

SCHOOLS'
HEBRIDEAN SOCIETY



REPORT 1976.

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SCHOOLS HEBRIDEAN SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT 1976

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LIVER

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South Uist	M.Heyward
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EXPEDITION LEADERS 1977

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Jura (Cruib Lodge)	TBN
Jura (Ruantallin	J Bromley
Lewis (ArdBheag)	Mr and Mr. P. N.Renold
mum (Salisbury's Dam)	TBN
Knoydart (Loch Nevis)	C Roscoe

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every year the Society receives help from so many people firms and organisations that it would be impossible to mention them all by name. We would however like to express our very sincere thanks to all those people without whose help our activities would not be possible.

*.....

EDITORIAL

Once again the literary efforts of the Society reach the printed page. Unfortunately the report is a little thinner this year, and a change the reason is not the constraints imposed by the Treasurer. Contributions were thinner on the ground this year especially project material. Also the input from the Lewis expedition did not make the deadline for the publication of the report. So next year while out there having a good time spare a moment to write it all down, .well some of it anyway..and send it in.

However, all is not lost for the phantom Lewis expedition. Young Laffery wrote a confidential report on how it all went to the SHS Board...juicy bits of which I will now reveal. First of all came the noble leader's thoughts on food.

Milk... difficult to use

Coffee. Rank

Washing-up liquid.. Poor - watch Fairy Snow TV advert.

Fruit cake.. This had a selling date of 16th July and by 16th August it tasted like it."

Wait for the bit about the officers...

" Absolutely no complaints..."

how about that. On a more serious note things seem to have gone well with the local population.

" Very good relationships were established with the local community. Help was given in bringing in peat and in hay-making and in return we were treated to meals and demonstrations of local arts like dyeing. spinning, weaving, and butter-making. Most of the expedition members took part in these."

And: in conclusion....

"A good expedition....the, site was a good one." From the rest of the expedition reports that follow I think you can see that things went well with them too. So once you have got through the Chairman's report you can read all about it. Many thanks to all those who did send in there efforts..now read on.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Once again it is pleasant to be able to report that last summer's expeditions went very well. Despite very poor weather conditions for the first expeditions and drought for the later ones we had neither exposure nor sunstroke to deal with. In large measure this success was due to the enormous amount of energy and enthusiasm shown by the leaders and officers on the expeditions.

During the past year, the 'back-room boys' have worked wonders with equipment, transport, food, projects, money, recruitment etc, so that we had full, well fed, equipped, planned and executed expeditions. Thank you to all these people.

The Board of Directors has also worked hard in making various decisions. We are to run an experimental mixed expedition in 1977. We have worked out a detailed capital expenditure plan for the next five years and are organising an Appeal to raise the necessary funds, details of which you have already received. Please persuade your parents to give generously, because without this capital expenditure the standard of equipment must, inevitably, fall. We have also, at long last, been able to locate and rent a permanent store in Leeds where all our equipment can be stored. This will be a great improvement over both Fort William and Poole. Finally, and most important, we have remained solvent. I would like to pay tribute to our retiring Financial Director, Richard Marshall. He has never been on an expedition, yet over the last six years he has put in an enormous amount of hard work on our behalf. In 1970 the Society was In grave danger of going bankrupt, yet we now enjoy a very sound financial position, a remarkable achievement, especially in view of recent rates of inflation. Thank you, Richard.

As most of you will know. I am now resigning as Chairman. I have enjoyed the last six years enormously, largely due to the help and enthusiasm of everybody in the Society. Roger Weatherly now assumes the reins of power! To him I wish the very best of good fortune. From the Society, may I ask for the same co-operation and enthusiasm that I have enjoyed.

Phil Renold



SOUTH UIST 1976

Leader: Michael Hayward

Camp Administrator: Stephen Southworth

Officers: John Adam, Simon Atkinson, Paul Chick, Colin Moss,
Michael Sharp, Ray Snook

Boys: Vincent Amiot, Pat Biddulph, John Bostock, John Cherrington, Boz Earley, Philip Espin, Stephen Howard, John Hudson, Simon Hyde, Trevor Knight, Tim Lewis, Hugh Lorrimer, Andrew Lunt, John McColl, Micky McCoy, Gary Marshall, Steven Marston, Ian Mayhew, Andrew Molloy, Mark Pratley, Ronald Smith, Richard Sneddon, Jock Stevenson, Matthew Stuttard.

LEADER'S REPORT

When at conference and one sees the chairman beckoning you towards a secluded corner, one has the same feelings as a prisoner seeing a judge don his black cap. However, nine months later I am still alive to tell the story, despite John and Ron's attempts to reduce the officers into physical wrecks.

For the first time since 1966 we brought the islanders good weather. After our initial drenching while setting up camp it became far too hot for any activity which required excessive expenditure of ATP. At least that was some people's excuse. Nevertheless, I managed the summit of Beinn Mhor on three occasions, and that of Stival twice.

Because of the good weather our flotilla could be seen on Loch Eynort most of the time. Unfortunately the "Protoveg" took its usual toll, and Boz's four day hospital confinement put paid to a sailing bivvy to Loch Skipport. My idea that it should be replaced by a visit to Rhum in the "Harvey Wallbanger" was also quashed. Yet, as can be seen from the other reports, the canoeists were far more successful. The stream when be seen diverted through certain channels provided the material for a lively boat race on the penultimate night. All the participants managed to sink their vessels, and the fact that the team containing all the officers won is totally without significance.

Fourteen of us spent a night on the top of Bheinn Mhor watching the sun go down over St. Kilda and rise again over Skye. An extraordinary cloud effect, a cliff emerging through the mist, an unexpected view, all surprise and arrest us for a moment. In the calm the distancing and isolating sound of far off human sounds gives the quiet a tangible quality. Is this the sort of silence in which we can learn afresh?

The ornithologists undertook the long trek to the Balranald reserve on North Uist. Their outward Journey was eventful, and all future SHS seekers after lifts should be well equipped with breathalysers and spare ridge poles. Not only did their efforts enable them to see more species than would have otherwise have been possible, but also to escape the plague of midges that had taken up residence around the camp site. Hugh set up the Longworth traps around the camp area, but most of the small mammals seemed to be far more interested in our store tent,

The field voles were the only species caught. I understand that the Patents Office has turned down the application from Steve Howard for his rat (man?) trap.

An army marches on its stomach and the SHS is no exception. Despite Lawrence Hall's excellent efforts Vincent still felt the need for a little home cuisine. He could be seen wading through the mud at low tide with buckets full to the brim with cockles, winkles, mussels, and small crabs. At first the rest of us recoiled from this horrible French custom. But after the first "Protoveg" supper they were given a try, and the "Lomotil" remained untouched! Thanks must also go to Steve for making Spam fritters palatable. But who will ever forget his combination of Spag Bol followed by rice pudding and pineapple. The observation (from his eating habits) that Steve's stomach extends from his xiphisternum to his pubic symphysis has been confirmed by barium studies.

It is impossible to thank everybody who enabled the expedition to take place, but especial thanks must go to John Joseph for ferrying us in the pouring rain, and to Donald McDonald for receiving our mail. Thanks must also go to Macauley's for transporting both us and our equipment without a hitch, to all the MCM, and to Trev for his never ending dry wit. Last thought for the day: if evolution had intended us to do capsized drill it would have endowed men with gills.

MIKE HAYWARD

AFLOAT ON SOUTH UIST 1976

The sailing on South Uist, I think we will all agree, was superb. The Wayfarer dinghy and Paul ('the Moon' funny lad..likes his beans unmashed) Chick both served us admirably. For those who took the helm and crewed the feeling of taut sheets in the hand, wind in the hair, and the exhilaration of leaning over the side, were unequalled experiences ~ though Tim may think otherwise. The people who operated the inflatable dinghy proved a valuable service, not only for the fishermen, but also for ferrying weary sailors from boat to shore. Many thanks to them, and to Micky "The Real" McCoy, who helped keep the canoes in a seaworthy condition.

Our stay on the island was rounded off in style by two highly successful overland and loch canoeing bivvies. My fellow pioneers and I proved 2 ideal routes, both over fifteen miles long, and thus proved wrong those who said it could not be done. Agreed the journeys were sometimes arduous, but that sea surfing on the breakers was just cosmic man, and the feeling of scampering down those Dunes to be greeted by the sun kissed (ugh: Ed.) West coast was one of contented explorers reaching a highly treasured goal.

In keeping with safety instructions I demonstrates the capsized drill on countless occasions much to the delight of the non-canoeists. However, I did have the last laugh when all the canoe users had to follow suit. But Gary, you didn't have to do it twice... Just loves falling out of canoes .that guy. Just one last thought for those who

shied away from any sort of water activity, particularly capsizing drill, God help you if you are in trouble at sea when my helicopter's not around.

RAY SNOOK R.N.

THE OFFICERS

MIKE HAYWARD: Photographer extraordinaire whose favourite occupation was photographing officers sleeping, which they did most of the time. He also had an endless supply of Nottingham Carnival T shirts dating back to the year dot. He loved shaving cream but had a distinct dislike of water activities. On the whole he was an excellent bloke although he did wear a silly hat and carry a shepherd's staff.

PAUL CHICK: A great sailor when he was not asleep. His coal mining boots seemed to be stuck to his feet. He also got lost constantly in the heather. A short comment for a short bloke. "See you at tea time- love the boys."

STEVE SOUTHWORTH: (another silly hat wearer) He was obviously a hard up student, as he bought Wrangler jackets for 50p. He loved hard work...he could sit and watch it for hours. He had an endless supply of dirty jeans, dirty jean shirts, and indescribable jean jackets.

MIKE SHARP: The vet who looked after the officers...had a thing about Liverpool since he sang "Liverpool Home" every night.

SIMON ATKINSON; Amazing Marine Biologist. Had a few ideas about winkle projects but the only sea creatures he dealt with were jelly fish...he throw rocks at them. He seemed to have kinky blue camel boots stuck to the bottom of his feet. He made an excellent home brew, but would not let anybody touch it. Then, when it was ready nobody would touch it.

COLIN MOSS Boggy was a climbing officer who was a bit too keen. He tried so hard to ascend cliffs he wore huge holes in his only pair of trousers. He was a great laugh and a great sport although he did resemble King Kong. Thanks a lot Colin.

RAY SNOOK: Did very imaginative things with hard-boiled eggs. By profession he was a seaman, but the journey to South Uist proved that he hadn't got his sea legs. he was also afraid of water., he didn't wash once during the entire expedition.

JOHN ADAMS: Although he was a medical student he couldn't do much with his bowel problem, of which everybody was constantly reminded. He told some great stories of his life at Cambridge and the hard women of Australia.



CLIMBING REPORT

Climbs were found at the southern end of Sloc Dubh (813276) on Ben na Hoe and Creg Mor as well as in the gorge above the campsite. The loose rock made it difficult to place secure chocks and pegs to make belays, many thanks must therefore go to the Blacks of Greenoch for donating four large marquee pegs for this purpose. Only one survived, the other three splitting under repeated pounding into the often rocky peat.

