

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 1,016 (which corresponds to Litir 1,320). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

There is a loch in the north of Barra and locals call it 'Loch an Eich-uisge' ['the loch of the water-horse']. It's a tiny loch.

A first-class storyteller kept the heritage of the loch alive in oral tradition. He was John MacPherson or 'The Cuddy'. He was recorded in Gaelic, telling the story of the water-horse. The recording is on the Tobar an Dualchais website. He also has an account in English in the book 'Tales from Barra'. Here is my own version of the tale.

A woman was herding livestock by the loch. It was a beautiful summer's day. She saw a man sleeping. He was handsome. She put his head on her lap. She started to stroke his hair.

The woman noticed a strange thing. Entwined in the man's hair was rathabhaich. That's a plant – a bit like grass – that only grows in water. The woman remembered that her father and mother were telling her that a water-horse was living in the loch.

She said to herself, 'Perhaps this is the water-horse. I'd better flee.'

She didn't want to waken the man. She took her skirt off carefully, leaving it still under the man's head. She had a

Tha loch ann an ceann a tuath Bharraigh, agus 's e 'Loch an Eich-uisge' a chanas muinntir an àite ris. 'S e loch beag bìodach a tha ann.

Chùm sàr-sgeulaiche dualchas an locha beò ann am beul-aithris. B' esan Iain Mac a' Phearsain no 'An Codaidh'. Chaidh a chlàradh ann an Gàidhlig, ag innse sgeul Loch an Eich-uisge. Tha an clàradh air làrach-lìn Thobar an Dualchais. Tha cunntas aige ann am Beurla cuideachd anns an leabhar 'Tales from Barra'. Seo mo dhreach fhèin air an sgeul.

Bha boireannach a' buachailleachd ri taobh an locha. 'S e latha brèagha samhraidh a bha ann. Chunnaic i fear na chadal. Bha e eireachdail. Chuir i a cheann na h-uchd. Thòisich i air fhalt a shliobadh.

Mhottaich am boireannach rudeigin annasach. Fillte ann am falt an duine, bha rathabhaich. 'S e sin lus – coltach ri fear – a tha a' fàs a-mhàin ann an uisge. Chuimhnich am boireannach gun robh a h-athair 's a màthair air innse dhi gun robh each-uisge a' fuireach anns an loch.

Thuirt i rithe fhèin, 'Math dh'fhaodte gur e an t-each-uisge a tha seo. 'S fheàrr dhomh teicheadh.'

Cha robh i airson an duine a dhùsgadh. Leig i a sgiorta dhith gu faiceallach, ga fàgail fhathast fo cheann an

tartan plaid close by. She put that on and went home.

When the man awoke, he returned to his natural form as a horse. He was angry because the woman was gone. He arose. With his feet he smashed the rocks here. It can still be seen where he did the damage. It's not known what happened to the water-horse but he was never seen again.

That's the second loch I know in the Gàidhealtachd which is called 'Loch an Eich-uisge'. But there is Loch na Doireanaich on Skye. That's in Sleat between Ord and Teangue.

According to local people, the name comes from Loch Doir' an Eich 'the loch of the grove of the horse'. We'll look at the name and the story next week.

duine. Bha plaide tartain aice faisg air làimh. Chuir i sin oirre agus dh'fhalbh i dhachaigh.

Nuair a dhùisg an duine, chaidh e air ais na riochd nàdarrach mar each. Bha e feargach oir bha am boireannach air falbh. Dh'èirich e. Le a chasan, bhris e na creagan an sin. Chithear fhathast far an do rinn e an sgrios. Chan eil fhios dè thachair don each-uisge ach chan fhacas tuilleadh e.

Sin an dàrna loch as aithne dhomh air a' Ghàidhealtachd air a bheil 'Loch an Eich-uisge' mar ainm. Ach tha Loch na Doireanaich anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha e ann an Slèite eadar An t-Òrd agus An Teanga.

A rèir muinntir an àite, tha an t-ainm a' tighinn bho Loch Doir' an Eich 'the loch of the grove of the horse'. Bheir sinn sùil air an ainm agus air an sgeul an-ath-sheachdain.