

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 330 (which corresponds to Litir 634). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

The Westmann Islands in Iceland are small but rugged. From the mainland, the view of the islands reminded me of St Kilda. It's submarine volcanoes that made them. That was eleven thousand years ago.

A new island – Surtsey – appeared in 1963. And ten years after that, another eruption began. That was on the island where the people live – Heimaey. Lava and ash came out. The people had to leave for the mainland.

For five months thirty million tons of lave moved over the eastern side of the island. A large new hill arose. More than three hundred houses were destroyed. The lava was moving towards the only harbour on the island. That was dangerous. Without a harbour, the people couldn't live on the island.

Some people went back with big pumps. They put millions of gallons of seawater on the lava. The lava stopped before it reached the harbour.

En route to the port on the ferry, I went past a small island called Bjarnarey. That's the same name we have in Scotland. We have more than

Tha na h-Eileanan Westmann ann an Innis Tìle beag ach garbh. À tìr-mòr, chuir sealladh nan eilean Hiort nam chuimhne. 'S e bholcànòthan fon mhuir a rinn iad. Bha sin aona mhìle dheug bliadhna air ais.

Nochd eilean ùr – Surtsey –ann an naoi ceud deug, seasgad 's a trì (1963). Agus deich bliadhna an dèidh sin, thòisich spreadhadh ùr. Bha sin air an eilean far a bheil an sluagh a' fuireach – Heimaey. Thàinig làbha agus luathre a-mach. B' fheudar do na daoine falbh gu tìr-mòr.

Airson còig mìosan ghluais trithead millean tonna de làbha thairis air taobh an ear an eilein. Dh'èirich cnoc mòr ùr. Chaidh còrr is trì cheud taigh a sgrios. Bha an làbha a' gluasad a dh'ionnsaigh an aon chala anns an eilean. Bha sin cunnartach. Gun chala, cha b' urrainn do na daoine fuireach anns an eilean.

Chaidh feadhainn air ais don eilean le pumpaichean mòra. Chuir iad milleanan de ghalanan de shàl air an làbha. Stad an làbha mus do ràinig e an cala.

Air an t-slighe don phort air a' bhàt'-aiseig, chaidh mi seachad air eilean beag air a bheil Bjarnarey. 'S e sin an aon ainm a th' againn ann an

one “Bernera(y)”.

And I learned an interesting thing about the name Westmann. Westmann means “a man from the west”. That’s the name the Vikings had for people from Britain and Ireland.

Here’s how the Westmann Islands got their name. Ingólfur Arnarson was the first Norseman to make his home in Iceland. He built a house where Reykjavik is today. Along with him, he had a close friend, Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson. They had slaves. It is thought they were Gaels – from Ireland or perhaps from Scotland.

Hjörleifur abused the slaves badly. The slaves murdered him. They had to flee. They left for the islands off the south coast of the country.

But Ingólfur went in pursuit of them. He was wanting revenge. He found the slaves on the islands. He killed them all. Since then they have been called the Westmann Islands.

Alba. Tha barrachd air aon “Beàrnaraigh” againne.

Agus dh’ionnsaich mi rud inntinneach mun ainm Westmann. Tha *westmann* a’ ciallachadh “duine bhon taobh an iar”. ’S e sin an t-ainm a bha aig na Lochlannaich air daoine à Breatainn is Èirinn.

Seo mar a fhuair na h-Eileanan Westmann an t-ainm aca. B’ e Ingólfur Arnarson a’ chiad Lochlannach a rinn a dhachaigh ann an Innis Tìle. Thog e taigh far a bheil Reykjavik an-diugh. Còmhla ris, bha dlùth-charaid aige, Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson. Bha tràillean aca. Tha dùil gur e Gàidheil a bha annta – à Èirinn no ’s dòcha à Alba.

Rinn Hjörleifur droch dhìol air na tràillean. Mhuirt na tràillean e. B’ fheudar dhaibh teicheadh. Dh’fhalbh iad do na h-eileanan far costa deas na dùthcha.

Ach chaidh Ingólfur an tòir orra. Bha e ag iarraidh dìoghaltas. Lorg e na tràillean anns na h-eileanan. Mharbh e iad uile. Bhon uair sin, ’s e na h-Eileanan Westmann a tha air a bhith orra mar ainm.