

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 586 (which corresponds to Litir 890). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

In Morar, in the Rough Bounds, there is a lochan which carries an unusual name – Lochan Tàin Mhic Dhùghaill. It's in the hills between Loch Beòraid and Loch Morar. There is an island on the lochan. Meoble is the closest settlement to it. I wonder how the lochan got a name like that?

Perhaps you'll know the old Gaelic story Tàin Bò Cuailgne – 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley' in English. It's set in Ireland. Tàin means 'plunder', 'driving off' and things like that. Lochan Tàin Mhic Dhùghaill – 'the lochan of the plundering of MacDugald'?

It appears that the name is connected with an old story. It is called The Grey Dog of Meoble. It's only short.

Many years ago, there was a man living in Meoble. He belonged to the MacDonalds of Morar. They are called MacDhùghaill in Gaelic. This man owned greyhounds. They were grey.

This man left to go overseas. Before he left, he tried to find all of the greyhounds – to kill them. But he failed to get hold of one bitch.

Ann am Mòrar, anns na Garbh Chrìochan, tha lochan ann air a bheil ainm car annasach – *Lochan Tàin Mhic Dhùghaill*. Tha e anns a' mhonadh eadar Loch Beòraid agus Loch Mhòraid. Tha eilean anns an lochan. 'S e Meòbal am baile as fhaisge air. Saoil ciamar a fhuair an lochan ainm mar sin?

'S dòcha gum bi sibh eòlach air an t-seann sgeulachd Ghàidhlig *Tàin Bò Cuailgne – The Cattle Raid of Cooley* ann am Beurla. Tha e stèidhichte ann an Èirinn. Tha *tàin* a' ciallachadh 'plunder', 'driving off' is a leithid sin. Lochan Tàin Mhic Dhùghaill – 'the lochan of the plundering of MacDugald'?

Tha e coltach gu bheil an t-ainm ceangailte ri seann sgeulachd. 'S e an t-ainm a th' oirre *Cù Glas Mheòbail*. Chan eil i ach goirid.

O chionn bhliadhnaichean mòra, bha fear a' fuireach ann am Meòbal. Bhuineadh e do Dhòmhnallaich Mhòraid. 'S e Clann Dhùghaill a chanar riutha ann an Gàidhlig. Bha mial-choin aig an fhear a bha seo. Bha iad glas.

Dh'fhalbh am fear seo a-null thairis. Mus do dh'fhalbh e, dh'fheuch e ris a h-uile gin de na mial-choin a lorg – airson cur às dhaibh. Ach dh'fhàilnich air grèim fhaighinn air aon ghala.

After he left, the bitch went up to the lochan. She swam out to the island. On the island, some puppies were born to her. These greyhounds lived off the produce of the hills.

Our friend – MacDugald – returned to the area. She heard that the bitch and her puppies were alive, and that they were living on the island in the lochan.

He went there to see the dogs. He whistled. The bitch heard him, and she swam to land. She was pleased to see the man. After a short while, however, three of the puppies swam over. They were now big and strong. They ripped the man to shreds on the spot. They weren't recognising him as a friend.

To this day, when one of the MacDonalds of Mòrar is about to die, they see a grey dog as an omen of death. Or that's what they say anyway.

An dèidh dha falbh, chaidh a' ghala suas don lochan. Shnàmh i a-mach don eilean. Air an eilean, rugadh grunn chuileanan dhi. Bha na mial-choin seo beò air toradh a' mhonaidh.

Thill ar caraid – MacDhùghaill – don sgìre. Chuala e gun robh a' ghala agus a cuileanan beò, agus gun robh iad a' fuireach air an eilean anns an lochan.

Chaidh e ann airson na coin fhaicinn. Rinn e fead. Dh'fhairich a' ghala e, agus shnàmh i gu tìr. Bha i toilichte an duine fhaicinn. An ceann tacain, ge-tà, shnàmh trì de na cuileanan a-null. Bha iad a-nise mòr is làidir. Stiall iad an duine às a chèile sa spot. Cha robh iad ga aithneachadh mar charaid.

Chun an latha an-diugh, nuair a tha fear no tè de Chloinn 'ic Dhùghaill Mhòrair an impis bàs fhaighinn, chì iad cù glas mar mhanadh a' bhàis. No 's e sin a chanas iad co-dhiù.