

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 850 (which corresponds to Litir 1,154). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

What does the word druim mean to you. You'll be thinking about 'back', I'm sure. Tha mo dhruim ghoirt 'my back is sore'.

But druim has other meanings. Sometimes it stands for the top of something, like 'the ridge of a hill'. Druim an aonaich 'the mountain ridge'. And it appears in place-names where Gaelic was once spoken For example – Drumchapel in Glasgow. Some say it came from Druim a' Chapail 'the ridge of the horse'. But I've also heard an opinion that it came from Druim a' Chaibeil 'the ridge of the chapel'.

For 'the spine' of a book we say druim an leabhair. Druim an leabhair.

Turn a boat upside-down on the shore. What do you see now but druim a' bhàta at the top – the keel of the boat. Druim a' bhàta. If the boat is big enough and you are brave enough, perhaps you'll go out to druim a' chuain. The open sea. Druim a' chuain.

In olden times, when people were speaking about 'druim an rathaid', they were meaning 'the middle of the road'. Cùm an t-each air

Dè tha am facal druim a' ciallachadh dhuibh? Bidh sibh a' smaoinichadh air 'back', tha mi cinnteach. Tha mo dhruim goirt 'my back is sore'.

Ach tha ciallan eile air druim. Uaireannan, tha e a' seasamh airson mullach rudeigin – mar 'the ridge of a hill'. Druim an aonaich 'the mountain ridge'. Agus tha e a' nochdadh ann an ainmean-àite far an robh a' Ghàidhlig air a bruidhinn uaireigin. Mar eisimpleir – Drumchapel ann an Glaschu. Tha cuid ag ràdh gur ann à Druim a' Chapail a thàinig e – the ridge of the horse. Ach chuala mi beachd cuideachd gun tàinig e à Druim a' Chaibeil 'the ridge of the chapel'.

Airson 'the spine' of a book canaidh sinn druim an leabhair. Druim an leabhair.

Cuiribh bàta bun-os-cionn air a' chladach. Dè chì sibh a-nise ach druim a' bhàta aig a' mhullach – the keel of the boat. Druim a' bhàta. Ma tha am bàta mòr gu leòr is ma tha sibh treun gu leòr, ma dh'fhaodte gun tèid sibh a-mach gu druim a' chuain. The open sea. Druim a' chuain.

Anns an t-seann aimsir, nuair a bha daoine a' bruidhinn mu 'druim an rathaid', bha iad a' ciallachadh 'the middle of the road'. Cùm an t-each air druim an rathaid. Keep the horse in the middle of the road.

druim an rathaid. *Keep the horse in the middle of the road.*

But you wouldn't keep a horse on druim an taighe! That means 'the ridge line of the house'.

How do we say 'flat on my back' in Gaelic? Air mo dhruim dìreach. I was lying flat on my back.

The word druim is a bit irregular. In the genitive singular case we say droma. Taigh an Droma 'the house of the ridge'. That's a village called Tyndrum in English.

Sometimes the moon is on her druim 'back'. That's when there is a crescent moon, with her horns sticking up at either end of her. She is like a bowl or a smiley mouth. The old Gaels were pleased to see her. They were saying, when the moon is like that, that the weather will be good.

Ach cha bhiodh sibh a' cumail each air druim an taighe! Tha sin a' ciallachadh 'the ridge line of the house'.

Ciamar a chanas sinn 'flat on my back' ann an Gàidhlig? Air mo dhruim dìreach. Bha mi nam laighe air mo dhruim dìreach.

Tha am facal *druim* rud beag neo-riaghailteach. Anns an tuiseal ghinideach shingilte canaidh sinn *droma*. Taigh an Droma 'the house of the ridge'. Sin baile beag ris an canar Tyndrum ann am Beurla.

Uaireannan, bidh a' ghealach air a druim. Sin nuair a tha a' ghealach chorrnach ann, agus na h-adharcan aice a' stobadh an-àirde aig gach ceann dhith. Tha i coltach ri bobhla no beul a tha ri gàire. Bha seann Ghàidheil toilichte a faicinn. Bha iad ag ràdh, nuair tha a' ghealach mar sin, gum bi deagh aimsir ann.