

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 944 (which corresponds to Litir 1,248). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was speaking about Eilean nan Ròn near Tongue in the Mackay Country. When a population was living there, they were hunting the seals. They were wanting the oil. They were giving it to their calves. They were also using the oil themselves, as a medical treatment for the chest.

In a recording on Tobar an Dualchais, Donald Mackay tells us that they were hunting the grey seals at the end of the autumn. They were killing the cubs with a club. They were melting the blubber in pans outside on a dry day.

The islanders were also hunting red grouse. The grouse were going over from the mainland.

There were very few wild mammals there. There were no hares, or foxes or rats or mice. Nor were there snakes. The islanders were crossing to another island – the island of the rabbits – to hunt rabbits. There were none on Eilean nan Ròn.

I was telling you recently about the Isle of Stroma. It is close to John O' Groats in Caithness. There was a connection between Eilean nan Ròn and Stroma. The fishermen from Eilean nan Ròn were using boats that were built on Stroma.

Bha mi a' bruidhinn mu Eilean nan Ròn faisg air Tunga ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh. Nuair a bha sluagh a' fuireach ann, bha iad a' sealg nan ròn. Bha iad ag iarraidh an ola. Bha iad ga toirt do na laoih aca. Bha iad cuideachd a' cleachdadh na h-ola iad fhèin, mar chungaidh-leigheis airson a' bhroillich.

Ann an clàr air Tobar an Dualchais, tha Dòmhnall MacAoidh ag innse dhuinn gun robh iad a' sealg nan ròn-glasa aig deireadh an fhoghair. Bha iad a' marbhadh nan cuileanan le maide. Bha iad a' leaghadh na saille ann am panaichean a-muigh air latha tioram.

Bha na h-eileanaich cuideachd a' sealg chearcan-fraoich. Bha na cearcan a' dol a-null à tìr-mòr.

Bha glè bheag de mhamailean fiadhaich ann. Cha robh maighich ann, no sionnaich, no radain no luchan. Cha robh no nathraichean. Bha na h-eileanaich a' falbh a-null gu eilean eile – Eilean nan Coinean – airson coineanaich a shealg. Cha robh gin dhiubh air Eilean nan Ròn.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Eilean Stròma o chionn ghoirid. Tha e faisg air Taigh 'an Ghròt ann an Gallaibh. Bha ceangal ann eadar Eilean nan Ròn agus Stròma. Bha na h-iasgairean à Eilean nan Ròn a' cleachdadh bhàtaichean a bha air an togail ann an Stròma.

After the First War, things deteriorated on Eilean nan Ròn. The herring fishing was declining. Some people went to Australia. Early in the twenties, three families got new crofts on the mainland at Borgie. Those were for people who had been on active service in the war.

The last people left in 1938. But twelve years later, a group went to stay there for a while. Most of them were students. They were participating in a medical experiment. They were researching the common cold.

They wanted to be by themselves, without visitors, but where there were houses to live in. They chose Eilean nan Ròn. I'll tell you about the experiment in the next Litir.

An dèidh a' Chiad Chogaidh, chaidh cùisean bhuaithe ann an Eilean nan Ròn. Bha iasgach an sgadain a' dol air ais. Dh'fhalbh feadhainn gu Astràilia. Tràth anns na ficheadan, fhuair trì teaghlaichean croitean ùra air tìr-mòr ann am Borghaidh. Bha iad sin do dhaoine a bha air a bhith a' sabaid anns a' chogadh.

Dh'fhalbh na daoine mu dheireadh ann an naoi ceud deug, trithead 's a h-ochd (1938). Ach dusan bliadhna an dèidh sin, chaidh buidheann a dh'fhuireach ann airson greis. 'S e oileanaich a bha anns a' chuid mhòir dhiubh. Bha iad a' gabhail pàirt ann an deuchainn mheidigeach. Bha iad a' rannsachadh a' chnatain.

Bha iad airson a bhith leotha fhèin, gun luchd-tadhail, ach far an robh taighean ann airson fuireach. Thagh iad Eilean nan Ròn. Innsidh mi dhuibh mun deuchainn anns an ath Litir.