

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 1,015 (which corresponds to Litir 1,319). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

Recently, I walked in to Loch an Eich-uisge. It's in the area of Lochcarron, in Wester Ross. It's a freshwater loch – a hill loch.

There is a tremendous number of lochs in the Highlands that are connected, in oral tradition, to a water-horse. It was estimated that there are at least sixty of them.

Occasionally, a person who suffered death in a loch will be named in the name of the loch itself. I told you about Loch na Mnà on Raasay in Litir Bheag 213. A young woman was killed there by a water-horse. Loch na Mnà means 'the loch of the woman'. And Loch Iain Mhic Aonghais, near Glenelg, is named for a man – John MacInnes (or John, son of Angus) who was killed there by a water-horse.

However, as far as I know, there is only one loch in the Highlands that is named on the maps as 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. And, because the name is so unusual, I walked in to see it. I commenced my walk in Ardaneaskan, at the mouth of Loch Carron.

The situation of Loch an Eich-uisge is nice enough, although it appears that the water is not deep.

O chionn ghoirid, choisich mi a-steach gu Loch an Eich-uisge. 'S ann an sgìre Loch Carrann a tha e, ann an Ros an Iar. 'S e loch uisge – loch monaidh – a tha ann.

Tha an t-uabhas de lochan air a' Ghàidhealtachd a tha co-cheangailte, ann am beul-aithris, ri each-uisge. Chaidh tomhas a dhèanamh gu bheil co-dhiù seasgad ann dhiubh.

Corra uair, bidh cuideigin a dh'fhuiling bàs ann an loch ainmichte ann an ainm an locha fhèin. Dh'inns mi dhuibh mu dheidhinn Loch na Mnà ann an Ratharsair ann an Litir Bheag dà cheud 's a trì-deug (213). Bha boireannach òg air a mharbhadh an sin le each-uisge. Tha Loch na Mnà a' ciallachadh 'the loch of the woman'. Agus tha Loch Iain MhicAonghais, faisg air Gleann Eilg, ainmichte airson fear – Iain MacAonghais – a chaidh a mharbhadh an sin le each-uisge.

Ge-tà, fhad 's as aithne dhòmhsa, chan eil ann ach aon loch air a' Ghàidhealtachd a tha ainmichte air na mapaichean mar 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. Agus, leis gun robh an t-ainm cho annasach, choisich mi ann airson fhaicinn. Thòisich mi air mo chuairt ann an Àird an Fheusgain, aig beul Loch Carrann.

Tha suidheachadh Loch an Eich-uisge snog gu leòr, ged nach eil coltas air gu bheil

There is a lot of water lilies growing there.

In terms of the environment of the hill country around the loch, I was disappointed. Off-road vehicles have damaged the moorland. I reckon the water-horse left a long time ago.

Now, I was careful to say that that is the only loch that is named on the maps as 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. But there is a loch on Barra, and the island folk call it 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. However, it carries no name on Ordnance Survey maps.

It's a tiny loch in the very north of the island. It's near Loch na Cuilce. The famous storyteller – John MacPherson – or The Cuddy – was telling a tale about the loch and the water-horse. We'll look at it in the next Litir.

an t-uisge domhainn. Tha an t-uabhas dhen duilleig-bhàite a' fàs ann.

A thaobh àrainneachd a' mhonaidh timcheall an locha, ghabh mi briseadh-dùil. Tha carbadan far-rathaid air sgrios a dhèanamh air a' mhòintich. Saoilidh mi gun do theich an t-each-uisge o chionn fhada.

Nise, bha mi faiceallach le bhith ag ràdh gur e sin an aon loch a tha ainmichte air na mapaichean mar 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. Ach tha loch ann am Barraigh, agus tha muinntir an eilein a' gabhail 'Loch an Eich-uisge' air. Ge-tà, chan eil e ainmichte idir air mapaichean na Suirbhìdh Òrdanais.

'S e loch beag bìodach a tha ann ann am fìor cheann a tuath an eilein. Tha e faisg air Loch na Cuilce. Bha an seanchaidh ainmeil – Iain Mac a' Phearsain – no An Codaigh – ag innse sgeul mun loch agus mun each-uisge. Bheir sinn sùil air anns an ath Litir.