

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 283 (which corresponds to Litir 587). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

The Gaelic for The Milky Way is Slighe Chlann Uisnich [“the path of the children of Uisneach]. Milky Way came into English from the Latin Via Lactea. Many languages took their name for the Milky Way from Latin. The Romance languages themselves are like that. In Italy, for example, it's Via Lattea. The German Milchstraße and the Dutch Melkweg are translations from Latin. As are the names in the Slavic languages.

But some of the names are connected to legends. Ours is like that. Slighe Chlann Uisnich is named for three heroes. They were Deirdre's companions – Deirdre's lover, Naois, and his brothers, Aillean and Àrdan. The brothers made a famous journey between Scotland and Ireland. That was Slighe Chlann Uisnich.

I have a book open in front of me. It's title is Reul-eòlas [Astronomy]. It's Patrick Moore that wrote it. John Angus MacLeod translated it to Gaelic. They write this about the Milky Way: “I'm afraid that you'll hardly see it in the Highlands in the summer, but in the winter it is glorious.” Well, I was out during the summer, camping. I saw the Milky

'S e a' Ghàidhlig air The Milky Way Slighe Chlann Uisnich. Thàinig Milky Way don Bheurla bhon Laidinn Via Lactea. Thug mòran cànanan an ainm airson a Milky Way bhon Laidinn. Tha na cànanan Laideannach fhèin mar sin. Ann an Eadailtis, mar eisimpleir, 's e Via Lattea. Tha a' Ghearmailtis Milchstraße agus an Dùitsis Melkweg mar eadar-theangachadh air an Laidinn. Tha, agus na h-ainmean anns na cànanan Slàbhach.

Ach tha cuid de dh'ainmean co-cheangailte ri fionnsgeulan. Tha am fear againne mar sin. Tha Slighe Chlann Uisnich air ainmeachadh airson trìuir ghaisgeach. B' iad na companaich aig Deirdre – leannan Deirdre, Naois, agus a bhràithrean, Aillean is Àrdan. Rinn na bràithrean slighe ainmeil eadar Alba is Èirinn. B' e sin Slighe Chlann Uisnich.

Tha leabhar fosgailte air mo bheulaibh. 'S e an tiotal air Reul-eòlas. 'S e Pàdraig Moore a sgrìobh e. Rinn Iain Aonghas MacLeòid eadar-theangachadh air gu Gàidhlig. Tha iad a' sgrìobhadh seo mu Shlighe Chlann Uisnich: “Tha eagal orm gur gann gum faic sibh i air Ghàidhealtachd anns an t-Samhradh, ach tron Gheamhradh tha i òirdheirc.” Uill, bha mi a-muigh as t-

Way very clearly.

I was in Glen Etive. That's in the Western Highlands. It's near Glencoe. Many people say that Deirdre and the Sons [Children] of Uisneach were living in Glen Etive.

Dùn Dearduil of Glen Etive is beautiful. It's a grassy hill. It's above the river. There are high mountains round about it. I stood on the top of the hill. As it was in the story, "the deer of the speckled slope" were there. And there were "salmon of the rapid torrent" in the river.

I camped at the bottom end of the glen. I woke during the night. I put my head out of the tent. There was no light. There was none, at least, with the exception of the stars. Above me was the Milky Way. It was clear and beautiful. Slighe Chlann Uisnich in Glen Etive on a beautiful night. It doesn't get any better than that!

samhradh, a' campachadh. Chunnaic mi Slighe Chlann Uisnich gu math soilleir.

Bha mi ann an Gleann Eite. Tha sin air taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd. Tha e faisg air Gleann Comhann. Tha mòran ag ràdh gun robh Deirdre agus Clann Uisnich a' fuireach ann an Gleann Eite.

Tha Dùn Dearduil Ghleann Eite brèagha. 'S e cnoc feurach a tha ann. Tha e os cionn na h-aibhne. Tha beanntan àrda timcheall air. Sheas mi air mullach a' chnuic. Mar a bha anns an sgeulachd, bha "fèidh a' bhearraidh bhric" ann. Agus bha "bradain a' bhoinne bhrais" san abhainn.

Champaich mi aig ceann shìos a' ghlinne. Dhùisg mi air an oidhche. Chuir mi mo cheann a-mach às an teanta. Cha robh solas sam bith ann. Cha robh, co-dhiù, ach na rionnagan. Os mo chionn bha Slighe Chlann Uisnich. Bha i soilleir agus àlainn. Slighe Chlann Uisnich ann an Gleann Eite air oidhche bhrèagha. Chan eil e a' fàs càil nas fheàrr na sin!