

## 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 162 (which corresponds to Litir 466). Ruairidh can be contacted at [roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

*Where did the name come from for the highest mountains on the Isle of Skye? An Cuiltheann – The Cuillin. Peter Drummond has an interesting opinion in his book Scottish Hill Names.*

*People were saying at one time that the name came from the Gaelic hero, Cuchullin. Cuchullin has links to the Isle of Skye, at least according to oral tradition. He learned his fighting skills from Queen Sgàthach. She had a castle at Dùn Sgàthaich in Sleat [peninsula in south Skye].*

*Some [people] have said that the name came from another Gaelic hero – Fionn MacCumhail [also known in Scotland as Fingal]. Above Portree there is Suidhe Fhinn – “Fionn’s seat”. Fionn, according to oral tradition was sitting there often. He was watching the Fenians [his warriors] when they were hunting. So An Cuiltheann is Cùil Fhinn, the nook or hiding place of Fionn. That’s not particularly likely, however.*

*Some [people] have said that*

*Cò às a thàinig an t-ainm airson nam beann as àirde anns an Eilean Sgitheanach? An Cuiltheann – The Cuillin. Tha beachd inntinneach aig Peter Drummond anns an leabhar aige Scottish Hill Names.*

*Bha daoine ag ràdh aig aon àm gun tàinig an t-ainm bhon ghaisgeach Ghàidhealach, Cuchulainn. Tha ceangal aig Cuchulainn don Eilean Sgitheanach, co-dhiù a rèir beul-aithris. Dh’ionnsaich e na sgilean sabaid aige bhon Bhanrigh Sgàthach. Bha caisteal aice aig Dùn Sgàthaich ann an Slèite.*

*Tha cuid air a ràdh gun tàinig an t-ainm bho ghaisgeach Gàidhealach eile – Fionn MacCumhail. Os cionn Phort Rìgh tha Suidhe Fhinn – Fionn’s seat. Bha Fionn, a rèir beul-aithris, an sin gu tric. Bha e a’ coimhead air an Fhèinn nuair a bha iad a’ sealg. ’S e An Cuiltheann, ma-thà, Cùil Fhinn, the nook or hiding place of Fionn. Chan eil sin uabhasach coltach, ge-tà.*

*Tha feadhainn air a ràdh gu bheil an*

*the name is connected to the Gaelic for holly – cuileann. Those mountains are sharp, as are holly leaves. But, again, that’s not [a] likely [explanation].*

*Peter Drummond tells us that perhaps the name came from the Vikings. There are mountains in Norway called Kjølén. There are others called Kiolen in Iceland. There are also mountains in Norway called Velskjølén and Kvitingskjølén. And kjølén means “high rocks”. Did Cuiltheann come from the Scandinavian name for those mountains – Kjølén?*

*I understand that kjølén also means “an druim”. That’s a druim on a boat – the keel in English. Perhaps the old Vikings thought that some mountains were like a boat’s keel. That’s when the boat is upside-down.*

*Kjølén – Cuiltheann – An Cuiltheann – The Cuillin. It could be [correct], right enough.*

t-ainm co-cheangailte ris a’ Ghàidhlig airson *holly* – cuileann. Tha na beanntan sin gu math biorach, mar a tha duilleagan cuilinn. Ach a-rithist, chan eil sin coltach.

Tha Peter Drummond ag innse dhuinn gur dòcha gun tàinig an t-ainm bho na Lochlannaich. Tha beanntan ann an Nirribhidh air a bheil *Kjølén* mar ainm. Tha feadhainn eile air a bheil *Kiolen* ann an Innis Tìle. Tha beanntan ann an Nirribhidh cuideachd air a bheil *Velskjølén* agus *Kvitingskjølén*. Agus tha *kjølén* a’ ciallachadh “creagan àrda”. An tàinig Cuiltheann bhon ainm Lochlannach airson nam beann sin – *Kjølén*?

Tha mi a’ tuigsinn gu bheil *kjølén* cuideachd a’ ciallachadh “an druim”. Sin druim air bàta – *the keel* ann am Beurla. Ma dh’fhaodte gun do smaoinich na seann Lochlannaich gun robh cuid de bheanntan coltach ri druim bàta. Sin nuair a tha am bàta bun-os-cionn.

*Kjølén – Cuiltheann – An Cuiltheann – The Cuillin.* Dh’fhaodadh e bhith, ceart gu leòr.