

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 759 (which corresponds to Litir 1,063). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Recently, I crossed to Isle Martin for the first time ever. Do you know Eilean Mhàrtainn or Isle Martin? It's at the mouth of Loch Broom near Ullapool in Wester Ross.

It's a small island. It's about a mile in length and width. The north is rocky and rough. It's in the south, where there is fertile ground, that the population were living. Nobody lives there today.

I went over in a boat. It's run by the Isle Martin Trust. The island is in the hands of the trust – a community trust – today.

It's not known for sure who the Martin in the name is. Perhaps St Martin of Tours. But we're not certain about that. There is a stone in the cemetery on which there is a cross – the sort perhaps linked at one time to the Celtic Church. But the form of the cross is a bit strange.

In the eighteenth century, the herring fishing industry was large. A processing facility was developed on Isle Martin. Two types of herring were made there – white herring in salt and red herring that were smoked.

O chionn ghoirid, chaidh mi a-null a dh'Eilean Mhàrtainn airson a' chiad turais riamh. A bheil sibh eòlach air Eilean Mhàrtainn no Isle Martin? Tha e aig beul Loch a' Bhraoin faisg air Ullapul ann an taobh siar Rois.

'S e eilean beag a tha ann. Tha e timcheall air mìle ann am fad agus leud. Tha an ceann a tuath creagach agus garbh. 'S ann anns a' cheann a deas, far a bheil talamh torrach, a bha an sluagh a' fuireach. Chan eil duine a' fuireach ann an-diugh.

Chaidh mi a-null ann am bàta. Tha e air a ruith le Urras Eilein Mhàrtainn. Tha an t-eilean ann an làmhan an urrais – urras coimhearsnachd – an-diugh.

Chan eil fios le cinnt cò am Màrtainn anns an ainm. 'S dòcha Naomh Màrtainn à Tours. Ach chan eil sinn cinnteach mu dheidhinn sin. Tha clach anns a' chladh air a bheil crois – seòrsa a bha 's dòcha ceangailte ris an Eaglais Cheiltich uaireigin. Ach tha cruth na croise car annasach.

Anns an ochdamh linn deug, bha iasgaich an sgadain gu math mòr. Chaidh taigh-giollachd a leasachadh ann an Eilean Mhàrtainn. Bhathar a' dèanamh dà sheòrsa sgadain ann – sgadain bhàna ann an salann, agus sgadain dearga a bha air an smocadh.

Tro bhliadhnaichean an Dàrna Cogaidh, bha muileann stèidhichte ann.

<p><i>Through the years of the Second [World] War, a mill was established there. Flour was being made there. Most of the workers were living on the mainland. The mill was closed in 1948.</i></p> <p><i>From the 1960s on, Isle Martin has been in the hands of private landlords. It was also owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the RSPB. The RSPB gave the trust the island – free of charge – twenty years ago.</i></p> <p><i>But the islanders are not entirely forgotten there. One can learn in a small museum about the families who were living there.</i></p> <p><i>Before I leave, I want to pose a question to you. What are the two famous buildings in Stornoway in which stones from Isle Martin cover the walls? I'll give you the solution next week.</i></p>	<p>Bhathar a' dèanamh min-fhlùr ann. Bha a' chuid a bu mhotha dhen luchd-obrach a' fuireach air tìr-mòr. Chaidh am muileann a dhùnadh ann an naoi ceud deug, ceathrad 's a h-ochd (1948).</p> <p>Bho na seasgadan dhen fhicheadamh linn (1960s) a-mach, bha Eilean Mhàrtainn ann an làmhan uachdaran prìobhaideach. Bha e cuideachd le Comann Rìoghail Dìon nan Eun, an RSPB. Thug an RSPB seachad e don urras – an-asgaidh – o chionn fichead bliadhna.</p> <p>Ach chan eil muinntir an eilein uile gu lèir air an dìochuimhneachadh ann. Faodar ionnsachadh ann an taigh-tasgaidh beag mu na teaghlaichean a bha a' fuireach ann.</p> <p>Mus fhalbh mi, tha mi airson ceist a chur oirbh. Dè an dà thogalach ainmeil ann an Steòrnabhagh anns a bheil clachan à Eilean Mhàrtainn a' còmhdachadh nam ballachan? Bheir mi am fuasgladh dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain!</p>
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