Two attempts were made to ferry a party of climbers over to Prince's Cave in Glen Corodale. We wished to tackle the climbs there and also those in Glen Hellisdale. The dinghy was intended to cut down on the walking, which with the heavy climbing gear would have made the Beinn Mhor saddle even more arduous. Unfortunately this idea was never put into action, deferred once through illness and again by rough seas.

Sane interesting climbs were found, several of which were quite demanding, and more people discovered them as the expedition progressed, my thanks go to all of them, especially the poor chap who had to contend with my full 12 stone on the rope five times in as many minutes, while I was on (or off) a particularly tricky overhang.

COLIN MOSS

CANOEING BIVVY NO.1

Unlike the decrepit matters of the 1975 South Uist expedition, who stated "the amount of portage that was revealed as being necessary forced the abandonment of the idea of an overland canoeing bivvy" (Ed: Ugh: Did we really let that through?) three members and one officer set off this year in search of the west coast. At the unearthly hour of 10.45. having laden down the canoes with food, sleeping bags and the dreaded O.B.venture, the party set off into the burning morning sun.

Our passage took us up the main part of Loch Eynort. and then by various smaller lochs to the main road at Bornish. A certain member of the party was not even tempted by the offer of tea and...? biscuits, made the day before by a certain young lady well known at the camp, and we were soon navigating the machair lochs. Having lugged the canoes a small distance overland, we reached the dunes of the west coast, and there had lunch, with only the waders and the noise of the breakers for company.

Our respite completed, we headed in the direction of Wilton Cross, our bed for the night. We arrived there in time for supper, and on our arrival learnt that plastic bags + fibre glass = ripped plastic bags. and that ripped plastic bags + SHS canoes = extremely damp sleeping bags (even though we had somehow avoided capsizing). Having eaten our

completely soaked bread, our ration of sausage and sponge pud, we changed into clean wet clothes and strolled down to the main road, here we had our arm twisted into accepting a lift from a friendly local to a destination of the same name. Having sampled the spa water from the river Spey, and something a little heavier, we returned merrily, if not a little late, to our tents. Andy Lunt and Ray had exceptional difficulty getting a lift and were, unfortunately, caught out by the leader on his midnight return from the hospital at Daliburgh. Early (???JMH) next morning we arose for a quick breakfast, and set out on our long journey home. This was uneventful with Ray, Andy and myself forcing ourselves to keep up with the tireless Moll only getting lost twice under the expert navigation of Able Seaman 3 months gone Snook, and arriving back at camp in time to join the midges for supper.

TIM LEWIS

THE THREE PEAKS WALK

Mot content with the view of South Uist from the island's highest mountain, Beinn Mhor, a group expeditioners set off on the supposedly exhausting three peaks walk. After a long circuitous course around the foothills of Spin, contouring to avoid losing height gained, we reached the summit of Hecla. Over lunch we surveyed the sight of Benbecula and through the heat haze, Eaval on North Uist.

After lunch we descended back down to the ridge and climbed the much steeper gradient of the Un-named peak (which the O.S. have named Ben Corodale to justify the new extortionate price of their maps). On the summit, as there had been on Hecla. there was magnetic rock in abundance - a map reader's nightmare. Having filled the leader's rucksack with such samples, we felt ready for the final section of the journey, the long slog to the ridge of Beinn Mhor. The sun was unrelenting and we could just make out the tiny figures of Paul and Vice-admiral Boswald partaking of coffee on the summit, they had taken almost as long to get there as we had to climb all three peaks! Eventually we walked triumphant along the ridge, where John Adams found some interesting Eagle pellets, but, unfortunately, no Eagles to go with them. Pausing briefly on the summit for the purposes of leader resuscitation, we made a bee-line for camp, where we were already late for tea. It had been a most interesting, if somewhat tiring, walk, and I myself enjoyed the geographical side of the walk, which had taken in a lot of typical glaciation features.

PAT BIDDULPH

THE WEST COAST BIVVY
(or why everybody should go on a bivvy
with the Camp Administrator and Leader)

The bivvy party set off at a cracking pace, quickly clearing the distance between the camp site and Donald McDonald's croft. Seeing no sign of the lethargic officers at this point we sped off to Bornish. One of the highlights of the trek came as a Golden Eagle (a highly elusive species on this expedition) made a brief appearance before disappearing behind the towering ridge of Beinn Mohr. The unpacking and repacking of binoculars and rucksacks allowed the officers to catch up, and we continued to our camping spot for the night, which was situated between the farming land of the machair and the sand dunes, 50 yards away was the utopian west coast beach.

The officers at last proved their worth and began cooking the evening meal. Meanwhile, England were playing Scotland at Lords: "McColl bowls his medium slow pea rollers - but it's short, Cherrington swings back and crashes it into the covers. Smith fields and makes a superb return throw - straight down a rabbit hole. Ron stopped play."

Having watched yet another magnificent sunset and undertaken a little wader identification, we sat round the fire that night. Isn't this what SHS expeditions are all about sitting watching the changing images in the fire, occasionally glancing up and surveying the vast expanse of night sky that makes us seem totally without significance the hot cocoa and discussions pursuing various lines of thought.... These reflections were rudely shattered by the sound of flying lead shot. The islanders were out "lamping" and had us worried for a few minutes, before they turned back along the coast.

The following day a 10 mile walk lay ahead. The first part lay through fields of ripe corn swaying in the breeze, interspersed with the odd piece of evidence of the previous night's 'lamping'. A good lunch was had by all on the bivvy, a fact commented upon by the rest of the camp on our return.

After an afternoon's road walking, we arrived at the crossroads at Pollachar. Our gallant leader fell flat on his back fast asleep whilst the tents were erected and supper cooked. Who will forget that evening the Whooper Swan on the farmyard pool? Curlews calling on the rocks, the familiar triangular headed silhouette of Eider out to sea, and the view across to Eriskay - with envious memories of "Whiskey Galore: This more than made up for the administrative bungle of arriving at Pollachar on a Sunday evening. In fact, we managed to cut short our losses the following morning, before wending our way back to Loch Eynort in an unbelievable 2½ hours. A most enjoyable end to an even more enjoyable expedition.

CHEZ, MAVERS, JMH

ORNITHOLOGICAL REPORT - SOUTH UIST 1976

having recovered from the pleasant surprise of my examination results, and spent ages surveying my photographs of fulmars, turnstones and expedition leaders covered in shaving cream,! can now look back on what was, ornithologically speaking, a successful expedition.

The birdwatching was well organised with a bivvy trip to Balranald as well as other walks to Loch Druidibeg and the coasts. A significant event was 'the great white stork' hunt along Loch Eynort that got the whole camp interested when Ray Snook, with certain other canoeists, returned from a trip one day having seen three large black and white birds similar to herons but flying with outstretched necks. Consultation with field guides convinced the canoeists that these birds were white storks. But as any ornithologist (whether an arser or a legger) will know white storks are not generally found anywhere in the British Isles let alone in the northern most parts of Scotland. Hours of suggestion that the birds might be swans, greylag, or snow geese failed to shake the conviction of the canoeists that they had seen white storks. So because of insufficient evidence the white stork does not appear on the expedition bird list, although a report of the 'sighting' has been sent to British Birds to satisfy the canoeists and their supporters.

The expedition produced a few further points of interest. Great Northern and Red Throated Divers were seen but no definite sighting of the Black Throated Diver was recorded. From the boat half a dozen Storm Petrel were seen flying towards Rhum (and Roger Weatherly) along with Gannets, Manxies, Shags, and Cormorants.

Grey Lag geese were the only birds of interest seen at Druidberg and they were typically inactive. On Loch Eynort we saw a family of nine goosander .while oystercatcher, redshank, and snipe were flying around by the camp. All six common species of gull were seen as well as common and arctic terns.

Two juvenile cuckoos were also sighted together - rather an odd occurrence if you think about it! The birds of prey were disappointing. The Golden Eagle was seen only twice. Once on the road by Paul Chick, and once along the west coast by Mike and his bivvy party. Plenty of stonechats, wheatears, twite, linnets, and other finches were seen by us all around the camp. There was .however, a distinct lack of tits and only one willow chiff was seen.

A total of 90 species was recorded, and since I doubled the number of slides of birds in my cupboard it must have been a successful expedition.

HUGH LORRIMER

APPENDIX

In the table below is a list of the species of bird seen. Alongside each species is a symbol denoting the frequency of sighting.

KEY:

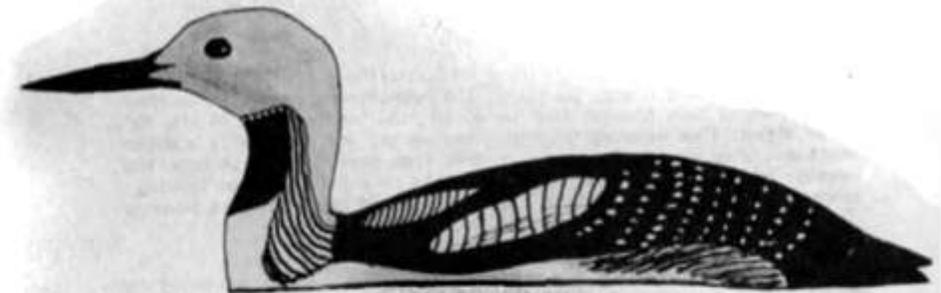
- 1 - Seen once only, possibly in a group.
- 2 - Seen between 2 and 5 times.
- C - Common, is seen more than 5 times, but on limited number of days.
- A - Abundant, is seen almost every day.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>
Red Throated Diver	1	Oystercatcher	A
Great Northern Diver	1	Ringed Plover	C
Little Grebe	2	Golden Plover	1
Fulmar	C	Lapwing	A
Storm Petrel	1	Turnstone	C
Manx Shearwater	C	Dunlin	C
Gannet	C	Sanderling	C
Cormorant	C	Redshank	A
Shag	C	Knot	2
Grey Heron	C	Greenshank	1
Canada Goose	1	Common Sandpiper	2
Grey lag Goose	2	Curlew	C
Mute Swan	A	Snipe	A
Whooper Swan	1	Bur T. Godwit	2
Shelduck	2	B.H. Gull	C
Mullard	C	Herring Gull	A
Teal	2	L.B.B. Gull	A
Gadwall	2	C.B.B. Gull	C
Widgeon	1	Common Gull	C
Shoveller	2	Kittiwake	2
Eider	C	Common Tern	2
Goosander	2	Arctic Tern	1
Sparrowhawk	1	Gullinot	2
Buzzard	C	Black Gullinot	2
Golden Eagle	2	Wood Pigeon	1
Hen Harrier	2	Rock Dove	2
Merlin	2	Turtle Dove	1
Kestrel	2	Cuckoo	2
Red Grouse	Heard once	Short-eared Owl	1
Coot	2	Skylark	A
Moorhen	2	Meadow Pipit	A
Quail	Heard once	Rock Pipit	2
Corncrake	Hears once	Grey Wagtail	1

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>
Pied Wagtail	C	Chaffinch	C
Pipper	1	Greenfinch	2
Wren	A	Twite	C
Stonechat	A	Goldfinch	2
Wheatear	C	Linnet	A
Robin	C	Bullfinch	2
Blackbird	C	House Sparrow	A
Songthrush	C	Tree Sparrow	C
Mistle Thrush	1	Carriion Crow	2
Corn Bunting	2	Hooded Crow	A
Willow Chiff	1	Raven	C
Reed Bunting	2	Starling	C

NOTE: Jock seemed certain that he saw a farmyard hen, but as I cannot find this species on the European check-list it has been left off.

