.”

Reinherd Scheitler from Munich was here with Will Johnson. It was 11 September and he was reminded of the terrible things that happened on that day 16 years ago. He was glad to see that places like this remain. For Rachel and Philip Garsed from Cambridge who were on a cycling tour, the Gatliff hostels were a real highlight of their trip. Robert Phillips of Kilbirnie, Ayrshire, was here after going to St Kilda. Charlie Finlaw and Phil Metcalf from the Isle of Man were on their first trip to the Outer Hebrides. Their visit was made all the more special by the hostels which were welcoming and well-maintained.

In October Pina, (Betina Uhse) from Germany, described the hostel as a wonderful cosy, warm, snug welcoming little house at the end of the world. The open doors, heating, coal and wood to light the stove all based on trusting everyone to treat it as if it was their own home and leave their fee was much appreciated. Ol Warlow from Edinburgh was on a cycling trip and had come from Berneray on the early ferry experiencing the dawn from the ferry, rain on West Harris, sun for Luskentyre and fortunately a tail-wind and no rain on the climb out of Tarbert.

In November and December the work party were busy at the hostel, constructing the bike shed, cleaning the steps of vegetation, painting and cleaning. Frances Passey was glad to get back to a small quiet hostel with no traffic noise.

Brian Hall and Rosemary Boyd from Galloway, were here over New Year, enjoying the bells of Big Ben on the radio, welcoming Kate, the warden, as the first footer as well as the fireworks over the village.

Berneray

Jorg from London was the first person to write in the book and summarised what most people will write – this is a place to be in love with. Elina Bry from Glasgow agreed. Meriela from Mexico met John Joyce and Frances Passey from the Trust in March. They had a great time, as did a Gaelic speaker in April with the initials DM from Edinburgh who thought the beach amazing for views and walks. Jan and Sönke from Germany were walking the Hebridean Way. At the end of April John Smith and Frances Moran from Ipswich, weathered a storm. They had experienced horizontal snow and hail alongside beautiful sunshine and green seascapes.

In May there was some beautiful oriental logographs in the book written by a lady from Stockport. Dave, George, Derek and Graham from Dundee enjoyed a great stopover and good company. Geoff and Lorna from Coniston thought it a very special place which attracts special people and enjoyed the birdlife and shades of blue and turquoise across to Harris. It was windy for French visitors and Polish visitors enjoyed the tides. Philip and Elizabeth Gruar, long standing GHHT members from Cumbria, were back again and wrote that Berneray had worked its usual magic with lots of interesting folk to talk to.

For Shirley and Richard also from Cumbria had another wonderful restful visit and left leaving another piece of their souls. Margaret saw a short eared owl and BT wrote “this wonderful place can be life changing”. Other visitors loved this place of rest and timelessness with the freedom for the children to play and howl into the wind writing “there is comfort in the continuity of life on the islands and the enduring nature of these stone walls”.



Berneray at dusk

Into July a cyclist was glad of the fire to dry wet clothes and Fraser enjoyed an early morning walk including seeing the otter on the West Beach. For Mairi and Jan the sun always seems to shine on Berneray. Kit and Drew walked along the beach escorted by a group of dolphins. Jim the Magician was here on his way to Heb Celt enjoying amazing weather and awesome people. Scott, a regular at Berneray week, was now heading off to enjoy pastures new in India. He wrote, "I will be back". A young camper was here at the end of July and enjoyed swimming in the sea, the beaches and the weather. His parents had first visited twenty five years ago!

Into August David from Perth cycled from Eriskay and Simon and Zita found Berneray as magical as ever with Jackie on top form. Marion was here from Donegal tracing Cameron family ties at Claddach Kirkibost, North Uist, and said the hostel made the trip even more enjoyable. Anja and Wesden from Munich were back after 22 years and found Berneray Hostel as magical as ever. All the changes on the island have not taken away the spirit of serenity and sense of remoteness.

Will from Aberystwyth was on his second visit in September and loved the hostel and the stunning scenery. Duncan from Inverness was here for his 31st birthday in stormy weather but still with spectacular views. Italian visitors wrote that it had been nice to find this amazing place and share it with nice people. Guy and Zara walked, climbed up Bheinn Shleibe, ran down and chattered like children. They were pleased that the hostel offered a safe and cosy environment for the night.

