

## **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 995 (which corresponds to Litir 1,299). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*The other day, I came across an old article in the publication 'An Gàidheal'. It was published in September 1933. The author was Ruairidh Campbell from Minard on the shore of Loch Fyne in Argyll. The article first appeared as an essay in a competition at the Dunoon Mod.*

*The subject was 'tweed'. The author explains each part of the process between the smearing of the sheep and waulking the tweed.*

*Ruairidh writes this: 'Smearing is not practised anywhere today because, by act of law, sheep must be dipped in a cleansing material twice a year.' He tells us how every family in olden times would put aside a special night during the winter. That was for the smearing of the sheep. And he says, although the smearing work was hard, that it was a good time for telling stories.*

*The shearing was next. Here's what Ruairidh wrote: 'the sheep would commonly be in the fank at noon, and about half an hour after that, each man would have his own sheep on the green sward next to the fank ...'*

An latha eile, thàinig mi tarsainn air seann alt anns an iris 'An Gàidheal'. Chaidh fhoillseachadh as t-Sultain naoi ceud deug, trithead 's a trì (1933). B' e an t-ùghdar Ruairidh Caimbeul à Mionaird air cladach Loch Fyne ann an Earra-Ghàidheal. Nochd an t-alt an toiseach mar aiste ann am farpais aig Mòd Dhùn Omhain.

B' e an cuspair 'An Clò Mòr'. Tha an t-ùghdar a' mìneachadh gach pàirt dhen phròiseas eadar smeuradh no smiùradh nan caorach agus luadhadh a' chlà.

Tha Ruairidh a' sgrìobhadh seo: 'Chan eil a leithid de rud agus smiùradh air a chleachdadh an àite sam bith an-diugh, a chionn, le Achd lagha, feumaidh caoraich a bhith air an tumadh ann an stuth-glanaidh dà uair sa bhliadhna.' Tha e ag innse dhuinn mar a bhiodh gach teaghlach anns an t-seann aimsir a' comharrachadh oidhche shònraichte anns a' gheamhradh. Bha sin airson smiùradh nan caorach. Agus tha e ag ràdh, ged a bha an obair-smiùraidh cruaidh, gum b' e sin deagh àm airson sgeulachdan innse.

Bha an rùsgadh ann an uair sin. Seo na sgrìobh Ruairidh: 'bhiodh na caoraich gu cumanta anns an fhaing aig tràth-nòin agus mu leth-uair an uaireadair an dèidh sin, bhiodh a chaoraich fhèin ceangailte aig gach fear air an rèidhlean ghorm ri taobh na fainge ...'

*Ruairidh reports on the noises that were there. Firstly, the noise of the hand-shears. Are you familiar with that? Fuaim nan deamhaisean – the sound of the hand-shears. He also tells us what the shearers would be shouting at each other. For example, ‘Thoir dhomh spearrach!’ Give me a fetter. To tie sheep’s legs together. Give me a fetter.*

*The crofters were recognising the sheep, and to whom they belonged, by their comharraidhean-cluaise. Or ear-marks. Comharraidhean-cluaise. They were cutting pieces from the ears. Here are four of the marks in his account: beum, bàrr na cluaise, toll and sùbhlag. You’ll get the meaning of those words in Dwelly’s dictionary. I’ll have more on sheep, wool and tweed in the next Litir.*

Tha Ruairidh a’ dèanamh aithris air na fuaimean a bha ann. An toiseach fuaim nan deamhaisean. A bheil sibh eòlach air sin? Fuaim nan deamhaisean – *the sound of the hand shears*. Tha e cuideachd ag innse dhuinn na bhiodh na rùsgadairean ag èigheachd air a chèile. Mar eisimpleir, ‘Thoir dhomh spearrach!’ *Give me a fetter*. Airson casach chaorach a cheangal ri chèile. Thoir dhomh spearrach.

Bha na croitearan ag aithneachadh nan caorach, agus cò bu leis iad, air na comharraidhean-cluaise aca. No *ear-marks*. Comharraidhean-cluaise. Bha iad a’ gearradh phìosan às na cluasan. Seo ceithir de na comharraidhean anns a’ chunntas aige: *beum, bàrr na cluaise, toll agus sùbhlag*. Gheibh sibh ciall nam faclan sin ann am faclair Dwelly. Bidh tuilleadh agam air caoraich, clòimh agus an clò mòr anns an ath Litir.