HUGH LORRIMER



Black-throated Diver

Alan Gifford

RHUM EXPEDITION 1976

Leader: Roger Weatherly

Camp Administrator: Nick Deeley

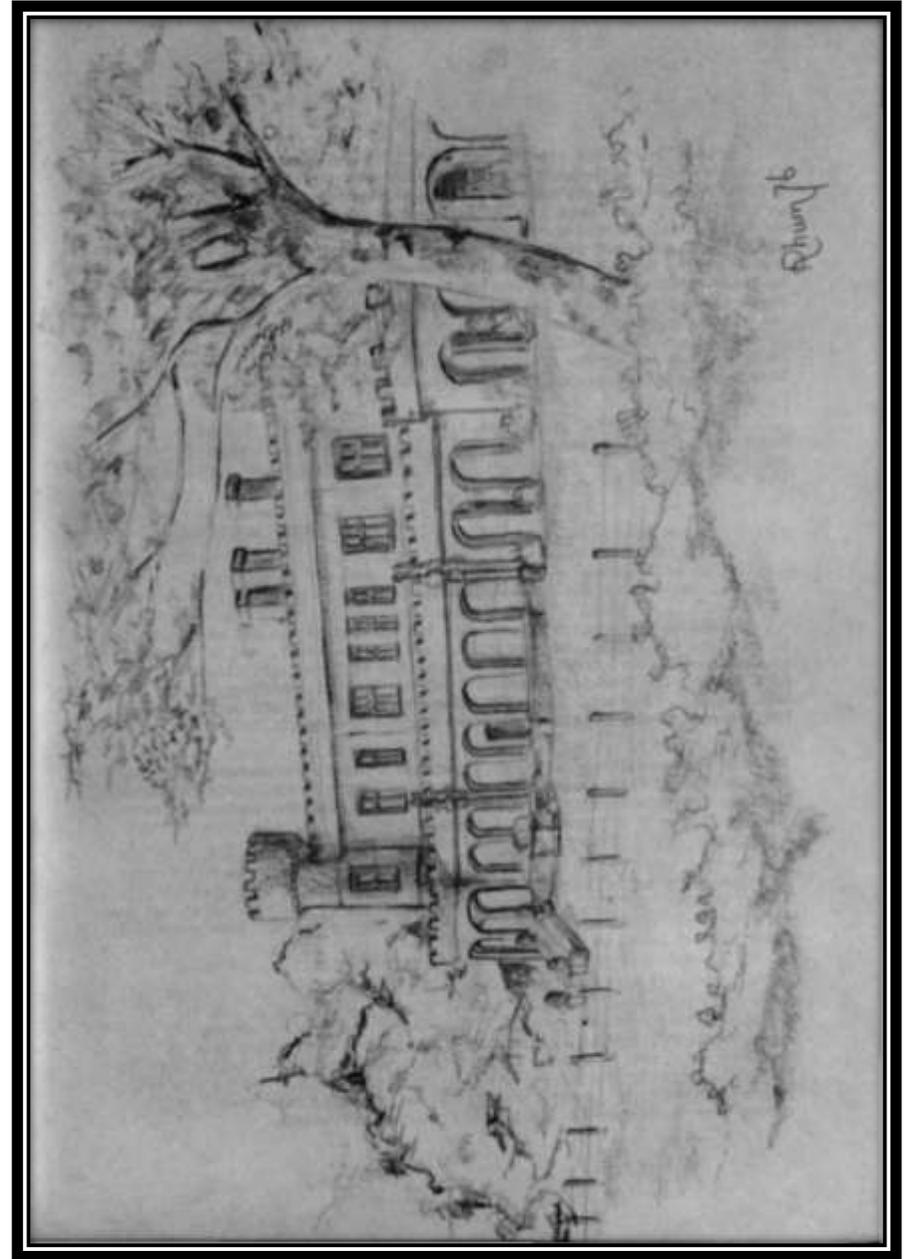
Members: Nick Caplin, Tim Chadwick, Dick Light, Phil and Lyn Renold, John Courtman, David Deeley, David Ellis, Colin Gilbert. Gavin Gordon. Paul Hillman, Mark Hopwood. Neil Hyde. Richard (Benje) Lovelock, David Morley. Martin Oetiker, Richard (Emu) Owen, Stephen Paynter. Chris Price, Nick Showan. Nick Smith, Patrick Thompson, Chris Venning.

LEADER'S REPORT

Leading an expedition to Rhum is rather like getting a free pass into Heaven - nothing can possibly go wrong.... once you get there. For aboard the elderly and laden MacBraynes vessel out of Mallaig it was far from plain sailing. "Excuse me Sir.."a discrete word in the left ear " I wonder if you would mind moving your party to the other side of the boat? They seem to have given us a noticeable list." Such is the impact of the Society on the Hebrides.

On a more serious note we would do well to remember the effect we have on an island like Rhum which has thirty inhabitants, a full programme of research to undertake in a short summer, and a deer cull to fit around the visitors. The Chief Warden ,Mr Corkhill. and all his staff were incredibly generous with practical assistance, time, advice, good humour, and we thank them all. Truly what we found on Rhum would not have been possible without them.

Nearly everyone knows something of Rhum. The surrealistic castle, the high demanding craggy Cuillins, the magnificent deer, the beaches. But who would have thought that we would find temperatures in the 60's. clear skies, five minutes rain in three weeks, and eventually a water shortage. When we started we all rushed from peak to peak In case the weather broke. But when it didn't we could be sometimes seen looking anxiously towards Skye ,through the heat haze to check in case someone had towed our island southwards to the Canaries.we were a large party for a senior expedition, and I waft delighted as It seemed everyone accepted the slight restraints that numbers imposed on us. Camp chorea and the cooking were enthusiastically handled, walkers happily accommodated larger parties than usual, and the turnaround speed of bivvy equipment was stunning. All this was with only three officers at the start, for sadly Mark Rayne and Stuart Fry suffered personal emergencies which prevented them departing with us. Phil and Lyn Renold came to swell the ranks, and throughout expedition members seemed to initiate, fill leadership gape, and improvise, officers or not. In fact "Your kindness was only exceeded...", so you have guessed who else was there? Launcelot - who arrived for five days at the end, and so greatly enriched us with his company in spite of the kilt. (I wipe my dipstick with a better rag.)



So what did we do? For the most part this was an activity expedition. The great ridge walk was completed in both directions, involving a 5.50 am start to avoid the afternoon heat. There were so many civvies we lost count. There were six to the bird hut on Hallival for a start. We did a slope analysis survey, a settlement study, two biological projects, a good deal of climbing, played rugby on the beach at Kilmory, and of course swam. We returned the kindness of the Nature Conservancy by twice weeding at Guirdil, and helping with a fencing project on the north side of the island. But there were other less tangible things- the extremely frank discussions some evenings when we learned to listen to each other, the nocturnal snipe at the camp site, canoeing on Long Loch, and soaking up the stillness, and of course the castle .. that time machine building, uncanny, incongruous, Edwardian, vital.

I am left thankful for August 1976- for the weather, that wild beautiful island, the Conservancy staff, the SHS executives and directors, and the members of the expedition itself. The experience was a privilege that will live on for all of us.

ROGER WEATHERLY

THE RHUM RIDGE

It was on Saturday 21 August when two parties of six set off to try to complete the ridge. We rose at 5.00am, had breakfast, and left camp at Salisbury Dam at 5.50am. Party 1 consisted of Dick Light (leader), Nick Showan, Tim Chadwick, Richard Lovelock, Paul Hillman (Buggy). and Mark Hopwood. In Party 2 were Phil Renold (leader), Richard Owen (Emu). Pat Thompson (Paddy), Neil Hyde, Steve Paynter and Martin Oetiker.

The two parties split up with the intention of meeting somewhere near the halfway point. Phil's party walked down the Harris track, across Ruinsival and over the tops to Barkeval, while Dick's party did the route in reverse.

Our party, with Dick leading, began by heading towards Long Loch, then cut up over the rough ground to Barkeval. After negotiating a few rough crags we reached the top of Barkeval (1,924 ft) at 7.15am, and were greeted with a cool breeze. We felt we had achieved something at the top, which was the first of seven challenging peaks ahead - an early start had been essential. After a short pause we pushed on to Hallival.

The top of Hallival (2,365 ft) was reached by 8.25 am. Now the ridge, an arete, lay before us, a drop of around 300 ft and a climb of 600 ft. It was an exciting part of the walk. After skirting round and scrambling over steep rock below Askival, we reached the top at 9.45am. This peak is 2,663 ft above sea level, the highest point on Rhum. While eating our rations we spotted the others across on Trollval, so after taking photographs of some good views of the Island, we descended over steep, well eroded rock to Bealach an Oir pass and stopped for water.

We went next up the gross slope of Trollval, stopping for lunch while waiting for the others. A short chat, and then they too were away for water. Trollval was reached by 12.10pm, a spectacular top with two small pinnacles. Dick thought of some great climbs, not forgetting a great drop off! We left at 12.19pm from the breezy top, a rugged climb then on to Alnshval (2,552 ft) - time 1.45pm - a short siesta, but Buggy decided to build a cairn, which we knocked down though he, determined, rebuilt it.

Walking was now easier, with the knowledge that the steepest climbs were over. At 2.10pm we crossed an unnamed hill and detoured to include Sgurr nan Gillean (2,503 ft), arriving at 2.40pm. After we had spent ten minutes admiring the view, we returned to the main ridge to collect the sacks. Eventually we conquered the top of Ruinsival at 3.50pm.

The last of the hills was completed and a sense of satisfaction came upon us. Descending off the steep side, we made it over the track with an effort, and slogged it back to camp. We made it by 6.00pm welcomed by a cuppa!

The other party did it in less leisurely fashion than we did. Having fit Phil with them, who had done it before, I think he tried to set the pace, aiming to beat his previous record. Leaving camp at the same time as we had, but striding out with fewer rests, they arrived back at 2.40pm experiencing the same thrills and pleasure as our party.

