

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Srath Chonainn agus Sgàrd Ruaidh

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.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 673. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 369 corresponds to Litir 673.

Aig ceann shuas Shrath Chonainn, ann an Siorrachd Rois, tha loch ann air a bheil Loch Beannacharain. Gu siar air an loch tha baile-fearainn ann air a bheil *Scardroy* ann am Beurla. Anns a’ Ghàidhlig thùsail, ’s e sin Sgàrd Ruaidh. Bha Uilleam MacBhàtair dhen bheachd gu bheil an t-ainm a’ ciallachadh “red scree”. Ach tha Iain Mac an Tàilleir ag innse dhuinn, anns an leabhar aige *Place-Names of Scotland*, a thàinig a-mach an-uiridh, gu bheil e a’ ciallachadh “red-brown swathe of land”.

Chan eil mi cinnteach dè as coireach ris an dath ruadh anns an ainm – ’s dòcha a’ chreag no an ùir. Ach, a-rèir beul aithris, ’s e fuil aig beathaichean mairt a thug an t-ainm don àite. Seo an stòiridh:

Bha fear à Loch Abar a bha ainmeil airson a bhith a’ **togail creach** anns an t-seachdamh linn deug. B’ esan Iain Geal Donn mac Dhòmhnail Dhuibh. Bhiodh e gu tric a’ **togail creach** air taobh an ear-thuath na Gàidhealtachd agus a’ tilleadh dhachaigh tro ghlinn is srathan mar Srath Chonainn.

Bha Iain agus a bhràthair Dòmhnall air a bhith a’ cur dragh mòr air coimhearsnachdan ann an Siorrachd Rois. Chuir ceann-cinnidh Clann ’ic Coinnich Gheàrrloch, Alasdair Breac, roimhe gun dèanadh e a’ chùis air Iain an ath thuras a nochdadh e ann an Siorrachd Rois.

Chuir Alasdair fios a-mach gu muinntir a’ chinn a tuath, feuch faighinn a-mach cò an gaisgeach a bu treasa a bh’ ann anns na sgìrean sin. Thàinig fios air ais thuige – Alasdair Buidhe MacAoidh à Srath Òiceall. Chuir e Alasdair Buidhe os cionn oidhirp gus sprèidh nan Rosach a dhìon bho na mèirlich Abrach.

Co-dhiù, chaidh Iain Geal Donn ’s a chompanaich gu ruige An Àmait, ann an taobh sear Rois, far an do thog iad dusan beathach mairt. Fear dhiubh, ’s e tarbh a bh’ ann. Thill iad tro Shrath a’ Bhàthaich agus Srath Chonainn gu ruige taobh an iar Loch Beannacharain far an do chuir iad seachad an oidhche. ’S iad a thug an t-ainm Sgàrd Ruaidh don àite oir bha iad air na beathaichean a phutadh cho cruaidh ’s gun robh fuil a’ tighinn asta.

Bha sgalag aig Alasdair Buidhe – Abrach òg. ’S e an gille sin a thug fios do dh’Alasdair gum biodh na mèirlich a’ stad airson na h-oidhche ann am bothan-àirigh ri taobh Loch Beannacharain. Chaidh an dithis aca don àite. Chuir Alasdair dos a ghunna ris a’ ghille. Thug e air a’ ghille gealltainn gum biodh e dileas dhà, seach do na h-Abraich eile.

Anns a’ bhothan, bha na mèirlich a’ ròstadh pìos dhen tarbh. Cha robh amharas sam bith aca gun robh Alasdair Buidhe air an tòir. Chuir Alasdair a sgalag aig an

doras. Chaidh Alasdair fhèin gu ceann eile a' bhothain. Thog e sgrath bhon mhullach pìos beag. Chunnaic e Iain Geal Donn **ga gharadh fhèin** aig an teine. Bha Iain ann an sunnd mhath. Bha na fir gu lèir ann an cròileagan timcheall an tèine.

Gu h-obann, dh'èigh Iain do a chompanaich, “An aire – tha mi a' faighinn fàileadh pùdair!” Ach mus d' fhuair e fhèin no càch cothrom dad a dhèanamh, chuir Alasdair Buidhe peilear ann. Leum Alasdair sìos far a' mhullaich agus chaidh e gu doras a' bhothain airson taic a thoirt do a sgalaig. Agus chì sinn dè thachair an uair sin an-ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: tùsail: *original*; Sgàrd Ruaidh: *Scardroy*; Uilleam MacBhàtair: *William J Watson*; ùir: *soil*; Loch Abar: *Lochaber*; coimhearsnachdan: *communities*; Siorrachd Rois: *Ross-shire*; Srath Òiceall: *Strath Oykell*; An Àmait: *Amat*; Srath a' Bhàthaich: *Strathvaich*; sgalag: *lackey*; bothan-àirigh: *shieling bothy*; peilear: *bullet*.

Abairtean na Litreach: ceann shuas Shrath Chonainn: *the upper end of Strathconon*; gu siar air an loch tha baile-fearainn ann: *to the west of the loch there is a farm*; dè as coireach ris an dath ruadh: *what is responsible for the red colour*; fuil aig beathaichean mairt: *cattle blood*; ceann-cinnidh Clann 'ic Coinnich Gheàrrloch: *the chief of the MacKenzies of Gairloch*; chuir X roimhe gun dèanadh e a' chùis air Y: *X intended to defeat Y*; muinntir a' chinn a tuath: *the people of the north*; feuch faighinn a-mach cò an gaisgeach a bu treasa a bh' ann: *in an attempt to identify the strongest hero*; os cionn oidhirp gus sprèidh nan Rosach a dhìon bho na mèirlich Abrach: *in charge of an attempt to protect the Ross people's livestock from the Lochaber robbers*; dusan beathach mairt: *a dozen cattle*; bha iad air na beathaichean a phutadh cho cruaidh 's gun robh fuil a' tighinn asta: *they had pushed the cattle so hard that they were bleeding*; chuir X dos a ghunna ris a' ghille: *X put the muzzle of the gun against the lad*; thug e air a' ghille gealltainn gum biodh e dileas dhà: *he forced the lad to promise that he would be loyal to him*; a' ròstadh pìos dhen tarbh: *roasting a piece of the bull*; air an tòir: *in pursuit of them*; thog e sgrath bhon mhullach pìos beag: *he lifted a sod a little from the roof*; ann an cròileagan: *in a circle*; an aire – tha mi a' faighinn fàileadh pùdair: *look out – I'm getting the smell of [gun]powder*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: airson a bhith a' togail creach anns an t-seachdamh linn deug: *for stealing livestock in the seventeenth century*. Togail creach (*or in more old-fashioned Gaelic togail na creiche*) means literally “lifting (ie taking away) the plunder” and I imagine the Gaelic idiom has found its way into the Scots and English expression “lifting cattle”, meaning “rustling” (unless the linguistic influence was in the reverse direction). When we refer to “togail creach”, unless we are more specific about the situation, it would be understood as referring to the old Highland practice of stealing cattle from another clan or in another part of the country, and driving them home.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: ga gharadh fhèin aig an teine: *warming himself by the fire*.

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