

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 214 (which corresponds to Litir 518). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

There's a place in Islay called Lochan na Nigheadaireachd (little loch of the washing). It's near Laggan Point. I reckon people did washing in the lochan. That was in the old days. But how did they do the washing?

Well, I was reading a book recently. And the author gave a description of washing like that. The name of the book is Cocoa and Crabs. Flora MacDonald is the author. In the book, Flora tells about the day of washing the blankets when she was young. She was living in a remote place in Benbecula. They walked to a freshwater loch to do the washing. That was on a beautiful day in May.

They had a zinc bath. They had a black enamel pot. They had washing powder. They had soap. They were as busy as ants on that day. They made a fire beside the loch. They put the black pot on the fire. They filled the pot with water from the loch. When the water was hot, they poured it into the bath.

The water was full of foam. The children jumped into the bath.

Tha àite ann an Ìle air a bheil Lochan na Nigheadaireachd. Tha e faisg air Rubha an Lagain. Tha mi a' dèanamh dheth gun robh daoine a' dèanamh nigheadaireachd anns an lochan. Bha sin anns an t-seann aimsir. Ach ciamar a bha iad a' dèanamh na nigheadaireachd?

Uill, bha mi a' leughadh leabhar o chionn ghoirid. Agus rinn an t-ùghdar tuairisgeul de nigheadaireachd mar sin. 'S e an t-ainm air an leabhar *Còco is Crùbagan*. 'S i Flòraidh NicDhòmhnaill an t-ùghdar. Anns an leabhar tha Flòraidh ag innse mu latha nigheadaireachd nam plaideachan – no plangaidean – nuair a bha i òg. Bha i a' fuireach ann an àite iomallach ann am Beinn na Fadhlà. Choisich iad gu loch-uisge airson an nigheadaireachd a dhèanamh. Bha sin air latha brèagha anns a' Chèitean.

Bha tuba sinc aca. Bha poit dhubh eanamail aca. Bha fùdar nigheadaireachd aca. Bha siabann aca. Bha iad cho trang ris na seangain air an latha sin. Thog iad teine ri taobh an locha. Chuir iad a' phoit dhubh air an teine. Lìon iad a' phoit le uisge bhon loch. Nuair a bha an t-uisge teth, dhòirt iad don tuba e.

Bha an t-uisge na chop. Leum a' chlann a-steach don tuba. "Bha sinn a'

“We were bouncing and jumping and stamping,” Flora writes. “We were just like yo-yos up and down in the white foam.” Flora really enjoyed washing day.

She was really keen on the bubbles. “My heart fills with happiness,” she writes, “when I remember the beautiful bubbles.”

After the washing came the rinsing. The blankets were rinsed in the loch. Then they were wrung out. Then they were put out to dry.

Was it hard work? Yes, certainly. But young Flòra enjoyed it. I expect the folk of Lochan na Nigheadaireachd in Islay enjoyed it in very much the same way.

bocadaich is a’ leumadaich is a’ stampadh,” tha Flòraidh a’ sgrìobhadh. “Bha sinn dìreach mar yo-yos suas is sìos sa chop gheal.” Chòrd latha na nigheadaireachd ri Flòraidh gu mòr.

Bha i uabhasach measail air na builgeanan. “Tha mo chridhe a’ lìonadh le toileachas,” tha i a’ sgrìobhadh, “nuair a chuimhnicheas mi air na builgeanan àlainn.”

Às dèidh an nighe, thàinig an sgoiladh. Bha na plaideachan air an sgoiladh anns an loch. An uair sin, bha iad air am fàsgadh. An uair sin, bha iad air an cur a-mach airson tiormachadh.

An e obair chruaidh a bha ann? ’S e, gun teagamh. Ach chòrd i ri Flòraidh òg. Tha mi an dùil gun do chòrd e ri muinntir Lochan na Nigheadaireachd ann an Ìle anns an aon dòigh.