In October Oli was glad to be tucked up nice and warm with a fierce storm blowing outside. Dianne too arrived in a storm and with the stove going the windows steamed up. With students from City of Glasgow College she spent five days making art, sharing food. She found Berneray bracing and bliss. Sue and Pete from Findhorn were recommended to stop at Berneray by the postie at Callanais and were



glad that they did having a wonderful time and their last night was Samhain (Halloween) ...oooh. For them this place was a gem.

Meg, Frances and John were here on the work party in November. Ben and Sheena decided to take a road trip to the Hebrides on the spur of the moment. They randomly stumbled across the hostels and thought them gems. In December PW described arriving in the 1970s on a small boat to find only one bucket of coal left for the fire. He was woken that night by a thump and then another and another. On going out later they found 10 bags of coal outside – the two sisters (the former wardens Annie and Jessie) had done it again.

Christmas saw quite a few visitors. A good time was had by all with great food and cheer!

Howmore

Jorg was the first to write in the book in February and “as always” had a wonderful time. The work party was here in March. Later in March Sharon thought it a special place and a beautiful location. She thanked Betty for the roaring fire. Philip too enjoyed the fire and found it remote and magical. In April MZM quoted Terry Pratchett – “Up on the wold the winds grew cold”, writing “how great the hardship was to make a living on this land is difficult to imagine for modern man...” Hearing the wind blowing outside while sitting in “this stronghold of comfort is deeply satisfying and fills one with bliss”. All appreciated the good quality interior and the ambiance of the hostel. Joseph from France wrote his own ‘Barra Song’.

In April Lindsay and Chris arrived by tandem in wet and windy weather. Mark, Victoria and Florence were here on the same day intending to camp but the weather and the sight of the hostel was mind made up with Florence especially enjoying the board games. Kathryn had the same experience and had an idyllic night. Sean from Australia wrote that it was the best hostel he had ever stayed in – an amazing place to meet interesting people. Ria too was escaping from the bad weather as was Jan walking the Hebridean Way.

Matt Hopwood was here at Easter exploring ‘A Human Love Story’ exploring all kinds of love and wrote “communal love and the idea of welcome seem central to our expression of who we are and how we experience belonging. Thank you for this welcome and for being part of this journey exploring Scottish love stories – this is certainly one. It doesn’t matter what path you walk what matters is the heart you walk it in!

Susie and Linda on their way from Vatersay to Berneray were reluctant to leave, “it’s so lovely here”. Linda from Cumbria, who was here first in the 1970s, was very impressed by the new kitchen and showers – “lots of memories but now so comfortable”.


In May Laurent was here from Belgium, as were Emily, Ian and Sharon who felt reinvigorated for the next stage of their walk up to Harris. A cyclist had come via the Orkneys and found it a delight to cruise down the Hebrides with a following wind (makes a change!). Simon had seen the hostel recommended and stayed as a break from cycle camping and was glad that he had. Billy from Glasgow witnessed why the views, sites and people mean we call this place Bonnie Scotland. Lots of hostellers thanked Betty and admired the improvements. Alan and Calum found it a warm and welcome and dry stop on their first father and son (wet) cycle trip. Eric who had come from Eriskay and Barra. Phil from Barnsley visited twice having been up to Berneray and wrote that “the hostel was a credit to the warden who clearly takes pride in her role here”. He wondered about a brolly to cope with the wet and windy weather. Lucy from Devon was here at the end of May when the hostel was busy with folk from all over the globe, different journeys, different tales to tell, all bought together around a coal fire, eating, drinking and sharing. She found it truly magical and hoped to return one day. Ed too found the hostel exactly how a hostel should be and made even better by the lovely old thatched buildings and the ruined churches alongside. Jayne on a three-month bike tour wrote that it was lovely to sit and read a book for a few hours.

In June the boys from Bolton were here as was Bernard. Sharilyn Anne (and family) from Oregon USA celebrated her 42nd birthday with a sunset that refused to quit – carrying on until 11.15 or later and with fruit cake from Betty. Much Praise. Someone wrote “Wunderbaar”. Rebecca from the Swiss cycling family especially loved the big table that connects people. Vicki, Virginia and Tricia were carrying the warm wishes of Len Clark who now nearly 101 loves recounting his happy memories of hostelling all over the UK. Hostel happy and live long. Alison and David having discovered the beauty



of the machair and the roads to the east shore discovered that South Uist was not just “on the way” from Barra to North Uist but beautiful in its own right. Another hosteller was here 30 years on from their first visit and found it as amazing as they remembered. Jane and Martine were here again and it was very busy with visitors from Argentina and elsewhere enjoying food and music at the Eriskay festival.

