

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 857 (which corresponds to Litir 1,161). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

This week I'm examining a cave. You'll see and hear an English name for it – Church Cave. It's on the Isle of Rona between Skye and Applecross. The cave was used as a church when there was not a built church on the island. There is an old Gaelic name for the cave. We'll come to that shortly.

I first saw the cave from the sea. It's on the east coast of the island, a bit above the shore. It's big and obvious, and a rowan tree is growing at its mouth.

A week or two after that, I visited it. The cave is not far distant from the 'big anchorage' where tourists go. From the anchorage, there is a path going to the cave. You must be fit to go there because the route is rough and steep.

And what a place! The cave is deep and wide. There could be really bad weather and the congregation would be dry inside it. The minister would be at the mouth of the cave.

It's not known how many would get in – I'd say between sixty and a hundred. It would be amazing to be listening to a minister with a big voice preaching there!

An t-seachdain seo, tha a' phrosbaig agam air uamh. Chì sibh agus cluinnidh sibh ainm Beurla oirre – Church Cave. Tha i air Eilean Rònnaigh eadar an t-Eilean Sgitheanach agus a' Chomraich. Bha an uamh air a cur gu feum mar eaglais nuair nach robh eaglais thogte anns an eilean. Tha seann ainm Gàidhlig air an uaimh. Thig sinn gu sin an-ceartuair.

Chunnaic mi an uamh an toiseach bhon mhuir. Tha i air costa sear an eilein, pìos os cionn a' chladaich. Tha i mòr agus follaiseach, agus tha craobh chaorainn a' fàs aig a beul.

Seachdain no dhà an dèidh sin, thadhail mi oirre. Chan eil an uamh uabhasach fada bhon Acarsaid Mhòir far am bi luchd-turais a' dol. Às an acarsaid, tha ceum a dh'ionnsaigh na h-uamha. Feumaidh tu a bhith fut airson a dhol ann oir tha an t-slighe garbh agus cas.

Agus abair àite! Tha an uamh domhainn agus leathann. Dh'fhaodadh fìor dhroch shìde a bhith ann agus bhiodh an coitheanal tioram na broinn. Bhiodh am ministear aig beul na h-uamha.

Chan eil fhios cia mheud duine a gheibheadh a-steach – chanainn eadar seasgad agus ceud. Bhiodh e iongantach a bhith ag èisteachd ri ministear le guth mòr a' searmonachadh an sin!

The cave was a church when there was a large population in Rona. Most of them were about a mile away in a township near the 'dry anchorage'. But the cave was known to the people of the area long before that. And the Gaelic name for it is Uamh an Fhuamhaire – or Uamha an Fhuamhaire as it is written.

The name means 'the giant's cave'. Who was the giant who was living there? I don't know. I'd like to find out!

And whom do we have as an authority for the Gaelic name? Well; who but the renowned bard, Sorley Maclean. He belonged to Raasay, the island to the south of Rona. Sorley mentioned the cave in one of his poems. We'll look at that and at a bit of Rona's history in the next Litir.

Bha an uamh na h-eaglais nuair a bha sluagh mòr ann an Rònaigh. Bha a' chuid as bu mhotha aca mu mhìle air falbh ann am baile faisg air an Acarsaid Thioraim. Ach bha an uamh aithnichte do mhuinntir na sgìre fada roimhe sin. Agus 's e an t-ainm Gàidhlig a tha oirre *Uamh an Fhuamhaire* – no *Uamha an Fhuamhaire* mar a tha i sgrìobhte.

Tha an t-ainm a' ciallachadh '*the giant's cave*'. Cò am fuamhaire a bha a' fuireach ann? Chan eil fhios a'm. Bu toigh leam faighinn a-mach!

Agus cò th' againn mar ùghdarras airson an ainm Ghàidhlig? Uill, cò ach am bàrd cliùiteach, Somhairle MacGill-Eain. Bhuineadh esan do Ratharsair, an t-eilean gu deas air Rònaigh. Thug Somhairle iomradh air an uaimh ann am fear de na dàin aige. Bheir sinn sùil air sin agus air beagan de dh'eachdraidh Rònaigh anns an ath Litir.