TIM CHADWICK

TAKING THE WATERS ON RHUM

It has been rumoured that there was a strange and hitherto unheard-of, occurrence on the Isle of Rhum this year. Due to the general lack of precipitation and blizzards, a group of sturdy young men, led by the adventurous and previously sane Roger Weatherly ventured forth into the fury of the ocean, to a depth of approx 3'6' (depending on one's height) for the duration of about half a minute, whereupon the leader was heard to remark, "I know the SHS Is supposed to change one's outlook on life, but this is stretching things a bit far!" With that, he promptly leapt out of the water, proving to a neighbouring deer stalker that one doesn't have to venture as far as St Tropez for a sight of the unusual!

Those less gullible members of the expedition took to bathing in the streams, waterfalls, pools and lochs which were of a far more agreeable temperature. Saying that, there was one foolish enough to accept a bribe to swim the length of Long Loch (which lives up to its name) in search of the Long Loch Monster (which apparently makes Nessie look no bigger than a pregnant Wombat!) Alas, even though he claimed to have spotted it twice, it was found to be Martin in his more familiar role of underwater canoeist..... Which reminds me I still haven't collected my reward!

NICK CAPLIN

KINLOCH CASTLE

On arrival on the Island of Rhum the first thing that strikes you is the settlement at Kinloch. It is surrounded by acres of rugged hills and is connected by rough tracks to other parts of the island.

In the very centre of Kinloch stands Kinloch Castle built by Charles Bullough as a shooting lodge for himself, his family, and friends. It is an enormous building built of sandstone shipped specially to the island, and is described as the best example of an Edwardian house in Britain after Sandringham.

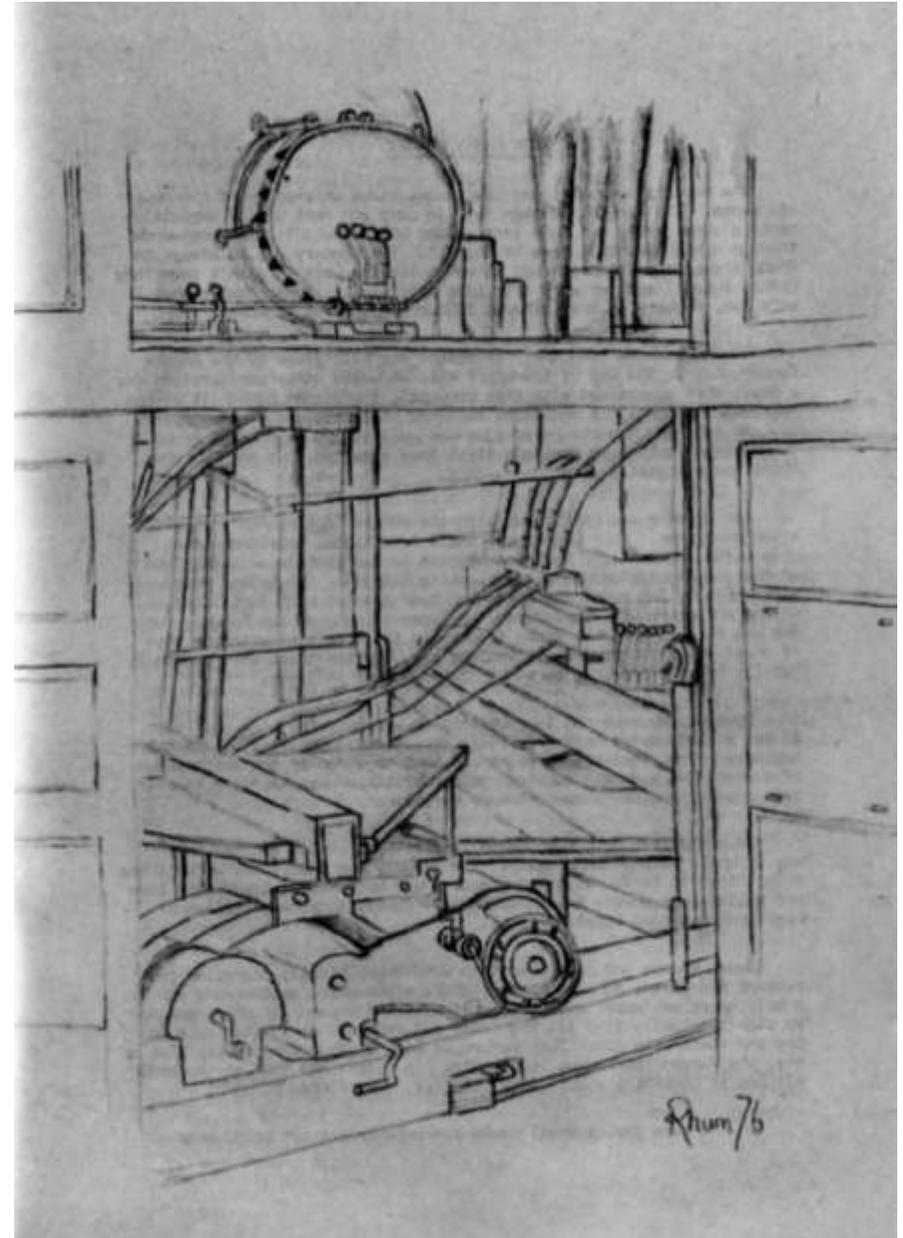
The members of the expedition were all fortunate enough to be taken on a guided tour of the castle by its custodian Sir Ball. Once inside it was like stepping back in history for the interior decoration was the same as when the house had been in use. The house was liberally decorated with eastern ornaments and paintings collected during the owner's voyage around the world. (Part of his 21st birthday present from his father.) To my mind the outstanding feature was a Javanese monkey-eating eagle cast in bronze which drew one's attention by its size and ferocity.

The house is full of interesting innovations of the time which we now take for granted such as double glazing, air conditioning, and an astounding bath that could spray water at you from every conceivable angle. Among the many bedrooms in the house were several situated in a dark musty corridor. The most obvious things in these rooms were the very short beds which would prove most uncomfortable for those over 5' tall. We were told that these rooms were for the less important guests of the castle.

Another amazing feature of the castle is its famed *organola* of which there is only one other in the world. It was built by Imhoff and Muckle of Barden and was Sir Charles' way of keeping up with the Joneses for Prince Albert had just had one built. The *organola* still plays today and while we were there it played the William Tell Overture, and enabled us to see the hundreds of moving parts going berserk and trying to keep up the pace.

It costs the Nature Conservancy a great deal of money to keep the castle going, but I think all the members of the expedition thought that it was well worth while.

CHRIS PRICE



WORK PARTY REPORT

The morning was warm, and low, heavy cloud whisked round the mountain peaks. The midges had been left in camp and neat of the expedition members were strung out in a long column which would its way westwards through a high mountain pass to Guirdil. The scenery was, as always on Rhum, tremendous, and although it was a longish walk It didn't seem long before Guirdil and our work site came into view.... yes, that's what I said, we, ranters of the infamous SHS were going out to work!!

It had boon decided that, in return for help given by the Nature Conservancy in the way of transport etc, we would offer our services for a day. When approached with this proposal, the warden had a fit of the Hebridean Habdabs his moustache twitched violently., and he accepted.

As jobs go, the one he gave us was well-suited to a large group..

...weeding! Not quite what one might have expected, but on Rhum anything and everything goes!

The weeding was associated with the Nature Conservancy's reforestation program-re. Four years ago, small traditional Hebridean trees only a few inches high, had been planted on two fertile alluvial fans on the slopes of Bloodstone overlooking Guirdil. The trees, mainly Birch, Elder, Oak and Scots Pine, had been planted with fertilizer, which, unfortunately, had caused the grass to outgrow the trees. Our job was to pull away the grass from round the trees, clearing an area of about eight inches. Easy, you may say. but the trees were generally totally hidden, and they were not staked out or in lines.

However, we were not to know this as we approached the enclosure. It was at this point that Dave Ellis showed definite signs of the extraordinary effect that the Hebrides can have on a man in the short space of a week. He suddenly acquired an irresistible urge to fling himself into a cold boulder-strewn stream..backwards. Amazing!

Nevertheless, work soon began, but if many people had had their way it would have stopped again. The trouble was that trees weren't the only things to be found in the grass, there were midges too. Every time one pulled back a wet, knee-deep mass of grass, a crack battalion of mighty midges came bursting forth.

Great whoops and cheers went up when Roger finally signalled the retreat for lunch, some two hours later, after which another one and a half hours of "more" enjoyable grass pulling began - i.e. no midges! We didn't actually find all the trees and returned at a later date to try and finish the job. Just before we left under a wonderfully blue sky, the Warden thanked us for feeding his midges and then, at the end, slipped in something about grass pulling. We returned to camp!

On the same day. a small Poole contingency set out to do some

fencing. I was not present myself, but heard vague stories of an enormous Scots foreman, cursing the midges and hurling around a colossal piece of special fencing equipment, while our SHS lads stood around and watched. That's more like it!

STEVE PAYNTER

CONSERVATION OF RHUM

Rhum was purchased in 1957 by the Nature Conservancy from the trustees of the late Sir George Bullough, and since then it has been a National Nature Reserve.

It was selected for its variety of habitats - mountain, coast, peatland and the fact that it is an Island and therefore not easily accessible by "harmful elements of Mankind" This isolations and diversity of habitat enables detailed studies to be undertaken in an environment partially free from the influence of man.

A number of these studies and experiments were under way during the 76 SHS expedition on the island. Among those that aroused great interest were the grazing habits, and management of red deer, the reintroduction of sea-eagles and the restoration of tree cover.

Red deer are native to Rhum but during the 18th century they were hunted to the point of extinction. They were reintroduced about a century ago to establish a sporting estate, and, when the Nature Conservancy took over, there were nearly 1.500 deer on the island. This number was maintained by the Conservancy, and culling only takes place to remove old or unfit deer. The deer research programme of movement, behaviour and food preferences took place mainly at the North end of the island, around Kilmory (the only area from which the expedition was partially banned). Each year about 70 calves are caught and marked with coloured ear tags, so that it is possible to identify individual deer without unnecessarily disturbing them.

Sea-eagles have been absent from Scotland for many years, and it is hoped that if a few pairs can be encouraged to nest on Rhum they may re-colonise the Highlands.

Other birds and mammals are to be reintroduced throughout Rhum but these are long-term projects depending greatly of the restoration of tree cover.

Forestation is a major experiment on Rhum. It is hoped to return to the island a mixed woodland similar to that which followed the last Ice Age. When this has been accomplished, a lengthy project indeed, the reintroduction of more rare wildlife can begin.

Rhum is an invaluable open air laboratory, and already the results and knowledge gained from the red deer research has assisted deer conservation and control throughout Scotland. The information to be gained in the future will be priceless, and who knows, Rhum may become the last outpost and refuge of some of the rarer flora and fauna of our country.

D J ELLIS



RHUM BIRD REPORT

The Rhum expedition had a good contingent of ornithologists who were prepared to go out and look for the birds. Between us we covered most of the island except the few miles of south coast that we could only work on Sundays.

