

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 765 (which corresponds to Litir 1,069). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I like sailing. To learn sailing skills, I did courses under the auspices of the Royal Yachting Association. As you would understand, the instruction was in English. Thus, I am not as familiar with the Gaelic vocabulary of sailing as I would like to be.

The other day, I came across useful phrases about sailing in an old booklet - The Tourists Hand-book of Gaelic and English Phrases. It appeared in print over a hundred year ago. It was compiled by the famous poetess, Mary MacKellar from Lochaber.

The booklet - which is also available on the internet - was for tourists who were coming to the Highlands for sporting pursuits. At that time, many of the workers on Highland estates had no command of the English language.

Here are some of the phrases in it. Mach am bàta. Out with the boat. Mach am bàta. Suas an seòl. Up with the sail. Suas an seòl. Gabh an stiùir. Take the helm. Gabh an stiùir.

We say sgòd for a rope that draws on a sail to tighten or loosen it. In English, a sheet. For 'haul the sheet', we say 'tarring an sgòd' in Gaelic. Tarring an sgòd. Tarring teann e 'haul it taught'. Tarring teann e.

'S toigh leam seòladh. Airson sgilean seòlaidh ionnsachadh, rinn mi cùrsaichean fo sgèith Chomann Rìoghail na Luinearachd. Mar a thuigeas sibh, 's ann ann am Beurla a bha an t-oideachadh. Mar sin, chan eil mi cho eòlach air briathrachas Gàidhlig an t-seòlaidh 's a bu mhath leam a bhith.

An latha eile, thàinig mi tarsainn air abairtean feumail mu sheòladh ann an seann leabhran - *The Tourists Hand-book of Gaelic and English Phrases*. Nochd e ann an clò o chionn còrr is ceud bliadhna. Bha e air a chur ri chèile leis a' bhana-bhàrd chliùiteach, Màiri NicEalair à Loch Abar.

Bha an leabhran - a tha cuideachd ri fhaighinn air an eadar-lìon - airson luchd-turais a bha a' tighinn don Ghàidhealtachd airson spòrs air a' bhlar a-muigh. Aig an àm sin, bha tòrr dhen luchd-obrach air na h-oioghreachdan Gàidhealach gun Bheurla aca.

Seo cuid de na h-abairtean ann. Mach am bàta. Out with the boat. Mach am bàta. Suas an seòl. Up with the sail. Suas an seòl. Gabh an stiùir. Take the helm. Gabh an stiùir.

'S e sgòd a chanas sinn ri ròp a tharraingear air seòl airson a theannachadh no a lasachadh. Ann am Beurla, *sheet*. Airson 'haul the sheet', canaidh sinn 'tarring an sgòd' ann an Gàidhlig. Tarring an sgòd. Tarring teann e 'haul it taught'. Tarring

Lasaich e *'slacken it'*. Lasaich e. *For 'down with the sail', Mary tells us simply 'Nuas an seòl'*.

There is further vocabulary in Dwelly's dictionary. For example – sgòd an t-siùil thoisich 'foresail sheet' and sgòd an t-siùil mheadhain 'mainsheet'.

If the wind disappears, and it is too calm to sail, here is a series of phrases from the booklet that could be useful. Down with the sail. The wind has gone. Out with the oars. Row, fine lads. There you are, lads. You did well. We had a good day. May you sleep soundly!

There is no mention of 'outboard motor' in the phrases. There was no such thing at the time. When there was no wind, the lads were taking out the oars in order to row the boat to land.

teann e. Lasaich e *'slacken it'*. Lasaich e. Airson *'down with the sail'*, tha Màiri ag innse dhuinn gu sìmplidh *'Nuas an seòl'*.

Tha briathrachas a bharrachd mu a leithid ann am Faclair Dwelly. Mar eisimpleir – sgòd an t-siùil thoisich *'foresail sheet'* agus sgòd an t-siùil mheadhain *'mainsheet'*.

Ma dh'fhalbhas a' ghaoth, agus i ro chiùin airson seòladh, seo sreath abairtean bhon leabhran a dh'fhaodadh a bhith feumail: Nuas an seòl. Dh'fhalbh a' ghaoth. Mach na ràimh. Iomraibh, 'illean gasta. Sin sibh fhèin, 'illean. Is math a rinn sibh. Fhuair sinn latha math. Cadal math dhuibh!

Chan eil guth air *'outboard motor'* anns na h-abairtean. Cha robh a leithid ann aig an àm sin. Nuair nach robh gaoth ann, bha na gillean a' toirt a-mach nan ràmh airson am bàta iomradh gu tìr.