

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 842 (which corresponds to Litir 1,146). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

A year or two ago, for my birthday, I received a rather unusual present. My wife bought me a rake.

It was not a normal rake. I don't use it for gardening. It's elegant, with large shiny teeth on it.

It's a cockle-rake. I like cockles as food. The cockle is a shellfish. It lives on sandy beaches. In some of the islands, people call them srùbain. In English, you'll know them as 'cockles'.

If you know beaches [the beach], you'll know that you find cockles under the sand at low tide. Unlike razorfish, cockles don't go to a great depth [in the sand]. You don't need to take a spade with you in order to harvest cockles. A rake will do the job.

I would recommend that you don't take small shells with you. Put the small ones back. Put sand over them again. A cockle strand should be sustainable (everlasting).

How do you deal with the cockles at home? If you stay near the shore, it's easy enough. But if you live a distance from the shore, take seawater with you in bottles. Why?

O chionn bliadhna no dhà, airson mo chòlatha-breith, fhuair mi prèasant car annasach. Cheannaich mo bhean ràcan dhomh.

Chan e ràcan àbhaisteach a bha ann. Cha bhi mi ga chur gu feum airson gàirneilearachd. Tha e spaideil le fiaclan mòra, gleansach air.

'S e ràcan-choilleag a tha ann. Tha mi measail air coilleagan mar bhiadh. 'S e maorach a tha anns a' choilleig. Tha i a' fuireach air tràighean-gainmhich. Ann an cuid de na h-eileanan, canaidh daoine srùbain riutha. Ann am Beurla, bidh sibh eòlach orra mar cockles.

Ma tha sibh eòlach air an tràigh, bidh fios agaibh gun lorg sibh coilleagan fon ghainmhich aig muir-tràigh. Eu-coltach ri muirsgianan, cha bhi coilleagan a' falbh gu doimhneachd mhòr. Cha leig sibh a leas paid a thoirt leibh airson coilleagan a bhuain. Nì ràcan a' chùis.

Mholainn nach toir sibh sligean beaga leibh. Cuiribh an fheadhainn bheaga air ais. Cuiribh gainmheach thairis orra a-rithist. Bu chòir do thràigh-choilleag a bhith buan-mhaireannach.

Ciamar a bhios sibh a' dèiligeadh ris na coilleagan aig an taigh? Ma tha sibh a' fuireach ri taobh a' chladaich, tha e furasta gu leòr. Ach ma tha sibh a' fuireach pìos air falbh bhon chladach, thoiribh sàl leibh ann am

Well, you should put the cockles in clean seawater, in order to remove the sand from them. Do that twice. They are ready then for cooking.

If you have been to Barra in a plane, you will know that they lie on a cockle-strand – or cockle-strand (Barra name) – called ‘the great strand’. Some people still harvest cockles on the great strand.

Now, a bit of advice if you are harvesting cockles. When the wind comes from the north, you will need to rake more deeply. That advice came from Martin Martin three hundred years ago.

And remember that shellfish are not safe to eat in summer. Wait until autumn before you harvest cockles. But, if you have a birthday in the interim, remember that a rake would be a good present!

botail. Carson? Uill, bu chòir dhuibh na coilleagan a chur ann an sàl glan, agus an t-uisge atharrachadh, feuch a’ ghainmheach a thoirt asta. Dèanaibh sin dà thuras. Tha iad deiseil an uair sin airson còcaireachd.

Ma tha sibh air a dhol a Bharraigh ann an itealan, bidh fios agaibh gum bithear a’ laighe air tràigh-choilleag – no tràigh-shrùban – ris an canar An Tràigh Mhòr. Bidh feadhainn fhathast a’ buain shrùban air an Tràigh Mhòir.

Nise, beagan comhairle dhuibh ma bhios sibh ri buain nan srùban no nan coilleag. Nuair a thig a’ ghaoth bhon àird a tuath, bidh agaibh ri ràcadh nas doimhne. Thàinig a’ chomhairle sin bho Mhàrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn o chionn trì cheud bliadhna.

Agus cuimhnichibh nach eil maorach sàbhailte ’son ithe as t-samhradh. Fanaibh chun an fhoghair mus buain sibh coilleagan. Ach, ma tha ceann-bliadhna gu bhith agaibh anns an eadar-àm, cuimhnichibh gum biodh ràcan na dheagh phrèasant!