The birds of prey were most popular. We saw golden eagles, kestrels, and peregrines on several occasions. Of course the white-tailed eagles, in their cages, were an additional attraction. The golden eagles were often seen soaring near the camp during the early part of the morning, and during the midge period at night.

There were very few waders on Rhum. This is not surprising as the island is not really an ideal habitat for them. There were, however, several pairs of golden plover and many common snipe. One night we got a magnificent view of a snipe feeding in a pool a few yards from the marquee. Roger, who had spotted the bird, shone a torch on it and it strutted around quite unconcerned coming quite near to him.

We failed to find the sea cliffs where the razorbills and guillemots nested. We covered most of the coast, but I fear on one occasion we had not gone far enough around. But what of the most sought after bird - the manx shearwaters? These birds managed to attract most of us half way up Hallivall, even during darkness. All of us who heard their weird selection of calls will always remember those nights.... they were great.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those concerned with running such a marvellous expedition. I am also compelled to thank the Weatherman who was so very kind. I do not, alas feel like thanking the midges.

PATRICK THOMPSON



MIKE
TOMKINS

THE
RHENIGADALE
CAMP-SITE
& VILLAGE

HARRIS 1976

Leader: John Bromley

Officers: John Cullingford, Ken Cook, Dave Harding, Martin Rhodes,
Andrew Todd, Sean O'Brien.

Boys: Brian Barnes, Steven Barrett, Michael Biddulph, John Broadbent. Ian Carr, John Chasemore, David Clarke, David Eaglesham, Mark Eustace, Alexander Foss, Philip Hay, Stephen Hide, Michael Johnson, Philip Jones, Alun Lloyd, Richard Tucker, David Nichols, David Perritt, Neil Rivers, Alexander Robertson, Nicolas Simon, Andrew Smith, Simon Thomas, David Thomas, Richard Thompson, Michael Tonkin, Ian Wolstonholme,

LEADER'S REPORT

Long ago - or so it seems....But to look at the photographs recaptures instantly the atmosphere of the rocky, green wetness of the resilient Rhenigadale inhabitants of those heady days when we did lots or merely forgot our excuses for not doing much. A scattered miscellany of memories which recur at will or when least expected.

Harris is a unique setting, even on the enchanting Hebrides, differ -unt. We were able to sample so many facets of the island...the wild ness of the campsite and its scope for activities, the sporadic weather (No, not rain - just liquid confetti!). A good number of us managed to get to the strikingly different Luskentyre area on errands as various as sand-dune photography, bird study, and to sample plant foods. Most of us sought further practice on the Scriob (Zig-zag) footpath to Tarbert, whether on the bread-run, or en route for the Tarbert Games or the weaving visit.

The strenuous hill walking around the site was obligatory, whilst the Clisham trek,-of disputable distance and hazards, was open only to the 'Hard Bunch', led (from the rear) by Ken and John C. The canoes were, well used on brief forays, but most successfully on the open water: over to the deserted settlement of Moliginish with its haunting, atmospheric ruins, and on to a twelve mile round trip up Loch Seaforth to plant the SHS flag on Seaforth Island (at beach level, I must add), to the accompaniment of sea-water seasoned Jam sandwiches and damp matches. The brightly helmeted climbers scaled the few faces near the site with enthusiasm and skill.

The weather tested us a fair bit, demolishing some tentage in one assault. Despite this, the study work was pursued doggedly. John Chasemore went to inordinate lengths to study seashore plant and animal life, often donning snorkel and mask whilst the rest of us shivered to watch. Phil Jones fitted a rock study project in whilst involved in most other activities too. Alun Lloyd and Dave Perritt put into practice an idea for a survival shelter. -Ian Carr, amongst many other things, studied fish anatomy fairly regularly. Michael Tonkin amazed us by his ability to interpret the local scene in his sketches. And so much more besides.

Our expedition would have been so much less without our proximity to the village of nine adults and four children. At times this posed difficulties, at others unexpected dividends, like the cooperative Sunday service, the insights into local life and work, but, most important, the mutual giving. And what a flop without such a sound (i.e. tested, stamped, and certified) band of officers. John, always ready to raise our spirits with music and song, always ready to give things a try. Martin, the jovial jester who didn't let anything get him down. Dave, of the deep, bass voice, always smiling, did he see something we missed?). Ken, the ever-busy Camp Administrator, looking after our insatiable appetites. The modest piper and guitarist. Andrew, the Bread, exhorting us to editorial sacrilege. Our doctor at large, Sean, last seen disappearing over the headland in search of samples. Exiled for telling Yak-yak stories. Thank you all

JOHN BROMLEY

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF DUNES, WEST HARRIS

The Scottish Nature Conservancy Council asked the Schools Hebridean Society to undertake a photographic survey of the sand dunes in the Luskentyre basin. West Harris. The object was to study the effect tourists had on the dunes by wearing away what grass had established itself, and, therefore, allowed wind erosion to take place.

When we arrived at the site suggested, Corran Seilebost, we found grassed dunes with Marram grass at the edges, and other flora in the centre cover of the dunes. There was, however, no sign of the tourists! On making enquiries locally, we discovered that they were a mile down the road, on another set of dunes nearer Horgabost. We carried out a survey of the two sets of dunes, in order to provide some comparison between those affected by tourist pressure and those not so affected.

Accurate photographs were taken, in order that they could be repeated in the near future to assess the erosion process. Bearings were taken on houses, hills, and other stable objects. The edges of the dunes were studied intensively (1 photograph every fifty paces), as these were the surfaces most prone to erosion.

Despite all this effort, we were told by the local inhabitants that the erosion process had nothing to do with the tourists, but had been taking place over the last forty years, largely because the Government agencies had stopped planting grass to hold the dunes together. However, the expedition was a success despite some inclement weather.

DAVID NICHOLS

WILD FOODS BIVVY

The Sellebost (pronounced •Sheilebost) bivvy wasn't exactly an unqualified success, but then it was an experiment, and all experiments contain the possibility of failure. Otherwise they are not experiments. Anyway, that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!

The intention was that we should aim to prepare at least one meal consisting entirely of wild foods. Consequently, the Luskentyre / Seilebost area was chosen being on the west coast there was a greater chance of variety in plant life, and therefore, edible plants. There was indeed variety, though items for the menu still seemed relatively scarce.

On the sands, we hoped to find cockles. There were cockles, but lacking local knowledge of exactly where, and not really having time to find out, our catch was somewhat limited. Fortunately, there were not many plants which had the annoying exclusively subterranean habits of cockles. We found extensive and dense growths of silverweed. Alas, the roots (the edible part) proved inaccessible without the aid of a digging implement, we resorted instead to eating the stems, which were not bad in taste, but where stringy to say the least. There was also a fair quantity of sorrel, which proved popular. Also, the close relatives, the yellow and curled docks, which proved less popular, being rather bitter in taste.

With regard to preparation and cooking, we found that the plants we were able to sample were more palatable raw. The sorrel lost its interesting crispness and became mushy when cooked, although its flavour was still distinctive. The rather fibrous silverweed stems were not much helped by boiling, and rather lost their taste, whilst remaining chewy. Wild plants do not, of course, grow in neat convenient beds, so considerable time has to be spent picking the stuff, and in the case of roots, washing and preparing it prior to eating.

To conclude, we didn't really manage one meal from wild sources, though other factors, such as lack of time and an inadequate knowledge of the location hampered us considerably. However, there was no lack of plant food, and the general feeling was that the experiment could have worked, given more time and better local knowledge.

SEAN O'BRIEN, ALEX FOBS, AND SANDY ROBERTSON

NATURAL DYES PROJECT

We began with a fairly long list of plants which were considered suitable for dyeing. Some of these plants proved too hard to find, and we did not try to look for others through lack of time. We managed to try the following, Heather flowers. Heather tops. Heather roots. Sedge grass. Nettle, Tormentil, Yellow Ragwort, seaweed, Sorrel, and two lichens. Beard of the Rock and Crotal.

Our first attempt was with Heather flowers. We put the flowers in an empty fruit tin with some wool scraps we had collected and washed well, added water and some salt. These were boiled for several hours, then the wool was washed. The result was a rather disappointing pale brown.

It is common practice when dyeing by the natural process, to use a mordant to encourage the dye to set. Mordants are metallic acids, such as Alum, Chrome and Tin. In the past urine was used, and we decided to try this, having none of the other compounds with us. We repeated the attempt with the Heather flowers, and this time achieved a much better purple-brown colour. We then treated most of the other plants in a similar way.

Heather tops and Heather roots produced a pale yellow colour, as did Sedge grass and Yellow Ragwort, of slightly different shades. Sorrel produced a strong green-yellow. Nettle, Tormentil and Seaweed all produced varying shades of light brown. By far the most successful dye was a mixture of the two lichens, when a beautiful deep auburn colour was obtained. Lichens, incidentally, require no mordant, and are called substantive dyes.

Future expeditions could achieve greater success by taking with them chemical mordants. Comparing the results obtained using mordants and without their use could be a useful and interesting study. Finally, the wool must be well washed and rinsed, otherwise the grease will resist the plant dyes.

DAVID (*FRED*) THOMAS

THE LIMPET

Do you cling to the rock when I kick you
in defiance or self-defence?
If you had legs would you run away,
..if you had eyes would you return my stare?

DAVID (*FRED*) THOMAS

ESCAPE

It's a hell of a fight
To get into the light
And my blisters are giving me pain
But if I stay in town
Where life gets me down
I'll have blisters all over my brain.

The useless facts
And meaningless tracts
And months of so-called education
All the lies
And all school ties
Are left behind at Euston Station

Away from the crowd
Where the noise isn't so loud
And on waking thoughts don't have to shrink
For after each mile
And over each stile
It becomes that much easier to think

DAVID (*FRED*) THOMAS

THE CLISHAM HIKE

We set off at about 09.30 climbing up over the boggy ground at the base of Toddun. Reaching the top of a small valley we got our first glimpse of Clisham. the biggest of three peaks in North Harris. We had all had ourselves equipped with light packs, and despite the ground being soggy we all managed to reach the Tarbert-Stornoway road without serious mishap. After skirting a small hill we stopped for lunch, the dreaded corn beef sandwiches. From there we aimed straight towards Clisham climbing a grassy shoulder of the mountain to reach the main peak. For the final 100' the going was very steep and rocky. Eventually we clambered up to the summit at 2,622ft. The view was incredible, and we could see the whole of Harris and Lewis spread out before us like a map. We could also look down on the other high peaks around us. After an hour we decided to start back. We climbed down the other face of Clisham. another scree slope, in a south easterly direction. After negotiating some small hills we reached the main road again. As we had to get bread supplies in Tarbert we made our way there by hitch-hiking. From there we returned to the camp at Rhenigadale along the strenuous four mile footpath, and managed to get back in time for the evening meal. Quite a hike!