In July the hostel was described as cosy, magical, full of lovely people.



Howmore - early morning sunshine

Dana and Wes described their stays at all three hostels as an excellent experience. Sally and Toby had no luck with otter spotting but had seen ponies and an owl and had fun with great company at the hostel. Steve was tired after cycling here from Berneray in strong wind and Lorna and Dino were glad to stop after all the walking. Toby and Amanda bog hopped and climbed Beinn Mhor. Isle from Edinburgh found the hostel a cosy and welcome stop. Mike and Cat shared conversation. The sun was shining for them. Another visitor arrived with sore feet but the next day saw an otter and lingered a day longer than intended. Neil from Glenbrittle SYHA enjoyed fine weather as did Bob and Graeme. Alan and Lynn were walking the Hebridean Way and thanked Betty for the cake. Didi was glad to be back after 20 years. Elizabeth and Philip were on a short visit and marvelled at the work carried out by John and his team and as always enjoyed chat with other hostellers as did Mikayla from Kangaroo Island, Australia. By the end of August it was rainy and windy for Doris and Jan from Germany. The Jones Family from Northampton enjoyed a comfortable night and great company. Phil who was back after 30 years ago praised the improvements. Robin praised the location. He made a 75 mile round trip of North Uist by bicycle from Howmore.

In September a visitor from India stopped off while doing the Hebridean Way and thought the hostel a wonderful pitstop.

Duncan and Lizzie enjoyed the location and the sunset. Another cyclist loved meeting like-minded people because it creates endless variety. Lydia and Dida from Germany were on their way south and Margaret saw a Hen Harrier. Andrew from Switzerland climbed the three mountains and enjoyed great views. Peter and Stuart were here working up the bike shed project in sunny and dry weather and someone else planned to stay two nights and ended up staying six! Karen from Oregon had a happy reunion with another traveller she had met on the ferry from Eigg, telling stories and sharing laughs. By the end of September James and Nicole, who had seen a minke whale near Stornoway and saw an otter hunting on the shore, were glad of the welcome roof over their heads for a wild and windy night.

In October visitors who had been following the 'Stonor Eagles' story had been to Callanish, had their ferry from Harris to Berneray cancelled due to the high winds and enjoyed the comforts of Howmore. Others too found it a haven from the weather. In November Sue, Pete and Sharon were journeying and had great gratitude. Col had been camping but with a hoolie blowing outside was glad he had found the hostel. Kirsten from Alaska also found it a refuge from the elements and enjoyed a chat with Betty. Malcolm from Loch Lomond found it an excellent wee place and Hugh was glad to be here rather than at home watching TV. He was looking forward to putting one foot in the sand on the beach at Berneray and sharing a glass with a fellow traveller.

Where else could a lady arrive by horse?

Back in August Mary from Heptonstall, Yorkshire and Gabi from Diss, Norfolk wrote. "Thank you for this very special place. Where else could a lady arrive by horse?..." Well, the lady who arrived by horse was Karen Inkster, from Blairgowrie. Here is her story.

The Deaf, the Daft and the Ditsy, a four legged journey across the Hebrides

By Karen Inkster, Blairgowrie Riding for the Disabled

If I was to sum up our adventure in one word it would be "humbling". On the 10th August 2017 I set off to the Outer Hebrides with my rescue animals, dog Pip, who is deaf and my ditsy mare Connie. Our plan was to walk/ride the length of the islands to raise funds for Blairgowrie Riding for the Disabled in Perthshire Scotland, of which I am Chair. We were undertaking the adventure unsupported, which meant we were, or rather Connie, was carrying all of our camping, corralling and cooking equipment.

We set off from the southerly island of Vatersay and headed north, covering both Vatersay and Barra in two days. Whilst crossing our third island, Eriskay, some of the rare Eriskay ponies came trotting down the hillside to say hello. Continuing onto South Uist I couldn't wait to start the Machair Path, 36km of sandy trails and beaches, what more could we ask for? Two days later we arrived to a warm welcome at Howmore Hostel. We'd had our biggest day, over 9hrs and 32km after getting lost, arriving at a fence with no gate and having to back track and then getting into boggy ground, before

jumping a ditch and having our panniers end up under Connie's belly! We received a very warm welcome by the residents, everyone was keen to know what we were doing and why. Warden Betty and her daughter were also super friendly and we had a lovely evening relaxing.

