

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 341 (which corresponds to Litir 645). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Do you know the word geodha or geo? Geodha in Gaelic, geo in Scots. It's plentiful in place-names in the north of Scotland. It's especially plentiful in Caithness. There are a few examples of Gaelic names in Caithness, such as Geodha nam Fitheach. But most of them have a Scots or Scandinavian form.

The word comes from the Old Norse gjá. Some are easy to understand, such as Red Geo, Castle Geo and Broad geo. Examples like Fullie Geo, Selly Geo and Skippie Geo are not as clear. They came from Old Norse. Fullie Geo means "the geo of the birds". Selly Geo means "the geo of the seals". And Skippie Geo means "the geo of the ships".

This is what Jim Miller says in his book A Caithness Wordbook - "geo: narrow, usually cliff-bound, inlet of the sea, or chasm in a cliff." I was in Caithness primary schools recently. I was doing lessons with the children on place-names. They really enjoyed it.

I was asking the children how they would pronounce the word "g-e-o". Some were saying "geo" as in geology or geography. I think that's

A bheil sibh eòlach air an fhacal geodha no geo? Geodha ann an Gàidhlig, geo ann an Albais. Tha e pailt ann an ainmean-àite air costaichean ceann a tuath na h-Alba. Tha e gu sònraichte pailt ann an Gallaibh. Tha eisimpleir no dhà ann de dh'ainmean Gàidhlig ann an Gallaibh, leithid Geodha nam Fitheach. Ach tha dreach Albais no Lochlannach air a' chuid as motha aca.

Tha am facal a' tighinn bhon t-Seann Lochlannais gjá. Tha feadhainn furasta a thuigsinn, leithid Red Geo, Castle Geo agus Broad Geo. Chan eil leithid Fullie Geo, Selly Geo no Skippie Geo cho soilleir. Thàinig iadsan bhon t-Seann Lochlannais. Tha Fullie Geo a' ciallachadh "geodha nan eun". Tha Selly Geo a' ciallachadh "geodha nan ròn". Agus tha Skippie Geo a' ciallachadh "geodha nan long".

Seo na chanas Jim Miller anns an leabhar aige A Caithness Wordbook - "geo: narrow, usually cliff-bound, inlet of the sea, or chasm in a cliff." Bha mi ann am bunsgoiltean Ghallaibh o chionn ghoirid. Bha mi a' dèanamh leasanan leis a' chloinn air ainmean-àite. Chòrd e riutha gu mòr.

Bha mi a' faighneachd dhen chloinn ciamar a chanadh iad am facal "g-e-o". Bha cuid ag ràdh "geo" mar ann an geology no geography. Cha chreid mi nach e sin

a modern pronouncation. Some others were saying “gee-o” or “gyo”. I said I’d prefer “gyo”, but that both are okay.

But some pupils in Wick were saying “goe”. And, indeed, that can be seen in Whaligoe and Girnigoe. There are also two villages near Wick which are called Staxigoe and Papigoe. I said to a particular class in Wick – “Can anybody think of a place-name near here that ends in ‘goe’?” A young lad put his hand up.

“Yes, yes!” he said.

“And?” I said, “What is your place that ends in ‘goe’?” I was expecting him to say “Taxigoe” or “Papigoe”. Or perhaps “Girnigoe”.

But that’s not what he said. With a big smile on his face, thinking that he’d got the correct answer, he said, “Glasgow!”

fuaimneachadh ùr. Bha cuid eile ag ràdh “gee-o” no “gyo”. Thuir mi riutha gum b’ fheàrr leam “gyo”, ged a tha an dà chuid ceart gu leòr.

Ach bha cuid de sgoilearan ann an Inbhir Ùige ag ràdh “goe”. Agus, ceart gu leòr, tha sin ri fhaicinn ann an Whaligoe agus Girnigoe. Tha cuideachd dà bhaile bheag faisg air Inbhir Ùige air a bheil Staxigoe agus Papigoe. Thuir mi ri clas a bha seo ann an Inbhir Ùige – “An urrainn do dhuine sam bith smaoinichadh air ainm-àite faisg air seo a tha a’ crìochnachadh le “goe”? Chuir balach òg a làmh suas.

“Yes, yes!” thuir e.

“Seadh?” thuir mise. “Dè an t-àite a th’ agads’ a tha a’ crìochnachadh le ‘goe’?” Bha mi an dùil gun canadh e “Staxigoe” no “Papigoe”. No ’s dòcha “Girnigoe”.

Ach chan e sin a thuir e. Le gàire mhòr air aodann, agus e a’ smaoinichadh gun d’ fhuair e freagairt cheart, thuir e “Glasgow”!