

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 264 (which corresponds to Litir 568). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was in the country of the Sámi in northern Sweden. That was at Easter time this year. I was skiing through country in which the Sámi keep reindeer. I saw two deer. But I saw several Sámi people on snow scooters.

I met a Sámi woman. Her name is Lisa. She was cooking reindeerburgers! They were tasty! Her family has a restaurant. The Sámi flag was above the door.

I had a nice conversation with Lisa. She speaks Sámi. She told me about the language. It has strong links to the environment. It was treated with disrespect. It was kept out of education for a long time.

Things have changed – to a degree. They have several schools now which teach through the medium of Sámi. They have a sort of parliament. But [only] a minority of Sámi speak the language today. That's even true in Norway where they are more numerous. Some Swedes still show disrespect to the Sámi. Some Sámi, who speak the language, do not speak it to their children. It's rather like

Bha mi ann an dùthaich nan Sàmi ann an ceann a tuath na Suain. Bha sin aig àm na Càisge am-bliadhna. Bha mi a' sgitheadh tro dhùthaich anns am bi Sàmi a' cumail fèidh-shneachda. Chunnaic mi dà fhiadh. Ach chunnaic mi grunn dhaoine Sàmi air sgutairean-sneachda.

Thachair mi ri tè Shàmi. 'S e Lisa an t-ainm a tha oirre. Bha i a' còcaireachd *reindeerburgers!* Bha iad blasta! Tha taigh-bìdh aig an teaghlach aice. Bha bratach nan Sàmi os cionn an dorais.

Bha còmhraidh laghach agam le Lisa. Tha Sàmais aice. Dh'innis i dhomh mun chànan. Tha ceangal làidir aice don àrainneachd. Chaidh dìmeas mòr a dhèanamh oirre. Bha i air a cumail a-mach à foghlam fad ùine mhòr.

Tha cùisean air atharrachadh – gu ìre. Tha corra sgoil a-nise a' teagasg tro mheadhan na Sàmais. Tha seòrsa de phàrlamaid aca. Ach tha an cànan aig beag-chuid de Shàmi an-diugh. Tha sin fìor eadhon ann an Nirribhidh far a bheil iad nas pailte. Tha cuid fhathast a' dèanamh dìmeas air na Sàmi. Tha cuid de Shàmi, aig a bheil an cànan, nach bruidhinn i ris a' chloinn aca. Tha e rudeigin coltach ri Alba. 'S e sin a thuir

Scotland. That's what I said to her.

"You're from Scotland?" she said.

"Yes. Were you there?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "But it's my father's uncle who took reindeer to Scotland."

"You mean Mikel Utzi," I said. I heard about him but I didn't know him. He took reindeer to the Cairngorms in 1952. The herd is still there. "The very man," she said, "the very man."

I shouted to a [female] friend from Aviemore who was with me.

"Come here," I said to her. "You must meet this woman." My friend is married to a man who was working for Mikel Utzi. That was at the beginning of the sixties. His work was herding the reindeer on the Cairngorms. The two women came together. They had a nice conversation about deer and snow and mountains.

mi rithe.

"Tha thu à Alba?" thuirt i.

"Tha. An robh thu ann?" dh'fhaighnich mi.

"Cha robh," fhreagair i. "Ach 's e uncail m' athar a thug fèidh-shneachda a dh'Alba."

"Tha thu a' ciallachadh Mikel Utzi," thuirt mi. Chuala mi mu dheidhinn ach cha robh mi eòlach air. Thug e fèidh-shneachda don Mhonadh Ruadh ann an naoi ceud deug, caogad 's a dhà (1952). Tha an treud ann fhathast. "An dearbh dhuine," fhreagair i, "an dearbh dhuine."

Dh'èigh mi air bana-charaid às an Aghaidh Mhòir a bha cuide rium. "Trohad seo," thuirt mi rithe. "Feumaidh tu coinneachadh ris a' bhoireannach seo." Tha mo bhana-charaid pòsta aig fear a bha ag obair do Mhikel Utzi. Bha sin aig toiseach nan seasgadan. B' e an obair aige buachailleachd nam fiadh-sneachda anns a' Mhonadh Ruadh. Thàinig an dithis bhoireannach còmhla. Bha còmhradh laghach aca mu fhèidh is sneachd is beanntan.