

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 1,041 (which corresponds to Litir 1,345). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

The word tairbeart means a 'portage site or isthmus'. An isthmus is a narrow piece of land between pieces that are broad. It's a good place to carry a boat over two pieces of water – the exact meaning of 'portage'. 'Portage' is a French word – portage – that means 'carry'.

Tairbeart is a Gaelic word. It comes from tar and beir, meaning 'carry over'. The word is old. The Gaels were using tarberts a long time ago. The old Gaels' boats were often made of cow hide. They were light. It would have been easy to put boats like that on rollers and push them across a tarbert.

There are twelve places in Scotland where there is the word tairbeart, or the English version of it, on the map. Tarbert Harris is well-known in the Gaelic world. In olden times, people could move a boat from the Atlantic to the Minch, without going through the Sound of Harris. That sound was challenging for old mariners in the days before marine charts and GPS. There are many sand shoals there.

Tha am facal tairbeart a' ciallachadh portage site no isthmus. 'S e isthmus pìos talmhainn caol eadar pìosan a tha leathann. 'S e àite math a tha ann airson bàta a ghiùlan eadar dà phìos uisge – an dearbh chiall a tha air portage. 'S e facal Frangach a tha ann am portage – portage – a tha a' ciallachadh 'giùlan'.

'S e facal Gàidhlig a tha ann an tairbeart. Tha e a' tighinn bho tar agus beir, no na seann dreachan dhiubh. Tha e a' ciallachadh 'carrying over'. Tha am facal sean. Bha na Gàidheil a' cleachdadh tairbeartan o chionn fhada. Bha na bàtaichean aig na seann Ghàidheil gu tric air an dèanamh de sheiche bà. Bha iad aotrom. Bha e air a bhith furasta bàtaichean mar sin a chur air rolairean agus a phutadh thairis air tairbeart.

Tha dà àite dheug ann an Alba far a bheil am facal tairbeart, no dreach na Beurla dheth, air a' mhapa. Tha Tairbeart na Hearadh ainmeil ann an saoghal nan Gàidheal. Anns an t-seann aimsir, dh'fhaodadh daoine bàta a ghluasad bhon Chuan Siar don Chuan Sgìth, gun a dhol tro Chaolas na Hearadh. Bha an caolas sin dùbhlach do sheann mharaidhean anns na làithean ro chairtean-mara agus GPS. Tha tòrr oitirean ann.

Many people live in Tarbert. You'll notice that we say 'on the Tarbert' rather than 'in the Tarbert'.

There are three other island tarberts. There is one in the middle of Jura. People would have an opportunity to take a boat across that tarbert between the Sound of Jura and the Sound of Colonsay. That would allow them to avoid the Sound of Islay in the south and Corryvreckan in the north. Corryvreckan is dangerous for small boats.

Near Jura, on the Isle of Gigha, there is a tarbert. It's in the north of the island. I don't see that it would be sensible to take a boat on land there. It would be easier to sail around the north of the island. I'd say, in this example, that tairbeart means 'isthmus' rather than 'portage place'. We'll look at the rest of the tarberts next week.

Tha daoine gu leòr a' fuireach air an Tairbeart. Bidh sibh a' mothachadh gu bheil sinn ag ràdh 'air an Tairbeart' seach 'anns an Tairbeart'.

Tha trì tairbeartan eileanach eile ann. Tha tè ann am meadhan Eilean Dhiùra. Bhiodh cothrom aig daoine bàta a thoirt thar an tairbeirt sin eadar Linne Dhiùra agus an Linne Cholbhasach. Bhiodh sin a' leigeil leotha Caol Ìle, aig deas, agus Coire Bhreacain aig tuath, a sheachnadh. Tha Coire Bhreacain cunnartach do bhàtaichean beaga.

Faisg air Diùra, ann an Eilean Ghiogha, tha tairbeart ann. Tha e ann an ceann a tuath an eilein. Chan eil mi a' faicinn gum biodh e ciallach bàta a thoirt gu tìr an sin. Bhiodh e na b' fhasa seòladh timcheall ceann a tuath an eilein. Chanainn, anns an eisimpleir seo, gu bheil 'tairbeart' a' ciallachadh *isthmus* seach *portage place*. Bheir sinn sùil air a' chòrr de na tairbeartan an-ath-sheachdain.