

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 527 (which corresponds to Litir 831). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I went past Beinn Eighe in April. It's one of the famous mountains of Wester Ross. It was beautiful, draped with snow.

I had a friend from England with me. He asked what 'Beinn Eighe' meant. I told him 'file mountain'. The mountain is like a file (tool) – the sort with three sides – when you are looking at it from Kinlochewe.

'The name can't be old,' said my friend. 'That type of tool has not existed terribly long.' I didn't know what to say. I went to Blaeu's map that was made in 1665.

Unfortunately, Beinn Eighe is not (marked) on Blaeu's map. Close to it there are two mountain names. One is Bin Rowastack – that's the Ruadh-stac that is part of Beinn Eighe. And there is Bin Inachan. Is that Beinn Eunachan, perhaps 'mountain of little birds'? There is just one mountain close by which has a name somewhat like that today – Beinn an Eòin.

William Roy made maps of the Highlands a hundred years

Chaidh mi seachad air Beinn Eighe anns a' Ghiblean. 'S i tè de bheanntan ainmeil Rois an Iar. Bha i brèagha, le sneachd oirre.

Bha caraid à Sasainn cuide rium. Dh'fhaighnich e gu dè bha 'Beinn Eighe' a' ciallachadh. Thuirt mi 'file mountain' ris. Tha a' bheinn coltach ri eighe – an seòrsa le trì taobhan oirre – nuair a tha thu a' coimhead oirre bho Cheann Loch Iù.

'Feumaidh nach eil an t-ainm sean,' thuirt mo charaid. 'Chan eil a leithid de bhall-acfhainn air a bhith ann uabhasach fada.' Cha robh fios agam dè chanainn. Chaidh mi gu mapa Bhlaeu a chaidh a dhèanamh ann an sia ceud deug, seasgad 's a còig (1665).

Gu mì-fhortanach, chan eil Beinn Eighe air mapa Bhlaeu. Faisg oirre tha dà ainm beinne. 'S e fear dhiubh Bin Rowastack – 's e sin an Ruadh-stac a tha mar phàirt de Bheinn Eighe. Agus tha Bin Inachan ann. An e sin Beinn Eunachan, 's dòcha 'mountain of little birds'? Tha dìreach aon bheinn faisg air làimh le ainm car coltach ri sin an-diugh – Beinn an Eòin.

Rinn Uilleam Roy mapaichean dhen Ghàidhealtachd ceud bliadhna an

after Blaeu. He names Beinn Eighe (Ben Eay) and Beinn an Eòin (Ben Neaun).

I turned to the question, then – were files, particularly three-sided ones, being made before the middle of the eighteenth century? Well, it's my understanding they were.

People were sharpening the teeth of saws with them. I'm thinking particularly of the big saw that people were using to cut trees. The people of Kinlochewe were very familiar with such things. They had an industry connected to the forest. There was an iron industry in the area at one time. The charcoal was made from the trees that were growing next to Loch Maree.

If one has a question about place names on the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, there is an excellent book. It was made by the scholar, the late Roy Wentworth. It was published seventeen years ago. Roy considered that the meaning of the name was indeed 'file mountain'. That will do me.

dèidh Blaeu. Tha esan ag ainmeachadh Beinn Eighe (Ben Eay) agus Beinn an Eòin (Ben Neaun).

Thionndaidh mi chun na ceiste, ma-thà – an robhar a' dèanamh eighean, gu h-àraidh feadhainn trì-thaobhach, ro mheadhan an ochdamh linn deug? Uill, 's e mo thuigse gun robh.

Bha daoine a' geurachadh fiaclan shàbhan leotha. Tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu sònraichte air an t-sàbh mhòr a bha daoine a' cleachdadh airson craobhan a ghearradh. Bha muinntir Cheann Loch Iù gu math eòlach air a leithid. Bha gnìomhachas aca co-cheangailte ris a' choille. Bha gnìomhachas iarainn anns an sgìre uaireigin. Bha an gual-fiodha air a dhèanamh às na craobhan a bha a' fàs ri taobh Loch Ma-ruibhe.

Ma tha ceist sam bith ann mu ainmean-àite air Teàrmann Nàdair Nàiseanta Beinn Eighe, tha leabhar fìor mhath ann. Chaidh a dhèanamh leis an sgoilear Roy Wentworth nach maireann. Chaidh fhoillseachadh o chionn seachd bliadhna deug. Bha Roy còir dhen bheachd dha-rìreabh gur e ciall an ainm 'file mountain'. Nì sin an gnothach dhòmhsa.