ANDREW SMITH

HARRIS BIRD REPORT 1976

The grand total of 62 species was recorded for Harris this year. This was an improvement on previous check lists. However, numbers were not our objective, but rather a comparative study of the species found around Rhenigadale, and Luskentyre Bay. 29 different species were identified by a one night bivouac party of six bird fanatics and myself that visited Luskentyre, Regular counting near the camp confirmed a total of 52 species, and a further 4 were spotted at or near Tarbert. It was interesting to discover that, as we expected, in the Sandybay area the habitat suited the waders, few of which were seen at Rhenigadale. However, we saw many moorland species around the campsite. Sea birds were common as well as a few upland species. The most notable of the latter seen was the Golden Eagle. Any future survey on Harris could usefully incorporate a study of the food available at different sites. Invaluable help was obtained from the following!

Dave Eaglesham
Mark Eustace
Steven Hide
Richard Tucker
Simon Thomas
Richard Thompson

(Note: The complete bird list for Harris can be obtained from the SHS files.)

DAVID HARDING



NORTH UIST 1976

Leader: Alan Fowler

Camp Administrator: Pat Bradley

Officers: Bill Hattersley, David Jones, Jim Loring, Bob Orrell,
Peter Smith, Bruin Thompson,

Boys: Darren Bottomley, Piers Hart, Geoffrey Rawling, John Carey, Andrew Holt, John Ringrow, Mark Courtneil, Mark Hudson, Mark Samuels, Stephen Cuthill, Mark Jaques, Iain Scarborough, Peter Fowles, Paul Jeffrey, Duncan Smith, David Frankland, Graham Kramer, Ceri Thomas, Paul Gradwell, Richard Ledger, Tony Thompson, Adam Gretton, Paul Lemkes, Timothy Walton, Bryn Griffiths, Mark Lester, Bruce Welsh, Ross Hamilton, Simon Lord, Peter Wood, Christopher Harper, Christopher Prentice, Christopher Young.

LEADER'S REPORT

In a recent article in the "Weekend Scotsman" the island moors are described as "...the oldest, kindest, sweetest smelling, most beguiling countryside left in the land..if there is a heaven on earth then it is here." While most of us at the end of a weary walk in the drenching rain and yielding peat must have cursed this "heaven" the sentiment does go part of the way to explain why we go to the remotest parts of the Hebrides for fun, and not self punishment.

The focus of the expedition to North Uist was a cottage called Eaval, set in the south east corner of the island where the 'most beguiling countryside' expires in a maze of sea lochs and rocky islets. All paths led to its promise of food and shelter. It is therefore to the credit of everyone who took part in the expedition that, despite continual rain and cloud, the cottage was mostly empty during the day, and an exceptional range of explorations, projects, and activities was accomplished.

To convey the true atmosphere of the expedition I would have to describe something of the character and activities of each of those people listed at the head of this article. But that is clearly impossible in such a short space. There were achievements, however, of which we may all be proud as a group. There was: The ascent of all the three highest peaks on South Uist, and the highest on North Uist survival of an orienteering course, survival of a wide game, visits to Balranald R.S.P.B. reserve, visit to a working tweed loom at Loch Eport an archaeological dig at Sollas, a fair at Hosta, and canoeing, sailing, walking, climbing, and bivvyng in damp weather with undampened enthusiasm. Singing and stories filled the evenings in the ' barn' by the very smoky fire. Some of the best moments of the expedition are recalled in the articles that follow, and a slide and tape recording survive to prove that it all really happened.

An expedition has itself to thank for much of its own success. Each member does some tasks which he may not at the time enjoy, but which he does because they have to be done for the well being of the group. The officers contribute more - their skills in sailing, canoeing, medical treatment, music, climbing and special subjects, as well as countless ideas and leadership in activities. However, we must look outwards to thank those people who enabled the expedition to happen at all. We must acknowledge especially our gratitude to Lord Granville for the use of his land, his Land Rover, and his boat on Loch Obisary, to Ewen Nicholson for his essential assistance with boats for moving the equipment, handling our post, constant helpfulness and most of all for the use of Eaval Cottage, to his friends and relations for their help and hospitality, to Phillip and Michelle Caxon for their interest, patience and hospitality, and to Mr MacKinnon, headmaster of the school at Lochboisdale who made us welcome at the beginning and end of the expedition. Finally, we are grateful to the Board and executive team of the Society, and to our parents who (for various reasons, no doubt) encouraged us to spend three weeks away from them and in the majority of cases provided the wherewithal for the expedition to run. Thank you for North Uist 1976 and for our taste of the island moors.

ALAN FOWLER

THE TWEED SHOP - LOCH EPORT

After a hurried breakfast, we set off for Claddach Carinish. Pete Smith set a cracking pace to keep up with his tight schedule as he was expected to pick up a group who were climbing the three highest peaks on South Uist - Beinn Mhor, Hecla and Beinn Corodale. It was a tight squeeze with ten boys and two officers shoulder-to-shoulder in the Land Rover which Lord Granville very kindly lent to us, and by the time we had picked up the bread from Grimsay, the back of it was very full. Having deposited the bread at Baymore, we arrived at the tweed shop at half past one. After spending twenty minutes in the main shop we went through into a second room where there was a working loom. The loom, one of the few left in the Hebrides, was worked with a couple of foot-pedals. Originally, they produced 120 yards of tweed per week, but the loom worker, Angus, is beginning to feel his age and it is usual for him to produce only 1 to 1½ bales (60 - 90 yards) per week. There must be at least 30 different types of Harris tweed, light or heavy, dark or bright. Because of the number of people who come to Loch Eport to buy the tweed the prices are quite high, although the quality of the work is also very good. Almost everybody bought some tweed from the shop and in the Land Rover on the return journey the variety of colour in the tweeds bought was quite astonishing.

RICHARD LEDGER

THE THREE PEAKS AND FOUR BEAKS OF SOUTH UIST

Officers: Jim Loring, Bob Orrell

Boys: Mark Courtneil, Peter Fowles, Chris Harper, Simon Lord, Geoff Rawling, Bruce Welsh.

We set off from camp on the evening of Friday 30 July at 4.30pm. We walked the four miles with our packs to reach the end of the road where the Land Rover awaited us. Later that evening we set up our camp, consisting of one Icelandic (for the boys) and one Vanguard Force Ten (for the two officers. Unfortunately, our tent was not quite complete, but with a little improvisation we managed to make it look something like a tent. We then took a brief stroll down to the coast so that a few boys could telephone their parents. It was a very peaceful evening, and the landscape was in marked contrast to that of North Uist.

When we returned, we began to cook supper, which was a very watery but enjoyable soup. Next we attempted to cook our main course - fried rice, tomatoes and spam, which ended with everything cooked in one saucepan and served in mugs! For our 'nightcap' which we combined with our supper we had biscuits, drinking chocolate and a large helping of something which is said to have the same molecular structure as diamond.

However, after surviving a heavy dose of Jim's cake and a rather stormy night, we set off after breakfast at 6.45am, and endured a five mile trudge (with four packs between eight of us) across boggy, rough terrain.

At last we reached the foot of the first of our three victims, which was Hecla, the mountain 606m (1,966') high. It was quite a hard climb to gain the valuable height of the lower ridge.

Just before the last part of the scramble for the peak. Simon Lord exclaimed suddenly that he had sighted a bird. As we entered the final ridge, we all saw the bird, except that there were now four of them! Indeed, we recognised them as two Golden Eagles with their young! Unfortunately, by the time we had reached the summit the Eagles had flown away, but, however far they had gone, the view compensated for their loss by being far, far better than we had ever imagined. The weather was holding out, and visibility was superb.

As we cautiously descended the steep south westerly slopes of Hecla, we looked back constantly to try and catch a further glimpse of the Eagles. (We did see one again, but from the foot of Hecla).

We ascended the North West ridge of Beinn Corodale, which led to the very steep and gruelling last climb, a slope of approximately 50 degrees with grass covering its greater part.

We were lucky indeed that the grass was not slippery, as I doubt that we could have reached the summit. The summit was, admittedly not as spectacular as that of Hecla, but one could appreciate the steepness of the North East face of Beinn Mhor and the South West slopes of Hecla.

There was a brief altercation between Bob and Jim as to whether or not to have lunch then or later. As Bob had managed to keep Jim on the move whilst they were talking we were a fair way up the mountain when it was decided that we should stop there for a snack before the last and most strenuous push to the summit ridge. One luckless member of the crew had not equipped himself adequately with socks, and suffered blisters as a result, but after he had put on another pair of socks he felt better.

This last climb was really hard, with Bob, Pete, Jim and myself carrying the packs. We were pretty tired after it, but once we had reached the ridge we felt much better. We could see the peak on the latter part of the ridge and soon we had all climbed into the small shelter around the trig point. We were soon indulging in lunch, consisting mainly of sandwiches and date cake.

We had climbed all three peaks before lunch and we could sit back and admire the fantastic view. From where we were we could see everywhere and anywhere we wanted, which was amazing. Indeed, we had even beaten the South Uist expedition to the top of the three peaks!

MARK COURTNELL PETER FOWLES

ISLAND ROVERS

Due to the generosity of Lord Grenville in giving the expedition the use of a long wheel base Land Rover we were able to be much more mobile than previous expeditions. In spite of various technical difficulties not unconnected with the starter motor we used the vehicle to take out two bivouac parties the Balranald bird reserve, a group to the three peaks of South Uist, a team to the archaeological dig at Vdal, two lots to visit the only working loom on the island, and another lot to see the agricultural show at Hosta.

The mobility of the expedition gave most of the members a greater opportunity to meet the Islanders, and allowed a closer observation of the way of life of the local community. The problems of the island remain as they have been for many years. The main ones are the lack of employment and the lack of opportunity for the younger people. This is in spite of the work of the Crofters Commission and the Highlands and Islands Development Board. These topics came up frequently in conversation, notably at the Tweed shop where we were told that forty years ago fourteen looms were working at Loch Eport alone

Now Peggy McDonald and Angus McDougall work the only remaining loom on the island. A constant source of irritation is the dependence of the island on the ferries and the high freight charges associated with them. One would like to hope for a system akin to that operating in Scandinavia where the ferry routes are considered part of the national road system, and only nominal charges apply. It is interesting to note that the island car owner pays the same tax as those on the mainland, but he has only fifty miles of road to run his car on unless he pays to take his car to the mainland.

The proposed change in the system of landholding by crofters, which would allow them to buy the freehold from the landlord, has not yet been fully discussed in the islands. Any change would almost certainly mean a fundamental change in the island philosophy, and it will be interesting to watch the progress of the legislation on this subject go through Parliament. These thoughts were inspired by the islanders, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their unfailing courtesy and kindness.

PETER SMITH

BIVVY TO BALRANALD

Members: Bruin Thompson, John Carey Adam Gretton, Piers Hart, Graham Kramer, Paul Lemkes, Chris Prentice.

