



THE HEBRIDEAN TRUST

Newsletter - Summer 2004

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Executive Director: Sarah Moore

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Email: info@hebrideantrust.org



See our web site for the Hynish Centre <http://www.hynishcentre.co.uk>

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Skerryvore Lighthouse Exhibition



Fascinating new interpretative exhibition at Hynish unfolds the tale of the light on the 'big sea rock'

At first, it's a little difficult to believe that the story of one of the most ambitiously imagined engineering feats of the 19th Century should have chosen the most south-westerly point on the Isle of Tiree on which to be played out.

But as the Hebridean Trust's new exhibition on the Skerryvore Lighthouse in Hynish explains, not only was it imagined but brilliantly realised by a member of one of the most famous Scottish families of that era.

The name Skerryvore itself derives from the Gaelic 'Sgeir' meaning 'sea rock' and from 'mhor' meaning, simply, 'big'. But while the name leaves little to the imagination, the same can't be said of the design required to overcome the perilous reef that in the early 1800s claimed more than 30 ships and over 100 lives.

At the time, such creative drive was the province of only one Scottish family, the rightly renowned 'Lighthouse Stevensons'. The story behind the exhibition begins in 1837 with the arrival on Tiree

of one Alan Stevenson.

Stevenson was the third generation of a family which, between 1786 and 1938, built no less than 156 lighthouses around the coast of Scotland. Today, from the Signal Tower to the Egyptian influenced Lighthouse Keepers' cottages or the prodigious forces contained by the harbour's unique sluice system, every inch of Hynish bears testimony to the former residence of this industrious Victorian.

The story of the incredible challenges met by Stevenson is told over 20 eye-catching interpretative panels in an exhibition further enhanced by a scale model of Skerryvore. Original artefacts such as the bell and foghorn along with original book entries made and signed by Stevenson himself are also on view.

Following a study of visitors to the island, every effort has been made to make this aspect of the island's heritage as interactive and accessible as possible. This is to appeal to the predominantly AB social class that the report points to as visiting Tiree in search of 'knowledge transfer'. In this respect, providing a centre for such visitors forms part



[Skerryvore](#)

of the Trust's mission to support the island economies - in this case **Lighthouse Exhibition** through increased tourism.

Almost half of the island's tourists are aged between 35 and 55 with the majority originating from the Scottish mainland listing pursuits such as 'wildlife, walking and archaeology' as priorities. This accounts for the immediate success of the 'Hynish Heritage Trail' that invites visitors to take a specially produced leaflet from the exhibition and continue round the village viewing each of its landmarks in turn.



©Brian Montgomery

A monument to endeavour

Today, standing 138 feet tall with granite walls more than nine feet thick, Skerryvore - Scotland's tallest lighthouse - is a tribute to the Stevenson's legacy and that of the 150 men who battled the Atlantic for seven years to build it.

However, Stevenson's legacy extends to the design of lanterns, lamps, radios and optics right through the storehouses, keepers' homes and Hynish's giant sluice. Each was a unique solution to the challenges of a unique environment.

It's no coincidence that the triumph of the Skerryvore Lighthouse celebrated by the exhibition is so much in keeping with the way that life has always been in the Hebrides.

This is why the work that your support enables the Hebridean Trust to undertake first began at Hynish some 20 years ago. In that time the Trust has restored the village to its former glory creating a first class facility for children from inner cities to enjoy subsidised holidays and introduced quality, rent-controlled local accommodation.

Over the years, Hynish may have attracted the attention of HRH The Princess Royal, not to mention the BBC, but the real plaudits, as always, belong to the Trust's supporters.

The exhibition, housed in Morton Boyd Hall, Hynish, is open daily and entrance is free to the public

Supporters 'lift the roof' at the Sandaig Thatched Cottage Museum

Work will shortly begin on the complete renovation of the roofs of Sandaig Thatched Cottage Museum in Tiree. Recent storms finally put paid to much of the cottage's famous thatch and that of its barn and byre. Local thatcher, Iain MacKinnon, has been engaged to restore the museum's main attraction, hopefully before the weather further threatens the museum's contents. These include wonderful examples of the everyday tools required for island life in the 19th Century.



