

# **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 696 (which corresponds to Litir 1,000). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*Hello, again, friends. The 'big' Litir – Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh – has reached a milestone. It started in 1999, more than nineteen years ago. The thousandth one appears this week.*

*Our word for ten hundreds is interesting, isn't it? Mile – like the word in Welsh, French, Latin ... It's thought it came from Latin. If you look [up] the word mìle in a Gaelic dictionary, you'll find two meanings for it – thousand and mile. That's not a coincidence.*

*The Roman soldiers had a mile – mille passus – a thousand paces. However, it wouldn't always be the same. When the soldiers were tired, their paces weren't so long. The Roman general Agrippa created a standard measure. The Roman foot was based on the length of Agrippa's own foot. And there were five feet in a pace.*

*Many countries and cultures had a mile – as a measure of distance – based on the Roman mile. But it was different in different places. A Scottish mile was longer than an English mile. The Scottish mile disappeared when Scotland and*

Halo a-rithist, a chàirdean. Tha an Litir mhòr – Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh – air clach-mhìle a ruigsinn. Thòisich i ann an naoi ceud deug, naochad 's a naoi (1999), còrr is naoi bliadhn' deug air ais. Tha am mìleamh tè a' nochdadh an t-seachdain seo.

Tha am facal againn airson a dheich uiread de cheud inntinneach, nach eil? *Mile* – coltach ris an fhacal ann an Cuimris, Fraingis, Laideann ... Tha dùil gun tàinig e bhon Laidinn. Ma choimheadas sibh air an fhacal *mìle* ann am faclair Gàidhlig, gheibh sibh dà chiall air – *thousand* agus *mile*. Chan e co-thuiteamas a tha sin.

Bha mìle aig na saighdearan Ròmanach – *mille passus* – mìle ceum. Ge-tà, cha bhiodh e co-ionnan fad na h-ùine. Nuair a bha na saighdearan sgìth, cha robh na ceumannan aca cho fada. Chruthaich an seanalair Ròmanach Agrippa slat-tomhais choitcheann. Bha an troigh Ròmanach stèidhichte air fad cas Agrippa fhèin. Agus bha còig troighean ann an ceum no *passus*.

Bha mìle – mar thomhas astair – aig iomadh dùthaich is cultar, stèidhichte air mìle nan Ròmanach. Ach bha i diofraichte ann an diofar àiteachan. Bha mìle

*England came together in the union. A nautical mile is different because that was originally based on a section of the Earth's circumference.*

*It's not clear where the word thousand came from. Perhaps it meant 'a few hundred'. It was in Old English as þúsend. There is a similar word in the Germanic languages. If you go to Norway, you'll hear people say tusen takk. That's equivalent to 'mìle taing' in Gaelic.*

*I said that it was from Latin that our own word came. But is that true in every place? I remember a time I went to visit an old man in the Mackay Country [North Sutherland]. We were speaking in Gaelic about sheep. He used the word sùstan for a thousand. I reckon sùstan came from Old Norse. It was also recorded in Caithness Gaelic.*

*Anyway, it's time for me to go. A thousand farewells.*

Albannach na b' fhaide na mìle Shasannach. Dh'fhalbh a' mhìle Albannach nuair a thàinig Alba is Sasainn còmhla anns an aonadh. Tha mìle-mara eadar-dhealaichte oir bha sin o thùs stèidhichte air earrann de chearcall-thomhas na Talmhainn.

Chan eil e soilleir cò às a thàinig am facal *thousand*. 'S dòcha gun robh e a' ciallachadh 'grunn cheudan'. Bha e anns an t-Seann Bheurla mar *þúsend*. Tha facal coltach anns na cànanan Gearmanach. Ma thèid sibh a Nirribhidh, cluinnidh sibh daoine ag ràdh *tusen takk*. Tha sin co-ionann ri 'mìle taing' ann an Gàidhlig.

Thuirt mi gur ann bhon Laidinn a thàinig ar facal fhèin. Ach a bheil sin fìor anns a h-uile h-àite? Tha cuimhne agam air turas a chaidh mi a chèilidh air bodach ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh. Bha sinn a' bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig air caoraich. Chleachd esan am facal *sùstan* airson mìle. 'S iongantach mura tàinig sùstan bhon t-Seann Lochlannais. Bha e clàraichte cuideachd ann an Gàidhlig Ghallaibh.

Co-dhiù, tha an t-àm agam falbh. Mìle beannachd leibh.