

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 537 (which corresponds to Litir 841). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Return the cattle, Donald, and you'll get a lovely wife,
Return the cattle, Donald, and you'll get a beautiful wife
Return the cattle, watch the cattle, chase the cattle, follow the cattle,
Return the cattle, Donald, and you'll get a beautiful wife.

The 'Donald' in the song is the Black-haired Lad of Tangusdale in Barra. He was a raider in the age of forays. Here is his story.

The MacNeil of Barra was making for Shetland to lift cattle. He took with him a large man from Tangusdale. He was the Black-haired Lad. They reached Shetland. And a man appeared who was protecting the Shetland cattle. He was the 'Shetland Buck'. The Buck and MacNeil started to fight. The Shetlander was winning. The Black-haired Lad jumped in and he killed the Shetland Buck.

MacNeil ordered the Barra men to gather the cattle and to put them on board their birlinn. But the Black-haired Lad was considering what he had done. He regretted killing the Shetland Buck. He told MacNeil to leave or he would kill

*Till an crodh, Dhòmhnail, 's gheibh thu bean bheadarach,
Till an crodh, Dhòmhnail, 's gheibh thu bean bhòidheach,
Till an crodh, fair an crodh, ruaig an crodh, lean an crodh,
Till an crodh, Dhòmhnail, 's gheibh thu bean bhòidheach.*

B' e an 'Dòmhnall' anns an òran – Gille Dubh Thangusdail à Barraigh. 'S e creachadair a bha ann ri linn nan creach. Seo a stòiridh:

Bha MacNèill Bharraigh a' dèanamh air Sealtainn airson creach a thogail. Thug e leis fear mòr à Tangusdal. B' esan an Gille Dubh. Ràinig iad Sealtainn. Agus nochd fear a bha a' dìon crodh Shealtainn. B' esan am 'Boc Sealtainneach'. Thòisich sabaid eadar am Boc is MacNèill Bharraigh. Bha a' chùis a' dol leis an t-Sealtainneach. Leum an Gille Dubh a-steach agus mharbh e am Boc Sealtainneach.

Dh'òrdaich MacNèill air na Barraich an crodh a thrusadh agus a chur air bòrd na birlinn aca. Ach bha an Gille Dubh a' meòrachadh air na rinn e. Bha e a' gabhail aithreachas airson am Boc Sealtainneach a mharbhadh. Thuirt e ri MacNèill a chasan a thoirt leis no

him. MacNeil had to leave without the cattle. The Black-haired Lad remained in Shetland and married the Buck's daughter. Their descendants are still there today.

This story and the words of the song 'Return the cattle, Donald' appear in a book that came out this year. It's a valuable book, with the title Ri Luinneig mun Chrò. It's about 'Cattle in the Life and Heritage of the Gaels'. The author is Janet Grigor, a teacher from Edinburgh, and what an amazing amount of research she did.

There are almost three hundred songs and poems in the book. They are about milking, the shieling, droving, cattle-raiding and other things. If you are interested in the heritage of the Gaels, you should buy this book! My congratulations to Janet and to Grace Note Publications in Perthshire for publishing the book. And to the Black-haired Lad for returning the Shetland cattle!

gum marbhadh e e. B' fheudar do MhacNèill falbh às aonais a' chruidh. Dh'fhuirich an Gille Dubh ann an Sealtainn agus phòs e nighean a' Bhuic. Tha an sliochd aca ann chun an latha an-diugh.

Tha an eachdraidh seo agus briathran an òrain *Till an crodh, Dhòmhnail* a' nochdadh ann an leabhar a thàinig a-mach am-bliadhna. 'S e leabhar prìseil a th' ann, leis an tiotal *Ri Luinneig mun Chrò*. Tha e mu dheidhinn 'Crodh ann am Beatha agus Dualchas nan Gàidheal'. 'S i Seònaid Ghriogair, tidsear à Dùn Èideann, an t-ùghdar, agus abair gun do rinn i rannsachadh mòr.

Tha cha mhòr trì cheud òran is dàn anns an leabhar. Tha iad mu dheidhinn bleoghann, an àirigh, dròbhaireachd, creach is eile. Ma tha ùidh agaibh ann an dualchas nan Gàidheal, bu chòir dhuibh an leabhar a cheannach! Mo bheannachd air Seònaid chòir agus air Grace Note Publications ann an Siorrachd Pheairt airson an leabhar a chur ann an clò. Agus air a' Ghille Dhubh airson an crodh Sealtainneach a thilleadh!