

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 664 (which corresponds to Litir 968). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

We have a word in Gaelic that means 'directing or guiding by the stars'. Steòrnadh. I'd say that our ancestors were more familiar with the heavens at night than we are today. Last week, we looked at Orion and the Pleiades. This week I want to look at another constellation.

But before I do that, here is a Gaelic proverb connected to the Pleiades. Caillidh fiù an Grioglachan a chùrsa – even Pleiades can stray off course. It means that even the most stable person can go off the road. Caillidh fiù an Grioglachan a chùrsa.

Anyway, back to steòrnadh. The most useful star for that is the 'guiding star'. That's Polaris or The Pole Star. For ancient mariners, it was used to find a way to the north.

The easiest way to find the Pole Star is to initially find the constellation called The Plough. That means in English 'the baker's bread-shovel'. The Plough. The English name for this constellation

Tha facal againn ann an Gàidhlig a tha a' ciallachadh 'directing or guiding by the stars'. Steòrnadh. Chanainn gun robh ar sinnsirean na b' eòlaiche air iarmailt na h-oidhche na tha sinne an-diugh. An t-seachdain sa chaidh, thug sinn sùil air an t-Sealgair Mhòr agus An Grioglachan. An t-seachdain seo, tha mi airson sùil a thoirt air reul-bhad eile.

Ach mus dèan mi sin, seo agaibh seanfhacal Gàidhlig co-cheangailte ris an Grioglachan. Caillidh fiù an Grioglachan a chùrsa – even Pleiades can stray off course. Tha e a' ciallachadh gum bi eadhon na daoine as seasmhaiche a' dol far an rathaid. Caillidh fiù an Grioglachan a chùrsa.

Co-dhiù, air ais gu steòrnadh. 'S e an rionnag as fheumaile airson sin an Reul Iùil. 'S e sin Polaris no The Pole Star. Airson seòladairean na seann aimsir, bha i air a cleachdadh airson steòrnadh a dh'ionnsaigh na h-àirde a tuath.

'S e an dòigh as fhasa an Reul Iùil a lorg, a bhith a' lorg an toiseach an reul-bhaid ris an canar An Crann-arain. Tha sin a' ciallachadh ann am Beurla 'the baker's bread-shovel'. An Crann-arain. 'S e an t-ainm Beurla airson an reul-bhaid seo The Plough. Tha e air aithneachadh cuideachd

is the Plough. It's also recognised as Ursa Major or The Great Bear and The Big Dipper.

There are three stars in the handle of the Plough. They have Arabic names. Alkaid is the furthest one out. In Gaelic 'the bear's head'. The next one, that is Mizar. There is a small star above Mizar. That's Alcor. In Gaelic, we call it 'the little old man'.

There is another star on the Plough's handle – Alioth. We are now at the body of the Plough. The first two stars are Megrez and Phad or Phecda. Up to now, I've named five stars. Together they have a Gaelic name – Còig Gadhair Osgair – the five mastiffs of Oscar. Osgair is one of the Fingalian heroes.

Finally, we're coming to the two stars on the right side of the Plough – Dubhe and Merak. We use these two stars in star-guiding – as I'll explain next week.

mar *Ursa Major* no *The Great Bear* agus *The Big Dipper*.

Tha trì rionnagan ann an làimh a' Chrainn-arain. Tha ainmean Arabach orra. 'S e *Alkaid* an tè as fhaide a-mach. Ann an Gàidhlig 'An Ceann Mathain'. An ath thè, 's e sin *Mizar*. Tha rionnag bheag os cionn *Mizar*. 'S e sin *Alcor*. Ann an Gàidhlig, canaidh sinn Am Bodachan rithe.

Tha rionnag eile air làmh a' Chrainn-arain – Alioth. Tha sinn a-nise aig cas a' Chrainn. 'S iad a' chiad dà rionnaig *Megrez* agus *Phad* no *Phecda*. Thuige seo tha mi air còig rionnagan ainmeachadh. Còmhla, tha ainm Gàidhlig orra – Còig Gadhair Osgair – *the five mastiffs of Oscar*. 'S e Osgair fear de ghaisgich na Fèinne.

Mu dheireadh, tha sinn a' tighinn chun na dà rionnaig air an taobh dheas dhen Chrann-arain – *Dubhe* agus *Merak*. Bidh sinn a' cur na dà rionnaig seo gu feum ann an steòrnadh – mar a mhìnichas mi an-ath-sheachdain.