

# Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk). This is Litir 395. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 91 corresponds to Litir 395.*

Bha sinn ann an Heisgeir an t-seachdain sa chaidh – eileanan beaga gu siar air Uibhist a Tuath. Tha na h-eileanan sin ainmeil an-diugh airson fiadh-bheathaichean – gu seachd àraidh ròin. Bidh timcheall air deich mìle ròin a’ dol air tìr ann an Heisgeir gach bliadhna airson breith an cuileanan. Ach do dhaoine, chan e àite furasta a th’ ann faighinn air tìr, gu h-àraidh ann an droch shìde.

A dh’aindeoin sin, ge-tà, bha sluagh ann uaireigin. Tha na h-eileanan machaireach agus torrach. Tha iad ceangailte ri chèile le fadhlaichean. Agus, a rèir beul-aithris, bha fadhail gan ceangal ri tìr-mòr Uibhist a Tuath. Ach, anns an t-siathamh linn deug, bha stoirm mhòr ann a sguabaich a’ ghainmheach air falbh.

Ma choimheadas sibh air a’ mhap, chì sibh gu bheil dà ainm air na h-eileanan seo – *Heisker or Monach Islands*. ’S ann bho na Lochlannaich a thàinig an t-ainm Heisgeir. Tha *Monach* a’ tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig *Manach* oir bha manaich a’ fuireach ann. Bha manachainn air an eilean as fhaide siar dhiubh – Siolaigh.

Bha **mnathan-cràbhaidh** ann uaireigin cuideachd. Sin *nuns* – mnathan-cràbhaidh. ’S e **cailleach-dhubh** a chanadh daoine ri *nun* anns an t-seann aimsir. Cailleach-dhubh – air sgath an cuid aodaich. Bha iadsan a’ fuireach air an eilean as fhaide sear – ris an canar an Ceann an Ear an-diugh. Anns an t-seann aimsir, ’s e Heisgeir nan Cailleach a chanadh daoine ris an eilean sin. ’S e sin an t-ainm a thug Dòmhnall Rothach, Deadhan nan Eilean, air ann am meadhan an t-siathamh linn deug – Heisgeir nan Cailleach.

Mun àm sin, thathar ag ràdh gum b’ urrainn do na h-eileanan sin fichead duine a thoirt seachad airson seirbheis anns an arm. Thathar a’ smaoinichadh, airson sin, gun robh mu cheud duine a’ fuireach ann. Tràth san naoidheamh linn deug, dh’fhalbh a’ chuid a bu mhotha de na daoine. Tha feadhainn dhen bheachd gun robh cus bheathaichean ag ionaltradh ann, agus gun do rinn stoirm milleadh mòr. Ach, mean air mhean, thill sluagh agus aig deireadh an naoidheamh linn deug, bha còrr is ceud is trithead (130) duine ann.

Am measg sin bha an fheadhainn a bha ag obair anns an taigh-sholais. Chaidh an taigh-solais a thogail ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug. Bha dragh ann mu cho cunnartach ’s a bha a’ mhuir gu siar air Uibhist. Tha tòrr sgeirean is oitirean ann.

Bha an taigh-solais air a thogail ann am meadhan Siolaigh. Bha e ceud, trithead ’s a trì (133) troighean a dh’àirde. Bha e air a thogail leis na bràithrean ainmeil Stevenson – Daibhidh agus Tòmas. Ged a tha solas anns an eilean an-diugh, ’s e fear beag a th’ ann. Chan eil an taigh-solais mòr ag obair tuilleadh, ged a tha an togalach ann. Chaidh a dhùnadh anns an Dàrna Cogadh.

Beagan bhliadhnaichean mus do dhùin e, thachair tubaist ann. Chan e call bàta a bh' ann, ach call dithis dhen trìuir a bha ag obair ann. Air a' chòigeamh latha deug (15<sup>mh</sup>) dhen t-Samhain, naoi ceud deug, trithead 's a sia (1936), dh'fhalbh an dithis don Cheann an Ear airson bathair fhaighinn. Dh'èirich a' ghaoth, agus b' fheudar dhaibh iomradh air ais a Shiolaigh ann an droch mhuir.

Anns an taigh-sholais, chunnaic an t-oifigear eile iad. Bha an eathar aca **bun-os-cionn** sa mhuir. Bha an dithis air a dhol air sgeir. Sguabaich tonn mòr far na sgeire iad. Chaidh na cuirp aca a lorg anns an Dùbhlachd air cladach Heisgeir fhèin.

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**Faclan na Litreach:** Heisgeir: *Heisker, Monach Islands*; fiadh-bheathaichean: *wildlife*; Lochlannaich: *Norsemen*; troighean: *feet (measurement only)*; An t-Samhain: *November*; bathair: *supplies*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** gu siar air Uibhist a Tuath: *west of North Uist*; gu seachd àraidh ròin: *especially seals*; airson breith an cuileanan: *for the birth of their pups*; machaireach agus torrach: *flat [and covered with machair] and fertile*; ceangailte ri chèile le fadhlaichean: *connected to each other with sandy fords that can be crossed at low tide*; air an eilean as fhaide siar dhiubh – Siolaigh: *on the westernmost island [of them] – Shillay*; air sgath an cuid aodaich: *because of their clothes*; as fhaide sear: *easternmost*; a chanadh daoine ris an eilean: *that people called the island*, Dòmhnall Rothach, Deadhan nan Eilean: *Donald Munro, Dean of the Isles*; meadhan an t-siathamh linn deug: *the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*; thathar ag ràdh gum b' urrainn do X fichead duine a thoirt seachad: *it is said that X could supply twenty men*; dh'fhalbh a' chuid a bu mhotha: *most left*; gun robh cus bheathaichean ag ionaltradh ann: *that too many animals were grazing there*; mean air mhean thill sluagh: *gradually a population returned*; chaidh an taigh-solais a thogail: *the lighthouse was built*; tòrr sgeirean is oitirean: *many rocks and shoals*; chan eil X ag obair tuilleadh: *X no longer works*; call dithis dhen trìuir a bha ag obair ann: *loss of 2 of the 3 people that worked there*; b' fheudar dhaibh iomradh ann an droch mhuir: *they had to row in a bad sea*; sguabaich tonn mòr far na sgeire iad: *a big wave swept them from the rock*; chaidh na cuirp aca a lorg anns an Dùbhlachd: *their bodies were found in December*.

**Puing-chànain na Litreach:** Did you notice that the two Gaelic phrases for “nun” are compound nouns viz. **mnathan-cràbhaidh** and **cailleach-dhubh**? Can you explain why they are hyphenated in the written form? The reason is that the compound creates a new concept different from the words as simple noun and adjective. For example bean-chràbhaidh is a nun whereas bean chràbhaidh (unhyphenated) would mean literally a “woman of religion”. Cailleach dhubh (unhyphenated) would mean a black-skinned old woman or possibly a black-haired old woman (lucky her!), whereas the hyphen indicates that she is in fact a nun. If you are referring individually to a living person, bean-chràbhaidh is more appropriate than cailleach-dhubh which is more old-fashioned and might be considered mildly disrespectful.

**Gnàths-cainnt na Litreach:** Bha an eathar aca **bun-os-cionn** sa mhuir: *their boat was upside down in the sea*.

\* Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.