

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 331 (which corresponds to Litir 635). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

I was in Iceland recently. I saw interesting place-names. They reminded me of place-names in Scotland. For example, the capital city, Reykjavik. You'll know the word in Scots and English – reek. Edinburgh had the nickname Auld Reekie. Reykja-vík means “reeky bay” or “smoky bay”. There are several places in Iceland with reykja- in the name. Those are places where smoke rises from the ground.

I'm going to tell you place-names from Iceland. I bet you'll understand some of them. Firstly, Barnafoss. Barnafoss. That means “the waterfall of the bairns”. Barnafoss. There is a story that two lads fell into the waterfall.

Here is another one – Bláfell. Bláfell. Think of Blaven on Skye. That's half Norse and half Gaelic. Blue mountain, Bláfell.

And Breiðavík. Breiðavík. Like Brevig in Lewis. Broad bay, Breiðavík.

And there is the village of Djúpavík in Iceland. It's the original name of Diabaig, a village in

Bha mi ann an Innis Tìle o chionn ghoirid. Chunnaic mi ainmean-àite inntinneach. Chuir iad ainmean-àite ann an Alba nam cheann. Mar eisimpleir, am prìomh bhaile, Reykjavik. Bidh sibh eòlach air an fhacal ann an Albais agus sa Bheurla Shasannaich – reek. 'S e Auld Reekie a bh' air Dùn Èideann mar frith-ainm. Tha Reykja-vík a' ciallachadh – “reeky bay” no “bàgh na toite”. Tha grunn àiteachan ann an Innis Tìle le reykja- anns an ainm. Sin àiteachan far a bheil toit ag èirigh às an talamh.

Tha mi a' dol a dh'innse dhuibh ainmean-àite à Innis Tìle. Cuiridh mi geall gun tuig sibh feadhainn aca. An toiseach Barnafoss. Barnafoss. Tha sin a' ciallachadh fors no eas na cloinne, the waterfall of the bairns. Barnafoss. Tha stòiridh ann gun do thuit dithis bhalach dom bàs anns an eas.

Seo fear eile – Bláfell. Bláfell. Smaoinichibh air Blàbheinn anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha sin leth-Lochlannach is leth-Ghàidhlig. Beinn ghorm, blue mountain, Bláfell.

Agus Breiðavík. Breiðavík. Mar Brèibhig ann an Leòdhas. Bagh leathann, broad bay, Breiðavík.

Agus tha baile Djúpavík ann an Innis Tìle. 'S e an aon ainm a bha an toiseach air Diabaig, baile beag ann an

Torrìdon. Deep bay, Djúpavík. And Fljót – big river. That’s related to the English flood. We have it in the Highlands at Loch Fleet on the coastal plain of East Sutherland.

And what’s the Gaelic for pike? I mean the fish. Geadas. There are three places in Scotland called Loch or Lochan nan Geadas. The word came from the Old Norse gedda. There are two lochs in Iceland called Gedduvatn – the loch of the pike.

Finally, here’s one that’s easy – Rif. There’s a place in Lewis called Riof. The word came into Gaelic. It’s in Dwelly’s dictionary. And it means, in English, reef. It’s easy when it has the same meaning and pronunciation in the three languages.

Toirbheartan. Bàgh domhainn, *deep bay*, Djúpavík. Agus *Fljót* – abhainn mhòr. Tha sin càirdeach don Bheurla *flood*. Tha e againn air a’ Ghàidhealtachd aig Loch Fleòid air Machair Chat.

Agus dè a’ Ghàidhlig air *pike*? Tha mi a’ ciallachadh an èisg. *Geadas*. Tha trì àiteachan ann an Alba air a bheil Loch no Lochan nan Geadas. Thàinig am facal bhon t-Seann Lochlannais *gedda*. Tha dà loch ann an Innis Tìle air a bheil *Gedduvatn* – loch nan geadas.

Mu dheireadh, seo fear a tha furasta – *Rif*. Tha àite ann an Leòdhas air a bheil Riof. Thàinig am facal a-steach don Ghàidhlig. Tha e ann am faclair Dwelly. Agus tha e a’ ciallachadh, ann am Beurla, *reef*. Tha e furasta nuair a tha an aon chiall is fuaimneachadh air anns na trì cànanan.