

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Sìth Chailleann (2)

Each week the West Highland Free Press publishes the text for Ruairidh's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal (103.5-105 FM). It is broadcast at 10.00 pm on Sunday, following the Gaelic Learners' programme 'Beag air Bheag', and repeated at 10.30 pm every Wednesday. There is also a simpler version – An Litir Bheag – which goes to air at 10.30 am on the same Sunday as the equivalent Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh. This is Litir 960 (corresponding to Litir Bheag 656). The Litir is also available on the BBC website at bbc.co.uk/litir and on the Gaelic learners' website www.learnghaelic.scot.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun deuchainn shaidheansail a rinneadh air Sìth Chailleann ann an Siorrachd Pheairt ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad 's a ceithir (1774). Bhathar a' feuchainn ri tomhas a dhèanamh air cuideam na cruinne.

Nuair a ràinig e a' bheinn à Lunnainn, 's cinnteach gun robh an Reultair Rìoghail, Nevil Maskelyne, a' faireachdainn gun robh e ann an saoghal eadar-dhealaichte. Anns an fharsaingeachd, bha droch bheachd aig muinntir Lunnainn air Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba aig an àm sin – mar dhùthaich bhochd, ghruamach, shalach – le droch shìde fad na h-ùine. Agus bha an samhradh ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad 's a ceithir (1774) air leth fliuch agus fuar!

Chaidh innse do Mhaskelyne gun robh ainm na beinne a' ciallachadh '*constant storm*'. Feumaidh **gun robhar a' smaoineachadh air gailleann, seach Chailleann** mar bhun-stèidh an ainm. No an e gun robh muinntir an àite ri spòrs leis an t-Sasannach?! Co-dhiù, bha an t-side gailleannach gu tric, fhad 's a bha an deuchainn a' dol air adhart. Ach, gu fortanach, bha oidhcheannan ann nuair a chìte na rionnagan, agus rinn Maskelyne tomhas orra leis an uidheamachd a b' fheàrr a bha san t-saoghal aig an àm sin.

Rinn e tomhas air àite rionnagan san iarmailt bhon ionad-sheallaidh aige air cliathaich a deas na beinne – air a' cheàrn no *angle* thuca bhon Talamh. An uair sin, rinn e an aon rud ann an ionad eile a thogadh air cliathaich a tuath na beinne. Bha an dà ionad faisg air mìle air falbh o chèile. Bha fios aig Maskelyne dè an diofar a bh' ann an domhan-leud – no *latitude* – eadar an dà àite. Mar sin, dh'obraich e a-mach dè an diofar a bu chòir a bhith anns a' cheàrn do na h-aon rionnagan eadar gach ionad-seallaidh.

Ach cha robh am figear a fhuair e co-ionann ri sin. Carson? Uill, bhathar a' tomhas dìreachdas le crochadan. Agus, mar a bha Maskelyne an dùil, bha a' bheinn a' tarraing air a' chrochadan pìos beag. Agus bhon diofar eadar an dà àireamh, dh'obraich Maskelyne a-mach dè cho trom 's a bha Sìth Chailleann. An uair sin, fhuair e fhèin is am fear-matamataig aige figear airson cuideam na cruinne gu lèir. Agus cha robh e fada ceàrr a rèir mar a tha daoine a' tomhas cuideam na cruinne an-diugh.

Chan eil fhios agam dè an seòrsa beachd a bh' aig Maskelyne fhèin air a' Ghàidhealtachd mus deach e ann, ach dh'ionnsaich e gun robh na Gàidheil gu math sìobhalta agus carthannach. Sgrìobh e '*their country is with justice celebrated for its hospitality and attention to strangers*'. Cuimhnicheamaid gun robh seo dìreach ginealach an dèidh Bliadhna Theàrlaich.

Am measg nan daoine air an d' fhuair Maskelyne eòlas, bha fear de mhuintir an àite, Donnchadh MacDhonnchaidh. Ged a bha e mar sgalag dhaibh tron latha, a' giùlan eallachan suas is sìos a' bheinn, bha Donnchadh cuideachd na fhidhlear air leth. Bhiodh e a' toirt na fìdhle aige don bheinn air an fheasgar a chluich rìdhlichean is sigichean don a h-uile duine.

Air an oidhche mu dheireadh, bha ho-ro-gheallaidh ann. A bharrachd air an fhidhill, thug Donnchadh buideal uisge-bheatha leis. **Chaidh am bothan na smàl** agus loisg e gu làr. Dh'fhalbh an fhidheall anns an teine, agus bha Donnchadh troimhe-chèile. Agus dè thachair an uair sin? Uill, innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: Reultair Rìoghail: *Astronomer Royal*; bun-stèidh: *basis*; gailleannach: *stormy*; sìobhalta: *civilized*; carthannach: *charitable*; Donnchadh MacDhonnchaidh: *Duncan Robertson*; fìdhlear: *fiddler*; ho-ro-gheallaidh: *knees-up*; buideal: *barrel*; troimhe-chèile: *really upset*.

Abairtean na Litreach: mun deuchainn shaidheansail a rinneadh air Sìth Chailleann: *about the scientific experiment that was done on Schiehallion*; bhathar a' feuchainn ri tomhas a dhèanamh air cuideam na cruinne: *an attempt was being made to measure the weight of the globe*; anns an fharsaingeachd: *in general*; droch shìde fad na h-ùine: *bad weather all the time*; an e gun robh muinntir an àite ri spòrs leis an t-Sasannach?: *is it that the local people were playing with the Englishman?*; nuair a chòite na rionnagan: *when the stars could be seen*; leis an uidheamachd a b' fheàrr a bha san t-saoghal: *with the best equipment that was in the world*; bhon ionad-sheallaidh aige air cliathaich a deas na beinne: *from his observatory on the southern end of the mountain*; dh'obraich e a-mach dè an diofar a bu chòir a bhith anns a' cheàrn do na h-aon rionnagan eadar gach ionad-seallaidh: *he worked out what difference there should be between each observatory*; bhathar a' tomhas dìreachdas le crochadan: *verticality was being measured with a pendulum*; cha robh e fada ceàrr a rèir mar a tha daoine a' tomhas cuideam na cruinne an-diugh: *it wasn't far wrong according to how people measure the mass of the Earth today*; cuimhnicheamaid gun robh seo dìreach ginealach an dèidh Bliadhna Theàrlaich: *let us remember that this was just a generation after the 1745-6 Jacobite rebellion*; ged a bha e mar sgalag dhaibh tron latha, a' giùlan eallachan suas is sìos a' bheinn: *although he was a labourer for them through the day, carrying loads up and down the mountain*; a chluich rìdhlichean is sigichean: *to play reels and jigs*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: Feumaidh gun robhar a' smaoinichadh air gailleann, seach Chailleann mar bhun-stèidh an ainm: *it must be that gaillean 'storm' was being considered as the basis of the name, rather than Chailleann 'of Caledonians' [presumably 'sìor-ghailleann']*. *This is highly unlikely. It is generally recognised that the name is Sìth Chailleann 'conical hill of [the] Caledonians [an ancient tribe]'*. Sìthean are often associated with the sìthichean 'fairies' and Schiehallion is replete with folklore, so 'fairy hill of the Caledonians' is probably a good translation.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: **Chaidh am bothan na smàl:** *the bothy went on fire*.

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