

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 398 (which corresponds to Litir 702). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was on two special small islands this year. One of them was of Gaelic heritage and the other was non-Gaelic.

In May I went to Soay. That is off the south of Skye. It's very beautiful. The Cuillin are very close. Gavin Maxwell made Soay famous. He had an industry there. He was hunting [the] basking sharks.

Although Soay is beautiful, it's not fertile. I'm sure that people existed on the bounty of the sea. There were 158 people living there in the nineteenth century. But conditions deteriorated. In 1952 the population sought assistance from the government. They were wanting to leave the island. In June 1953, they went to live on Mull.

The other island I was on this year is Stroma in Caithness. Stroma is more fertile than Soay. But it's surrounded by a dangerous sea. The marine currents in the Pentland Firth are strong.

Although there are two Gaelic place names on the island – on skerries off the shore – the people

Bha mi air dà eilean bheag shònraichte am-bliadhna. Bha fear dhiubh Gàidhealach agus am fear eile Gallta.

Ann an a' Chèitean chaidh mi a Shòthaigh. Tha sin far ceann a deas an Eilein Sgitheanaich. Tha e uabhasach brèagha. Tha an Cuiltheann gu math faisg. Rinn Gavin Maxwell Sòthaigh ainmeil. Bha gnìomhachas aige ann. Bha e a' sealg nan cearban.

Ged a tha Sòthaigh brèagha, chan eil e torrach. Tha mi cinnteach gun robh daoine beò air toradh na mara. Bha ceud, caogad 's a h-ochd daoine a' fuireach ann san naoidheamh linn deug. Ach dh'fhàs cùisean duilich. Ann an naoi ceud deug, caogad 's a dhà (1952), dh'iarr an sluagh taic bhon riaghaltas. Bha iad ag iarraidh an t-eilean fhàgail. Anns an Ògmhios naoi ceud deug, caogad 's a trì (1953), chaidh iad a dh'fhuireach ann am Muile.

'S e an t-eilean eile san robh mi am-bliadhna – Stròma ann an Gallaibh. Tha Stròma nas torraiche na Sòthaigh. Ach tha e air a chuirteachadh le muir chunnartach. Tha na sruthan mara anns a' Chaol Arcach làidir.

Ged a tha dà ainm-àite Ghàidhlig anns an eilean – air sgeirean far a' chladaich – chan e Gàidheil a bha sna

were not Gaels. I'd say many of them had Norse ancestry. They had names like Manson, Sinclair, Simpson and Robertson. They spoke a particular dialect of Scots.

Now there is no population there. The last ones left in the sixties. A harbour was built but the population had declined too much. There were good jobs at Dounreay, on the mainland.

Stroma is unusual. The houses are still there. From a distance away, you think there is still a population there. But on closer inspection, you see that the houses are empty. There's nothing on the island but sheep.

On the shore of Stroma, I saw a large number of seals. I've never seen as many in one place. But, on that afternoon, a large pod of killer whales came. They went in among the seals. They ate their fill. They left the sea off the shore of Stroma red with the blood of the seals.

daoine. Chanainn gun robh sinnsireachd Lochlannach aig mòran dhiubh. Bha ainmean orra mar Manson, Sinclair, Simpson agus Robertson. Bha dual-chainnt Albais shònraichte aca.

A-nise chan eil sluagh ann. Dh'fhalbh an fheadhainn mu dheireadh anns na seasgadan. Chaidh cala a thogail ach bha an sluagh air a dhol ro bheag. Bha obraichean tarraingeach aig Dùnrath, air tìr-mòr.

Tha Stròma annasach. Tha na taighean fhathast ann. Bho phìos air falbh, tha thu a' smaoinichadh gu bheil sluagh fhathast ann. Ach, faisg air làimh, chì thu gu bheil na taighean falamh. Chan eil dad anns an eilean ach caoraich.

Air cladach Stròma, chunnaic mi an t-uabhas de ròn. Chan fhaca mi uiread riamh anns an aon àite. Ach, air an fheasgar sin, thàinig buidheann mhòr de mhadaidhean-cuain. Chaidh iad am measg nan ròn. Dh'ith iad an sàth. Dh'fhàg iad a' mhuir far cladach Stròma dearg le fuil nan ròn.