

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 631 (which corresponds to Litir 935). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was at Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà recently. It's in Lochaber near Fort William. Lunn Dà Bhrà – a strange name. Lunn – LUNN – means 'pole'. For example, we call the piece in the middle of an oar a lunn – the piece between the handle and the blade. And lunn is in place-names. In Perthshire, there is Làirig nan Lunn 'the pass of the poles'. It's on a route between upper Glen Lyon and Glen Lochay.

There, lunn means 'pole of a bier or litter'. People were carrying coffins to the cemetery in Killin, using two poles.

But what about Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà? The lochan of the pole of the two querns or quernstones. Well, people would carry quernstones with a pole through the hole in the middle. Before I go too far down that road, however, I must take cognisance of Mary MacKellar's opinion. Mary was an eminent Gaelic scholar. She belonged to Lochaber. She delivered a paper on this matter to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1890. She was of the opinion that the old name of the loch wasn't Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà but

Bha mi aig Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà o chionn ghoirid. Tha e ann an Loch Abar faisg air a' Ghearasdan. Lunn Dà Bhrà – ainm annasach. Tha lunn – LUNN – a' ciallachadh pòla. Mar eisimpleir, canaidh sinn lunn ris a' phìos ann am meadhan ràimh – am pìos eadar an dòrn agus an liagh. Agus tha lunn ann an ainmean-àite. Ann an Siorrachd Pheairt, tha Làirig nan Lunn. Tha i air slighe eadar ceann shuas Ghleann Lìomhann agus Gleann Lòchaidh.

An sin tha lunn a' ciallachadh 'pole of a bier or litter'. Bha daoine a' giùlan chisteachan chun a' chladh ann an Cill Fhinn le bhith a' cleachdadh dà lunn.

Ach dè mu dheidhinn Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà? The lochan of the pole of the two querns or quernstones. Uill, bhiodh daoine a' giùlan chlachan-brà le pòla – no lunn – tron toll sa mheadhan. Mus tèid mi ro fhada air an rathad sin, ge-tà, feumaidh mi feart a ghabhail air beachd Màiri NicEalair. 'S e sàr-sgoilear na Gàidhlig a bha ann am Màiri. Bhuineadh i do Loch Abar. Lìbhrig i pàipear mun ghnòthach seo gu Comunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis ann an ochd ceud deug is naochad (1890). Bha i dhen bheachd nach e Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà seann ainm an locha, ach Lochan Dùn Dà

Lochan Dùn Dà Ràth *'the lochan of the castle of the two forts'*.

There are two islands in the loch. It appears they were crannogs. On the banks of the loch there is a farm called Lundavra. If Mary is correct it was called Dùn Dà Ràth in olden times. There was a castle there, and a fort on each of the islands.

But who was living in the castle? Well, here is where the matter gets interesting. Some people think that MacBeth, the old king of Scotland, was living there.

At the far end of Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà there is a glen. Its name is Gleann Rìgh 'king's glen'. Also there are Abhainn Rìgh 'king's river' and Innis Rìgh 'king's meadow'. Mary MacKellar was satisfied that these were royal names linked to MacBeth.

Ràth *'the lochan of the castle of the two forts'*.

Tha dà eilean anns an loch. Tha coltas ann gur e crannagan a bha annta. Air bruaich an locha, tha baile-fearainn air a bheil Lunn Dà Bhrà. Ma tha Màiri ceart, 's e Dùn Dà Ràth a bha air anns an t-seann aimsir. Bha caisteal ann, agus bha ràth air gach fear de na h-eileanan.

Ach cò bha a' fuireach anns a' chaisteal? Uill, seo far a bheil an gnothach a' fàs inntinneach. Tha cuid dhen bheachd gun robh MacBheatha, seann rìgh na h-Alba, a' fuireach ann.

Aig ceann thall Lochan Lunn Dà Bhrà, tha gleann ann. 'S e an t-ainm a tha air – Gleann Rìgh. Cuideachd tha Abhainn Rìgh agus Innis Rìgh ann. Bha Màiri NicEalair riarachta gur e ainmean rìoghail a bha annta le ceangal do MhacBheatha.