

**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 430 (which corresponds to Litir 734). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk).

*Do you know Loch Cuithir? It's on the east side of Trotternish in the north of Skye. It's near a crofting village called Lealt. The loch is situated on the moorland under Sgùrr a' Mhadaidh Ruaidh. It's beautiful.*

*Loch Cuithir today is very peaceful and quiet. But it wasn't always like that. There was once an industrial enterprise there. The diatomite industry.*

*The diatomite was coming from the shells of diatoms that were living millions of years ago. A diatom is a tiny plant that lives in water.*

*When they die, their shells go to the bottom. Through time, they form a soft white stone. It's full of silica. It's useful to humans. It was being used, for example, to absorb water and for heat insulation.*

*The diatomite was in beds below the peat. The place was wet. Pumps were being used all the time. The industry started in the final year of the nineteenth century (1899).*

*There are three miles of moorland between Loch Cuithir*

A bheil sibh eòlach air Loch Cuithir? Tha e anns an Taobh Sear, ann an ceann a tuath an Eilein Sgitheanaich. Tha e faisg air baile croitearachd air a bheil An Leth-allt. Tha an loch suidhichte sa mhòintich fo Sgùrr a' Mhadaidh Ruaidh. Tha e brèagha.

Tha Loch Cuithir an-diugh gu math sìtheil is sàmhach. Ach cha robh e riamh mar sin. Bha gnìomhachas tionnsgalach ann aig aon àm. Gnìomhachas na cailc.

Bha a' chailc a' tighinn bho shlìgean dhà-dhadaman, *diatoms*, a bha beò o chionn mìltean bhliadhnaichean. 'S e dà-dhadam lus beag bìodach a tha beò ann an uisge.

Nuair a gheibh iad bàs, bidh an slìgean a' dol don ghrund. Tro thìde nì iad clach bhog bhàn. Tha i làn *silica*. Tha i feumail do mhac-an-duine. Bhathar ga cleachdadh, mar eisimpleir, airson airson uisge a shùghadh agus airson bacadh a chur air call teas.

Bha a' chailc ann an leabannan fo mhòine. Bha an t-àite fliuch. Bhathar a' cur pumpaichean an sàs fad na h-ùine. Thòisich an gnìomhachas anns a' bhliadhna mu dheireadh dhen naoidheamh linn deug (1899).

Tha trì mìle de mhòinteach ann eadar Loch Cuithir agus an cladach.

*and the shore. To take the diatomite away, a railway line was built. On the shore there was a roasting building. The diatomite was dried there, and ground into a powder.*

*The diatomite was going out to a ship in small boats. On days like that, up to eighty people were employed, between the diatomite workers and the shipping staff. Up to fifty people worked at Lealt itself.*

*The industry stopped at the start of the First World War. But it started anew in the fifties. A road was built to the loch. A new factory was built in Uig, on the other side of Trotternish. Lorries were taking wet diatomite between Loch Cuithir and Uig. That wasn't particularly successful. And the industry completely ceased at the start of the sixties.*

*There is a Gaelic book about the industry. That's 'A' Chailc' by Richard Deveria. It's an interesting chapter in the long history of the Isle of Skye.*

Airson a' chailc a thoirt air falbh, bha rathad-iarainn air a thogail. Air a' chladach bha ionad-ròstaidh ann. Bha a' chailc air a tiormachadh an sin agus air a bleith.

Bha a' chailc a' falbh a-mach gu long ann an eathraichean. Air làithean mar sin, bha suas ri ochdad duine a' faighinn cosnadh, eadar luchd na cailc agus luchd nam bàtaichean. Bha suas ri caogad ag obair aig an Leth-allt fhèin.

Thàinig an gnìomhachas gu ceann aig toiseach a' Chiad Chogaidh. Ach thòisich e às ùr anns na caogadan. Chaidh rathad a thogail don loch. Thogadh factaraidh ùr ann an Ùig, air taobh thall Thròndairnis. Bha làraidhean a' toirt cailc fhliuch eadar Loch Cuithir agus Ùig. Cha robh sin cho soirbheachail. Agus thàinig an gnìomhachas gu ceann buileach aig toiseach nan seasgadan.

Tha leabhar Gàidhlig ann mun gnìomhachas. 'S e sin 'A' Chailc' le Richard Deveria. 'S e caibideil inntinneach a tha ann, ann an eachdraidh mhòr an Eilein Sgitheanaich.