

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Tòmas Colby agus an OS

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 989. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 685 corresponds to Litir 989.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu na ‘Colby Camps’ – togalaichean a thog muinntir na Suirbhidh Òrdanais nuair a bha iad a’ dèanamh mapaichean dhen Ghàidhealtachd. Chithear na tobhtaichean aig cuid dhiubh fhathast. Bha na togalaichean air an ainmeachadh an dèidh Tòmas Colby, fear de shàr-chruinn-eòlaichean an t-saoghail ri a linn.

Rugadh Colby ann an seachd ceud deug, ochdad ’s a ceithir (1784). Thogadh e ann an Sasainn agus ceann a deas na Cuimrigh, agus dhearbhadh e aig aois òg gun robh e fìor chomasach air obair mhapaichean. Ge-tà, cha mhòr nach do chaill e a bheatha aig aois naoi-deug nuair a bha e air turas trèanaidh anns a’ Chòrn. Bha e a’ gabhail spòrs le gunna-làimhe nuair a spreadh an gunna na làimh chlà. Chaidh pàirt dhen ghunna a-steach air a chlaigeann air a bhathais. Chaill e a làmh ach, gu fortanach dha, chuir caraid stad air lannsair bho bhith a’ tolladh a chlaiginn.

Bha suirbhidheadh doirbh do dhuine a bha gann de làimh ach rinn Colby a’ chùis. Agus, gu fortanach, cha do rinn a’ mheatailt a dh’fhuirich na chlaigeann cron air inntinn. Ann an ochd ceud deug is fichead (1820), dh’èirich e gu bhith na cheannard air an t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais, às dèidh a bhith air a mholadh le Diùc Wellington agus Sir Iòsaph Banks, Ceann-suidhe a’ Chomainn Rìoghail. Ceithir bliadhna an dèidh sin, roghnaich an riaghaltas suirbhidh mhòr a dhèanamh de dh’Èirinn air fad air sgàth ’s gun robh iad ag iarraidh cìsean-fearainn a chur an sàs, stèidhichte air meud an fhearainn. Bha na mapaichean sin aig sia òirlich air a’ mhìle. Chruthaich Colby slat-tomhais ùr airson na h-obrach ris an cante an ‘Colby bar’.

Tha na mapaichean a rinn Colby ann an Èirinn air leth cudromach oir tha iad a’ sealltainn cruth na dùthcha ron Ghoirt Mhòir. Thàinig an obair suirbhidh gu ceann dìreach bliadhna mus do thòisich a’ Ghort.

Bha Colby ann an Alba cuideachd agus choisinn e cliù dha fhèin air a’ Ghàidhealtachd airson a bhith a’ seasamh ri cruadal is droch shìde. Chuir e fhèin is sgioba de luchd-obrach seachad seachdainean air mullach Beinn Nibheis. Uaireannan, bha iad a’ fuireach ann an teantaichean. Uaireannan, thog iad togalaichean cloiche. Gu tric, cha robh aca airson ithe ach lite.

Bha Colby **cho fut ri fiadh** – agus bha e an dùil gum biodh a chompanaich a cheart cho comasach is deònach ris fhèin. Nuair a bha iad a’ gabhail cuairtean rannsachaidh, bhiodh iad a’ coiseachd **anns a’ choitcheannas** trithead ’s a naoi mìle gach latha. Ann an aon turas air a’ Ghàidhealtachd, a’ coiseachd air talamh garbh thar trì seachdainean, choisich Colby faisg air sia ceud mìle.

Mar bu trice, bhiodh e a' coimhead airson eaglais air Didòmhnaich. Ach aon turas ann an Loch Abar cha robh sgeul air eaglais. Dh'iarr Colby air an luchd-obrach aige an latha 'dheth' aca a chur seachad ann a bhith a' dìreadh an Aonaich Bhig faisg air Beinn Nibheis – àirde còrr is ceithir mìle troigh!

Ach bha aon mhullach a bha ro dhoirbh, eadhon do Cholby. B' e sin An Stac – no am Bidean Do-ruigsinneach mar a chanas mòran an-diugh – air mullach a' Chuilthinn anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Rinn Colby oidhirp air a shreap ach, le dìreach aon làmh agus gun ròpan no àraidhean, cha deach leis.

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Faclan na Litreach: An t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais: *The Ordnance Survey (UK mapping organisation)*; spreadh: *exploded*; suirbhidheadh: *surveying*; roghnaich: *chose*; Beinn Nibheis: *Ben Nevis*; An Stac: *the old name for the Inaccessible Pinnacle*; Am Bidean Do-ruigsinneach: *the modern name for the Inaccessible Pinnacle*; àraidhean: *ladders*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Chithear na tobhtaichean aig cuid dhiubh fhathast: *the ruins of some of them can still be seen*; fear de shàr-chruinn-eòlaichean an t-saoghail ri a linn: *one of the great world geographers of his day*; dhearb e aig aois òg gun robh e fìor chomasach air obair mhapaichean: *he proved at a young age that he was extremely capable at map work*; cha mhòr nach do chaill e a bheatha: *he almost lost his life*; turas trèanaidh anns a' Chòrn: *a training trip in Cornwall*; a-steach air a chlaigeann air a bhathais: *into his skull in the forehead*; gu fortanach dha: *fortunately for him*; chuir caraid stad air lannsair bho bhith a' tolladh a chlaiginn: *a friend stopped a surgeon from drilling into his skull*; às dèidh a bhith air a mholadh le: *after being recommended by*; Ceann-suidhe a' Chomainn Rìoghail: *President of the Royal Society*; gun robh iad ag iarraidh cìsean-fearainn a chur an sàs, stèidhichte air meud an fhearainn: *that they were wanting to implement land taxes, based on the size of the land*; cruth na dùthcha ron Goirt Mhòir: *the shape of the land before the Great Famine*; choisinn e cliù dha fhèin airson a bhith a' seasamh ri cruadal is droch shìde: *he won a reputation for himself for putting up with hardship and bad weather*; cha robh aca airson ithe ach lite: *they only had porridge to eat*; bhiodh e a' coimhead airson eaglais air Didòmhnaich: *he would be looking for a church on a Sunday*; aon turas ann an Loch Abar cha robh sgeul air eaglais: *one time in Lochaber there was no sign of a church*; an latha 'dheth' aca a chur seachad ann a bhith a' dìreadh an Aonaich Bhig: *to spend their day 'off' in climbing the Aonach Beag*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: bhiodh iad a' coiseachd anns a' choitcheannas trithead 's a naoi mìle gach latha: *they would commonly walk 39 miles each day*. If you want to say 'on average' ie 'commonly', this is a good expression, as is anns a' chumantas. If you want to be more accurate and express a mathematical average, a better term is cuibheas ie anns a' chuibheas, gu cuibheasach.

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: Bha Colby cho fut ri fiadh: *Colby was as fit as a fiddle*.

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