

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 647 (which corresponds to Litir 951). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I'm going to start this Litir with a proverb. Cha tuit caoran à cliabh falamh. A small peat will not fall from an empty creel. Idiomatically it means 'don't expect wise words from an empty head'. Cha tuit caoran à cliabh falamh.

The word caoran is interesting. It comes from caor or caoir which means something from which light or heat, or both, emanate – like a glowing coal in a fire. A caoran is a piece of peat that shines in a fire. But the word also stands for a red berry like those that appear on a rowan tree. Yes – caorann [rowan].

There are many words in the dictionaries connected to caor or caoir, and light or shining is connected to them in some way or another. Caoir-bianag means 'phosphorescence in the sea'. Caoir-sholas means 'gleaming light'. Caoir-gheal means 'white crest of waves in a gale'.

Because people were using the words caor or caoran in connection with fruit, the word now stands for 'dearc' or berry in English, even if it's not red. Often, it appears in the

Tha mi a' dol a thòiseachadh na Litreach seo le seanfhacal. Cha tuit caoran à cliabh falamh. A small peat will not fall from an empty creel. Gu gnàthasach, tha e a' ciallachadh 'don't expect wise words from an empty head'. Cha tuit caoran à cliabh falamh.

Tha am facal caoran inntinneach. Tha e a' tighinn à caor no caoir a tha a' ciallachadh rudeigin às an tig solas no teas, no an dà chuid – coltach ri èibhleag ann an teine. 'S e caoran pìos mòine a tha a' deàlradh ann an teine. Ach tha am facal a' seasamh cuideachd airson dearc dearg coltach ris an fheadhainn a tha a' nochdadh air craobh-chaorainn. Seadh – caorann.

Tha tòrr fhaclan anns na faclairan co-cheangailte ri caor no caoir, agus tha solas no deàlradh co-cheangailte riutha ann an dòigh air choreigin. Tha caoir-bianag a' ciallachadh 'phosphorescence in the sea'. Tha caoir-sholas a' ciallachadh 'gleaming light'. Tha caoir-gheal a' ciallachadh 'white crest of waves in a gale'.

Leis gun robh daoine a' cleachdadh an fhacail caor no caoran ann an co-cheangail ri measan, tha am facal a-nise a' seasamh airson 'dearc' no berry ann am Beurla, eadhon ged nach bitheadh

form caora. For example, caora-dhromain ‘elderberry’, caora-staoin ‘juniper berry’ and caora-mhitheig ‘blaeberry’.

The word caorachan appears in place names, for example in Sgùrr a’ Chaorachain in Applecross in Ross-shire. That means ‘the peak of the gleaming torrent’. When water streams off a mountain on a dark day, the streams are somewhat like lights because they are so white. Light – caor, caorachan.

North of Applecross there are Coire Chaorachain and Gleann Chaorainn in the area around Little Loch Broom. I expect that they mean the same. And east of Applecross in the mountains south of Achnashellach, there is Toll a’ Chaorachain ‘the deep corrie of the gleaming torrent’. Toll a’ Chaorachain.

I hope you enjoyed our tour around caor and caoran. Cheerio just now.

e dearg. Gu tric tha e a’ nochdadh san dreach caora. Mar eisimpleir caora-dhromain ‘elderberry’, caora-staoin ‘juniper berry’ agus caora-mhitheig ‘blaeberry’.

Tha am facal caorachan a’ nochdadh ann an ainmean-àite, mar eisimpleir ann an Sgùrr a’ Chaorachain air a’ Chomraich ann an Siorrachd Rois. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh ‘the peak of the gleaming torrent’. Nuair a tha uisge a’ sruthadh far beinn air latha dorch, tha na sruthan car coltach ri solais oir tha iad cho bàn. Solas – caor, caorachan.

Gu tuath air a’ Chomraich tha Coire Chaorachain agus Gleann Chaorachain ann an sgìre an Locha Bhig. Tha mi an dùil gur e an aon chiall a tha orra. Agus gu sear air a’ Chomraich anns na beanntan deas air Achadh nan Seileach, tha Toll a’ Chaorachain ‘the deep corrie of the gleaming torrent’. Toll a’ Chaorachain.

Tha mi an dòchas gun do chòrd ar turas timcheall caor is caoran ribh. Mar sin leibh an-dràsta.