We remained northerly bound and spent a storm bound day at the Community Riding School in Benbecula, a wonderful community led initiative. We then briefly touched on Grimsay before crossing North Uist where we crossed over the tidal beach to the truly stunning island of Valley. Uninhabited but with beautiful, albeit hauntingly old mansion ruins we spent the afternoon watching the tide come in, leaving us island bound, exploring the bays and routes bareback, stopping off for lunch on the beach with Pip and Connie roaming free. It was to be our favourite day of the trip, our own island, all to ourselves!

We then headed again north and had a very welcome day off on the small but beautiful island of Berneray. Although beaches were around each and every corner, you never took their beauty for granted.

Another short ferry crossing brought us onto Harris where we took the Old Road to Tarbert. A former packhorse route it led me to wonder what it was like, back in the day when horses would have been part of everyday life on crofts. It was a lovely, albeit boggy path which climbs up to a bealach, which gives stunning views across the loch behind. Unfortunately we went into a bog, Connie floundered, sending me off over her shoulder crashing onto solid ground. We'd lost a hoof boot, which was no surprise really as I had to lie on my stomach with my arm at full length to recover it! This brought us to another Gatliff Hostel, Rhenigidale, where Connie made friends with the warden's pet Hebridean sheep! Again we were warmly welcomed. Kate, the warden, arrived with buckets of water and cloths to wash Connie's legs, which were covered with hardened peat. The weather was again challenging, so we decided to spend two nights at the hostel. Pip was happy snoozing in the tent, as was I drinking tea and reading by the stove!

**Connie & Karen on the Machair
Track in South Uist**



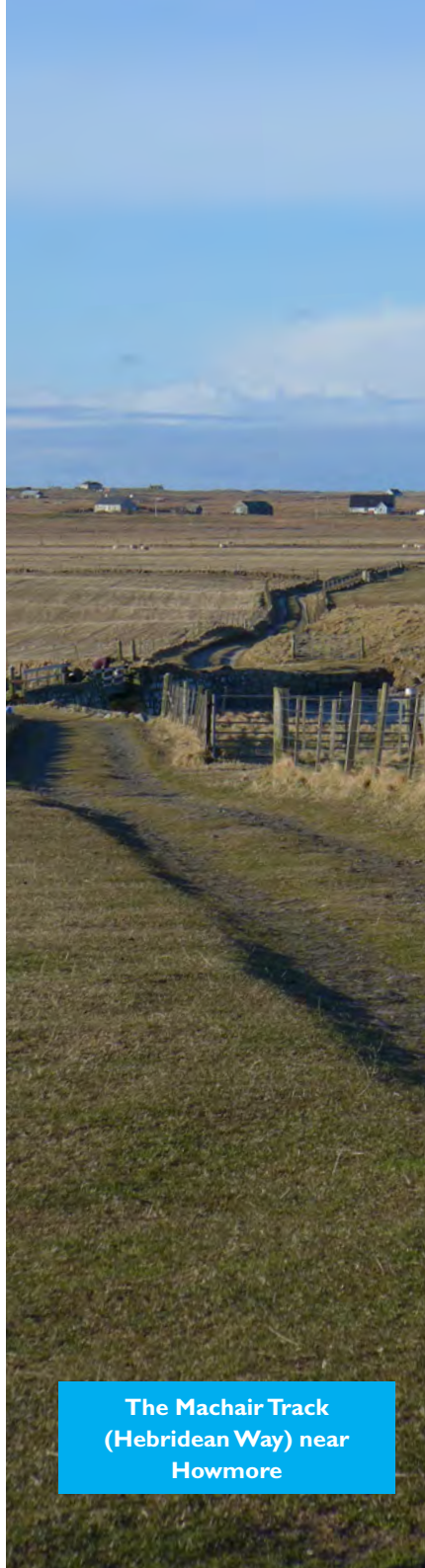
We then ran out of tracks and paths and so instead of heading north and hitting busy roads I decided to head to the most westerly island of Scalpay and then to the easterly isle of Great Bernera. I then boxed northwest to the stunning Callanish Stones before setting off again with panniers full of kit. We arrived at the Butt of Lewis, the most northerly point of the Outer Hebrides on 26th August. It was with mixed feelings I took some final pictures and shed a wee tear remembering the adventures we'd had.