Laden with packs and equipment we set off from the campsite with the five archaeologists for the Land Rover at Claddach Carinish. The weather at this point was extremely good by Hebridean standards. Once out of the Rover we were able to extract ourselves from under a heap of rucksacks and stretch our legs after the cramped ride. Corn Buntings sang all around and we had the feeling it was going to be a good trip. We said goodbye to Peter Smith and the archaeologists, who were on their way to Langass, and trudged off to a suitable site for pitching the tents.

After lunch, and the erection of the tents, we went back to the warden's R.S.P.B. cottage. There we met the warden, Phillip Caxon, who took us on a tour of the marshes. The bird watching was marvellous, and many species were seen. Supper was not a success and the presence of a rather faulty Gaz cylinder did not help at all. The soup had been carefully disguised as milk powder so we improvised with half an Oxo cube each in water - it did not work, and we had to fill the gap with half a pear while waiting for some fried rice. Unfortunately no thought to boil the rice before frying it! However, birding was resumed with the sighting of sanderling, ringed-plover, eider, and an arctic skua. Then after cocoa and ghost stories we had an early night.



After a rainy night we met Phillip Caxon on the beach from where he took us around the shoreline and across the machair. In all we sighted forty six species that morning including three hen harriers as well as a short eared owl. The warden left us at one o'clock, and we waited for Peter Smith to pick us up at the cemetery where we had a good view of the marshes. This bivvy was enjoyed by all, and the half filled bellies were forgotten by full memories.

GRAHAM KRAMER AND PAUL LEMKES

THE NORTH UIST ORNITHOLOGICAL REPORT 1976

During our stay on North Uist, in the last two weeks of August, we had to endure damp weather for most of the time, and this made it impossible to remain seated in the same place for more than half an hour. Consequently the type of bird watching mainly practised was "legging".

Our campsite was based at the foot of Eaval which normally had its summit enfolded by cloud. Although there are few trees on the island we were excellently placed for watching moorland birds. Our team, many of them of old Colonsay stock, were John Carey, Adam Grettin, Piers Hart, Graham Kramer, Paul Lemkes, Chris Prentice, and Bruce Welsh. We made the most of our short stay.

The highlights of our expedition were our two visits to the Nature Reserve at Balranald. Phillip Caxon, the warden, gave us two of his days to show us around the reserve. Graham Kramer has given a full account of one of these visits above, but I would mention one or two points of interest. We learnt that over sixty pairs of com buntings bred in the lushly vegetated fields, and we got a wonderful view of female and male immature hen harriers. We saw a short-eared owl on a post thirty yards away, and watched Dabchicks, Gadwalls, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute Swan, Teal, Tufted Duck, Shoveller, and Widgeon all on the same reedy loch. On the coast we were able to see Ringed Plovers feeding high on the beach, while their neighbours comprising of Dunlin, Sandpiper, and Turnstone fed rapidly by the lapping sea. On the north shore a beautiful summer plumaged Bar-tailed Godwit was seen. Need I say more.

Black-throated Divers, flying over the camp from the sea to feed their young in a small high tarn in the hills, were seen by everyone. In fact, while lost on an orienteering course T-Bar actually saw a young diver being fed by its parents. It is unusual for Black-throated divers to be seen here as it is often the Red-throated divers that breeds in the small lochans, and feeds in the sea.

Most of the coastal birds expected were actually seen namely Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake, Cormorant, and Shag. Eider and Shell-duck were frequently seen scattered along the rough coastline. Bruce saw the only Black Guillemot off Eilean Buidhe.

The pair of Eagles we had hoped to observe at a distance from their eyrie had their nest robbed early on in the season by Hooded Crows. This was unfortunate as the young eaglets would have been fully fledged and ready to leave the nest - always an exciting thing to see. However we managed to get up to an old eyrie, and eight feet above this we saw two Ravens, from a group of four, swoop down on another eyrie, then return to their group to perform a marvellous series of tumbles and rolls. The only Merlin that we heard was in a deep gorge cutting through Burrival. A Peregrine was seen flying with two Eagles, and the Kestrels that lived on the low moors were occasionally seen dropping on unsuspecting prey.

One pair of Golden Plovers were seen doing distraction display 700' up the south slope of Eaval. Snipe were fairly common, and one Whimbrel was seen flying above the graveyard at Balranald. When we were returning from Loch Obisary on 26th August we saw a Great Skua being mobbed by four Hooded Crows above the south west moor leading up to Eaval. Yet we saw only a few Arctic Skuas because of the poor visibility. Passerines were fairly common.. the Rock Pippit by the coast, and the Meadow Pippit on the moors. T- Bar found a Wren's nest with chicks while studying different lichens growing on the dyke behind the croft. And in the garden of Ewen Nicholson on Grimsay Mistle and Song Thrush, Blackbird, and Hedge Sparrow were all seen.

Finally, there were two disappointments. The first one was the apparent absence of Dipper and Ring Ouzle, birds that you would expect to find in such suitable habitats as Eaval. The second was the sad news that the Red-Necked Phalaropes had not bred on North Uist this year. Only one female was seen late on in the year. Unfortunately their numbers have been declining recently.

I must conclude by saying how enjoyable it was to see the boys taking their own note of their different observations. Their enthusiasm was a great credit to them. Although we got little 'scientific' work done we saw a lot of new things and learnt a great deal. There is great scope for the bird watchers on North Uist, be they 'Arsers*' or 'Leggers': 73 species were seen in all, and a full list can be obtained from the SHS files.

(Note: In order to visit an occupied nest of a Schedule One Species a permit must be obtained from the Nature Conservancy.)

GLOSSARY - Legger is one who chases over as much of the countryside as possible hoping to see as much bird life as he can.

Arser; One who sits and observes all that can be seen from one spot, (usually more than the legger.)

BRUIN THOMPSON

PROJECT MATERIAL PROBLEMS OF LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT ON THE MACHAIR OF NORTH UIST

It is obvious to the eye that the machair of the west coast provides the better opportunity for agricultural exploitation. More particular observations were made whilst bivvying at the R.S.B.P. Reserve at Balranald. Here the land management has particular significance regarding the ecological balance on the reserve.

Arable farming included principally oats-barley mix, potatoes and even a little lucerne. This is tucked on the headland between the seashore and the machair marshes. In the past, no doubt, seaweed movement on to the land was practised, to enrich the soil value. The discontinuation of this is fortunate for waders, such as the ringed plover and turnstone, which find seaweed both a source of food and camouflage.

Both sheep and cattle graze on the marsh and its immediate vicinity. Here, two particular veterinary problems may be considered, bearing in mind that no mowing or drainage improvements are carried out on the pasture.

Firstly, the vast abundance of ragwort (*Senecio* sp.) would lead one to suspect a high level of poisoning in the beef suckler cattle, but this is not supported. The local veterinary surgeon remarked that the incidence is surprisingly low, and he has noted only a few cases in the last couple of years. (They were, in fact, associated with consumption of hay/silage containing ragwort - not usually removed, it seems.) It is significant that the toxicity is enhanced in preserves. Sheep are relatively resistant to such poisoning.

The low incidence is fortunate from an ornithological point of view, since mowing and removal would substantially alter the botanical situation in the pasture.

The second problem is that of liver fluke, a serious source of economic loss to livestock farmers in wet areas. Briefly, the causal organism, *Fasciola hepatica* (or similar species) is associated with its immediate host, a snail, *Limnaea truncatula*, which dwells in the damp pasture. Ingestion of the fluke by both cattle and sheep can lead to extensive liver damage of varying severity, according to the scale of infection. (N.B. For precise details of the complex life cycle and pathological significance, ref. textbooks of Veterinary Helminthology).

Although regular preventative treatment is carried out by farmers -- approximately every six weeks - it is relatively unsuccessful in preventing liver condemnation. It was indicated to me that almost all sheep livers are condemned, and in addition, a substantial proportion of cattle livers.

GLEN HARRIS SETTLEMENT SURVEY

It is recognised that acid soils, ie peats, have a negligible level of fluke infestation. This may suggest that the solution is, simply, at least as far as the sheep are concerned, to restrict access to the machair. In fact, by law, they remain there only for lambing, being required to leave not later than 28 May. Movement occurs 'up the hill', not always to the mountain and peats, but to pastures which still retain significant fluke levels.

What is the problem threatening the maintenance of a machair eco-Acceptance of the need for continued agricultural improvement in a region, already subsidised, creates a need for reduction of the fluke population. Drainage to reduce the snails' environment would seriously threaten the critical water levels essential for the feeding of various ducks and waders, the latter including the red-necked phalarope (when present).

An alternative might be the use of a selective molluscicide. Would this be possible? Might other significant food sources be damaged for other species?

These remarks are based on the assumption that the evaluation of the situation is basically correct. A very useful project would be to carry out Fluke counts in a transect across the machair from the seashore to the inland peats, to support a hypothesis that "Distribution of liver fluke is strongly related to the wetness and pH on the machair". Could this possibly offer any light on improvement of stock management and pasture selection?

MICHAEL W SHARP
South Uist Expedition

Probably one of the most impressive features of Rhum is the way it contrasts from one coast to another. The southern coast, in relation to the N.E., is harsh and scarred with cliffs which rise fearlessly from the roaring depths below... or so we were led to believe! On the day I visited Glen Harris, the sea was as tranquil as a mill pond, and it was hard to imagine it otherwise.

The valley is formed around the Glen Duian River, which runs from the east face of Orval. The actual settlement is widespread over the valley, but has a nucleus on the relatively fertile plateau above the last few hundred yards of the river. With very few exceptions, the cottages are in ruins and, in some cases, so far overgrown that they are hard to distinguish. One possible explanation for their present state is the Westerlies, which use the valley as a convenient wind tunnel. It is with this in mind, I think, that some of the more exposed houses are facing end-on down the valley. To some extent, however, shelter is given by Gualann na Pairce, a ridge on the west side of the valley, and this probably explains the better condition of buildings towards this side. As far as design goes, the houses are very similar, having a common length of approximately 16 feet or multiple thereof. Most of them have just the one room, but some have small, cupboard-like areas at the seaward side, which would suggest nothing more than perhaps a store for food, wool or peat. A few of the longer houses are divided into two equally sized rooms.

A valid restriction on the size of the crofts, apart from the elements, are the abundant drainage ditches which are a necessity for a plateau like this with such a large catchment area. The presence of damp, fertile ground definitely proves attractive to the many varied insects. At about mid-afternoon they emerged *en masse*, and made life extremely uncomfortable, being as I was the only human in the valley.

As far as the surveying itself goes. I had to use a method which would suit my means, namely a ball of string and a compass. Therefore, the method must admit to some degree of inaccuracy. I also assumed the buildings to be rectangular, which, although appearing somewhat presumptuous on my part seemed, generally speaking, to be true. The cattle pen, erected most probably by the Nature Conservancy, served conveniently as my base lines, and enabled me to choose some of the less weather-beaten remains for my survey.

