

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 843 (which corresponds to Litir 1,147). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I'm going to tell you about Lagan a' Bhainne 'the dell of the milk' and how the place got its name. Lagan a' Bhainne is on the Corrieyairack Pass. That's a pass that connects Badenoch to the southern end of Loch Ness. General Wade built a military road through the Corrieyairack Pass in the 18th century.

There was at one time a large population living in the area. Their milk was famous. However, at the start of the 14th century, the milk grew scarce. There was no obvious reason for that. The local people were of the opinion that the country was under a spell. They prayed. They asked the bishop for help.

However, that didn't make a difference. The milk famine continued for a year. The people were getting anxious. Their children were growing unhealthy and weak.

Among those who were suffering was Alasdair Bàn (fair-haired Alasdair). One afternoon, Alasdair went for a hillwalk. He was thinking about how weak his children were.

When he was near the summit, he saw a man climbing the hill. Alasdair wasn't recognising him. He was an old man. He was walking slowly, as if there were a load on his back.

Tha mi a' dol a dh'innse dhuibh mu Lagan a' Bhainne agus mar a fhuair an t-àite ainm. Tha Lagan a' Bhainne air Màm Choire Ghearraig. 'S e sin làirig a tha a' ceangal Bàideanach ri ceann a deas Loch Nis. Thog an Seanailear Wade rathad-airm tro Mhàm Choire Ghearraig anns an ochdamh linn deug.

Bha uaireigin sluagh mòr a' fuireach anns an sgìre. Bha am bainne aca ainmeil. Ge-tà, aig toiseach a' cheathramh linn deug, dh'fhàs am bainne gann. Cha robh adhbhar follaiseach ann airson sin. Bha muinntir an àite dhen bheachd gun robh an dùthaich fo gheasaibh. Rinn iad ùrnaighean. Dh'iarr iad taic bhon easbaig.

Ge-tà, cha do rinn sin diofar. Lean gort a' bhainne airson bliadhna. Bha na daoine a' fàs iomagaineach. Bha an cuid cloinne a' fàs mì-fhallain is lag.

Am measg na bha a' fulang bha fear Alasdair Bàn. Feasgar a bha seo, chaidh Alasdair air chuairt sa mhonadh. Bha e a' meòrachadh air cho lag 's a bha a' chlann aige.

Nuair a bha e faisg air a' mhullach, chunnaic e fear a' dìreadh a' mhonaidh. Cha robh Alasdair ga aithneachadh. 'S e bodach a bha ann. Bha e a' coiseachd gu slaodach, mar gun robh eallach air a dhruim.

The old man's face was wrinkled. But he had long hair, as if he were a young man. His eyes were blue. He wasn't wearing Highland garb. He had a long green coat on, and a tall hat on his head.

On his shoulder, there was a hawthorn rod. It was bending as if there were a large weight on its distal end. Alasdair took out a dirk. He cut the end of the rod off. The old man continued, as if nothing had happened.

But, from the piece of the hawthorn rod on the ground, much milk emanated. It was pouring out. It was like a white river. It was covering the ground. It wasn't long until there was enough milk in the area again. And that is why the place is called Lagan a' Bhainne to this day.

Bha aodann a' bhodaich preasach. Ach bha falt fada aige, mar gur e fear òg a bha ann. Bha a shùilean gorm. Cha robh aodach Gàidhealach air. Bha còta fada uaine air, agus ad àrd air a cheann.

Air a ghualainn, bha slat sgithich. Bha i a' lùbadh mar gun robh cuideam mòr air a' cheann a-mach aice. Thug Alasdair biodag a-mach. Gheàrr e ceann na slaite dheth. Lean am bodach air, mar nach robh càil air tachairt.

Ach, às a' phìos dhen t-slait-sgithich air an talamh, thàinig bainne gu leòr. Bha e a' sruthadh gu làidir. Bha e mar abhainn gheal. Bha e a' còmhdachadh na talmhainn. Cha b' fhada gus an robh bainne gu leòr ri fhaighinn anns an sgìre a-rithist. Agus 's e sin as coireach gur e Lagan a' Bhainne a tha air an àite mar ainm chun an latha an-diugh.