

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 551 (which corresponds to Litir 855). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

Have you ever tried seaweed as a food? Perhaps in a Japanese restaurant. But how many times have you eaten seaweed at home?

For those of you who live near a shore where there is no pollution, seaweed is healthy food. It's good for us. It's free of charge.

Years ago, I decided to learn the Gaelic names of the different sorts of seaweeds. I was doing an interview with a woman who is famous in the Gaelic world. I was making a radio programme about Embo, a village on the coastline of East Sutherland. Embo is the last fishing village in the Eastern Highlands where Gaelic was spoken by the people. And Nancy Dorian is the person that was most knowledgeable on that dialect.

While I was speaking to Nancy, who belongs to the United States, she asked me if I knew the different seaweeds. She told me their Gaelic names. The fishermen of Embo knew the seaweeds well, she said. And why wouldn't they? They were on the shore every day. Except Sunday(s), perhaps.

An do dh'fheuch sibh a-riamh feamainn mar bhiadh? 'S dòcha ann an taigh-bìdh Iapanach. Ach, cia mheud turas a dh'ith sibh feamainn aig an taigh?

Dhuibhse a tha a' fuireach faisg air cladach far nach eil truailleadh, 's e biadh fallain a tha ann am feamainn. Tha i math dhuinn. Tha i an-asgaidh.

O chionn bhliadhnaichean chuir mi romham ainmean Gàidhlig nan diofar sheòrsaichean feamainn ionnsachadh. Bha mi a' dèanamh agallamh le tè a tha ainmeil ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig. Bha mi a' cur ri chèile prògram rèidio mu Euraboll, baile beag air oirthir Machair Chat. 'S e Euraboll am baile iasgaich mu dheireadh air taobh sear na Gàidhealtachd far an robh Gàidhlig aig an t-sluagh. Agus 's i Nancy Dorian an neach a b' eòlaiche a bha ann air an dualchainnt sin.

Fhad 's a bha mi a' bruidhinn ri Nancy, a bhuineas do na Stàitean Aonaichte, dh'fhaighnich i dhìom an robh mi eòlach air na diofar fheamainn. Dh'inns i dhomh na h-ainmean Gàidhlig aca. Bha iasgairean Euraboill gu math eòlach air na feamainn, thuirt i. Agus carson nach bitheadh? Bha iad air a' chladach a h-uile latha. Ach a-mhàin Latha na Sàbaid, 's dòcha.

I knew the Gaelic names for marine fish, but I didn't know the seaweeds. We ate fish but we didn't eat seaweed. It's a pity we didn't, but that's how it was. Well, perhaps that wasn't true about every person, for I can remember my grandmother talking about eating carrageen.

Anyway, at home I now eat seaweed from time to time. And, in the environment course I run on Skye every summer for Gaelic-speakers, I included a new segment this year – seaweed as food.

It's difficult to be sure which one the students enjoyed most. But it was carrageen they enjoyed least! Perhaps that will surprise some listeners for many Gaels still eat carrageen. I'll tell you next week which were the tastiest seaweeds.

Bha na h-ainmean Gàidhlig agam airson èisg-mhara, ach cha robh airson feamainn. Bha sinn ag ithe èisg ach cha robh sinn ag ithe feamainn. Is truagh nach robh, ach sin mar a bha. Uill, 's dòcha nach robh sin fìor mun a h-uile duine, oir tha cuimhne agam air mo sheanmhair a' bruidhinn mu ithe cairgein.

Co-dhiù, aig an taigh bidh mi a-nise ag ithe feamainn bho àm gu àm. Agus, anns a' chùrsa àrainneachd a bhios mi a' ruith anns an Eilean Sgitheanach gach samhradh do luchd na Gàidhlig, chuir mi earrann ùr ann am-bliadhna – feamainn mar bhiadh.

Tha e doirbh a bhith cinnteach cò tè a b' fheàrr a chòrd ris na h-oileanaich. Ach 's e an cairgein a bu lugha a chòrd riutha! 'S dòcha gun cuir sin iongnadh air cuid de luchd-èisteachd oir bidh gu leòr de Ghàidheil fhathast ag ithe cairgein. Innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain, cò na feamainn a bu bhlasta a bha ann.