Sandaig Museum in Tiree

Of course, central to the success of the museum, which continues to attract healthy numbers of Tiree's visitors is the contribution made by its volunteer staff. Couples like Bella and Donald MacKinnon and Ina and Charlie McLeish not only allow the museum to stay open through the visitor season but along with Effie MacKinnon, Mary Davies, Anneen Black and Jan Hunter they infuse the museum with a captivating sense of the 'real'. Unfortunately, according to Mr

Restoration of the Signal Tower



The Signal Tower at Hynish

Touchwood Renovations has been engaged to carry out the much-needed restoration of Alan Stevenson's famous Signal Tower in Hynish.

Once the only means of communicating with the keepers of the Skerryvore Lighthouse some 10 miles out to sea, its past has seen children's clothes hoisted up the flag pole to communicate the news of new arrivals while recent times have seen local sheep climbing the stairs to enjoy the view!

It's hoped that water damage in the Tower can be

MacKinnon, whose family has been thatching the roofs of Tiree's cottages for generations, the repairs needed are extensive with each of the three buildings needing to be fully rethatched at a cost of around £6,000.

One initiative that the Trust hopes will help secure at least part of the funding is a competition to win a week's free accommodation in Morton Boyd House. The Trust would be grateful for any support you might be able to lend - and with raffle tickets priced at £5, the odds are actually rather good!

Alternatively, you might be willing to sell a small number of tickets within your immediate social circle. If either of these options appeals, please contact the Trust on 01865 311468.

quickly put right although scaffolding is likely to obscure much of the Tower for several weeks.

For further information on the Signal Tower in Hynish and the Skerryvore Lighthouse - see our [Isle of Tiree web page](#)

Where a helping hand can be met with open arms

Monica Smith has been warden of Alan Stevenson House since it first opened its doors in May 1991. But as the Trust's involvement with the heritage of Hynish has grown, so has Monica's role.

This means that whether there's a problem with the hot water, abandoned socks stewing in a drawer or just visitors needing to borrow a cooking pot or some loo roll, it's usually Monica or her deputy, Emma, who field the call.

But while Monica acknowledges her role as a font of knowledge for some of the families who make Hynish a regular holiday location, her real reward comes in the faces of those teenagers that have benefited from visiting Alan Stevenson House over the last dozen years or more.

Monica's days start early. By 7.30am she's driving across Tiree and by 8.30am, breakfast choices are already laid out at the centre. As Monica explains, the emphasis has always been on self-reliance. After cleaning up after breakfast, each group goes on to prepare its choice of packed lunch.

Visiting groups range from young to late teens and frequently include those with learning difficulties or the mentally disabled. A frequent denominator though, is the hardship and lack of opportunity they can face back home.

"You can usually see the children start to change after just a few days here," says Monica. "Often they start out with the weight of the world on their young shoulders. After a few days of activity though," she says, "they often seem like different children."



Monica (pictured above fourth from left) with a group at Alan Stevenson House

It's the confidence and self-worth that these teens take away that makes all the difference. "It's not uncommon to see tears on departure day," says Monica, "as many just don't want to leave. I recently received a letter from a 24-year old woman who'd visited 10 years ago but who still remembered all our names. Her visit was clearly a turning point for her," she says.

"An experience like that leaves you hoping that all our visitors make it to a happy ending," says Monica who recalls a similar young girl visiting this summer. "When she arrived, she was severely withdrawn but after a few days here she literally started to beam. We later found out that she was the eldest of four in a family with no father and where the mother was a registered drug addict. The poor child had been the only real parent her siblings had known but she was still only 14. It's heartbreaking," she says, "but it makes us all the more determined to try and equip these children with the tools they need for a better future."

If you are able to support the Trust's crucial work in this area in any way, please contact the Development Office on 01865 311468.

Developments

Later this year will also see work start to improve disabled facilities at Alan

The work is being undertaken by Touchwood Renovations of Tiree using environmentally friendly Golpla® - a plastic, erosion control and grass



Stevenson House. Its unique attributes mean that the facilities it offers for disadvantaged and inner city children to enjoy activity-based holidays are

in great demand. As part of an ongoing programme to maintain and improve the Trust's offering here, a disabled toilet is to be installed along with a number of other sensible additions to improve disabled access.



As part of the Trust's commitment to improve 'interpretation and access' to Hynish, work is underway on a car park, including two disabled spaces, at Morton Boyd Hall to coincide with the recent opening of the Skerryvore exhibition.

