

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 roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Nuair a bha mi eòlach air, bha Ruairidh MacNeill nach maireann a’ fuireach anns an t-Sàilean ann am Muile, ach rugadh is thogadh e ann an Gomastra, eilean beag air ceann a-mach Ulbha. Thogadh e le sheana-phàrantan agus, air sàilleamh sin, bha Gàidhlig ghlan, bhrèagha aige, agus bha eòlas sònraichte aige air dualchas na sgìre.

Air là grianach samhraidh, chaidh e fhèin ’s mi-fhìn a choimhead air seann choilltean nàdarrach ann am Muile, agus mi airson rud beag dhen eòlas aige air craobhan fhaighinn bhuaithe. Sheall e dhomh na craobhan calltainn, air am bi cnothan calltainn a’ fàs. An là an-diugh, cha bhi daoine a’ gearradh nan craobhan seo air ais mar bu chòir agus, ann am Muile, chan eil na cnothan cho pailt orra ’s a b’ àbhaist. Nuair a bha Ruairidh òg, bha iad air an gearradh air ais gu mòr agus bhiodh an cinneas ùr math airson boghachan – pìosan fiodha a tha a’ lùbadh gu furasta. Bhiodh daoine ann an eileanan eile, gu h-àraidh Tiriodh agus Uibhist, a’ faighinn fiodh mar sin à Muile airson rudan mar chlàibh a dhèanamh.

Bha dàrna cinneas na craoibh uinnsinn uabhasach feumail cuideachd oir chan eil e cho bristeach ris a’ chiad chinneas, agus bhiodh na Muilich a’ cleachdadh a fiodha airson casan spaid, gràpa no ùird a dhèanamh. Tha e furasta sgoltadh agus bidh e a’ losgadh fiù ’s gun a bhith air a thiomachadh. Bhiodh Ruairidh a’ dèanamh cipeanan de dh’fhiodh na craoibh uinnsinn – ’s e sin na pìosan beaga fiodha a chumas riibe, no *snare*, anns an talamh. Bhiodh iad a’ cleachdadh nan ribeachan airson coineanaich a ghlacadh.

’S e craobh bhrèagha a tha anns an leamhan agus bha i gu math feumail do mhuinntir an eilein. Bhiodh iad a’ gearradh pìosan a bha lùbte gu nàdarrach airson an cleachdadh ann am bàtaichean. Mar eisimpleir, thogadh iad ceann tobhta le bhith a’ cleachdadh fiodh lùbte bhon chraoibh leamhain.

Uaireannan, ge-tà, bhiodh na seann daoine a’ lùbadh fiodh iad fhein, mar eisimpleir airson sùil a dhèanamh ann an cliabh ghiomach. Ghabhadh iad geug òg bho chraobh sheilich agus bhiodh iad ga lùbadh lem beòil, le bhith a’ bìeadh an fhiodha. Dh’innis Ruairidh dhomh gum faicear fhathast làrach fhiacalan ann an seann chlàibh. Is cinnteach gur e daoine aig nach robh fiacalan fuadain a rinn an obair sin! Bha an seileach cuideachd feumail airson feadag no fideag a dhèanamh – an seòrsa a bhios daoine a’ cleachdadh airson a bhith a’ dèanamh fead air cù.

Bha grunn seòrsachan eile anns a’ choille – beithe, cuileann, darach – agus an caorann. Tha saobh-chràbhadh co-cheangailte ris a’ chraoibh chaorainn agus chan eil daoine uabhasach deònach an leagail. Cha bhi iad a’ losgadh gu math co-dhiù, a rèir seanfhacal a dh’innis Ruairidh dhomh: *Teine caorainn is gaol ghiullan, cha do mhair iad fad’ a-riamh.*

Am measg an fhiosrachaidh eile a thug Ruairidh MacNèill dhomh, tha cuimhn' agam air aon rud gu h-àraidh. Dh'innis e dhomh gur e “connadh nam mèirleach” a bh' aig na seann daoine air an droigheann dubh, air sàilleamh 's nach tig toit às nuair a tha e ann an teine. Cha bhiodh fios aig daoine, mar sin, càit' an robh campa nam mèirleach. Agus, le gàire mhòr, ged nach eil mi a' dèanamh dheth gu robh fios pearsanta aige air seo, thuirt e gur iongantach mura robh an dearbh fhiodh “air uisneachadh airson na poite duibhe anns a' mhonadh”!

