

# Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

## le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

### Coilltean-calltainn (1)

*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](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk). This is Litir 697. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 393 corresponds to Litir 697.*

O chionn bliadhna no dhà, chuir mi seachad madainn ann an **coille-chnò**. Uill, leis an fhìrinn innse, **cha robh mòran chnothan innte**. Mar sin, 's dòcha gum bu chòir dhomh **coille-challtainn** a ghabhail oirre. Tha an dà chuid – *coille-chnò* agus *coille-challtainn* – a' ciallachadh coille anns a bheil gu leòr de chraobhan calltainn. Ann am Beurla, 's e *hazel wood* a chanas daoine rithe.

'S toigh leam coilltean-calltainn agus bha an tè sin gu math brèagha. Ach bha mi ann airson adhbhar, a bharrachd air bòidhchead na coille fhaicinn. Bha mi fhìn is caraid dhomh còmhla ri tè de luchd-siubhail na Gàidhealtachd – Easaidh Stiùbhart. Tha Easaidh ainmeil airson a bhith ag aithris sgeulachdan Gàidhlig, feadhainn dhiubh a bhiodh a seanair, Ailidh Dall, ag innse. Bho àm gu àm, bidh i a' sealltainn do dhaoine mar a bhiodh an luchd-siubhail a' togail an cuid theantaichean. Bha iad a' cleachdadh shlatan calltainn.

Agus, ged nach ann leis an luchd-siubhail a tha na coilltean-calltainn, chan e mèirle a th' ann a bhith a' toirt shlatan calltainn a-mach asta. Mar a chanas an seanfhacal ainmeil, a tha cho fìor 's a ghabhas – **breac à linne, slàt à coille, 's fiadh à fireach – mèirle nach do ghabh duine riamh nàir' aiste**.

Bha Easaidh a' fuireach ann an Luirg nuair a bha i òg. Taobh a-muigh a' bhaile, bha coille-challtainn far am biodh an luchd-siubhail a' buain shlatan airson an cuid theantaichean. Bha iad a' faighinn cead airson sin. Ach, an latha taobh Loch Nis, chuimhnich sinn air an t-seanfhacal – breac à linne, slat à coille...!

'S e as coireach gun robhar a' cleachdadh calltainn, seach slatan craoibhe eile, gu bheil calltainn nas fhasa a lùbadh, agus nas fhasa car a chur ann. Bha sinn anns a' choille anns a' Chèitean. Shaoil mi gur dòcha gur e sin an t-àm as fheàrr sa bhliadhna airson slatan a lùbadh, nuair a tha sùgh ag èirigh as t-earrach. Ach bha mi ceàrr. Dh'inns Easaidh dhomh gur ann aig deireadh na bliadhna a bhiodh iad a' buain nan slatan calltainn oir cha robh uiread de shùgh anns na craobhan an uair sin.

Bhiodh iad a' coimhead airson slatan dìreach gun char, feadhainn a bha tiugh gu leòr airson an canabhas a chumail suas ach gun a bhith ro thiugh airson lùbadh gu furasta. An uair sin, bhiodh na slatan air an *seatadh*, mar a chanadh iad. Bhiodh iad a' cur an dàrna cinn dheth san talamh – an ceann a bu tighe. Bhiodh iad a' cur a' chinn eile, an ceann caol, ann an eag ann an gàrradh, le lùb ann. Mar a bhiodh an ùine a' dol seachad, bhiodh iad a' cur lùb na bu mhotha is na bu mhotha anns an t-slait gus am biodh an cumadh ceart oirre. Bhiodh an gnothach gu lèir a' toirt beagan mhiosan. Bhiodh an t-slat deiseil airson a dhol air an rathad as t-samhradh.

Ann an cuid de dh'àiteachan, bhiodh daoine a' dèanamh preasarlach no preas-choille de choilltean-calltainn. An e sin an seòrsa coille anns an robh Easaidh a' faighinn a slatan? Dh'inns i dhomh nach e. Agus tha a' cheist air èirigh – an robh na Gàidheil a' dèanamh phreasarlach de choilltean-calltainn uiread 's a bha sinn a' smaoineachadh? Bheir sinn sùil air a' cheist sin an-ath-sheachdain.

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**Faclan na Litreach:** Easaidh Stiùbhart: *Essie Stewart*; Luirg: *Lairg*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** a bharrachd air bòidhchead na coille fhaicinn: *in addition to seeing the beauty of the wood*; mar a bhiodh an luchd-siubhail a' togail an cuid theantaichean: *how the travelling people would erect their tents*; chan e mèirle a th' ann a bhith a' toirt shlatan calltainn a-mach asta: *it's not theft to take hazel rods out of them*; an latha taobh Loch Nis: *[on] the day on Loch Ness-side*; nas fhasa a lùbadh: *easier to bend*; nas fhasa car a chur ann: *easier to put a turn/twist in it*; anns a' Chèitean: *in May*; nuair a tha sùgh ag èirigh: *when sap is rising*; gur ann aig deireadh na bliadhna a bhiodh iad a' buain X: *that it was at the end of the year that they would harvest X*; slatan dìreach gun char: *straight rods without a kink*; tiugh gu leòr airson an canabhas a chumail suas: *thick enough to keep the canvas up*; an dàrna ceann dheth san talamh: *one end of it in the ground*; an ceann a bu tighe: *the thicker end*; eag ann an gàrradh: *a notch in a stone wall*; gus am biodh an cumadh ceart oirre: *until it had the correct shape*; bhiodh daoine a' dèanamh preasarlach no preas-choille: *people would coppice the wood*; uiread 's a bha sinn a' smaoineachadh: *as much as we were thinking*.

**Puing-chànain na Litreach:** **coille-chnò:** *literally 'nut wood', meaning 'hazel wood' (the nuts most highly valued by the Gael). Cnò is here in its old genitive plural guise, being the same as the nominative singular (but lenited without the article), so coille-chnò means 'wood of nuts'. However, I made the statement **cha robh mòran chnothan innte** 'there weren't many nuts in it' and I've used the form chnothan as the genitive plural here, as it is the form likely to be used by modern Gaelic-speakers (the same as the nominative plural but lenited), except in phrases like coille-chnò that preserve a slightly archaic form. Another compound noun for 'hazel wood' is **coille-challtainn** 'wood of hazel'. Calltainn is lenited, not because it is an indefinite genitive plural but because it's acting like an adjective qualifying the feminine noun coille.*

**Seanfhacal na Litreach:** **breac à linne, slàt à coille, 's fiadh à fireach – mèirle nach do ghabh duine riamh nàir'** aiste: *a salmon from the pool, a stick from the wood and a deer from the hill – theft that never shamed a man. In some dialects breac is the salmon, although it more commonly represents the brown trout.*

*Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoineachadh le MG ALBA*