

An Litir Bheag

Ie 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 697 (which corresponds to Litir 1,001). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

There are a few islands called Fladda or Fladday. The name comes from Old Norse, meaning 'flat island'.

I was on one of them recently. It is off the north-west shore of Raasay. There is a narrow channel between Fladda and Raasay. But it's not possible to sail through it in a boat with a large keel. The two islands are connected to each other by a tidal causeway. For a while every day, at high tide, Fladda becomes a proper island, with seawater surrounding it entirely.

If you want to walk there, you have to leave the car at the end of Calum's Road at Torran in Raasay. A walking track two miles long then goes to the causeway.

Fladda is a nice island. It's a mile and a half in length and a bit over half a mile in width. It's somewhat level – as would be expected – with a loch in the middle. There's plenty of boggy terrain there. But, around the settlement, where the population was living, it's relatively fertile. I'd say the Fladda folk were planting potatoes and oats and barley there at one time. And they had a good harbour for their boats.

At the end of the nineteenth century,

Tha grunn eileanan air a bheil an t-ainm – Flada no Fladaigh. Tha an t-ainm a' tighinn bhon t-Seann Lochlannais, a' ciallachadh 'eilean còmhnard'.

Bha mi air fear dhiubh o chionn ghoirid. Tha e far cladach an iar-thuath Ratharsair. Tha caolas cumhang ann eadar Flada agus Ratharsair. Ach chan urrainn seòladh troimhe ann am bàta le druim mòr. Tha an dà eilean ceangailte ri chèile le dòirlinn. Airson greis gach latha, aig àm an làin, bidh Flada na eilean ceart, agus sàl ga chuariteachadh gu lèir.

Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh coiseachd ann, feumaidh sibh an carbad fhàgail aig ceann Rathad Chaluim aig an Torran ann an Ratharsair. Tha ceum coiseachd dà mhìle a dh'fhaid an uair sin a' dol chun na dòirlinn.

'S e eilean snog a tha ann am Flada. Tha e mìle gu leth ann am fad agus beagan is leth-mhìle ann an leud. Tha e car còmhnard – mar a bhiodh dùil – le loch anns a' mheadhan. Tha boglaichean is mòinteach gu leòr ann. Ach, timcheall a' bhaile, far an robh an sluagh a' fuireach, tha e rudeigin torrach. Chanainn gun robh na Fladaich a' cur buntàta is coirce is eòrna an sin uaireigin. Agus bha cala math aca airson an cuid eathraichean.

fifty people were living there. But they couldn't get across the channel at high tide. In the 1920s, the people of the island asked Inverness County Council to build a bridge or causeway between Fladda and Raasay. The Council refused the request but they built a school in Fladda itself.

At the beginning of the sixties there were only a dozen people living on Fladda. They were applying for a causeway, piped water and grid electricity. But they got fed up of waiting. They all left the island before 1965 was out. There are still three houses on the island but they are only used in summer for holidays.

Aig deireadh an naoidheamh linn deug, bha caogad duine a' fuireach ann. Ach cha b' urrainn dhaibh fhaighinn thar a' chaolais aig àm an làin. Anns na ficheadan dhen fhicheadamh linn, dh'iarr muinntir an eilein air Comhairle Siorrachd Inbhir Nis drochaid no cabhsair a thogail eadar Flada is Ratharsair. Dhiùlt a' Chomhairle an t-iarrrtas ach thog iad sgoil ann am Flada fhèin.

Aig toiseach nan seasgadan cha robh ach dusan duine a' fuireach ann am Flada. Bha iad a' tagradh airson cabhsair, uisge na pìob agus cumhachd an dealain. Ach dh'fhàs iad sgìth de bhith a' feitheamh. Dh'fhàg iad uile an t-eilean mus robh a' bhliadhna seasgad 's a còig (1965) a-mach. Tha trì taighean anns an eilean fhathast ach tha iad air an cur gu feum a-mhàin as t-samhradh airson làithean-saora.