

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIleathain

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 355 (which corresponds to Litir 659). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Spring – the season of hunger. Well, in the old days, at least. Food was getting scarce in Spring. When food was scarce, what were people eating? Well, a proverb tells us. In Spring, when the sheep is thin, the shellfish are fat. In Spring, when the sheep is thin, the shellfish are fat. In Spring, when the sheep is thin, the shellfish are fat. People were going to the seashore (if they were near the shore). They were getting shellfish.

But it wasn't of any use when the tide was in. They were waiting until the tide was out. Here's another proverb for you: Pick shellfish when the tide is out. It's equivalent to the English, 'make hay while the sun shines'. Pick shellfish when the tide is out.

That's shellfish. But what else were people eating when food was scarce? There was a plant that was important. It's plentiful on the machair. It's scientific name is Potentilla anserina. In English – silverweed. And in Gaelic, brisgean. It has a long root. The root is a bit like a carrot. It's brittle.

The roots were useful to people. They were eating them. I was reading a bit of an interview, in English, with

An t-Earrach – ràith an acrais. Uill, anns an t-seann aimsir, co-dhiù. Bha biadh a' fàs gann as t-Earrach. Nuair a bha biadh gann, dè bha daoine ag ithe? Uill, tha seanfhacal ag innse dhuinn: As t-Earrach, nuair a bhios a' chaora caol, bidh am maorach reamhar. *In Spring, when the sheep is thin, the shellfish are fat.* As t-Earrach, nuair a bhios a' chaora caol, bidh am maorach reamhar. Bha daoine a' dol don chladach (nam biodh iad faisg air cladach). Bha iad a' faighinn maorach.

Ach cha robh e gu feum sam bith nuair a bha an làn ann. Bha iad a' feitheamh gus an robh tràigh ann. Seo seanfhacal eile dhuibh: *Buain maorach nuair a tha an tràigh ann.* Tha e co-ionann ris a' Bheurla, *make hay while the sun shines.* Buain maorach nuair a tha an tràigh ann.

Sin maorach. Ach dè eile a bha daoine ag ithe nuair a bha biadh gann? Bha lus ann a bha cudromach. Tha e pailt air a' mhachair. 'S e an t-ainm saidheansail a tha air *Potentilla anserina*. Ann am Beurla – *silverweed*. Agus, ann an Gàidhlig, *brisgean*. Tha freumh fada air. Tha an freumh car coltach ri curran. Tha e brisg.

Bha na freumhan feumail do dhaoine. Bha iad gan ithe. Bha mi a' leughadh pìos bho agallamh, ann am

<p><i>a Gaelic-speaking woman. She explained that they were harvesting the roots with a rake or spade. They were cleaning the roots. The roots were about six inches long. People were roasting the roots on an open fire.</i></p> <p><i>She said that they really enjoyed that food. Food wasn't scarce at the time. It's just that they enjoyed the silverweed. She said that the root has a nice nutty taste.</i></p> <p><i>The people weren't doing much with the leaves. But they were drying them for the cattle. They were making winter hay with the leaves. The cattle enjoyed the silverweed leaves. They were going past all the other types of hay to get to the silverweed.</i></p> <p><i>That's the silverweed. I'll tell you more about it next week.</i></p>	<p>Beurla, le bana-Ghàidheal. Mhìnich i gun robh iad a' buain nam freumhan le ràcan no spaid. Bha iad a' glanadh nam freumhan. Bha na freumhan mu shia òirlich a dh'fhaid. Bha daoine a' ròstadh nam freumhan air teine fosgailte.</p> <p>Thuir i gun do chòrd am biadh sin riutha. Cha robh am biadh gann aig an àm. 'S e dìreach gun robh am brisgean a' còrdadh riutha. Thuir i gu bheil blas math cnòthach air an fhreumh.</p> <p>Cha robh na daoine a' dèanamh mòran leis na duilleagan. Ach bha iad gan tiormachadh airson a' chruidh. Bha iad a' dèanamh feur geamhraidh leis na duilleagan. Chòrd duilleagan a' bhrisgein ris a' chrodh. Bha iad a' dol seachad air gach feur eile airson faighinn chun a' bhrisgein.</p> <p>Sin am brisgean. Innsidh mi tuilleadh mu dheidhinn an-ath-sheachdain.</p>
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