

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 390 (which corresponds to Litir 694). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

Árainn Mhór is a small island in Ireland. It's off the coast of Donegal. I was on that island in the nineties. My family was with me. We were on summer holidays. And an amazing thing happened on Árainn Mhór.

We found a beautiful bay. It had a shingle beach. Behind the shore, there was a good place for a tent. There was one house up on the hill. An old man lived there. We went to speak to him. He was happy that we were going to camp near the shore. We erected the tent.

Big waves were breaking on the shore. An amazing thing happened. The bay began to fill with fish. And I mean 'fill'! It was as if the bay were full of fish.

There were small silver ones – millions of them. They were sprats. After them came enormous shoals of mackerel and saithe. They were eating the sprats. We brought out our fishing rods. I like mackerel.

At times, however, we put our rods aside. Because the view was so good. Indeed, the view was marvellous. We saw fish swimming in the crests of the waves. In the sunlight, the colours were amazing,

'S e Árainn Mhór eilean beag ann an Èirinn. Tha e far costa Thìr Chonaill. Bha mi anns an eilean sin sna naochadan. Bha an teaghlach agam còmhla rium. Bha sinn air làithean-saora samhraidh. Agus thach-air rud iongantach ann an Árainn Mhór.

Lorg sinn bàgh brèagha. Bha mol ann. Air cùl a' chladaich, bha àite math ann airson teanta. Bha aon taigh shuas air cnoc. Bha bodach a' fuireach ann. Chaidh sinn a bhruidhinn ris. Bha e toilichte gun robh sinn a' dol a champachadh faisg air a' chladach. Chuir sinn an teanta an-àirde.

Bha tuinn mhòra a' briseadh air a' chladach. Thachair rud iongantach. Thòisich am bàgh air lìonadh le èisg. Agus tha mi a' ciallachadh 'lìonadh'! Bha e coltach gun robh am bàgh làn èisg.

Bha feadhainn bheaga airgid ann – milleanan dhiubh. 'S e garbhagan a bha ann. Às an dèidh, thàinig sgaothan mòra mòra de rionnaich agus saoidheanan. Bha iad ag ithe nan garbhagan. Thug sinn ar slatan-iasgaich a-mach. Is toigh leam rionnaich.

Aig amannan, ge-tà, chuir sinn ar slatan an dàrna taobh. Oir bha an sealladh cho math. Gu dearbh, bha an sealladh mìorbhaileach. Chunnaic sinn èisg a' snàmh ann am bilean nan tonn. Ann an solas na grèine, bha na dathan iongantach,

particularly the mackerel.

We were catching plenty of fish. Mackerel to begin with. Then the mackerel left. After the mackerel, it's saithe we were catching. There were too many. And I'm not too keen on the flavour of [the] saithe.

I thought of the old man in the house. Perhaps he was wanting fish. I asked the children to go up to his house. I said to them, 'Tell him we have too many fish. We'll be pleased to give him some. Tell him that we call them saoidhean in our Gaelic. The people of Scotland call them saithe in English. The English call them coalfish.' I was expecting that the old man would understand one of those names. But he didn't, as we'll see next week.

gu h-àraidh na rionnaich.

Bha sinn a' glacadh èisg gu leòr. Rionnaich an toiseach. An uair sin dh'fhalbh na rionnaich. Às dèidh nan rionnach, 's e saoidheanan a bha sinn a' glacadh. Bha cus ann. Agus chan eil mi ro dhèidheil air blas an t-saoidhein.

Smaoinich mi air a' bhodach anns an taigh. 'S dòcha gun robh esan ag iarraidh èisg. Dh'iarr mi air a' chloinn a dhol suas don taigh aige. Thuirt mi riutha, 'Inns dha gu bheil cus èisg againn. Bidh sinn toilichte feadhainn a thoirt dha. Inns dha gur e saoidhean a chanas sinn riutha anns a' Ghàidhlig againn fhèin. Canaidh muinntir na h-Alba saithe riutha ann am Beurla. Canaidh na Sasannaich coalfish riutha.' Bha mi an dùil gun tuigeadh am bodach fear de na h-ainmean sin. Ach cha do thuig, mar a chì sinn an-ath-sheachdain.