

MINGULAY Expedition Officers Newsletter 1.

Confidential

Dear Ben

Following my site visit to Barra and the recent Board meeting which could have easily led to the cancellation of the Mingulay expedition, I think its time to produce the first Assistant Leaders Newsletter.

Cancellation was on the cards because the society is not in a strong financial position following a £600 loss last year and severe under-recruitment this year. As a whole the Slid had budgeted on getting 137 members on expeditions and to date we only have 106 - the shortfall representing a loss of over £2,600. Things should improve slightly between now and the expeditions but the budget has again been cut back.

The expeditions which are most seriously under recruited are Colonsay with 14 places out of 30 available filled and Mingulay with only 11 out of 30 filled. As it is the Mingulay expedition will go ahead as paradoxically it is one of the cheapest to run, 'out we must get more members to make it socially viable and to finance the society. I make no apologies then for asking for your help in actively recruiting members for the expeditions to Colonsay and for our own. Please do what you can to interest boys of 12³/₄-14 for Colonsay and 14-16 for Mingulay. I personally believe that an expedition of only 11 members would be just as difficult to run as one which had 30 on it. 20 would be about right.

But to happier matters. The society received a very warm welcome on Barra this Easter, the owners of Mingulay are delighted to have us return and have been enormously helpful. Let me tell you how planning is getting on. We have firm permission to visit the island, and I have chartered a 50' boat 'The Boy James' for the journey over to Mingulay and back to Castlebay, Barra. Bread, Calorgas and fresh vegetables (for a change) have been ordered and delivery arranged. The local primary school in Castlebay is happy to accommodate us on the outward and return journeys. In addition I have managed to get Mingulay declared a temporary coastguard station for the duration of the expedition, so the Oban Coastguard is able to lend us good quality radios for emergency-only use.

The enclosed circular will give you some information if you know little about Mingulay, and this has already been circulated to the kids. In addition I enclose a map order form if you want a copy of the 1:10,000 map of the island. You will also come across the travel form. The SHS will arrange your travel for you if you wish with the; main party, but I must warn you that the society cannot obtain good discounts for you and a student rail card would offer a better bet. In any event please return the travel form to me stating whether or not you want SHS provided bookings. It is also important that I know when and where you will be joining the expedition if you are not travelling with the main party.

But to Mingulay - as I said in a letter to Sean O'Reilly on the expedition "Mingulay will be the eighth expedition I have been on to the Hebrides and it is without doubt the best site that the SHS uses". And I'll stick by those words. It is quite simply stunning. On the east there is the most magnificent beach of shell white sand, surrounded by flat gentle fields, an old ruined village and behind all this a circle of hills getting steeper and steeper until they end suddenly and precipitously in sheer cliffs plunging hundreds of feet into the mighty Atlantic.

On the cliffs the noise is deafening - a continuous shrill wailing, which endlessly echoes between the chasms and the opposite stacks. The cliffs will be white with bird faeces, for over 1% of all Britain's seabirds nest on this small isle. Mingulay is not quite as limiting as its size of 2¾ x 1½ miles would suggest, for there is over 12 miles of very rugged coast; - which is by no means easy walking in some parts. But the real secret of Mingulay's interest lies in its diversity. Each part of the island is different, unique and worth visiting, and as the mood of the weather changes, each time you visit it, it will be different.

But an expedition is much more than just a place. Mingulay offers a tremendous opportunity for an expedition - but only an opportunity - a potential, and it will be our job to mould a group of hyperactive, exciting and occasionally exasperating youngsters into an expedition of co-operating members. You will need all of the skills you undoubtedly have for this, for the 14- - 16 age group can be the most difficult to understand, but (if generalisations stand for anything) they also have a great sense of humour and can be terrific fun. More on this in later newsletters.

All the expeditions which the Society has run to Mingulay previously have been based around 'The Priest's House' - a ruinous chapel built at the very end of the island's occupation and standing in the best position on the island - on a slightly raised hummock overlooking the ruined village and the sandy bay. Two years ago that house was bought by an English teacher who has since spent a great deal of time and money restoring the house. I now learn that it is possible that he may be on the island continuing restoration work during part of our expedition. Were he not there I would camp in the fields next to a stream just across from the House. Now I am not so sure. And my dilemma is indicative of the larger problem; whether to try and pretend he doesn't exist and live independently elsewhere on the island (but without that superb view) or to camp next to the Priest's House and suffer the possibility that the expedition may feel obliged to offer help in the restoration work. Perhaps a compromise is possible. Which ever way it turns out, I would very much appreciate your comments and help on the matter.

On more mundane things, the expedition will be taking a large 40' x 20' marquee and a 12' x 12' food marquee and 7 Icelandic sleeping tents. In addition we will have the two smaller rubber dinghy's (not the new P4-s I am afraid) with outboard motors, and four canoes.

The Assistant Leaders are:

Nick Deeley, Compton, Near Newbury, Berks.

Alan Howard, Sherborne, Dorset.

Matthew Thomas, Loughton, Essex.

Ben Buxton, Durham.

Vince Giavarini Wimbourne, Dorset.

Hugh Lorimer, Broxbourne, Herts.

Graham Kramer, Prince Albert Road, London NWS.

In addition we need a medical officer, please forward suggestions you might have for the job to Dr Mike Hayward.

That's all from me for the moment; please keep in touch. Another newsletter should reach you in a month.

All the best,

Nick.

Nick

Please fill in an Assistant Leader form from Mike Hayward, if you haven't done so already