

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Na h-Eileanan Westmann

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.macleam@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 634. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 330 corresponds to Litir 634.

Air a’ mhadainn a dh’fhalbh mi a-mach do na h-Eileanan Westmann ann an Innis Tìle, cha robh ach trì dathan rim faicinn – dubh, geal agus glas. ’S e latha gruamach a bh’ ann agus tha am port-aiseig air cladach dubh a th’ air a dhèanamh de chloich bholcànach. Bha a’ mhuir glas. Agus, os cionn a h-uile nì, bha ceap-deighe geal. Bha an ceap-deighe sin ainmeil air feadh na Roinn Eòrpa an-uiridh oir spreadh a’ bholcàno a tha fodha, a’ cur luathre don iarmailt. Chuir sin stad air itealain bho bhith a’ falbh don adhar.

’S e ainm a’ chip-dheighe Eyjafjallajökull. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh “ceap-deighe beinn nan eilean”. Agus ’s iad na h-eileanan anns an ainm na Vestmannaeyjar – na h-Eileanan Westmann a tha far a’ chladaich an sin.

À tìr-mòr, chuir sealladh nan eilean Hiort nam chuimhne. Tha iad àrd, cas is rudeigin biorach. Bha iad air an dèanamh le bholcànothan fon mhuir aona mhìle dheug bliadhna air ais. Uill, chan eil sin uile-gu-lèir ceart. Nochd fear de na h-eileanan – Surtsey – bhon mhuir ann an naoi ceud deug, seasgad ’s a trì (1963). Agus deich bliadhna an dèidh sin, gun rabhadh, thòisich spreadhadh ùr air an eilean far a bheil an sluagh a’ fuireach – Heimaey. Thàinig làbha agus luathre a-mach agus b’ fheudar don t-sluagh – còig mìle dhiubh – an t-eilean fhàgail.

Airson còig mìosan ghluais trithead millean tonna de làbha thairis air taobh an ear an eilein. Dh’èirich cnoc mòr ùr agus chaidh còrr is trì cheud taigh a sgrios. Eadhon na bu mhiosa na sin, bha an làbha a’ gluasad a dh’ionnsaigh an aon chala anns an eilean. Nan cailleadh na daoine an cala, cha bhiodh comas aca fuireach anns na h-eileanan tuilleadh. Chaidh daoine air ais don eilean le pumpaichean mòra. Chuir iad milleanan de ghalanan de shàl air an làbha airson fhuarachadh. Bha iad soirbheachail agus stad an làbha **goirid don** chala.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh an t-seachdain sa chaidh gun cuala mi mac-talla de dh’Alba anns na h-Eileanan Westmann. Air an t-slighe don phort air a’ bhàt’-aiseig chaidh mi seachad air eilean beag air a bheil Bjarnarey. Chan eil duine anns na h-Eileanan an Iar nach aithnicheadh sin. Tha barrachd air aon “Beàrnaraigh” againne.

Agus dh’ionnsaich mi gu bheil ceangal aig ainm nan Eilean Westmann fhèin ris na Gàidheil. Tha *westmann* a’ ciallachadh “duine bhon taobh an iar”. ’S e sin an t-ainm a bh’ aig na Lochlannaich air daoine à Breatainn is Èirinn. Gu tric, thathar ag ràdh gu bheil a’ ciallachadh “Èireannaich”. Ach tha cuid de dh’èolaichean ag ràdh gun robh na h-Albannaich air an tomhas anns an aon dòigh oir bha iad gu siar air a’ Chuan a Tuath.

Seo mar a fhuair iad an ainm. B’ e Ingólfur Arnarson a’ chiad Lochlannach a rinn a dhachaigh ann an Innis Tìle. Thog e taigh far a bheil Reykjavik an-diugh. Còmhla ris bha dlùth-charaid aige, Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson, agus tràillean Gàidhealach. **Rinn Hjörleifur droch dhìol air na tràillean.** Mhuirt na tràillean e. B’ fheudar dhaibh teicheadh, agus dh’fhalbh iad do na h-eileanan far costa deas na dùthcha.

Ach chaidh Ingólfur an tòir orra agus lorg e iad anns na h-eileanan. Mharbh e iad uile. Bhon uair sin, tha na h-eileanan air ainm nan tràillean Gàidhealach a ghiùlan.

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Faclan na Litreach: Innis Tìle: *Iceland*; ceap-deighe: *icecap*; fodha: *underneath it*; itealain: *aeroplanes*; làbha: *lava*; pumpaichean: *pumps*; soirbheachail: *successful*; mac-talla: *echo*; Lochlannaich: *Vikings (Scandinavians)*.

Abairtean na Litreach: cha robh ach trì dathan rim faicinn – dubh, geal agus glas: *there were only three colours to be seen – black, white and grey*; latha gruamach: *a dismal day*; tha am port-aiseig air cladach dubh: *the ferry port is on a black shore*; air a dhèanamh de chloich bholcànach: *made of volcanic rock*; ainmeil air feadh na Roinn Eòrpa: *famous throughout Europe*; a’ cur luaithe don iarmailt: *sending ash high into the atmosphere*; a tha far a’ chladaich: *that lie offshore*; chuir sealladh nan eilean Hiort nam chuimhne: *the view of the islands reminded me of St Kilda*; rudeigin biorach: *somewhat pointed*; le bholcànathan fon mhuir aona mhìle dheug bliadhna air ais: *by submarine volcanoes eleven thousand years ago*; gun rabhadh, thòisich spreadhadh ùr: *without warning, a new eruption began*; b’ fheudar don t-sluagh an t-eilean fhàgail: *the population had to leave the island*; eadhon na bu mhiosa na sin: *even worse than that*; a dh’ionnsaigh an aon chala: *towards the only harbour*; nan cailleadh na daoine X: *if the people were to lose X*; chuir iad milleanan de ghalanan de shàl air an làbha airson fhuarachadh: *they put millions of gallons of seawater on the lava to cool it*; nach aithnicheadh sin: *that wouldn’t recognise that*; air an tomhas anns an aon dòigh: *characterised in the same way*; mhuirt na tràillean e: *the slaves murdered him*; b’ fheudar dhaibh teicheadh: *they had to flee*; chaidh X an tòir orra: *X pursued them*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: Rinn Hjörleifur droch dhìol air na tràillean: *Hjörleifur abused the slaves. It shouldn’t surprise us that our word for slave, tràill, is a borrowing from Norse (þraell), as many Gaels were taken into slavery by the Norse and, as we’ll see in a future Litir, ended up contributing to the settlement of Iceland. The Landnámabók (book of the settlement of Iceland) tells us that Hjörleifur harried Ireland and took ten slaves from there (so it’s likely the “westmen” in this case were from Ireland rather than Scotland). This is not the Westmann Islands’ only experience of slavery. In 1627 Algerian pirates kidnapped three-quarters of the islands’ population, over two hundred people, to take into slavery in North Africa. Only 27 of them ever made it back, when their freedom was bought years later (and they had to find their own way home).*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: stad an làbha goirid don chala: *the lava stopped close to the harbour*.

Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA