

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 933 (which corresponds to Litir 1,237). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

More today about James Robertson, the botanist. In 1768 he went on an excursion in Highland areas. He wrote notes about the people.

Their beds were very comfortable. They were made of heather or of straw with the tops of the plants uppermost.

To preserve yeast, they were cutting an oak rod. They were twisting it and putting it in new yeast. They were hanging the rod to dry it. When they needed yeast, such as for making beer, they were taking the rod down. They were putting it in a pot in which there was lukewarm wort. At the end of two hours, they had yeast ready to use.

For tanning leather, the Skye folk were using the roots of a small plant called 'ground bark' or Tormentil. To clean out the intestines of [the] calves, milking maids were using Roseroot. In Gaelic that is 'the plant of the heroes'. It's said that the name comes from it being difficult to find except on crags and cliffs. You have to be a hero to get it! However, according to James Robertson, the

Tuilleadh an-diugh mu Sheumas MacDhonnchaidh, an lus-eòlaiche. Ann an seachd ceud deug, seasgad 's a h-ochd (1768) chaidh e air chuairt ann an sgìrean Gàidhealach. Sgrìobh e notaichean mu na daoine.

Bha na leapannan aca gu math cofhurtail. Bha iad air an dèanamh de fhraoch no de chonnalach le bàrr nan lusan gu h-àrd.

Airson beirm a ghleidheadh, bha iad a' gearradh slat-dharaich. Bha iad ga snìomh agus ga cur ann am beirm ùr. Bha iad a' crochadh na slaite airson a tiormachadh. Nuair a bha iad feumach air beirm, can airson leann a dhèanamh, bha iad a' toirt na slaite sìos. Bha iad ga cur ann am poit anns an robh brailis meadh-bhlàth. An ceann dà uair a thìde, bha beirm aca deiseil airson cleachdadh.

Airson leathar a chartadh, bha na Sgitheanaich a' cleachdadh nam freumhaichean aig lus beag ris an canar Cairt-làir no Tormentil. Airson caolain nan laogh a ghlanadh a-mach, bha banaraich a' cur Roseroot gu feum. Ann an Gàidhlig, 's e sin *Lus nan Laoch*. Thathar ag ràdh gur e as coireach ri ainm gu bheil e doirbh a lorg ach a-mhàin air creagan is bearraidhean. Feumaidh tu a bhith nad laoch airson fhaighinn! Ge-tà, a rèir Sheumais MhicDhonnchaidh, 's e *Lus nan*

<p><i>plant's name on Skye is 'the plant of the calves', not 'the plant of the heroes'.</i></p> <p><i>Also on Skye, James tells us how the people obtained various colours to dye tweed. They got yellow from the tops of the heather. For red, 'the rennet plant' or Rù (Lady's Bedstraw) was excellent.</i></p> <p><i>On Mull, the children were often suffering from worms. To cure that, they were taking a drink of Roid or Bog-myrtle. On Mull and Skye, women would take a drink of 'the little rough one of the moor' (the Fir Clubmoss) to cause an abortion.</i></p> <p><i>And James tells us that the women would be singing while they were waulking the tweed in a group. Is there an earlier record than this of our waulking songs that are so famous?</i></p>	<p><i>Laogh, chan e Lus nan Laoch, ainm an lusa anns an Eilean Sgitheanach.</i></p> <p>Cuideachd anns an Eilean Sgitheanach, tha Seumas ag innse dhuinn mar a fhuair na daoine diofar dhathan airson clò a dhathadh. Fhuair iad buidhe bho bhàrr an fhraoich. Airson dearg, bha <i>Lus an Leasaich</i> no an <i>Rù (Lady's Bedstraw)</i> fìor mhath.</p> <p>Ann am Muile, bha a' chlann gu tric a' fulang le dathagan no <i>worms</i>. Airson sin a leigheas, bha iad a' gabhail deoch de <i>Roid</i> no <i>Bog-myrtle</i>. Ann am Muile agus san Eilean Sgitheanach, bhiodh boireannaich ag òl deoch de <i>Gharbhag an t-Slèibhe (the Fir Clubmoss)</i> airson casg-breith adhbharachadh.</p> <p>Agus tha Seumas ag innse dhuinn gum biodh na boireannaich a' seinn fhad 's a bha iad a' luadhaidh a' chlà ann an còmhlan. A bheil aithris nas tràithe na seo air na h-òrain luadhaidh againn a tha cho ainmeil?.</p>
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