The Skerryvore exhibition, housed in Morton Boyd Hall, Hynish, is open daily and entrance is free to the public



reinforcement system.

Accommodation availability

We still have a few weeks/weekends available for the 2004 season in both Morton Boyd House (sleeps up to 8) and Alan Stevenson House (sleeps up to 24) in Hynish, Isle of Tiree. Families and couples welcome. You can check the latest availability for our accommodation by visiting our web site at www.hynishcentre.co.uk

For more information on Tiree and the Hynish Centre please send us your address - we will send you a copy of our full colour Tiree Brochure.

Study groups flock to Hebridean breeding ground

Since completing the purchase of the Treshnish Isles in April 2000, the Hebridean Trust has continued the gradual rollout of its management plans for the archipelago. The uninhabited islands lie to the west of the Isle of Mull and despite the fact that none of the eight islands has any facilities, visitor numbers in recent years have continued to climb to current estimates in the region of 10,000 a year.



Bird survey expedition group 2004, lead by Simon Walker (pictured back row third from left).

The management plan sets out to provide protection for the islands' unique confluence of geological, archaeological and wildlife interests while ensuring that the islands continue to make a full contribution to the economy of the region. To this end, the Trust is currently exploring the feasibility of a grazing management plan that could potentially buttress both these aims.

Key threats facing the delicate natural balance of the islands include the potential impact of unmonitored and growing tourism on the indigenous seabird colonies, the errant introduction of harmful alien species and, of course, the threat on sustained marine pollution.

Key species of note include wintering barnacle geese from the shores of Greenland, around 5% of the total guillemot population estimated to nest in Scotland and around 1% of the world population of storm petrels. But while this smallest of sea birds, like the famous local puffins, faces potential risk due to its slow breeding patterns and 40 year life span, of still more significance in conservation terms is likely to be the significant numbers of manx shearwaters that make their home on the Treshnish Isles - one of the four main colonies of the Hebrides which crucially represent almost all of the world population of this intriguing winged fisherman.

With ever increasing visitor interest in this remote avian paradise, the need to find adequate funding for the implementation of the Trust's conservation management programme has never been more pressing.



Puffin © Stanton

Trust benefits from Moore guidance...

Honorary Members



This month marks the six-month anniversary of the appointment of Sarah Moore to the post of executive director of the Hebridean Trust where she now leads all ongoing fundraising, conservation and renovation projects. Previously Sarah worked for more than a decade in a number of demanding and high profile marketing roles within the UK's insurance industry but now reports that she "couldn't be happier" in her new role. "The role combines a number of demanding business activities," she says, "but I have to admit that I've never felt as well rewarded as I do now." Although based in its Oxford Development Office, Sarah has already become a familiar figure on Tiree and the surrounding islands and found herself making many new friends when she recently holidayed on Tiree with her young family.

In recognition of his years of patient service to the Trust, former director, Ian Rees, has been awarded an honorary life membership. The Trust would like to take this opportunity to thank Ian for all his efforts over the years and to wish him well in his new life which sees him taking to the open seas.

The Trust would also like to extend similar thanks along with an honorary life membership to Jane Moody, of AH Moody & Son Ltd. Jane has consistently demonstrated a commitment and dedication to the Trust's work without which numerous special projects would not have been possible.

The Hebridean Trust Trustees:

Michael Stanfield (Chairman)
 Professor Ian Boyd
 David Christie
 Alan Smith

The Hebridean Trust
 North Parade Chambers
 75a Banbury Road
 Oxford OX2 6PE
 Tel/Fax: 01865 311468
www.hebrideantrust.org
 (email:info@hebrideantrust.org)

For more information on [Tiree](#) and the [Hynish Centre](#) please send us your address - we will send you a copy of our full colour Tiree Brochure.

Join the Friends of the Hebridean Trust



We need your support! We invite you to join the Friends of The Hebridean Trust where you will be helping us to conserve the unique Hebridean way of life and environment. Your membership or donation can help develop new projects, to ensure future generations will continue to enjoy a rich and varied experience of life in the Hebrides.

See our pages on [membership](#) and learn more about the other ways you can [help the Hebridean Trust](#).

The Hebridean Trust
 North Parade Chambers
 75a Banbury Road
 Oxford
 OX2 6PE

Email: info@hebrideantrust.org

Tel/Fax: 01865 311468