

# **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 737 (which corresponds to Litir 1,041). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk).

*I would like to tell you about the 'Big Cave' east of Kingussie. It's near a farm called Raitts, or Ràt in Gaelic. Many local people call it 'Raitt's Cave'. But it's not natural. It's a sort of underground house.*

*On today's maps, you'll see 'souterrain' where it is. On old maps, however, you'll see 'Pict House' or 'Pictish House' or 'Earth-house'. In 1835, the famous scientist Sir David Brewster was taking holidays in Balavil nearby. He was married to Juliet, the daughter of the landlord, Seumas Bàn, or James 'Ossian' MacPherson.*

*Brewster was well known in his day. He invented the kaleidoscope. He examined the Big Cave. It was full of stones and rubble. They took the rubble out. They found an underground house that was amazing. It was long and narrow, with stone slabs on each side. The roof was built of slabs also. It's in the form of a horseshoe and today in the middle of a grazing field.*

*Some called it MacNiven's Cave. I want to tell you why.*

Bu toigh leam innse dhuibh mun Uaimh Mhòir sear air Ceann a' Ghiùthsaidh. Tha i faisg air baile-fearainn air a bheil Raitts, no Ràt ann an Gàidhlig. Tha mòran de mhuintir an àite a' gabhail 'Raitts Cave' oirre. Ach chan eil i nàdarrach. 'S e seòrsa de thaigh fo-thalamh a tha innte.

Air mapaichean an latha an-diugh, chì sibh 'souterrain' far a bheil i. Air seann mhapaichean, ge-tà, chì sibh 'Pict House' no 'Pictish House' no 'Earth-house'. Ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a còig (1835), bha am fear-saidheans ainmeil Sir Daibhidh Brewster a' fuireach ann am Baile a' Bhile, faisg air làimh. Bha e pòsta aig Juliet, nighean an uachdarain, Seumas Bàn, no James 'Ossian' MacPherson.

Bha Brewster gu math aithnichte ri a linn. 'S e a chruthaich an *kaleidoscope*. Thug e sùil air an Uaimh Mhòir. Bha i làn chlachan is sprùilleach. Thug iad an sprùilleach a-mach. Lorg iad taigh fo-thalamh a bha iongantach. Bha e fada is caol, le leacan cloiche air gach taobh. Bha am mullach air a dhèanamh de leacan cuideachd. Tha e ann an cruth crudha-eich agus an-diugh ann am meadhan pàirc ionaltraidh.

Bha cuid a' gabhail Uamh Chlann 'ic Ille Naoimh oirre – *MacNiven's Cave*. Tha mi airson innse dhuibh carson.

*A long time ago, the MacNivens were powerful in Badenoch. They were in association with the Cummings – the Earls of Badenoch. The MacPhersons from Lochaber helped King Robert the Bruce in controlling the Cummings. The King gave them land in Badenoch. That land was previously owned by the Cummings.*

*An enmity thus arose between the Cummings and the MacPhersons. That meant that the MacNivens were also the enemies of the MacPhersons.*

*According to oral tradition, the MacNivens raided the cattle on the land of MacPherson of Cluny, over Laggan way. To begin with, MacPherson did not put together an armed band. Instead of that, he sent his daughter to MacNiven as a messenger. But, as we shall see in the next Litir, she wasn't successful.*

O chionn fhad an t-saoghail, bha Clann 'ic Ille Naoimh cumhachdach ann am Bàideanach. Bha iad ann an caidreabh leis na Cuimeanaich – Iarlan Bhàideanach. Thug Clann 'ic a' Phearsain à Loch Abar taic do Rìgh Raibeart am Brusach ann a bhith a' smachdachadh nan Cuimeanach. Thug an Rìgh fearann dhaibh ann am Bàideanach. Bha am fearann sin roimhe leis na Cuimeanaich.

Dh'èirich naimhdeas, mar sin, eadar na Cuimeanaich agus Clann 'ic a' Phearsain. Bha sin a' ciallachadh gun robh Clann 'ic Ille Naoimh cuideachd nan nàimhdean aig Clann 'ic a' Phearsain.

A rèir beul-aithris, thog Clann 'ic Ille Naoimh creach air fearann aig Mac a' Phearsain à Cluainidh, taobh an Lagain. An toiseach, cha do chuir Mac a' Phearsain feachd ri chèile. An àite sin, chuir e a nighean gu ruige Clann 'ic Ille Naoimh mar theachdaire. Ach, mar a ch'inn anns an ath Litir, cha do shoirbhich leatha.