

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 898 (which corresponds to Litir 1,202). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

What's the primary word for 'water' in the Gaelic of the Mackay Country – in the far north of Scotland? The solution is – bùrn. It's not only in Lewis and Harris that you hear bùrn.

There is a dictionary in front of me just now – The Gaelic of the Mackay Country by the dialect scholar, Seumas Grant. For 'did you drink the water?', there is an d' òl thu am bùrn?

Further south in the Gairloch area, uisge is the common word for water. But bùrn also appears, particularly in Strath in Gairloch. There, bùrn does not stand for the water that falls from the air, however.

It's not the same in the Mackay Country. In Seumas Grant's dictionary there is this: tha e a' bùrn 'it's raining'; bùrn aotrom 'light rain'; bùrn dubh 'torrential rain'.

The Litir is going to be somewhat watery today. I want to look at words and phrases connected to water.

In old Gaelic there was the word dobhar. That's connected to the Welsh word dŵr for water.

Dè am prìomh fhacal a th' ann airson *water* ann an Gàidhlig Dhùthaich MhicAoidh – ann am fìor cheann a tuath na h-Alba? 'S e am fuasgladh – *bùrn*. Chan ann a-mhàin ann an Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh a chluinneas sibh *bùrn*.

Tha faclair air mo bheulaibh an-dràsta – *Gàidhlig Dhùthaich MhicAoidh* leis an sgoilear dhualchainntean, Seumas Grannd. Airson '*did you drink the water?*', tha an d' òl thu am bùrn?

Nas fhaide deas ann an sgìre Gheàrrloch, 's e *uisge* am facal cumanta airson *water*. Ach nochdaidh *bùrn* cuideachd gu h-àraidh anns an t-Srath ann an Geàrrloch. An sin, cha bhi *bùrn* a' seasamh airson an uisge a thuiteas às an adhar, ge-tà.

Chan eil e co-ionann ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh. Anns an fhaclair aig Seumas Grannd, tha seo: tha e a' bùrn '*it's raining*'; bùrn aotrom '*light rain*'; bùrn dubh '*torrential rain*'.

Tha an Litir gu bhith rudeigin uisgeach no bùrnach an-diugh. Tha mi airson sùil a thoirt air faclan is abairtean co-cheangailte ri uisge.

Anns an t-seann Ghàidhlig, bha am facal *dobhar* ann. Tha sin ceangailte ris an fhacal Chuimreach *dŵr* airson

Dobhar is not extant in the daily speech of the Gaels today. But it's in place-names and in words connected to nature. I'm thinking of dobhar-chù for otter and dobhar-lus for watercress.

In some areas, uisge also means 'water'. We say Uisge Spè for [the] River Spey and Uisge Tatha for [the] River Tay. And we use uisge sometimes for freshwater. We say 'loch-uisge' for freshwater loch and 'loch-mara' for sea loch.

We have a different word for seawater or salt water – that's sàl. But people also say uisgeachan Bhreatainn 'British waters' when they are speaking about the sea around Britain.

At this time of the year, we often talk about 'watering', putting water on plants. Is there a verb for 'watering' in Gaelic? Yes – two [of them]. Uisgeachadh. Tha mi ag uisgeachadh nan craobhan 'I'm watering the trees'. And deurachadh. Tha mi a' deurachadh nan lusan-taighe 'I'm [lightly] watering the house-plants'.

uisge. Chan eil *dobhar* beò ann an cainnt làitheil nan Gàidheal an-diugh. Ach tha e ann an ainmean-àite agus ann am faclan co-cheangailte ri nàdar. Tha mi a' smaoinichadh air *dobhar-chù* airson *otter* agus *dobhar-lus* airson *watercress*.

Ann an cuid de sgìrean, tha 'uisge' cuideachd a' ciallachadh 'abhainn'. Canaidh sinn Uisge Spè airson *The River Spey* agus Uisge Tatha airson *The River Tay*. Agus bidh sinn a' cleachdadh 'uisge' uaireannan airson *freshwater*. Canaidh sinn 'loch-uisge' airson *freshwater loch* agus 'loch-mara' airson *sea loch*.

Tha facal eadar-dhealaichte againn airson *seawater* no *salt water* – 's e sin *sàl*. Ach canaidh daoine cuideachd *uisgeachan Bhreatainn* 'British waters' nuair a tha iad a' bruidhinn mun mhuir timcheall Bhreatainn.

Aig an àm seo dhen bhliadhna, bidh sinn gu tric a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn 'watering', a' cur uisge air lusan. A bheil gnìomhair ann airson *watering* ann an Gàidhlig? Tha – na dhà. *Uisgeachadh*. Tha mi ag uisgeachadh nan craobhan 'I'm watering the trees'. Agus *deurachadh*. Tha mi a' deurachadh nan lusan-taighe 'I'm watering the house-plants'.