

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 710 (which corresponds to Litir 1,014). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

There are islands called Heisgeir to the west of North Uist. I heard oral tradition in Uist that Heisgeir was at one time linked to North Uist. Now, there is a big channel between them.

Alexander Carmichael has an account of Heisgeir in the Napier Commission's report. He gave the islands three Gaelic names – Heisgeir, Teisgeir and Aoisgeir. He wrote that it is the third name that is most meaningful. Aoisgeir – isthmus rock. The word aoidh means an isthmus.

Carmichael wrote that there was once an isthmus between Heisgeir and Uist. The land became sea-fords. The sea-fords disappeared and then there was a shallow channel there (with a sandy bottom).

Carmichael also wrote that aoidh is the basis of Ì Chaluim Chille [Iona]. He was of the opinion that the name of the island at one time was Aoidh Chaluim Chille. Iona and Mull were connected by an isthmus.

It would be difficult to deny that entirely. I've sailed twice

Tha eileanan, air a bheil Heisgeir mar ainm, gu siar air Uibhist a Tuath. Chuala mi beul-aithris ann an Uibhist gun robh Heisgeir uaireigin ceangailte ri Uibhist a Tuath. A-nise, tha caolas mòr ann eatarra.

Tha cunntas mu Heisgeir aig Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil ann an aithisg Choimisean Napier. Thug e trì ainmean Gàidhlig do na h-eileanan – Heisgeir, Teisgeir agus Aoisgeir. Sgrìobh e gur e an treas ainm am fear as ciallaiche. Aoisgeir – *isthmus rock*. Tha am facal *aoidh* a' ciallachadh tairbeart no dòirlinn.

Sgrìobh MacIlleMhìcheil gun robh aoidh ann eadar Heisgeir is Uibhist uaireigin. Dh'fhalbh an talamh gu bhith nam fadhlaichean. Dh'fhalbh na fadhlaichean agus an uair sin bha caolas eu-domhainn ann (le grunn gainmhich).

Sgrìobh MacIlleMhìcheil cuideachd gur e aoidh bunait ainm Eilean Ì no Ì Chaluim Chille. Bha e dhen bheachd gur e Aoidh Chaluim Chille a bha air an eilean mar ainm aig aon àm. Bha Ì agus Muile ceangailte ri chèile le aoidh.

Bhiodh e doirbh a dhol às àicheadh sin gu tur. Tha mi air seòladh

through the Sound of Iona and it is shallow. There are sandbanks which are constantly shifting.

But back to Heisgeir. Alasdair Carmichael tells an old story about it. On a summer's day a long time ago, a few of the island people went to Shillay to shear sheep. The men landed the women on Shillay. The men went to a skerry to hunt seals. However, they didn't tie up the boat as they should and it left with the wind and the tide.

The women had no boat with which to save the men. The tide was coming in. The women in Shillay were shouting. A woman on Heisgeir itself heard them. That woman made a big effort. She dragged a boat down the shore. She floated it on the channel. But she wasn't quick enough. The men were swept from the skerry by great Atlantic waves. Their wives were watching but they couldn't do anything to save them.

dà thuras tro Chaolas Ì agus tha e eudomhainn. Tha oitirean ann a bhios a' gluasad fad na h-ùine.

Ach air ais gu Heisgeir. Tha Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil ag innse seann naidheachd mu dheidhinn. Air latha samhraidh o chionn fhada, chaidh grunn de mhuinntir an eilein gu ruige Siolaigh airson caoraich a rùsgadh. Chuir na fir na boireannaich air tìr ann an Siolaigh. Dh'fhalbh na fir gu sgeir airson ròin a shealg. Ge-tà, cha do cheangail iad an eathar mar bu chòir agus dh'fhalbh i leis a' ghaoith 's leis an t-sruth.

Cha robh bàta aig na boireannaich airson na fir a shàbhaladh. Bha a' mhuir a' lìonadh. Bha na boireannaich ann an Siolaigh ag èigheachd. Chuala boireannach air Heisgeir fhèin iad. Rinn an tè sin spàirn mhòr. Tharraing i eathar sìos an cladach. Chuir i air bhog sa chaolas i. Ach cha robh i luath gu leòr. Chaidh na fir a sguabadh far na sgeire le tuinn mhòra a' Chuain Siar. Bha am mnathan gan coimhead ach cha b' urrainn dhaibh dad a dhèanamh airson an sàbhaladh.