

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 542 (which corresponds to Litir 846). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

The word rathad is interesting. The Teach Yourself Gaelic dictionary gives the following as meanings of the word: road, route, way. Rathad mòr means main road, trunk road, highway. At one time the Gaels called the main roads between regions 'the great road of the king'. 'Iron road' meant railway line, although it is 'rail line' that people say today.

Rathad is used in several idioms. We say a-mach às mo rathad or teich às mo rathad for 'get out of my way'. If somebody has died, we might say 'chaidh e às an rathad'.

We use rathad in Gaelic in a different way from road in English. In olden times, however, people were translating rathad to road when they were speaking to English-speakers. But English-speakers wouldn't call the rathaidean on which the Gaels were walking 'roads'.

Why am I thinking about road and rathad? Well, I was

Tha am facal rathad inntinneach. Tha am faclair Teach Yourself Gaelic a' toirt dhuinn na leanas mar chiall air an fhacal: road, route, way. Tha 'rathad mòr' a' ciallachadh main road, trunk road, highway. Aig aon àm bha na Gàidheil a' gabhail 'rathad mòr an rìgh' air na rathaidean as motha eadar sgìrean. Bha 'rathad-iarainn' a' ciallachadh railway line, ged as e 'loidhne-rèile' a chanas daoine an-diugh.

Tha 'rathad' air a chleachdadh ann an grunn ghnàthasan-cainnt. Canaidh sinn a-mach às mo rathad no teich às mo rathad airson get out of my way. Ma tha cuideigin air bàs fhaighinn, dh'fhaodamaid a ràdh, chaidh e às an rathad.

Bidh sinn a' cleachdadh rathad ann an Gàidhlig ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte bho road ann am Beurla. Anns an t-seann aimsir, ge-tà, bha daoine ag eadar-theangachadh rathad gu road nuair a bha iad a' bruidhinn ri luchd na Beurla. Ach chan e 'road' a chanadh luchd na Beurla ris na 'rathaidean' air an robh na Gàidheil a' coiseachd.

Carson a tha mi a' beachdachadh air road agus rathad? Uill, bha mi a'

reading about a trip that Captain Edmund Burt made in the Highlands. That was in the 18th Century. Burt was an agent for General Wade who built many roads in the Highlands. Proper roads. And Burt wrote about the Highlands.

He went on a trip once with horses. Many things about his journey annoyed him. There were not many places where he could get food. He had to go through bogs. His English horses were too heavy. They got stuck in the bogs. And it was difficult for Burt to make his way – [there's the word rathad again] – through the bogs in his big boots.

But the thing that most annoyed him was that his guides would call the tracks on which they were walking 'road'. They were translating rathad to road. And to Edmund Burt, they weren't roads! They would have to wait for the work of General Wade until they would have 'proper' roads in the Highlands!

leughadh mu dheidhinn turas a rinn an Caiptean Edmund Burt air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Bha sin anns an ochdamh linn deug. Bha Burt na mhaor don t-Seanalair Wade a thog mòran rathaidean air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Rathaidean ceart. Agus sgrìobh Burt mun Ghàidhealtachd.

Dh'fhalbh e air chuairt turas le eich. Bha iomadh rud mu a thuras a' cur dragh air. Cha robh mòran àiteachan far am faigheadh e biadh. Bha aige ri a dhol tro bhoglaichean. Bha na h-eich Shasannach aige ro throm. Chaidh iad an sàs anns na boglaichean. Agus bha e duilich do Bhurt a rathad fhèin – agus sin am facal a-rithist – a dhèanamh tro na boglaichean anns na bòtannan mòr' aige.

Ach b' e an rud a bu mhotha a chuir dragh air – gun robh a luchd-iùil a' gabhail *road* air na frith-rathaidean air an robh iad a' coiseachd. Bha iad ag eadar-theangachadh 'rathad' gu *road*. Agus do dh'Edmund Burt, chan e *roads* a bha annta! Dh'fheumadh iad feitheamh ri obair an t-Seanalair Wade gus am biodh rathaidean 'ceart' air a' Ghàidhealtachd!