

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 rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk **

Bha mi anns a’ mhonadh an là eile, air taobh an iar na Gaidhealtachd, agus lorg mi “banana”. A’ fàs. Seadh, “banana” a’ fàs. Bha e beag, ach fallain gu leòr. Nise, tha fhios a’ m nach eil sibh gam chreidsinn, oir bidh sibh ag ràdh nach eil bananathan a’ fàs ann an Alba. Ach ’s e an fhìrinn a th’ agam agus mìnichidh mi an gnothach dhuibh ro dheireadh na Litreach.

Gu h-annasach, nuair a chunnaic mi am “banana”, bha mi anns an dearbh àite anns an robh mi leis an Litir an t-seachdain sa chaidh – air Leathad Leacachain, gu deas air Ulapul. Thachair sin mar thuiteamas, ge-tà. Bha mi air iarraidh air tè as aithne dhomh, a tha na lus-eòlaiche, dhol a choimhead air lusan nàdarrach a’ mhonaidh. “Uill,” thuirt i, “is aithne dhomh àite a tha glè mhath – Beinn Inagleir, faisg air Ulapul.” Bha sin math gu leòr dhomhsa, ach bha e fìor annasach dhomh nuair a thòisich sinn air ar slighe aig Leathad Leacachain.

“A bheil fios agad gu bheil stòiridh annasach ann mu thachartas an seo?” dh’fhaighnich mi dhi. Cha robh fios aice, agus dh’innis mi dhi mun fhear a lorg am boireannach a bha a’ breith leanabh air oidhche fhuar, agus mar a shàbhail e an dìthis le bhith a’ toirt greallach à each.

Co-dhiù, thòisich sinn air cabadaich mu ainm an àite – Leathad Leacachain. Tha e a’ ciallachadh “the slope of the place of the flagstones.” Ach nuair a choimheadas tu air a’ mhonadh, chan eil leacan nàdarrach rim faicinn – dìreach corra chreag an siud ’s an seo.

As dèidh beagan mhionaidean, thàinig sinn gu toll mòr anns an talamh, anns am b’ urrainn ceithir no còig taighean a chur. Bha e follaiseach gu robh e uaireigin na chuaraidh, às am biodh daoine a’ toirt clach. Saoil an e leacan a bha iad a’ toirt às, agus gur e sin as coireach ris an ainm?

Agus dè an seòrsa cloiche? Uill, thug sinn sùil air na lusan faisg air làimh. Bha Siabann nam Bàn-sìdh ann. Sin lus ris an canar *Heath Milkwort* ann am Beurla, agus tha e a’ fàs a-mhàin air mòinteach feurach far a bheil aol fon talamh. Chan fhàs e far a bheil an talamh searbh. Tha an aon rud fìor mu dhà lus eile a lorg sinn – Lìon nam Bàn-sìdh no *Fairy Flax*, agus an Dubhan Ceann-chòsach no *Selfheal*. Tha iadsan a’ fàs a-mhàin air talamh far a bheil am pH nas àirde nan àbhaist airson Alba. Agus saoilidh mi gu robh iad nan deagh chomharra gu bheil clach-aoil aig Leathad Leacachain agus gur e sin a bha iad a’ cladhach anns a’ chuaraidh.

Lean sinn oirnn suas am bruach gu bealach agus sin far an robh am “banana”. Nise, feumaidh mi rudeigin a mhìneachadh. Tha trì seòrsaichean de bheithe – craobhan-beithe – ann an Alba, agus buinidh iad uile don bhuidhinn, no genus, *Betula*. Tha na dhà dhiubh cumanta – *Betula pendula*, a’ Bheith Dhubhach no *Silver Birch*, agus *Betula pubescens*, a’ Bheith Charraigeach no *Downy Birch*. Nuair a tha lus-eòlaichean a’ bruidhinn ri chèile mu deidhinn nan seòrsaichean de *Betula*, cha chan iad “*Betula*” a h-uile turas idir. Canaidh iad dìreach “*B*”. *B. pendula* agus *B. pubescens*.

Uill, 's e an treas seòrsa, a tha rudeigin gann ann an Alba, agus a tha na phreas ìosal seach na chraobh, *Betula nana*, a' Bheith Bheag no *Dwarf Birch*. Agus canaidh na h-eòlaichean, *B. nana* ris. No, ma tha iad ri beagan spòrs – “banana”. Agus sin am “banana” a lorg mi-fhìn is mo bhana-charaid, a' fàs gu math air monadh àrd air taobh an iar na Gaidhealtachd.

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Faclan na seachdaine: lus-eòlaiche: *botanist*; mòinteach feurach: *grassy moor* (ie with more grass than heather); searbh: *acidic*; aol: *lime*; clach-aoil: *limestone*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: 's e an fhìrinn a th' agam: *I am telling the truth*; bha mi anns an dearbh àite: *I was in the exact same place*; tè as aithne dhomh: *a female (woman) I know*; bha sin math gu leòr dhomhsa: *that was good enough for me*; le bhith a' toirt greallach à each: *by gralloching a horse* (see last week's *Litir*); thòisich sinn air cabadaich: *we started to chat*; nuair a choimheadas tu air a' mhonadh: *when you look at the hill*; chan eil leacan rim faicinn: *flagstones, slabs are not to be seen*; corra chreag an siud 's an seo: *the odd rock here and there*; anns am b' urrainn ceithir no còig taighean a chur: *in which 4 or 5 houses could be put (could fit)*; gu robh e na chuaraidh: *that it was a quarry*; far a bheil am pH nas àirde nan àbhaist: *where the pH is higher than normal* (ie where it is less acidic); buinidh iad uile don aon bhuidhinn: *they all belong to the same group*; a tha rudeigin gann: *which is somewhat scarce*; ma tha iad ri beagan spòrs: *if they are being playful, light-hearted*.

Puing-ghràmaid na seachdaine: Sometimes it pays to take a look at one of the common words in the language to try to analyse how it operates. One of the most common, about which we think little, is “gu” and I would like to highlight its use in forming adverbs from adjectives. The closest equivalent in English is the suffix “-ly” which has the same function eg the adjectives *sour, determined and happy* become the adverbs *sourly, determinedly and happily*. They qualify verbs rather than nouns. In Gaelic the *gu* is placed in front of the adjective as a separate word and the adjective is usually unaltered from its basic form (that qualifying a masculine noun in the nominative singular). You will be familiar with *gu math* (well) and *gu dona* (badly) and you will know the difference between *tha mi math* (I am good) and *tha mi gu math* (I am well) which is much the same in both languages. The *gu* is important in the phrase, common in northern mainland Gaelic, *tha mi gu snog* (I'm well). If you miss out the “gu”, the listener will think you have an inflated opinion of yourself! Many adjectives can be made into an adverb in this way eg *gu luath* (quickly), *gu mall* (slowly), *gu furasta* (easily), *gu sgiobalta* (tidily, quickly). In the *Litir*, note the *h-* in *gu h-annasach*. This is the case before vowels, eg *gu h-obann* (suddenly), *gu h-iongantach* (surprisingly). And note that in a series of adverbs, *gu* only appears in front of the first eg *sheas e gu daingeann, làidir, calma aig geatachan a' bhaile* (he stood resolutely, strongly and bravely at the gates of the town).

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: Thachair sin mar thuiteamas, *ge-tà*: *that happened by complete chance/accident, however*.

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