

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 1,048 (which corresponds to Litir 1,352). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you an old tale from Galloway. Niall of the Nine Hostages, the High King of Ireland, had a large army. They were attacking the last Picts in Galloway. The Picts were driven to an isthmus near the Mull of Galloway. There were only four of them left alive – and old man and his three sons.

Behind the isthmus was a ditch and embankments. They are still there. People call them the 'double dykes'. The four heroes defended themselves there for a week.

In the story, the Picts were surviving on biadh nan treun 'the food of the heroes'. The account is written in English but it's the Gaelic name that the author used. Biadh nan treun. Unfortunately, he doesn't explain what it is.

Finally, there was no food left. The old man agreed to speak to Niall's messenger. The messenger promised that they would be released if they would tell the Gaels how to make heather ale.

The old man agreed, but on a strange condition. He and his two

Bha mi ag innse seann sgeulachd à Gall-Ghàidhealaibh dhuibh. Bha feachd mòr aig Niall Naoi-ghiallach, Àrd-rìgh na h-Èireann. Bha iad a' toirt ionnsaigh air na Cruithnich mu dheireadh ann an Gall-Ghàidhealaibh. Bha na Cruithnich air an iomain gu tairbeart faisg air Maol Ghall-Ghàidheil. Cha robh ach ceathrar aca beò – seann duine agus a thriùir mhac.

Air cùl an tairbeirt bha dig agus uchdan. Tha iad fhathast ann. Canaidh daoine na *double-dykes* riutha. Rinn an ceathrar ghaisgeach dìon orra fhèin an sin airson seachdain.

Anns an sgeulachd, bha na Cruithnich gan cumail fhèin beò air 'biadh nan treun' – *the food of the heroes*. Tha an cunntas sgrìobhte ann am Beurla, ach 's e an t-ainm Gàidhlig a chleachd an sgrìobhadair. 'Biadh nan treun'. Gu mì-fhortanach, chan eil e a' mìneachadh dè tha ann.

Mu dheireadh, cha robh biadh air fhàgail. Dh'aontaich an seann duine bruidhinn ri teachdaire aig Niall. Gheall an teachdaire gum biodh iad air an leigeil mu sgaoil nan innseadh iad do na Gàidheil mar a dhèanadh iad leann-fraoich.

Dh'aontaich am bodach, ach air cùmhnant annasach. Bhiodh e fhèin agus a

youngest sons would be put to death. The oldest lad – Trost – would tell the Sionnach (Niall’s Pictish spy) in a whisper how they would make heather ale. It’s the Sionnach (‘fox’) that would reveal the recipe’s secret. And Trost would be freed.

The king agreed to the condition. The Sionnach went ahead. He had a sword. Trost was unarmed. Trost asked the other man to go with him to the summit of the Mull. They were on a cliff, high above the sea.

The Sionnach knew the king wasn’t keen on him. If he didn’t get the recipe, he would be killed.

‘Come closer,’ said Trost to him. ‘Nobody but you must hear the recipe from my lips.’

Suddenly, Trost put his arms around the Sionnach. He shouted that the recipe would be secret forever. He jumped off the cliff to his death, taking the Sionnach – and the recipe – with him.

dhithis mhac a b’ òige air an cur gu bàs. Bhiodh an gille a bu shine aige – Trost – ag innse don t-Sionnach (am fear-brathaidh Cruithneach aig Niall) ann an cagair mar a dhèanadh iad leann-fraoich. ’S e an Sionnach a bhriseadh dìomhaireachd na reasabaidh. Agus bhiodh Trost air a shaoradh.

Dh’aontaich an rìgh ris a’ chùmhnannt. Chaidh an Sionnach air adhart. Bha claidheamh aige. Cha robh armachd aig Trost. Dh’iarr Trost air an fhear eile dhol cuide ris gu mullach a’ Mhaoil. Bha iad air bearradh, gu h-àrd os cionn na mara.

Bha fios aig an t-Sionnach nach robh an rìgh dèidheil air. Mura faigheadh e an reasabaidh, bhiodh e air a chur gu bàs.

‘Thig nas fhaisge,’ thuirt Trost ris. ‘Chan fhaod duine sam bith ach thu fhèin an reasabaidh a chluinntinn o mo bhilean.’

Gu h-obann, chuir Trost a ghàirdeanan timcheall an t-Sionnach. Dh’èigh e gum biodh an reasabaidh dìomhair gu sìorraidh. Leum e far a’ bhearraidh gu a bhàs, a’ toirt an t-Sionnach – agus an reasabaidh – leis.