

# *Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh*

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at [rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk) \**

Am faca sibh na fir-chlis am bliadhna? Sin a’ Ghàidhlig air na solais a chì sibh, bho àm gu àm, anns an adhar air oidhche gheamhraidh. ’S dòcha gum bi sibh eòlach orra mar *the northern lights*. Ann an Laidinn, canaidh daoine an *aurora borealis* riutha. Chunnaic mi fhìn aon turas iad air a’ gheamhradh seo. Bha iad coltach ri fras-uisge dearg anns na speuran dorcha.

Tha mi air na fir-chlis fhaicinn gu tric, ach tha e annasach nach e an *aurora borealis* a bu mhotha a chòrd rium, ach an fheadhainn aig ceann thall an t-saoghail – an *aurora australis*. O chionn mòran bhliadhnaichean, chunnaic mi iad anns a’ bhaile mhòr as fhaide deas ann an Astràilia – Hobart. Bha mi a’ fuireach anns a’ bhaile sin aig an àm agus, oidhche a bha seo, bha mi a-staigh leis na cùrtairean dùinte. Sheirm am fòn. Thog mi e agus ’s e caraid dhomh a bh’ ann.

“An robh thu a-muigh a-nochd?” dh’fhaighnich e.

“Cha robh airson greis,” fhreagair mi.

“Uill, cuir am fòn sìos,” thuirt e, “agus thalla a-mach.”

Rinn mi mar a dh’iarr e orm, agus abair an sealladh a bha a’ feitheamh rium air an taobh a-muigh. Bha e mar gu robh cuideigin air a bhith a’ peantadh cùrtairean mòra – purpaidh is uaine - anns na speuran, agus gu robh e fhathast ann, ’s gan crathadh gun sgur. Bha iad a’ falbh ’s a’ tighinn, ’s a’ falbh, ’s a’ tighinn. Purpaidh is uaine, thairis air na speuran gu lèir. Bha e iongantach. Agus bòidheach.

Nuair a thill mi a-staigh, thug mi taing do mo charaid, agus chaidh mi a-mach a-rithist. Choimhead mi air na fir-chlis airson ’s dòcha leth-uair a thìde eile. Chan fhaca mi a-riamh cho math iad, ’s a chunnaic mi iad air an oidhche sin. Agus tha sin iongantach, oir chan eil Hobart idir cho fada gu deas air crìos meadhan an t-saoghail ’s a tha Alba gu tuath air. Agus, mar as fhaide air falbh a tha thu bho chrìos meadhan an t-saoghail, ’s ann as fheàrr a tha an sealladh agad dhen fhir-chlis, mar as trice. Chunnacas iad aig crìos meadhan an t-saoghail dìreach dà thuras anns an fhicheadamh linn, fhad ’s is fiosrach leamsa co-dhiù. Bha sin ann an naoi ceud deug ’s a naoi (1909) agus naoi ceud deug ’s aon ar fhichead (1921). Ach chìthear gu math tric iad faisg air na pòlaichean, tuath agus deas.

Tha luchd-saidheins ag innse dhuinn gur iad smùirneanan dealanaichte ann an ceann shuas an àile a dh’adhbharaicheas an rud iongantach a tha seo. Chanadh na Gaidheil o shean, ge-tà, gu robh na fir-chlis nan dannsairean. Agus, uaireannan, thigeadh an dannsa gu sabaid. Chanadh iad “nuair a bhios na fir-chlis ri mire, ’s gann nach dèan iad milleadh” neo, ann am Beurla, “*when the merry dancers play, they are like to slay.*”

An ath thuras a chì sibh na fir-chlis, thallaibh a-mach air an latharna-mhàireach, agus coimheadaibh air creagan faisg air an taigh agaibh, ma tha feadhainn ann. Coimheadaibh air dath a' chrotail. Ma tha e a' coimhead nas ruaidhe nan àbhaist, neo fiù 's rud beag dearg, bidh sin na dhearbhadh air na chreideadh clann na Gaidhealtachd o shean. A' coimhead air a' chrotal, chanadh iad "thug na fir-chlis fuil à cach a chèile a-raoir". An turas a chunnaic mis' iad air a' gheamhradh seo, bha iad cho dearg 's gu bheil e furast' a chreidsinn gu robh iad a' toirt fuil à cach a chèile anns na speuran fhèin. Tha mi an dòchas nach fhada gus am faic sinn a-rithist iad.

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**Faclan na seachdainne:** speuran: *sky (heavens)*; cùrtairean: *curtains*; luchd-saidheins: *scientists*; dannsairean: *dancers*; crotal: *lichen*.

**Abairtean na seachdainne:** tha e annasach nach e an X a bu mhotha a chòrd rium: *it's strange that it was not the X which I enjoyed most*; anns a' bhaile mhòr as fhaide deas: *in the southernmost city*; sheirm am fòn: *the phone rang*; rinn mi mar a dh'iarr e orm: *I did as he asked me*; bha e mar gu robh cuideigin air a bhith a' peantadh: *it was as if somebody had been painting*; gan crathadh gun sgur: *shaking them ceaselessly*; mar as fhaide air falbh a tha thu bho X, 's ann as fheàrr a tha an sealladh agad: *the further away you are from X, the better your view is*; fhad 's is fiosrach leamsa co-dhiù: *as far as I know anyway*; gur iad smùirneanan dealanaichte ann an ceann shuas an àile a dh'adhbharaicheas e: *that it is charged particles in the upper atmosphere which cause it*; thallaibh a-mach air an latharna-mhàireach: *go out the next day*; bidh sin na dhearbhadh: *that will be proof*; tha mi an dòchas nach fhada gus am faic sinn a-rithist iad: *I hope it will not be long until we see them again*.

**Puing ghràmair na seachdainne:** Chunnacas iad aig crìos meadhan an t-saoghail dìreach dà thuras anns an fhicheadamh linn: *they were seen at the equator only twice during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Here is another example, as we saw in Litir 82 (22.12.00), of a word – equator – which English has drawn from an external linguistic source, in this case medieval Latin, while Gaelic has created its own equivalent from native roots. Crìos generally means a belt or strap and, derived from that, anything which encircles something else, and it is met with fairly commonly in conversation. It might be, for example, the belt that holds up your trousers or a girdle which controls your figure! A seatbelt in a car is crìos-sàbhalaidh ("saving belt") and you might say to a child in a car, "a bheil do chrìos ort?" (is your seatbelt fastened?). Crìos meadhan an t-saoghail means literally "the middle belt of the world". An alternative is Crìos na Cruinne (usually written with capitals), "the belt of the globe". A Gaelic term for the zodiac is grian-chrìos (lit. "sun-belt"). And one of my favourite plants – the lovely meadowsweet, *Filipendula ulmaria* – has a wonderful native name – Crìos Chuchulainn – Cuchulainn's belt, named after the ancient Gaelic hero.*

**Seanfhacal na seachdainne:** thug na fir-chlis fuil à cach a chèile a-raoir: *the merry dancers shed each other's blood last night. A phrase, often repeated by children in times past, when they saw red crotal on the rocks, following a night in which the aurora had been active.*

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