

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 273 (which corresponds to Litir 577). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

At the end of the last Litir, I posed a question. I asked what Oidhche nan Seachd Suipearan (The Night of the Seven Suppers) is. The Night of the Seven Suppers. Well, that's the longest night of the year. It's in the middle of winter. Perhaps it's so long that people take seven suppers [during the night].

We were looking at another phrase associated with seven. That was Side nan Seachd Sian – the weather of the seven elements. That means really bad weather. I found a proverb about the weather in which there is “the weather of the seven elements”. Here it is: after thunder in winter, there is either good weather or terrible weather. If there is thunder in winter, good weather or really bad weather follows it. After thunder in winter, there is either good weather or terrible weather.

*Here is a proverb. It takes in the number seven. It's about creatures that live in the sea:
Seven herrings, a full meal for a salmon;
Seven salmon, a full meal for a seal;
Seven seals, a full meal for a small whale;*

Aig deireadh na Litreach mu dheireadh, chuir mi ceist oirbh. Dh'fhaighnich mi dè tha ann an **Oidhche nan Seachd Suipearan**. Oidhche nan Seachd Suipearan. Uill, 's e sin an oidhche as fhaide dhen bhliadhna. Tha i ann am meadhan a' gheamhraidh. 'S dòcha gu bheil i cho fada 's gum bi daoine a' gabhail seachd suipearan ann.

Bha sinn a' toirt sùil air abairt eile co-cheangailte ri seachd. B' e sin *Side nan Seachd Sian* – the weather of the seven elements. Tha sin a' ciallachadh aimsir fìor dhona. Lorg mi seanfhacal mun aimsir anns a bheil “side nan seachd sian”. Seo e: *An dèidh tàirneanaich a' gheamhraidh, thig aon chuid sìde mhath no sìde nan seachd sian*. Ma tha tàirneanaich ann sa gheamhradh, thig deagh aimsir no fìor dhroch aimsir às a dhèidh. An dèidh tàirneanaich a' gheamhraidh, thig aon chuid sìde mhath no sìde nan seachd sian.

Seo agaibh seanfhacal. Tha e a' toirt a-steach na h-àireimh seachd. Tha e mu dheidhinn chreutairean a tha a' fuireach anns a' mhuir:
*Seachd sgadain, sàth bradain;
Seachd bradain, sàth ròin;
Seachd ròin, sàth muice-mara bhig;
Seachd mucan-mara beag, sàth muice-*

<p><i>Seven small whales, a full meal for a large whale;</i> <i>Seven large whales, a full meal for a bull whale;</i> <i>Seven bull whales, a full meal for the leviathan of the ocean.</i></p> <p>Sàth means enough food to satisfy a creature. Seachd sgadain, sàth bradain – that means “seven herrings, a full meal for a salmon”. Seachd bradain, sàth ròin – “seven salmon, a full meal for a seal”. Seachd ròin, sàth muice-mara bhig – “seven seals, a full meal for a small whale” and so on. Listen to the verse again: <i>Seven herrings, a full meal for a salmon;</i> <i>Seven salmon, a full meal for a seal;</i> <i>Seven seals, a full meal for a small whale;</i> <i>Seven small whales, a full meal for a large whale;</i> <i>Seven large whales, a full meal for a bull whale;</i> <i>Seven bull whales, a full meal for the leviathan of the ocean.</i></p> <p>What is a cionnan-crò? Well, it’s a thing called “the bull whale” in English. And mial mhòr a’ chuain means the leviathan of the ocean. I’m not sure what it is but it certainly eats a lot!</p>	<p><i>mara mhòir;</i> <i>Seachd mucan-mara mòr, sàth cionnain-crò;</i> <i>Seachd cionnain-crò, sàth mial mhòr a’ chuain.</i></p> <p>Tha sàth a’ ciallachadh gu leòr de bhiadh a shàsaicheas creutair. <i>Seachd sgadain, sàth bradain</i> – tha sin a’ ciallachadh “seven herrings, a full meal for a salmon”. <i>Seachd bradain, sàth ròin</i> – “seven salmon, a full meal for a seal”. <i>Seachd ròin, sàth muice-mara bhig</i> – “seven seals, a full meal for a small whale”, agus mar sin air adhart. Èistibh ris an rainn a-rithist:</p> <p><i>Seachd sgadain, sàth bradain;</i> <i>Seachd bradain, sàth ròin;</i> <i>Seachd ròin, sàth muice-mara bhig;</i> <i>Seachd mucan-mara beag, sàth muice-mara mhòir;</i> <i>Seachd mucan-mara mòr, sàth cionnain-crò;</i> <i>Seachd cionnain-crò, sàth mial mhòr a’ chuain.</i></p> <p>Dè tha ann an <i>cionnan-crò</i>? Uill, rud ris an canar ann am Beurla “the bull whale”. Agus ’s e <i>mial mhòr a’ chuain</i> – the leviathan of the ocean. Chan eil mi cinnteach dè tha ann ach, gu dearbh, ’s e a dhitheas gu leòr!</p>
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