

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Srath Chonainn agus Drochaid Sguideil

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. This is Litir 672. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 368 corresponds to Litir 672.

Tha mi a’ sgrìobhadh na Litreach seo, agus mi dìreach air tilleadh bho bhith a’ coiseachd a’ mhonaidh ann an Srath Chonainn ann an Siorrachd Rois. Seo seann rann mun sgìre sin: Abhainn Mìg tre Srath Chonainn, Abhainn Chonainn tre Srath Bhràinn, Abhainn Dubh-chuileagach tre Srath Ghairbh, trì aibhnichean gun tairbh iad sin. *River Meig through Strathconon, River Conon through Strathbran, river of the black flies through Strathgarve, they’re three rivers without profit.*

Tha sin rudeigin cruaidh, chanainn; saoilidh mise gu bheil an sgìre sin brèagha. Ach tha e na rabhadh dhomh gun a bhith a’ dol a Shrath Ghairbh, co-dhiù as t-samhradh, gun lìon chuileagan a thoirt leam!

’S e an aon abhainn as aithne dhòmhsa ann an Srath Ghairbh tè a tha ainmeil ann an dualchas nan Gàidheal. ’S i an t-Alltan Dubh, a rinneadh ainmeil le Dòmhnall Friseal, Bàrd Fainich. Bidh sibh eòlach air an òran, ’s dòcha: *Tha ligh’ an-diugh san Alltan Dubh, chan urrainn mi dhol thairis air, tha eagal orm ro mhead an t-sruth ’s nach fhaigh mi ’n-diugh a-null air...* Bha am bàrd ag aithris gum biodh tuilleadh ’s a chòrr uisge anns an abhainn ag amannan, ach cha chreid mi gun robh guth aige air cus chuileagan!

Co-dhiù, tha e inntinneach mar a tha na h-ainmean sin. Ann an ceann shuas Srath Chonainn, chan e Abhainn Chonainn a tha a’ sruthadh, ach Abhainn Mìg; tha dùil gu bheil an t-ainm sin gu math sean. Tron chuid mhòir de Shrath Bhràinn, ’s e Abhainn Bhràinn a tha a’ sruthadh. Ach am pìos mu dheireadh dhen t-srath, nuair a dh’fhàgas an abhainn Loch Luinncheirt, ’s e Abhainn Chonainn a th’ oirre. Agus, anns a’ phàirt ìosal de Shrath Chonainn, ’s e Abhainn Chonainn no *River Conon* a th’ air an abhainn.

Faisg air beul na h-aibhne, nuair a ruigeas i ceann shuas Linne Chrombaigh, tha baile ann air a bheil *Conon Bridge*. Tha drochaid thar na h-aibhne an sin. Chan e Drochaid Chonainn an t-ainm Gàidhlig a th’ air, ge-tà, ach *Drochaid Sguideil*. Tha mi a’ tuigsinn gur e seann ainm, ’s dòcha fear Lochlannach, a th’ ann an *Sguideil*. Bha e clàraichte mar *Scuddale* o shean. Cha chreid mi gu bheil fios aig duine dè tha e a’ ciallachadh. Bhithinn an dùil gun tàinig am pàirt mu dheireadh dheth bho fhacal anns an t-Seann Lochlannais, a’ ciallachadh “achadh” no bho fhacal eile a’ ciallachadh “dail” no “gleann”.

Chan eil fhios a’ m dè an dreach a bh’ air Sguideil bho thùs, ach tha an t-àite a’ nochdadh ann am mapa a rinn an Seanalair Seòras Wade airson an airm ann an seachd ceud deug is trithead (1730). Cha robh drochaid thar Abhainn Chonainn aig an àm,

ach bha aiseag ann. 'S e an t-ainm a bh' air, ann am Beurla, *Ferry Sguigal*. S-G-U-I-G-A-L. Sguigal, seach Sguideil.

Tha òrdugh nam faclan inntinneach cuideachd. Bhiomaid an dùil *Sguigal Ferry* 's dòcha. Leis gur e *Ferry Sguigal* a th' ann, bhithinn an dùil gun robh an t-ainm stèidhichte air a' Ghàidhlig *Aiseag Sguigal* no rudeigin coltach.

Leis nach robh cuid anns an fhicheadamh linn eòlach air tùs an ainm, thòisich iad air *Drochaid Sgudail* a ghabhail air. Bha iad ag ràdh gun robhar a' cutadh èisg ann – agus gum b' e an “sgudal” am mionach èisg. Gu fortanach, chan e àite “sgudalach” a th' ann an *Drochaid Sguideil*!

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Faclan na Litreach: dubh-chuileagach: *black with flies*; An t-Alltan Dubh: *Blackwater River*; lighe: *flood, standing water caused by river breaking its banks*; aiseag: *ferry*; mionach: *guts*; sgudalach: *full of rubbish*.

Abairtean na Litreach: tha e na rabhadh dhomh gun a bhith a' dol a Shrath Ghairbh: *it's a warning to me not to go to Strathgarve*; co-dhiù as t-samhradh: *at least in summer*; gun lìon chuileagan a thoirt leam: *without taking a midge net with me*; tha eagal orm ro mheud an t-sruth: *I'm scared by the size of the stream*; tuilleadh 's a chòrr uisge: *too much water*; cha chreid mi gun robh guth aige air cus chuileagan: *I don't think he said anything about too many flies!*; nuair a dh'fhàgas an abhainn Loch Luinncheirt: *when the river leaves Loch Luichart*; ceann shuas Linne Chrombaigh: *the upper end of the Cromarty Firth*; dè an dreach a bh' air X bho thùs: *in what form X appeared originally*; tha an t-àite a' nochdadh ann am mapa a rinn an Seanalair Seòras Wade: *the place appears in a map that General George Wade made*; tha òrdugh nam faclan inntinneach cuideachd: *the order of the words is also interesting*; bhiomaid/bhithinn an dùil: *we/I would expect*; no rudeigin coltach: *or something similar*; leis nach robh daoine anns an fhicheadamh linn eòlach air tùs an ainm: *since people in the twentieth century did not know the origin of the name*; thòisich iad air X a ghabhail air: *they started to call it X*; gun robhar a' cutadh èisg: *that fish were being gutted*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *The Gaelic name for Conon Bridge – Drochaid Sguideil – remains a challenge to place-name experts. The accent on the form that appears on bilingual signs on the main road – ie Sgùideil – is incorrect. It's thought that a Norse origin is most likely, and that skut-dalr, or something similar, was the old Norse name for the lower Conon; if correct, the “skut” might refer to a type of sailing craft built using the area's forest resources – certainly the availability of good timber was probably a prime reason for Norse expansion out of Caithness and Sutherland into Ross in the 11th Century (the word came into Gaelic as sgud or scuta). The 1730 form Sguigal, however, is interesting. It doesn't quite correspond to the form in the Old Statistical Account – Scuddale. If you have information or thoughts on this place-name, I'd be pleased to hear from you at rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: Tha sin rudeigin cruaidh, chanainn: *I'd say that's a bit tough, hard.*

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