

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 996 (which corresponds to Litir 1,300). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you about an old Gaelic article by Ruairidh Campbell from Minard on the shore of Loch Fyne. The subject was '(traditional) tweed'. The author explains how tweed is made. Last week, we looked at the smearing and shearing of the sheep.

The next step is the washing of the wool. According to Ruairidh, the women would be 'barefoot [and] immersing the wool with their feet in large tubs beside the river'. The children were playing at the same time. The lads were doing leum-loga in the river. That's Ruairidh's Gaelic for skimming stones on the water. Leum-loga.

When the wool was clean, it was dried. Then it was put in bags in the barn. In the winter, people were carding and spinning the wool.

Then the dyeing took place. Dathadh na clòimhe. The dyeing of the wool. When Ruairidh was alive, the Gaels had already pretty much gone over to using 'shop dyes'. They were so 'convenient'. But he tells us that matters were different in the centuries before that. Many native plants were put to use. Ruairidh obtained knowledge of some of them in his youth.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu sheann alt Gàidhlig le Ruairidh Caimbeul à Mionaird air cladach Loch Fine. B' e an cuspair 'An Clò Mòr'. Tha an t-ùghdar a' mìneachadh mar a thathar a' dèanamh clò. An t-seachdain sa chaidh, thug sinn sùil air smeuradh agus rùsgadh nan caorach.

'S e an t-ath cheum nigheadh na clòimhe. A rèir Ruairidh, bhiodh na boireannaich 'cas-rùisgte a' bogadh na clòimhe le 'n casan ann an tubaichean mòra ri taobh na h-aibhne'. Bha a' chlann a' cluich aig an aon àm. Bha na gillean a' dèanamh leum-loga anns an abhainn. Sin a' Ghàidhlig aig Ruairidh airson *skimming stones on the water*. Leum-loga.

Nuair a bha a' chlàimh glan, bha i air a tiormachadh. An uair sin, bha i air a cur ann am pocannan anns an t-sabhal. Anns a' gheamhradh, bha daoine a' cìreadh agus a' snìomh na clòimhe.

An uair sin, bha an dathadh ann. Dathadh na clòimhe. *The dyeing of the wool*. Nuair a bha Ruairidh beò, bha na Gàidheil mu thràth gu ìre mhòr air a dhol gu cleachdadh 'dathan bùtha'. Bha iad cho 'goireasach'. Ach tha e ag innse dhuinn gun robh cùisean eadar-dhealaichte anns na ceudan roimhe sin. Bha mòran lus an duthchasach air an cur gu feum. Fhuair Ruairidh eòlas air cuid dhiubh na òige.

The old people were using five plants for dyeing wool black. They were seileastair, feàrna, grainnseag, preas nan àirneag and copag. Do you know those plants? Seileastair – flag iris; feàrna – alder; grainnseag – bearberry; preas nan àirneag – blackthorn; and copag – docken. Ruairidh doesn't tell us what part of the plants they used.

Two plants were useful for dyeing wool (dark) blue. Those were an droman ‘elder’ and braoileagan ‘blaeberrries’. He gives three other Gaelic names for blaeberrries – dearc an fhraoich, curra-mhiag and lus nan dearc. For curra-mhiag, some people say caora-mhitheag. I [have] heard that on the Isle of Lewis. That, then, is how they would dye black and blue. We'll look at other colours next week.

Bha na seann daoine a' cleachdadh còig lusan airson clòimh a dhathadh dubh. B' iad sin seileastair, feàrna, grainnseag, preas nan àirneag agus copag. A bheil sibh eòlach air na lusan sin? Seileastair – flag iris; feàrna – alder; grainnseag – bearberry; preas nan àirneag – blackthorn; agus copag – docken. Chan eil Ruairidh ag innse dhuinn dè am pàirt de na lusan a chleachd iad.

Bha dà lus feumail airson clòimh a dhathadh gorm. B' iad sin an droman ‘elder’ agus braoileagan ‘blaeberrries’. Tha e a' toirt trì ainmean Gàidhlig eile airson blaeberrries – dearc an fhraoich, curra-mhiag agus lus nan dearc. Airson curra-mhiag, bidh cuid ag ràdh caora-mhitheag. Chuala mi sin ann an Eilean Leòdhais. Sin, ma-thà, mar a bhiodh iad a' dathadh dubh agus gorm. Bheir sinn sùil air dathan eile an-ath-sheachdain.