

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 841 (which corresponds to Litir 1,145). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Recently I finished a book about place-names in Inverness and the surrounding area. I want to tell you about one place-name in the book. That's a large stone called Clach Cailleach nam Muc 'the stone of the old woman of the pigs'. It's in Strathnairn.

I found an account of the stone by a local historian. He was the late Andy Cumming. Andy wrote that the cailleach was from the Isle of Lewis. She would go around Loch Ness with a herd of pigs. She would find shelter under the stone. She died there. She was eaten by her own pigs. What a story!

I found other accounts about the cailleach. There is an account on the Tobar an Dualchais website in which two people speak about her. A woman says that her grandmother gave food to the cailleach and that she allowed her to stay in her barn.

I definitely wanted to find the stone! However, I did not have detailed information about where it was. I found stones that were large enough. But none of them had the correct shape.

O chionn ghoirid, chuir mi crìoch air leabhar mu dheidhinn ainmean-àite ann an Inbhir Nis agus an sgìre mun chuairt. Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu aon ainm-àite anns an leabhar. 'S e sin clach mhòr ris an canar Clach Cailleach nam Muc. Tha i ann an Srath Narann.

Lorg mi cunntas mun chloich le eachdraiche ionadail. B' esan Anndra Cuimeanach nach maireann. Sgrìobh Anndra gur ann à Eilean Leòdhais a bha a' chailleach. Bhiodh i a' falbh timcheall Loch Nis le treud de mhucan. Bhiodh i a' faighinn fàsadh fon chloich. Fhuair i bàs an sin. Bha i air a h-ithe le a mucan fhèin. Abair sgeul!

Lorg mi cunntasan eile mun chaillich. Tha cunntas air làrach-lìn Tobar an Dualchais anns a bheil dithis a' bruidhinn mu a deidhinn. Tha tè ag ràdh gun robh a seanmhair a' toirt biadh don chaillich agus gun do leig i leatha fuireach anns an t-sabhal aice.

Bha mi gu cinnteach airson a' chlach a lorg! Ge-tà, cha robh fiosrachadh mionaideach agam mun àite san robh i. Lorg mi clachan a bha mòr gu leòr. Ach cha robh cumadh ceart air gin dhiubh.

I was about to give up on the matter. But I met Alasdair Forbes, a farmer from Strathnairn. 'Oh, Clach Cailleach nam Muc,' he said, 'it's on my own land. I'll take you there. I'll tell you the story.'

On a snowy day, Alasdair took me there. On the summit of a rocky hill in the middle of a wood, was a tall stone. There was black ground under it where the snow wasn't lying. 'That's where the cailleach died, eaten by her own pigs,' said Alasdair. He reckons that she died of natural causes. Then the pigs ate her.

Alasdair got the story from oral tradition. The cailleach was from Stratherrick. Every year she would walk to Inverness with her pigs to sell them at market. Her journey would take two days. She would stop at the halfway point each way at the stone. And that's the story of Cailleach nam Muc and her stone in Strathnairn.

Bha mi an impis an gnothach a leigeil seachad. Ach thachair mi ri Alasdair Foirbeis, tuathanach à Srath Narann. 'O, Clach Cailleach nam Muc,' thuirt e, 'tha i air an fhearann agam fhìn. Bheir mi ann thu. Innsidh mi an stòiridh dhut.'

Air latha sneachdach, thug Alasdair ann mi. Air mullach cnoc creagach ann am meadhan coille, bha clach àrd. Bha talamh dubh fòidhpe far nach robh an sneachd na laighe. 'Sin far an d' fhuair a' chailleach bàs, air a h-ithe le a mucan fhèin,' thuirt Alasdair. Tha esan dhen bheachd gun do chaochail i gu nàdarrach. An uair sin dh'ith na mucan i.

Fhuair Alasdair an sgeul à beul-aithris. Bha a' chailleach à Srath Fharagaig. Gach bliadhna bhiodh i a' coiseachd a dh'Inbhir Nis le a mucan airson an reic aig margaidh. Ghabhadh an turas aice dà latha. Bhiodh i a' stad letheach-slighe gach rathad aig a' chloich. Agus sin agaibh sgeul Cailleach nam Muc agus na cloiche aice ann an Srath Narann.