The whole valley, although extremely picturesque, has, with its ruined crofts, insects and solitude, an eerie atmosphere, so much so that at the end of the day. I was content Just to pack up my work and set off back to camp.

NICK CAPLIN

SURVEY OF SOIL ACIDITY AT RHENIGADALE

The survey was carried out on two headlands, roughly S.S.E. and S.E. of the camp (see map). These two areas had been limed and sown with pasture grasses, and the presence of lime probably accounts for the relatively high pH readings of some samples. The higher the pH reading, the more alkaline a soil tends to be. Conversely, the lower readings indicate greater acidity. Sample 4 on the West Headland, for instance, gave a reading of less than 4.5, which is very acid.

The samples were taken at rather irregular intervals, as it was thought best to test those areas in which there were fairly obvious changes in vegetation. The plants found were then recorded, within a radius of 1 metre from the sample.

The distances between the samples were measured in relation to their distance from the sea, taken from the point of the headland.

For the West Headland, these distances were:-

- Sample 1 110 metres,
- Sample 2 50 metres,
- Sample 3 30 metres,
- Sample 4 10 metres.

For the East Headland, the distances were:-

- Sample 5 100 metres;
- Sample 6 60 metres;
- Sample 7 40 metres.

All distances are approximate only.

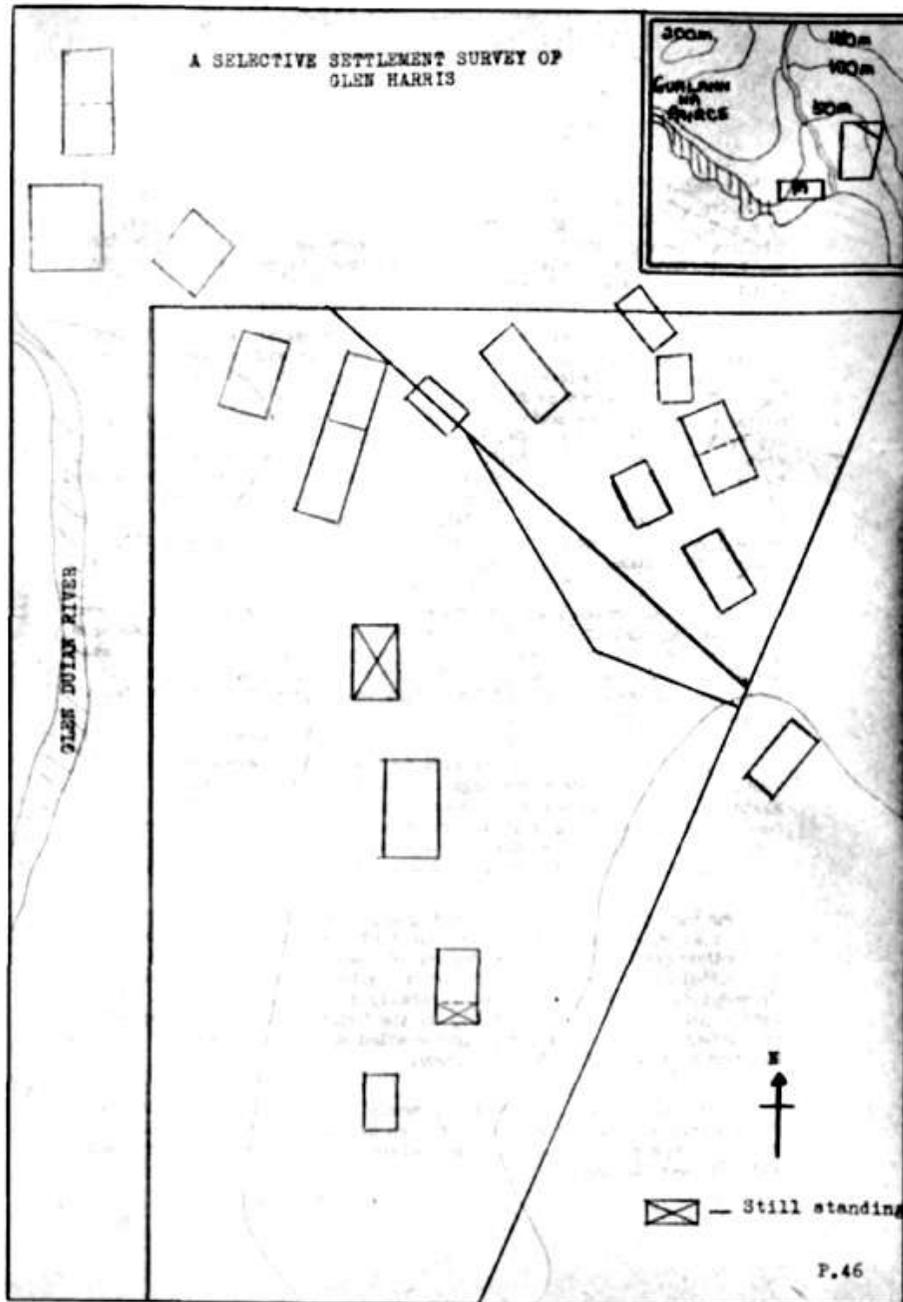
SEAN O'BRIEN

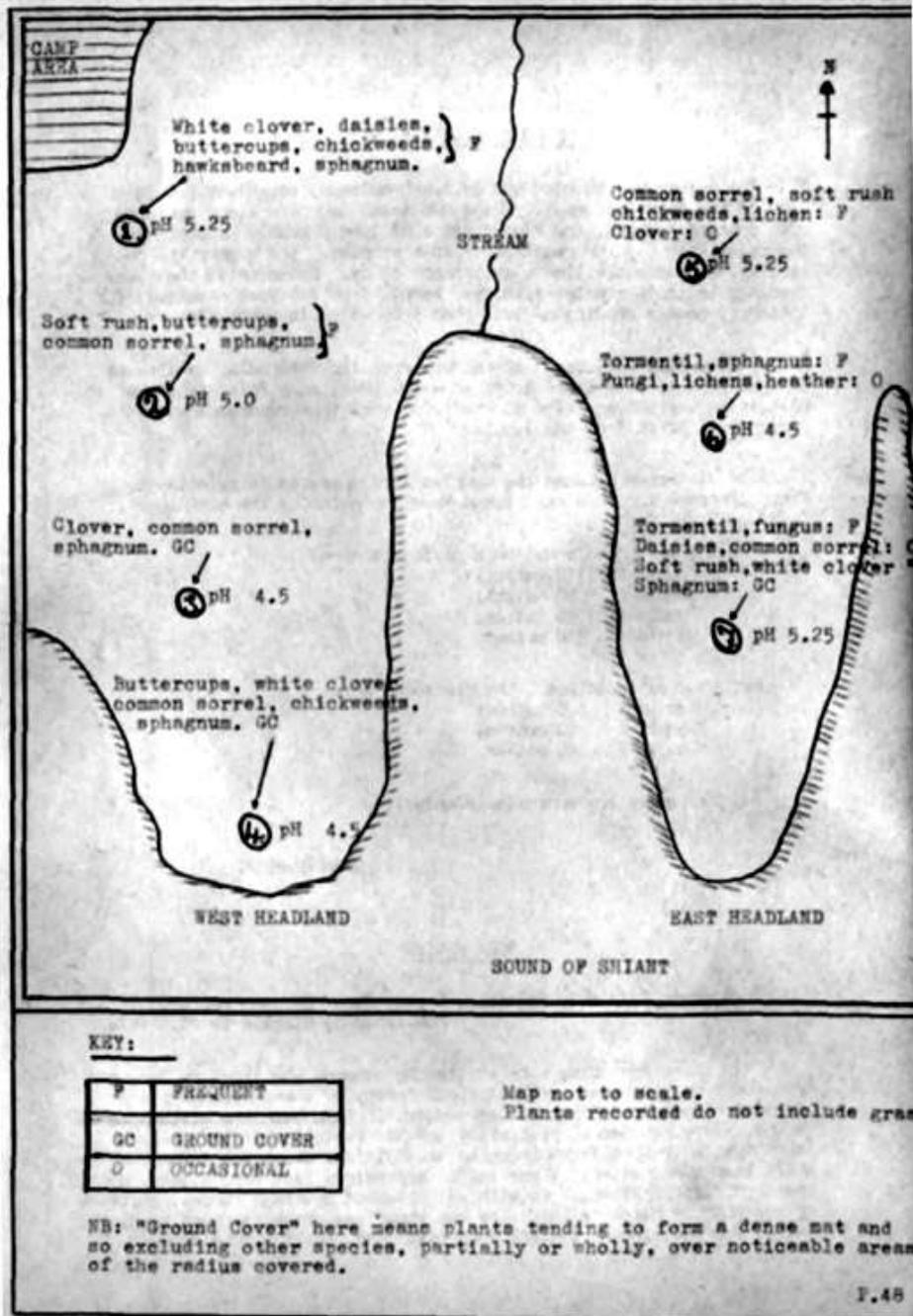
BOOK REVIEW

"Hebridean Islands: Colonsay, Gigha, Jura" by John Mercer

Published by Blackie £4-75. 1974.

This is an absorbing book written by someone who lives on Jura and has made a very careful archaeological survey of these islands (on occasion helped by SHS expedition members). It covers the natural landscape, flora and fauna, prehistory and the evolution of the present landscape, with some frank thoughts and opinions about the future, which bear examination. Three useful appendices list rare plants, plant uses and bird sightings. As with all 'blanket coverage books, sections relating to Mr Mercer's interests and expertise prove the best reading, but if you anticipate visiting Jura next year, it is worth a look.





- LEWIS (Uig Sands) •
- Group P (12½-14) 24th July/10th Aug .
- JURA (Cruib Lodge)
- Group O (14-15) 14th Aug/31st Aug
- JURA (Ruantallin)
- Group N (15-16) 25th July/12th Aug
- LEWIS (Ard Bheag)
- Group M (mixed 16-17) 10th Aug/31st Aug
- RHUM(Salisbury's Dam)
- Group La (16-17) 9th Aug/28 Aug
- KNOYDART (Nr Loch Nevis)
- Group Lb (17*) 21st July/10th Aug

* Age on 1st August 1977

All the dates mentioned must be regarded as provisional until the publication of the summer rail and steamer timetables. Details and copies of the Society's Prospectus for the coming year can be obtained from:

Mrs Mary Jones 19 Moss Lane Timperley Cheshire WA15 6TA
COVENANTS

A covenant is a most effective way of benefiting the Society. If you wish to make a donation to the Society, this way can be to its advantage. By making a series of payments out of one's regular income the Society will receive in addition to your donation an amount equivalent to the basic rate of tax one has already paid on earning that sum.

If you wish to have more details of this method of aiding the Society, the man to contact is:

JOHN ROUND (Treasurer) SCHOOLS HEBRIDEAN SOCIETY BACK LODGE,
SPELLOW HILL STAVELY. KNARESBOROUGH YORKS. TEL: COPGROVE 396

