

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 476 (which corresponds to Litir 780). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

There are well over a hundred words for high country in Gaelic in Scotland. But what happened do that vocabulary over in Nova Scotia? It would be interesting to examine that.

The word maol 'a rounded hill with a bare appearance' wouldn't be of much use. Or creachann 'a mountain summit with very little growing on it'. I never saw a place like that in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is nearly covered with forest. There are trees to the mountain tops. And the mountains aren't as high or as rocky as the mountains of Scotland.

They have the word beinn. And they use bruthach and cnoc as well. For ridge, they say rids, rather than druim, although I heard mention of a place called Druim Mòr a' Ridse. That's in Bràigh na h-Aibhneadh in Cape Breton.

I went to look at the forest along with Goiridh Dòmhnallach from Bràigh na h-Aibhneadh. Goiridh is fluent in Gaelic. He is a real champion of the language. He has collected words connected

Tha còrr math is ceud facal ann airson talamh àrd ann an Gàidhlig ann an Alba. Ach dè thachair don bhriathrachas sin thall ann an Alba Nuaidh? Bhiodh e inntinneach sgrùdadh a dhèanamh air sin.

Cha bhiodh am facal *maol* 'meall le coltas maol air' gu mòran feum. No *creachann* 'mullach beinne le glè bheag a' fàs air'. Chan fhaca mi àite mar sin ann an Alba Nuaidh.

Tha Alba Nuadh cha mhòr còmhdach le coille. Tha craobhan ann gu mullaichean nam beann. Agus chan eil na beanntan cho àrd no cho creagach ri beanntan na h-Alba.

Tha am facal *beinn* aca. Agus bidh iad a' cleachdadh *bruthach* is *cnoc* cuideachd. Airson *ridge*, canaidh iad *rids*, seach *druim*, ged a chuala mi brath air àite air an robh Druim Mòr a' Ridse. Tha sin ann am Bràigh na h-Aibhneadh ann an Ceap Breatainn.

Chaidh mi a choimhead air a' choille cuide ri Goiridh Dòmhnallach à Bràigh na h-Aibhneadh. Tha Goiridh fileanta ann an Gàidhlig. 'S e fìor ghaisgeach a' chàinain a tha ann. Tha e air faclan co-cheangailte ri nàdar a

with nature in Inverness County.

They say bèilleag for the bark of the birch tree. And they say cairt for bark, rather than rùsg. But, like ourselves, it's beithe they say for birch, and feàrna for alder. And I liked a name of theirs – for a tree that is lying dead on the forest floor – craobh-laighidh 'lying tree'.

But I heard one word that I did not understand initially. Somebody had left rubbish in a place. A man [one of the men] said, 'They thought this was a droighneach.'

I looked at the man. 'What do you mean?' I asked. 'Well,' he replied, 'a droighneach is a place where people put rubbish. What do you say in the old country?' 'Lagais or òtrach,' I replied. 'Droighneach means a wood in which prickly bushes grow.'

Then I understood the situation. When the Gaels went to Nova Scotia there was only forest. And they made a dump in a place that was of no use to them – the droighneach.

chruinneachadh ann an Siorramachd Inbhir Nis.

'S e bèilleag a chanas iad airson cairt na craoibhe-beithe. Agus canaidh iad cairt airson bark, seach rùsg. Ach, coltach rinn fhèin, 's e beithe a chanas iad airson birch, agus feàrna airson alder. Agus chòrd ainm aca rium – airson craobh a tha na laighe marbh air làr na coille – craobh-laighidh.

Ach bha aon fhacal a chuala mi nach do thuig mi an toiseach. Bha cuideigin air sgudal fhàgail ann an àite. Thuirtear fear, 'Bha iad a' smaoinneachadh gur e seo an droighneach.'

Choimhead mi air an duine. 'Dè tha thu a' ciallachadh?' dh'fhaighnich mi. 'Uill,' fhreagair e, 's e droighneach àite far am bi daoine a' cur sgudal. Dè tha sibhse ag ràdh anns an t-seann dùthaich?' 'Lagais no òtrach,' fhreagair mise. 'Tha droighneach a' ciallachadh coille anns a bheil preasan droighneach a' fàs.'

An uair sin, thuig mi an suidheachadh. Nuair a chaidh na Gàidheil a dh'Alba Nuaidh cha robh ann ach coille. Agus rinn iad òtrach ann an àite nach robh gu feum dhaibh – an droighneach.