

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 611 (which corresponds to Litir 915). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about imaginary marine creatures – the Cìrean Cròin and the Cionaran-crò. They are – or were – extremely large. I gave you this verse:

Seven herrings will fill a salmon,
Seven salmon will fill a seal,
Seven seals will fill a small whale,
Seven small whales will fill a large whale,
Seven large whales will fill a cionaran-crò,
Seven cionaran-crò will fill a great sea leviathan.

A man from Ness in Lewis, Angus Gunn, related a story about the Cionaran-crò. Angus was 84 years old. For a long time, he was living in Rona, a small island in the ocean, north of Lewis. Here is his story.

A long time ago, St Ronan came to Lewis. He wanted to bring the people to Christ. He built a small cell for himself in Eoropie. But the people were not interested in his message.

Ronan was getting fed up of the situation. He made a prayer to be taken away from Eoropie. An angel of God came. He asked Ronan to the boat landing place. The Cionaran-crò was

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu chreutairean macmeanmnach na mara – an Cìrean Cròin agus an Cionaran-crò. Tha iad – no bha iad – uabhasach mòr. Bha iad ag ithe mhucan-mara. Thug mi an rann seo dhuibh|:

*Seachd sgadain sàth bradain,
Seachd bradain sàth ròin,
Seachd ròin sàth muc-mhara bheag,
Seachd mucan-mara beaga, sàth muc-mhara mhòr,
Seachd mucan-mara mòra, sàth Cionarain-crò,
Seachd Cionarain-crò, sàth Mial Mhòr a' Chuain.*

Dh'inns fear à Nis ann an Leòdhas, Aonghas Gunnach, stòiridh mun Chionaran-chrò. Bha Aonghas ochdad 's a ceithir bliadhna a dh'aois. Fad ùine mhòr, bha e a' fuireach ann an Rònaigh, eilean beag anns a' chuan, tuath air Leòdhas. Seo an stòiridh aige.

O chionn fhada, thàinig Naomh Rònán a Leòdhas. Bha e airson na daoine a thoirt gu Crìosd. Thog e cealla bheag dha fhèin ann an Eòropaidh. Ach cha robh ùidh aige na daoine anns an teachdaireachd aige.

Bha Rònán a' fàs sgith dhen t-suidheachadh. Rinn e ùrnaigh a bhith air a thoirt air falbh bho Eòropaidh. Thàinig aingeal Dhè. Dh'iarr e air Rònán a dhol don laimrig. Bha an Cionaran-crò a' feitheamh

waiting for him. Ronan went to the landing place. The Cionaran-crò was there. His two eyes were shining like stars in the heavens.

Ronan got on the back of the Cionaran-crò. They left at speed across the sea. In the twinkling of an eye, they reached Rona. The island was full of snakes, griuffons and lions.

Those unusual animals did not last there long. They fled before the holy man. They went over the rocks to the sea. That's what left the scratches on the rocks on Rona. The creatures left the scratches with their claws when they were fleeing. The island was now peaceful. Ronan built a cell there for himself.

The story does not tell us what happened to the Cionaran-crò. Perhaps it returned to the great ocean. And what about the other creature in the verse? Seven cionaran-crò will fill a great sea leviathan. Mial Mhòr a' Chuain must be an incredible size. Perhaps it's just as well that nobody has seen one in Scotland for a long time!

ris. Rinn Rònán air an laimrig. Bha an Cionaran-crò ann. Bha a dhà shùil a' deàrrsadh mar rionnagan anns an iarmailt.

Chaidh Rònán air muin a' Chionarain-chrò. Dh'fhalbh iad ag astar thar na mara. Ann am priobadh na sùla ràinig iad Rònaigh. Bha an t-eilean làn nathraichean, ghrìbheanan agus leomhann.

Cha do mhair na beathaichean annasach ann fada. Theich iad ron fhear naomh. Chaidh iad thar nan creagan chun na mara. 'S e sin a dh'fhàg sgrìoban air na creagan ann an Rònaigh. Dh'fhàg na creutairean na sgrìoban len ìnean, agus iad a' teicheadh. Bha an t-eilean a-nise sìtheil. Thog Rònán cealla ann dha fhèin.

Chan eil an stòiridh ag innse dhuinn dè thachair don Chionaran-chrò. 'S dòcha gun do thill e don chuan mhòr. Agus dè mun chreutair eile anns an rann? *Seachd Cionarain-crò, sàth Mial Mhòr a' Chuain.* Feumaidh gu bheil Mial Mhòr a' Chuain iongantach mòr. 'S dòcha gu bheil e math nach fhaca duine tè dhiubh ann an Alba airson ùine mhòr!