

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 992 (which corresponds to Litir 1,296). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was speaking in the last Litir about the word cathair. It appears in place names in the Highlands. Sometimes it stands for 'chair' or 'seat'. In Mid-Argyll there is Cathair Dhonncha Dhuibh ['black-haired Duncan's seat'] north of Furnace. The Ordnance Survey says that it is a 'rude seat' The seat was created by a certain black-haired Duncan. Duncan was a shepherd.

In Ardnamurchan there is a ridge called Cathair Mhic Dhiarmaid. That means 'MacDiarmad's seat or stronghold'. But who was that man? I'm not sure.

The word sìthean is common throughout the Highlands. It is recognised as a place where fairies would be living. But in Wester Ross, cathair appears for exactly the same thing. If you look at a map of the Gairloch area, you'll see Portaigil or Port Henderson. South of the village, there is A' Chathair Dhubh 'the black fairy knoll'.

Also in Wester Ross, near Laide, there is a loch called Loch na Cathrach Duibhe. That means 'the loch of the black fairy knoll'.

Bha mi a' bruidhinn anns an Litir mu dheireadh mun fhacal cathair. Tha e a' nochdadh ann an ainmean-àite air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Uaireannan, tha e a' seasamh airson 'chair' no 'seat'. Ann an meadhan Earra-Ghàidheal, tha Cathair Dhonncha Dhuibh tuath air an Fhùirneis. Tha an t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais ag ràdh gur e 'rude seat' a tha ann. Bha a' chathair air a cruthachadh le fear Donncha Dubh. Bha Donncha na chìobair.

Ann an Àird nam Murchan, tha druim air a bheil Cathair Mhic Dhiarmaid. Tha sin a' ciallachadh MacDiarmad's seat or stronghold. Ach cò bha anns an duine sin? Chan eil mi cinnteach.

Tha am facal sìthean cumanta air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Tha e aithnichte mar àite far am biodh sìthichean a' fuireach. Ach, air taobh an iar Siorrachd Rois, nochdaidh cathair airson an dearbh rud. Ma bheir sibh sùil air mapa de sgìre Gheàrrloch, chì sibh Portaigil no Port Henderson. Deas air a' bhaile, tha A' Chathair Dhubh 'the black fairy knoll'.

Cuideachd ann an Ros an Iar, faisg air An Leathad, tha loch ann air a bheil Loch na Cathrach Duibhe. Tha sin a' ciallachadh 'the loch of the black fairy knoll'.

<p><i>The word cathair is usually feminine. But it appears here and there as a masculine word. There is an example in Easter Ross, near Tain. That is Cnoc an Dubh Chathair. The name means ‘the hill of the black chair’.</i></p> <p><i>If you see the word cathair on maps of the Highlands, make sure there is no accent on the first ‘a’. If there is an accent, you have a different word. That is càthar, with ‘-ar’ at the end. It means ‘boggy place’. Càthar. It appears in the genitive case with ‘-air’ at the end. There is an example in a place name in Glenmoriston – Druim a’ Chàthair. That means ‘the ridge by the boggy ground’. The first ‘a’ is long and the word is masculine. Druim a’ Chàthair.</i></p> <p><i>Cathair and càthar. The accents are important in Gaelic, aren’t they?</i></p>	<p>Tha am facal <i>cathair</i>, mar as trice, boireanta. Ach bidh e a’ nochdadh an siud ’s an seo mar fhacal fireanta. Tha eisimpleir ann an Ros an Ear, faisg air Baile Dhubhthaich. ’S e sin Cnoc an Dubh Chathair. Tha an t-ainm a’ ciallachadh ‘<i>the hill of the black chair</i>’.</p> <p>Ma chì sibh am facal <i>cathair</i> air mapaichean na Gàidhealtachd, dèanaibh cinnteach nach eil stràc air a’ chiad ‘a’. Ma tha stràc ann, tha facal eadar-dhealaichte agaibh. ’S e sin <i>càthar</i>, le ‘-ar’ aig an deireadh. Tha e a’ ciallachadh ‘<i>boggy place</i>’. Càthar. Bidh e a’ nochdadh anns an tuiseal ghinideach – <i>the genitive case</i> – le ‘-air’ aig an deireadh. Tha eisimpleir ann an ainm-àite ann an Gleann Moireasdain – <i>Druim a’ Chàthair</i>. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh ‘<i>the ridge by the boggy ground</i>’. Tha a’ chiad ‘a’ fada agus tha am facal fireanta. Druim a’ Chàthair.</p> <p><i>Cathair</i> agus <i>càthar</i>. Tha na stràcan cudromach ann an Gàidhlig, nach eil?</p>
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