Despite being deaf Pip was never on a lead, being a collie she is clever and knows to simply stick behind Connie's feet whilst on the road sections. Connie soon got into a routine, at around 6.30am each morning she would stand outside my tent pawing the ground as if to say, come on, it's light, we need to get going! The weather wasn't kind to us; it rained sixteen of the nineteen days we were on the islands. Two days had winds of over 50mph where we just had to hunker down and wait it out.

The islanders were so warm and welcoming, everywhere we went we were offered a field, food and often a bed, though I stuck to my "unsupported" mission and camped each night. People stopped in their cars, came out their houses and chased after us to say hello, give a donation and wish us luck. Old men came and shared their pony stories with me, recalling the days when ponies took peat off the moors, ploughed the fields and took children to school!

We rode across thirteen islands, covered approximately 230km over sixteen days and raised nearly £4,200. It's an experience I will never forget and I will forever be in debt to my four legged comrades who followed me day after day without question. We are still fundraising at Blairgowrie Riding for the Disabled, we need to build an arena to allow us to give good quality and regular lessons to a larger number of children with disabilities.

<https://www.facebook.com/thedeafthedaftandtheditys>



**The Machair Track
(Hebridean Way) near
Howmore**

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

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 HS1 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:

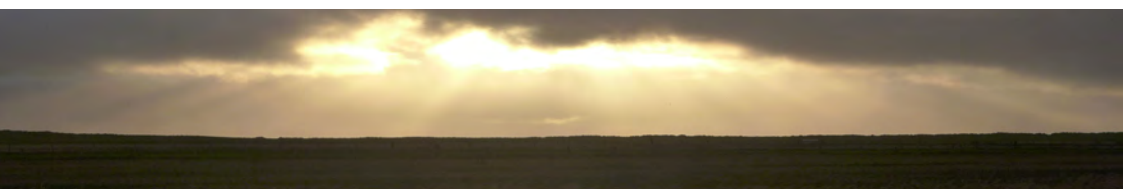
Date:

☐ 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

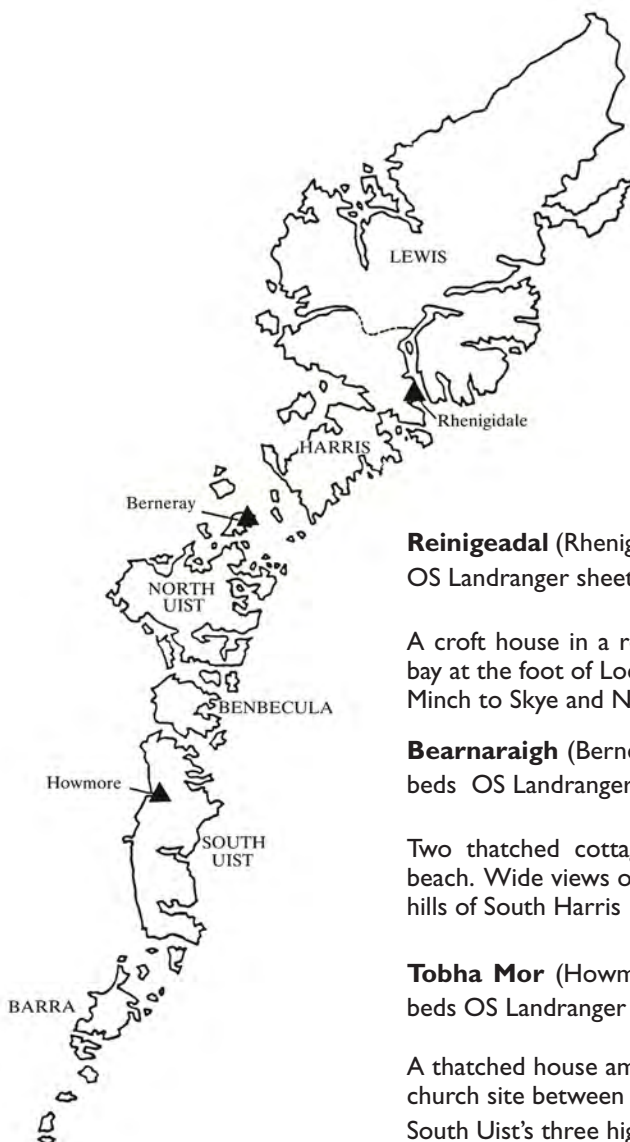
Date

**The awesome ecclesiastal
ruins at Howmore**



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

Bearnaraigh (Berneraigh) Isle of North Uist 21 beds OS Landranger sheet no.18 NF 932814

Two thatched cottages on Berneraigh'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.