

## **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 480 (which corresponds to Litir 784). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

Am Bile is near Portree on the Isle of Skye. It's a big grassy slope. Am Bile.

Bile is an old Gaelic word for a tree. Often it stands for a tree that was sacred. Perhaps that was in [the] pre-Christian days.

When I went to the Bile I was thus of the opinion that the name was connected to an old tree. But there is another thought about the place-name. That is that 'Am Bile' means 'the lip'. 'Lip' is used to denote a natural land feature in English. Why wouldn't the same apply in Gaelic as well? But I left my thoughts there. I didn't ruminate on the matter over the winter months.

'Am Bile' came back to my attention recently. I was reading a new book. The book's name is Reading the Gaelic Landscape/Leughadh Aghaidh na Tìre. It was written by John Murray. John is a Director of Landscape Architecture at the University of Edinburgh. He has been learning Gaelic.

There is fantastic inform-

Tha Am Bile faisg air Port Rìgh anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. 'S e leathad mòr feurach a tha ann. Am Bile.

Tha *bile* na sheann fhacal Gàidhlig airson craobh. Gu tric, tha e a' seasamh airson craobh a bha naomh. 'S dòcha gun robh sin anns na làithean ro-Chrìosdail.

Nuair a chaidh mi don Bhile bha mi dhen bheachd, mar sin, gum biodh an t-ainm co-cheangailte ri seann chraobh. Ach tha smuain eile ann mun ainm-àite. 'S e sin gu bheil 'Am Bile' a' ciallachadh 'the lip'. Thathar a' cleachdadh 'lip' mar chomharra de dh'fheart-tìre nàdarrach ann am Beurla. Carson nach bitheadh ann an Gàidhlig cuideachd? Ach dh'fhàg mi mo smuaintean an sin. Cha do mheòraich mi air a' chuspair thairis air mìosan a' gheamhraidh.

Thàinig 'Am Bile' air ais gu m' aire o chionn ghoirid. Bha mi a' leughadh leabhar ùr. 'S e *Reading the Gaelic Landscape/Leughadh Aghaidh na Tìre* ainm an leabhair. Chaidh a sgrìobhadh le Iain Moireach. Tha Iain na Stiùiriche de dh'Ailtireachd Tìre aig Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann. Tha e air a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig.

Tha fiosrachadh iongantach anns

*ation in the book. It will be really useful to people who spent time in the outdoors. And it will also be useful in the promotion of Gaelic, because it proves how rich are our language and heritage.*

*John is very familiar with the Isle of Skye. And he reckons that Am Bile near Portree means 'the lip'. The name represents the shape of the land. In the book, John names another place where there is bile in the name. That's Coshieville. It's in Glen Lyon in Perthshire.*

*The name looks French to some. That's until one sees the Gaelic for it – Cois a' Bhile 'close to the lip'. There is a slope nearby called Am Bile. Reading the Gaelic Landscape is full of interesting information like that. We'll look at another pearl or two from it in the next Litir.*

an leabhar. Bidh e gu math feumail do dhaoine a chuireas ùine seachad air a' bhlàr a-muigh. Agus bidh e feumail cuideachd do dh'adhbhar na Gàidhlig, oir tha e a' dearbhadh cho beartach 's a tha ar cànan agus ar dualchas.

Tha Iain gu math eòlach air an Eilean Sgitheanach. Agus tha e dhen bheachd gur e 'the lip' a tha Am Bile faisg air Port Rìgh a' ciallachadh. Tha an t-ainm a' riochdachadh cumadh na tìre. Anns an leabhar, tha Iain ag ainmeachadh àite eile far a bheil *bile* anns an ainm. 'S e sin *Coshieville*. Tha e ann an Gleann Lìomhann ann an Siorrachd Pheairt.

Tha an t-ainm a' coimhead Frangach do chuid. Sin gus am faicear a' Ghàidhlig air a shon – *Cois a' Bhile 'close to the lip'*. Tha leathad faisg air làimh air a bheil Am Bile. Tha *Reading the Gaelic Landscape* làn fiosrachadh inntinneach mar sin. Bheir sinn sùil air neamhnaid no dhà eile bhuaithe anns an ath Litir.