

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 1,044 (which corresponds to Litir 1,348). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

In the last Litir I was talking about the 'tarbat' (tarbert) near Portmahomack in Easter Ross. The archaeologist, Martin Carver, was of the opinion that there was a route between the Dornoch Firth and the Cromarty Firth through Loch Eye and that that was the 'tarbat'.

This week, I'm going to publish a different opinion. It comes from Liz Curtis, an expert on history and place-names. She reckons there was a shorter tarbat. It was between Portmahomack and a village on the eastern shore of Tarbat Ness, called Rockfield in English.

Now, the Gaelic for Rockfield is Creag Tarail Bheag. Liz Curtis thinks that the word Taral tells us about a route people would take. It comes from tar and ail, meaning 'over [the] cliff'. People were going over the cliff there.

Why? Because that was the end – or start – of the tarbat 'the boat portage place'. Curtis tells us that there was a route between the old Tarbat Church, where there was a famous monastery, and Rockfield where there was at one time an old

Annas an Litir mu dheireadh bha mi a' bruidhinn mun 'tairbeart' faisg air Port mo Cholmaig ann an Ros an Ear. Bha an t-àrc-eòlaiche, Martin Carver, dhen bheachd gur dòcha gun robh slighe ann eadar Caolas Dhòrnaich agus Caolas Chrombaigh tro Loch na h-Uidhe, agus gum b' e sin an 'tairbeart'.

An t-seachdain seo, tha mi a' dol a dh'fhoillseachadh beachd eile. Tha e a' tighinn bho Liz Curtis, eòlaiche air eachdraidh agus ainmean-àite. Tha ise dhen bheachd gun robh tairbeart na bu ghiorra ann. Bha e eadar Port mo Cholmaig agus baile beag air cladach an ear Rubha Thairbeirt, air a bheil *Rockfield* mar ainm ann am Beurla.

Nise, 's e a' Ghàidhlig air *Rockfield* Creag Tarail Bheag. Tha Liz Curtis dhen bheachd gu bheil am facal *Taral* ag innse dhuinn mu shlighe a bhiodh daoine a' gabhail. Tha e a' tighinn bho *tar* agus *ail*, a' ciallachadh 'over [the] cliff'. Bha daoine a' dol thar na creige an sin.

Carson? Bha, a chionn 's gum b' e sin deireadh – no toiseach – an tairbeirt 'the boat portage place'. Tha Curtis ag innse dhuinn gun robh slighe ann eadar seann Eaglais an Tairbeirt, far an robh manachainn ainmeil, agus Creag Tarail Bheag far an robh uaireigin seann seipeal.

<p><i>chapel. The route is a kilometre and a half in length.</i></p> <p><i>Why, then, did people not sail between the port and Rockfield? Because it was dangerous sailing past Tarbat Ness, where there is a lighthouse today. Skerries run out to sea from the point. And two sea currents meet at the extremity of the ness – one from the Dornoch Firth and one from the Moray Firth. Where they meet, the sea is very rough, very often.</i></p> <p><i>Thus, in the days of [the] wee leather boats, it was safer – very often – to avoid Tarbat Ness. Mariners who were going between, say, Rosemarkie on the Black Isle and Portmahomack would stop at Rockfield. The final part of their journey would be on land, across the boat portage (or tarbat).</i></p>	<p>Tha an t-slighe cileameatair gu leth ann am fad.</p> <p>Carson, ge-tà, nach biodh daoine a' seòladh eadar am port agus Creag Tarail Bheag? A chionn 's gun robh e cunnartach seòladh seachad air Rubha Thairbeirt, far a bheil taigh-solais an-diugh Tha sgeirean a' ruith a-mach gu muir bhon rubha. Agus, tha dà shruth-mhara a' coinneachadh aig gob an rubha – fear à Caolas Dhòrnaich agus fear à Linne Mhoireibh. Far am bi iad a' coinneachadh, bidh a' mhuir gu math garbh gu math tric.</p> <p>Mar sin, ri linn nan eathraichean beaga leathair, bha e na bu shàbhailte – gu math tric – Rubha Thairbeirt a sheachnadh. Bhiodh maraichean a bha a' dol eadar, can, Ros Mhaircnidh anns an Eilean Dubh agus Port mo Cholmaig, a' stad aig Creag Tarail Bheag. Bhiodh am pìos mu dheireadh dhen turas aca air tìr, thar an tairbeirt.</p>
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