

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 327 (which corresponds to Litir 631). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

There are cairidhean/yairs in many places in the Highlands. They are all old. People haven't used them for a long time. Cairidh means a small stone wall that people were building on a beach. Fish were swimming over the wall with the flood tide. When the ebb occurred, the water left; but the fish didn't leave. It was easy for people to pick up the fish from the sand.

It would be good to rebuild and reuse old yairs,. They would still work, I'm sure. In olden times people were catching salmon in them. Now, when I say "salmon" I mean "Atlantic salmon". I'm telling you that because there are other "salmons". For example, the scaly salmon. Do you know it? That's the sturgeon. The sturgeon grows to a prodigious size. The eggs are valuable. That's the stuff called caviar. Do you like it?

People were catching sturgeons in yairs from time to time. It's recorded in an old manuscript, the Wardlaw Manuscript. It happened in the Beaully Firth, west of Inverness, in 1660. The sturgeon

Tha cairidhean ann an grunn àiteachan air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Tha iad uile sean. Cha do chleachd daoine iad airson ùine mhòr. Tha *cairidh* a' ciallachadh balla beag cloiche a bha daoine a' togail air tràigh. Bha èisg a' snàmh thairis air a' bhalla nuair a bha a' mhuir a' lìonadh. Nuair a bha an tràghadh ann, dh'fhalbh an t-uisge; ach cha do dh'fhalbh na h-èisg. Bha e furasta do dhaoine na h-èisg a thogail far na gainmhich.

Bhiodh e math seann chairidhean a thogail agus a chleachdadh a-rithist. Bhiodh iad ag obair fhathast, tha mi cinnteach. Anns an t-seann aimsir bha daoine a' glacadh bhradan annta. Nise, nuair a chanas mi "bradan", tha mi a' ciallachadh "Atlantic salmon". Tha mi ag innse sin dhuibh oir tha "bradain" eile ann. Mar eisimpleir, tha am *bradan sligeach* ann – "the scaly salmon" – am bradan sligeach. A bheil sibh eòlach air? 'S e sin an *sturgeon*. Tha am bradan sligeach a' fàs uabhasach mòr. Tha na h-ùighean luachmhor. 'S e sin stuth ris an canar *caviar*. An toigh leibh e?

Bha daoine a' glacadh bradan sligeach ann an cairidhean bho àm gu àm. Tha e clàraichte ann an seann làmh-sgrìobhainn, am *Wardlaw Manuscript*. Thachair e ann an Linne Fharair (am Beaully Firth), siar air Inbhir Nis, anns a'

was ten feet long.

At that time there was a garrison of English soldiers in Inverness. They bought the sturgeon. It cost four English pounds Sterling. They took it back to the fort (“the citadel”). They reckoned they got a bargain. In England, a fish like that would have cost at least ten English pounds.

Today a fisherman would get perhaps eight thousand pounds for a fish like that! A yair would then be very profitable. But there is a problem. If you want to sell a sturgeon, you have to get permission from the queen. According to the law, she owns every sturgeon in British waters.

bhliadhna sia ceud deug is seasgad (1660). Bha am bradan sligeach deich troighean a dh’fhaid.

Aig an àm sin, bha gearastan de shaighdearan Sasannach ann an Inbhir Nis. Cheannaich iadsan am bradan sligeach. Chosg e ceithir puinnd Shasannach. Thug iad air ais don ghearastan e. Bha iad dhen bheachd gun d’ fhuair iad bargan. Ann an Sasainn, bha iasg mar sin air cosg co-dhiù deich puinnd Shasannach.

Anns an latha an-diugh bhiodh iasgair a’ faighinn ’s dòcha ochd mìle not airson iasg mar sin! Bhiodh cairidh ùr an uair sin gu math prothaideach. Ach tha cnap-starradh ann. Ma tha thu ag iarraidh bradan sligeach a reic, feumaidh tu cead fhaighinn bhon bhanrigh. A rèir an lagha, ’s ann leathase a tha gach bradan sligeach ann an uisgeachan Bhreatainn.