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Faclan na seachdainne: An Sàilean: *Salen*; Muile: *Mull*; Gomastra: *Gometra*; grianach: *sunny*; calltainn: *hazel*; cinneas ùr: *new growth*; a' lùbadh: *bending*; bristeach: *brittle*; cipeanan: *stakes (to tether snares)*; ribe, ribeachan: *snare, snares*; coineanaich: *rabbits*; leamhan: *elm*; lùbte: *bent*; beòil: *mouths*; a' bìdeadh: *biting*; fiaclan fuadain: *false teeth*; seileach: *willow*; feadag, fideag: *whistle [instrument]*; fead: *whistle [sound]*; beithe: *birch*; cuileann: *holly*; darach: *oak*; caorann: *rowan*; saobh-chràbhadh: *superstition*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: air ceann a-mach Ulba: *on the outer end of Ulva*; thogadh e le sheana-phàrantan: *he was raised by his grandparents*; cha bhi daoine a' gearradh nan craobhan seo air ais: *people don't cut these trees back*; chan eil na cnothan cho pailt orra 's a b' àbhaist: *the nuts are not as plentiful [on them] as was once the case*; dàrna cinneas na craoibh uinnsinn: *the new [second] growth of the ash tree*; bhiodh na Muilich a' cleachdadh a fiodha airson casan spaid, gràpa no ùird a dhèanamh: *the Mull people would use its [her] wood to make spade, fork or hammer handles*; thogadh iad ceann tobhta: *they would make the end of a thwart*; airson sùil a dhèanamh ann an cliabh ghiomach: *to make the opening in a lobster creel*; dh'innis Ruairidh dhomh gum faicear fhathast làrach fhiaclan: *Ruairidh told me that teeth marks can still be seen*; gur e “connadh nam mèirleach” a bh' aig na seann daoine air an droigheann dubh: *that the old people called the blackthorn “the robbers' fuel”*; ged nach eil mi a' dèanamh dheth gu robh fios pearsanta aige: *although I'm not making out that he had personal knowledge*; gur iongantach mura robh an dearbh fhiodh “air uisneachadh airson na poite duibhe anns a' mhonadh”: *that it would be likely that the same wood would be “used for the [a] whisky still on the hill” (uisneachadh is used in Argyll where cleachdadh would generally be used further north).*

Puing-ghràmaid na seachdainne: Bidh e a' losgadh fiù 's gun a bhith air a thiomachadh: *it burns even without being dried. I hope the gun here does not confuse you because you will often see gun in close proximity to a verb, acting as a conjunction eg thuirt e gun toireadh e dhomh e (he said he would give it to me), tha mi an dòchas gun tig feabhas ort (I hope you'll get better). Here, however, despite its close association with “a bhith”, it is actually the preposition gun, meaning “without”. You will be familiar with it in situations without a verb ie before a noun eg tha mi gun dòchas (I am without hope), gun teagamh sam bith (without any doubt). Here are another two examples of how to use it with verbs, employing a bhith: dh' iarr an tidsear orm gun a bhith ag èigheachd (the teacher asked me not to shout); gun a bhith a' coimhead air a' mhap, innse dhomh.. (without looking at the map, tell me..)*

Seanfhacal na seachdainne: Teine caorainn is gaol ghiullan, cha do mhair iad fad' a-riamh: *rowan fire and boys' love, they never lasted long. This is as Ruairidh MacNèill told it to me, but it is listed in Alexander Nicolson's Gaelic Proverbs as teine chaoran is gaol ghiullan, a caoran being a small peat broken off the fàd, which is the large peat cut for the fire. Both make sense but which is the original? Can anyone help me with further information?*

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