

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 185 (which corresponds to Litir 489). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

It's not obvious that the word ptarmigan came from Gaelic. But it did – from the word tàrmachan. It's unfortunate that the “p” is there at the start. The word looks Greek, rather than Scottish.

The ptarmigan has a special place in Alaska. The ptarmigan is their state bird. It was chosen as that in 1955. Ptarmigan are very plentiful in Alaska. Many people hunt them and eat them.

The ptarmigan in Alasga is not identical with our ptarmigan. It's more like our grouse [“heather-hen”]. But it goes white in the winter like our ptarmigan does. The grouse doesn't change its colour in the winter in Scotland.

There is a small town in Alaska called Chicken. Yup, Chicken. Chicken, Alaska. Population – seventeen. Well, I did say it was a small town. But how did it get a strange name like that? Well, it's connected to the ptarmigan. And the “p” that

Chan eil e follaiseach gun tàinig am facal *ptarmigan* bhon Ghàidhlig. Ach thàinig – bhon fhacal *tàrmachan*. Tha e mì-fhortanach gu bheil am “p” ann aig an toiseach. Tha am facal a' coimhead Grèigeach, seach Albannach.

Tha àite sònraichte aig an *tàrmachan* ann an Alasga. 'S e an *tàrmachan* an t-eun-stàite aca. Chaidh a thaghadh mar sin ann an naoi ceud deug, caogad 's a còig (1955). Tha *tàrmachain* uabhasach pailt ann an Alasga. Tha mòran daoine gan sealg is gan ithe.

Chan eil an *tàrmachan* ann an Alasga co-ionnan ris an *tàrmachan* againne. Tha e nas coltaiche ris a' chirc-fhraoich againne. Ach tha e a' dol geal anns a' gheamhradh mar a tha an *tàrmachan* againne. Cha bhi a' chearc-fhraoich ag atharrachadh a dath anns a' gheamhradh ann an Alba.

Tha baile beag ann an Alasga air a bheil Chicken mar ainm. Seadh, Chicken. Chicken, Alasga. Sluagh – seachd duine deug. Uill, thuirt mi gur e baile beag a tha ann. Ach ciamar a fhuair e ainm neònach mar sin? Uill, tha e co-cheangailte ris an *tàrmachan*. Agus am “p” nach bu chòir a bhith

shouldn't be there!

Chicken is in the east of Alaska close to the border with Canada. People went there in the 19th Century. They were miners. They were looking for gold.

At the start of the Twentieth Century, there were plenty of people in the area. There were enough to open a post office. But, for that, they had to choose a name for the town. What were they going to choose as a name?

Well, ptarmigan were numerous in the area. The miners themselves liked them. Thus, they decided that the town would be called "Ptarmigan". Ptarmigan with a silent [unsounded] "p". But the "p" was a problem. There was disagreement.

The people weren't agreeing with each other on how they would spell the name. So they discarded "Ptarmigan". They chose "Chicken" instead!

ann!

Tha Chicken ann an taobh an ear Alasga faisg air a' chrìch le Canada. Chaidh daoine ann anns an naoidheamh linn deug. 'S e mèinn-earan a bha annta. Bha iad a' lorg òr.

Aig toiseach an fhicheadamh linn, bha daoine gu leòr anns an sgìre. Bha gu leòr ann airson oifis puist fhosgladh. Ach, airson sin, bha aca ri ainm a thaghadh airson a' bhaile. Dè bha iad a' dol a thaghadh mar ainm?

Uill, bha tàrmachain pailt anns an sgìre. Bha na mèinnearan fhèin measail orra. Mar sin, cho-dhùin iad "Ptarmigan" a bhith air a' bhaile mar ainm. Ptarmigan le "p" neo-fhuaimnichte. Ach, bha am "p" na thrioblaid. Bha easaonta ann.

Cha robh na daoine ag aontachadh ri chèile mar a litricheadh iad an t-ainm. Mar sin, leig iad "Ptarmigan" seachad. Thagh iad "Chicken" na àite!